

Discourses of Anxiety over Childhood and Youth across Cultures

Edited by
Liza Tsaliki · Despina Chronaki

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Anxiety Over Childhood and Youth Across Cultures

Liza Tsaliki and Despina Chronaki

The body of work surrounding the epistemology and theorising of moral panics has proliferated considerably from the nineties onwards, with various researchers debating over the extent of its usefulness and the limitations of the concept (Best 2011, 2013; Hier 2011; Hunt 2011, 2013; Rohloff 2011). Moral panics have invariably been discussed as symptoms of a more general concern evoked by the rapid pace of social change; as entailing forms of displacement that detract attention from broader concerns for which it may be more difficult to achieve wide consensus; as better fitting the broader notion of social problems; or, as pertaining more to a discussion about risk (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2011, 2013; Miller 2013).

Taking into account the complexity and richness of the academic dialogue, we wish to contribute to it—especially insofar childhood and youth cultures and the media are concerned. Guided by collections such as Charles Krinsky's *Moral Panics Over Contemporary Children and Youth* (2008), Sean Hier's *Moral Panic and the Politics of Anxiety* (2011),

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and Gary Clapton's *Childhood and Youth* (2015), with this volume, we have the ambition to interrogate further public debates about children and media across cultures while taking fully into account the emotional baggage that the notion of moral panics is laden with. Following Buckingham and Strandgaard Jensen (2012), we are interested in contributions that will explore the social construction of discourses of anxiety surrounding childhood and youth as well as the cultural histories that framed these discourses and their broader consequences in shaping public policy regarding children and young people. In this respect, we are looking into different cultural accounts of a 'politics of consumption' (Buckingham and Strandgaard Jensen 2012) as reflected in and informed by popular understandings of childhood and youth cultures.

Our Analytical Framework

Insofar as the broader analytical framework of the collection is concerned, we are interested in the various, sometimes mundane, cultural practices young people are engaged with in their everyday lives, and in the ways such practices need to be understood historically and culturally.

As we adhere to the view that childhood and youth are social constructs, it is important not to lose track of the diversity with which societies have invested both concepts across time and space. With childhood blurring into youth in most contemporary Western societies, public perceptions and concern about 'the young' seem to proliferate as a result of the urge to police the boundary between childhood and youth—whether regarding sexual health (as a corollary of sexual experience or sexual knowledge), children's and youth's media uses and cultural practices, or consumption of popular culture. Though the 'new sociology of childhood' paradigm (Alanen 1992; King 1999) has extensively addressed how often media and popular culture is portrayed as the culprit for the disappearance of childhood innocence (Buckingham 2011), young people's growing participation in consumer culture in the twenty-first century has fuelled parental, academic and social concern and has brought a renewed media attention to the changing dynamics of childhood and youth. Concurrently, changes in financial cycles and the labour and housing markets have meant that we're also witnessing an extension of youth, as young people postpone leaving the parental home for much later in their life course (Skelton and Valentine 1998). Yet, at a time when 'youthfulness' is a state to aspire to, a project in itself, promoted by the media, fashion and fitness industries, sometimes

leading to the 'infantilisation' of adults, the cultural meaning of 'being young' becomes more problematised and ambiguous. Hence, childhood and youth, although universally acknowledged and experienced, carry different meanings and have different impacts across cultures—something that makes the pursuit of a cross-cultural framework necessary and meaningful.

Furthermore, once we take into account how the disciplinary power of neoliberalism swiftly becomes a common conceptual currency across national and cultural borders, discussing how neoliberal self-governance permeates the cultures of childhood and youth is even more pertinent. In this respect, we intend to broaden our understanding of global childhood and youth cultural practices within a context of specific circumstances, especially as new media technologies and marketing strategies offer new affordancies to young people in terms of their repertoires of cultural practices and uses. Such affordancies inevitably give rise to numerous anxieties. With this cross-cultural collection, we intend to offer a more nuanced conceptualisation of (what we believe is now universal) concern about children and teenagers.

Our Conception of 'Youth'

'Youth' (sometimes used to denote teenagers, others encompassing both childhood and teenage life) and 'childhood' (sometimes blurring into 'teendom') are social constructions imagined, represented, invoked by a range of discourses and institutions, rendering both terms a site of struggle over their social meanings, and a repository of aspirations and fears for the future (Bragg and Buckingham 2014). It is precisely because 'youth' has become an incontestable fixture in late modern societies, leading to adulthood eventually, that the narrative of anxiety enveloping 'youth' (as a broad category) and shaping parental cultures and public policy towards children and teenagers needs to be further explored and contextualised.

We view the construction of 'youth' as a result of the globalising forces of a neoliberal governamentality that saturates both the young and their parents, and as shaped through their consumption practices as ethical and responsible moral subjects (Griffin 2014). Such a culturally nuanced account of social constructions of 'youth' sheds fresh light in the discussion of children's and teenagers' citizenship and rights.

Overall, we believe that through this collection, we will be able to show how narratives of anxiety around childhood and youth become

the way we construct and perceive reality. Taking Somers and Gibson's (1994) taxonomy of narratives into account (ontological, public, conceptual, master/meta-narratives), we take the view that the narrative of the 'child at risk' becomes an ontological narrative through which children and teenagers come to define their place in the world; the need for 'child protection' becomes a public narrative, adopted and reiterated by public institutions (the family, schooling, the media, public policy), thus constructing a sense of a common purpose; it has also become a conceptual narrative in the form of the stories scholars devise for their object of study, as witnessed in various expert scientific advice and policy recommendations on risk awareness and resilience building among youth that circulates in the public sphere; finally, there is the master (or meta) narrative of the 'moral child', in the sense of a universally accepted discourse regarding childhood our everyday lives are embedded within (Tsaliki 2016). The moral discourse of childhood and youth is all the more intriguing, once we consider the parody children experience in relation to morality today: upon entering the moral world of adults, children are often positioned as 'others', for moral capacity is linked to the extent the individual is seen as capable of demonstrating agency and of constructing meanings. However, sometimes the 'agentic' child is still 'at risk', be it because of the forces of marketisation or as an outcome of its innate 'innocence'. In fact, innocence is very often connected to vulnerability—the child is vulnerable as a result of its innocence; loss of innocence has connotations of immorality. This discourse of innocence 'works in conjunction with the sacred status of the child, to produce childhood as a moral rhetoric' (Meyer 2007, 85).

Such kind of moralising is hardly new, nor is it a unique characteristic of the twenty-first century; rather, as others have argued (Barker 1984; Hunt 1999; Lemmings and Walker 2009; Critcher 2011), a longer historical perspective can be traced upon the discourses of moral regulation, especially of children and youth. In fact, not only is there a series of persisting traditional moral problems—sometimes with new names—which continue to occupy political and legislative attention (i.e. abortion, surrogacy, euthanasia), but a wider range of social issues is contested in moralised terms in a way reminiscing late nineteenth century moral politics (Hunt 1999). For example, politics about the sexual victimisation of young women and children echo calls for sexual purity and action against 'white slavery', and campaigns against cyberporn reverberate end of nineteenth-century obscenity laws, as do

calls for young people's alcohol intake regulation. Overall, the current agenda of moral regulation is one about consumption—everyday consumption (food, alcohol, energy drinks, fashion, sex), and consumption of everyday culture (smartphones, tablets, computers, along with social media, streaming TV, online gaming and so on).

Though items of everyday consumption have long been moralised (as seen, for example, in the restrictions placed on winter sleigh riding by women at the end of seventeenth-century Berne, as long as they were accompanied by fathers or husbands; the regulation of ice-cream parlours in 1911 Chicago, for being seen as sites of immorality and prostitution, run by Italian immigrants [Hunt 1999]; or in the 1955 legislation restricting the consumption of American comics by British children and youth, Barker 1984), contemporary discussions of health surrounding children's and youth consumption still carry connotations of strict moralising and (self) governance. Located within a medical-cum-moral discourse of abstention (from social media, online gaming, smartphones, heavy drinking, fat-saturated foods, 'sexualising' material), such moralising signifies a responsible 'care of the self' and is perceived of how people master simple pleasures in the name of health and wellness. Concurrently, alongside public regulation and monitoring of everyday consumption (as witnessed in legal restrictions of alcohol and beverage consumption for under 18s, in the age-appropriate classification of television, film and gaming content, or, better still, in the 2017 UK's government assertion that 'Britain is to become the safest place in the world to be online'[1]), therein lie class cultures as to whose consumption patterns are better, together with a moral sense of self.

Ulrich Beck's risk society thesis (1992) has impacted upon moral panic and moral regulation literature, as scholars have argued over the merit of the concept in an era of acute risk and insecurity perceptions (Ungar 2001, 2011; Hier 2003; Beland 2011). Toby Miller points out that the notion of risk society has been used extensively from sociology and media studies, through to anaesthesiology and philanthropy, while moral panic discourses are prominent in critical criminology and media and cultural studies. He reminds us that the risk society of today has a prehistory harking back to the appearance of stock exchanges in Western Europe between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries; travelling through the Industrial Revolution, where working people were advised to be prudent and secure their future through insurance; and taking the form of the 'social body' during the nineteenth century

of nation-making, understood through biostatistics and remodelled through policy interventions. The new science of demography codified knowledge about population reproduction, aging, migration, public health and ecology and hazards started to be calculated as part of an emergent risk society by the twentieth century (2006, 304).

Following Hier (2003, 2008), youth-related scares, and the intense parenting that results from them, are seen here to relate to both moral regulation and risk perception, as anxiety and insecurity are ever-present within risk-society. Actually, within risk society, individuals' sense of 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991) is being eviscerated by the prevalence of social anxieties, knowledge of which proliferates as a result of extensive media coverage. In fact, says Miller, 'the idea is to turn anxiety and sensation into spectatorship and money. Local news in particular is remorselessly dedicated to youth violence [as a source of anxiety] […] Clearly, risk is crucial to panic and governance, and the media provide staging grounds for its symbolic work' (2006, 306).

Rapid cultural change is unavoidably accompanied by doubts about traditional sources of authority and identity, as well as concern regarding the upcoming change, and as a result, provokes the constitution or reconstitution of moral norms (Lemmings and Walker 2009, 16) (which seem to be 'in limbo' because of that change). Inasmuch as the growth of professional journalism, the postal service and commercial printing in eighteenth-century England stimulated the development of public opinion which relied on mediated knowledge that identified and constructed social problems, thus fuelling the anxieties and fears of the Georgian middle classes, the contemporary explosion of 'transmediated continuity'[2] (Jones and Weber 2015) further exacerbates existing concerns about children and youth. In this case, the experience of rapid technological and cultural change feeds the 'ontological insecurity' of audiences, claim makers and moral entrepreneurs across cultures, whether said insecurity is about unprecedented technological change (see for example the popularity and critical acclaim that surrounds *The Black Mirror* even in small countries like Greece[3]), the rise of populist politics (as seen in *The Black Bitch*, *AHS Cult* and *The Good Fight*, Seasons 1, 2, 3; see also Steele and Homolar 2019), or about fears related to children's and youth's well-being. Such 'incapacitating anxiety' (Lemmings and Walker 2009, 16), associated with modern urban living from the mid-eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has a perennial ring to it—even in the post-millennium era.

In this volume, we are interested in depicting the ways in which children and youth are discussed and represented across cultures, as well as in how such knowledge is put to work in the regulation of the conduct and cultural practices of youth. Taking a Foucauldian approach, we want to build upon scholarly work and research that centers around ways of talking about and making sense—'of representing' (Hall 1992, 291)—knowledge about children and youth, usually in terms of anxiety and risk. By looking into how different cultures construct children's and teenagers' everyday cultural and consumption practices and experiences, we delve into how such risk discourses regulate youth—and parenting—at a particular historical moment.

Tsaliki (2016) uses Hilgartner and Bosk's (1988) conceptualisation of social problems as products of a process of collective definition, involving intricate processes of problem-amplifying and problem-dampening, in order to unpack the prevailing narrative of 'risk' engulfing children and youth. Focusing on children's sexualisation, she argues that 'the way we have come to regard discussions of sexualization as something sinister that derives, for example, as a side effect of the consumption of pornography, and as a social problem we need to take policy precautions against, is also tied to the way "risk" has become a commonplace term in the past decades' (83). Drawing on Cradock (2004), she discusses how 'risk' has insidiously crept into our understandings of children and youth and the social policy directed at them, and how it is tied to a notion of 'responsibilization' within neoliberalism, whereby

> the state is no longer responsible for direct service provision to citizens; instead, individuals become their own risk managers, by brokering the risk information made available by state and market agents. Thus, the neoliberal citizen is expected to develop a prudential subjectivity for which risk awareness determines decision-making (Cradock 2004, 322). Rose (1989/1999) has extensively discussed how neoliberal governments have sought to return responsibility for risk management to their citizenry. Within this neoliberal risk management, child protection becomes an issue, as those in need of protection (children), are not equipped to exercise prudential rationalism, hence their parents and their communities become responsible for their well-being. Such a Foucauldian notion of governance (Foucault 1991) is the outcome of the principle that liberal governance ultimately depends upon citizens governing themselves. (Tsaliki 2016, 84)

It is due to such 'risk talk'—driving policy-making at national, cross-national and global level for some time now—that the 'discursive formations' (Foucault 1976/1980 in Thompson 1998, 23–24) of children and teens in (pre- and) post-millennial times construct under 18s as always 'at risk' of being harmed (from almost everything—too much food, too much fun, too much sex, too much popular culture). In his account of the US society, Miller argues that a complex combination of commodification, governmentality and (religious) conservatism has led to its inherent fear of youth—as seen, for example, in the rapid deterioration of the social standing of the newly constructed 'teenager' by the 1950s, amidst concerns about rampant consumerism and irresponsibility. 'Young people clearly incarnate adult terror in the face of the popular. They provide a tabula rasa, onto which can be placed every manner of anxiety' (2006, 311).

As these discursive formations of anxiety unfold recurrently across cultures, they constitute a regime of truth and show that power is not a mere top-down imposition, but circulates productively at all levels, and creates 'transmediated continuity'. For example, the effort to monitor youth sexuality, alcohol consumption, food consumption, bodily size or social media use, produces numerous related discourses on television and radio, in magazines and newspaper articles and pictures, in legislation, in medical and counselling advice, or in research programmes, and across diverse media platforms, such as the internet, tabloids, cultural critics, fans, anonymous commentators, social media, commentary in the popular media and by expert opinion; in this process, they perpetuate constant visibility of the risk discourse.

Having said that, it is not merely that representations of childhood and youth are shaped by morality, nor that conceptualisations of morality imbue perceptions of childhood; such a closely knit nexus also impacts heavily upon policy and practice related to children and youth, as well as the rhetoric of children's rights (Frankel 2012). Once we make sense of children and teenagers as a threat, being innately programmed for wrongdoing, the rhetoric of control and constraint follows, with morality becoming a tool for maintaining order. On the other hand, the social construct of the child as innately innocent, creates social anxieties around certain cultural practices and uses which may result in loss of innocence—hence the need to shield the young from any force or agent that may strip them from it. This notion of the 'child at risk' within a 'risk averse' culture, leads to the rampant 'child protectionism' and 'moral parenting'

we experience today (reserving a lower social standing for those adults who fail to raise 'proper', 'moral' young citizens).

On Governance

We take the view that governing 'designates the way in which the conduct of individuals or states might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It does not cover only the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered, which were designed to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1982, 221).

While self-governance is not new, for the entire nineteenth century was preoccupied with the formation of 'character', where virtues such as perseverance and honesty had to be ingrained into the self, by mid-twentieth century the pursuit of 'personality' (perceived as a process of self-formation through self-discovery, leading to a distinct self-identity) had replaced the quest for 'character' (Hunt 1999, 4). Governing can come from different social positions—from above (e.g. state-sponsored anti-drug legislation), from the middle (e.g. anti-abortion campaigns endorsed by the Catholic Church) and from below (e.g. the name-and-shame practices of child sexual offenders). However, many forms of governing involve some mix of 'governing others' and 'governing the self', usually in the form of 'moral regulation' (6). Moral regulation involves the deployment of moral discourse which constructs a moralised subject (e.g. parents, teachers), and an object or target (e.g. children, tweens, teenagers) which is targeted through moralising practices (e.g. potty training, school prayer, detainment, Sunday preaching). Discourses which award knowledge (informal or expert) and advice as a normative component deem parents responsible for the conduct of their children (for example, parents are advised to monitor their children's viewing habits; smartphone and social media usage and gaming practices), so as to avoid the risk of being 'harmed' (as a result of 'over' or 'premature' exposure to 'non-age appropriate' content). Yet the moral element in moral regulation is detached from religious frameworks and has become linked with utilitarian claims about the personal or social harm that ensues when the 'wrong' conduct materialises—(e.g. in the case of children and youth, excessive food consumption, sexting, child sexual abuse, sexualisation, encounters with sexual content, etc). Hence, moral discourses

link moralised subjects and objects with moralised practices in a way that some wider social harm is inferred unless subjects, objects and practices are appropriately regulated (Hunt 1999, 8)—which is why good parenting today involves an array of disciplinary and regulatory practices regarding children's and youth fashion, leisure, eating habits and experiences.

The social construction of such discourses needs to be understood not in isolation, as separate cultural instances that are endemic in specific cultures, but rather as part of a shifting complex of projects of governance wherein moral regulation encompasses governing others, as well as governing selves. In fact, as we see in this volume, moralising discourses about childhood and teenage life form a unifying umbrella concept of 'child protection' which travels across cultures and governs parental attitudes as well as youth practices from zero to adulthood, while also resulting in calls for legislation, either coercive or regulatory.

As discussed elsewhere (Tsaliki 2015), lying within the need to govern children's and youth's everyday practices is an implicit fear of popular culture—and its 'effects'—which needs to be reformed and sanitised so that it does not offend or corrupt. Peter Burke is among those who take a historical focus on the 'reform of popular culture' (1978) by looking into how the dominant classes in fifteenth-eighteenth century England have tried to change the attitudes, values and cultural practices of subordinate classes through the suppression of 'riotous games', 'carnivals' and other popular activities. Least we forget how in the early twentieth century, opera, Shakespeare and romance fiction were being censored for fear of their immodest impact on the young (Heins 2002, 23); or that the Payne Fund Studies of the 1930s, which inaugurated mass social-science panic about young people at the cinema, propelled several more decades of obsessive attempts to correlate youthful consumption of popular culture with antisocial conduct.

In his insightful reading of present-day US anxieties about youth cultures, Miller extrapolates that there is a pattern when new communications technologies emerge, which immediately identifies children as both pioneers and victims, 'simultaneously endowed by manufacturers and critics with immense power and immense vulnerability'. Whether we refer to 1920s 'Radio Boys' or 1990s 'Girl-Power' avatars, children and youth are set out to be the first to know, yet the last to understand the media (2006, 308).

Contemporary contestations over drinking and smoking habits, especially when youth is concerned, show that the need to reform popular culture and govern others and the self is a narrative that persists to the present, while still raising cause for social concern and providing a target for moral regulation. What needs also to be made clear is that moral regulation is malleable and changing and exists and evolves in tandem with economic or political modes of regulation. Hence, while it may have appeared in evangelical tracts and Victorian serialised novels (Hunt 1999, 17), or in various anti-masturbation booklets (Egan and Hawkes 2010) in the nineteenth century, today, we find it in the guise of self-help texts on the road to 'recovery', and in discourses of 'addiction' (to sex, computers, gaming, smartphones, consoles, dieting, food and so on). Alongside an intricate array of institutional and commercial rules and regulations governing everyday practices (e.g. proper attire at school, banning or not of the hijab in public places, privacy protection of under 18s when using social media, various filters and parental guidance tips provided by ISPs and so on), parents and other adults try to regulate the conduct and subjectivities of children and teens. Yet, for moral regulation to have an impact, it must be able to mobilise a discursive formation (Hunt 1999, 213) which will bring together a number of moralised discourses and perceptions.

Social anxieties revolving around the permeating effects of television viewing (Chapter 1), food and sports habits (Chapter 5), popular culture consumption (Chapter 2), gaming devices (Chapter 7), experiences with sexual content (Chapter 10), sexting practices (Chapter 12), social media use (Chapter 14); or about parental worries (Chapters 13 and 15), show the durability of (anxiety) discourses about popular culture over the past 200 years. Such worries are, in fact, associated with middle-class discourses of childhood development in the West in the nineteenth century, where the dangers of 'unstructured' and 'self-directed' leisure became of pressing concern for middle class reformers (Tsaliki 2015).

While moral politics continue unabated in the twentieth century as well, they underwent a significant change with the gradual decline of the welfare state in late modernity: individuals, as neoliberal subjects, increasingly carried the responsibility for the 'management of the self' at its fullest (Rose 1989). Exemplified in the Thatcherite notions of individual responsibility and 'family values', moral politics return 'retraditionalised' (Hunt 1999, 194). To elaborate, Hunt sees retraditionalisation in the way traditional forms of social relations are reinstated after

Sixties' 'permissiveness', and in the configuration of new social values at the heart of which laid individual responsibility and 'family values'. Such concerns about pleasure without purpose are clad with fears of 'permissive populism' (Hunt 1998). Yet, contrary to the popularisation of sex in the 70s, which meant that even the consuming working classes could not be denied their momentary pleasures of the newly founded 'Soho permissiveness' and the hedonism of tabloid populism, sex education guides, light entertainment and sexploitation films, this time the trickling down of 'permissiveness' concerns children's and teenagers' consumption of popular culture[4] (Tsaliki 2016, 212).

With the gradual demise of the welfare state, the moral regulation of the neoliberal citizen started to employ the language of self-health, nutrition, medical science, and advice coming from wellness instructors, beauty and relationship experts and life coaches; whether it is about young babies and the monitoring of their bodily size, weight, growth (Chapter 4), or about young teenage girls eating habits and body weight (Chapter 5), or young teenager sexting habits (Chapter 12) and experiences with sexual content (Chapter 10), or their viewing (Chapters 1 and 6) and gaming habits (Chapter 7), the disciplinary discourse that governs children's and youth's everyday lives and experiences remains profoundly moral, constructing the ethical subjectivity of the individual (in terms of 'good' and 'bad'). Though there is nothing new in such eruptions of social anxiety surrounding childhood and teenage life, there is a generalised concern that parents may have lost the ability to control their offspring.

This way, and although post-World War II social policy practices were aimed at ensuring the family took on board 'the business of production of normal subject[s]' (Rose 1989, 156), moralising discourses assert the responsibilisation of parents for the conduct of their children. Here lies the contradiction between how children and youth is constructed as 'in need of care and protection' while ascribed increased autonomy, and how the family—parents—is perceived as a potential liability due to 'bad parenting' and its inability to produce 'normal citizens'. Young people are expected to have internalised such self-governing principles, while their parents, as legally and in essence responsible for them, instil and apply those self-governing principles for them.

The Aim of This Volume

In the light of the above, the aim of this edited volume is threefold:

- To gather and reflect on the recent growth of relevant research and scholarship into social anxieties surrounding youth and childhood cultures and practices, and revisit the notion of harm in relation to contemporary media and popular culture and its consumption.
- To enhance both local and global understandings and debates of anxiety by being at the forefront of current research and by including a wide range of experiences from diverse countries and cultures while being premised on a social constructionist perception of childhood and youth.
- To disseminate new research (especially at the intersection of childhood and parenting cultures, consumption of popular culture and media, and narratives of anxiety) from countries we do not necessarily hear very much about, such as Mexico, Brazil and francophone Canada, among others.

And here lies one aspect of this volume's distinctiveness: with most relevant literature focusing on Europe and North America, non-Western accounts of anxiety about children and young people do not enjoy a similar visibility. In existing volumes dealing with moral panics, the discussion on children and youth is either a small part of the overall discussion [as for example, in the three dedicated chapters in Krinsky's *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* (2013), covering such panics in Britain, Poland and Japan] or entails specific concerns related to children (in general), such as child abuse, child pornography, child sexual exploitation and child trafficking, as in Gary Clapton's *Childhood and Youth* (2015).

Julian Petley, Chas Critcher, Jason Hughes, and Amanda Rohloff's (2013) *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*, focuses on the study of drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse and racism, yet extends the geographical scope of analysis only to France and Argentina. Earlier work on moral panics includes Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda's (2009) *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (2nd Edition), and is intended as an exploration of the creation, development and demise of moral panics and of their social repercussions, yet not exclusively on young-aged audiences. On the other hand, the latest cross-cultural work

on children and adolescents, Gielen and Roopnarine's (2016) *Childhood and Adolescence: Cross-Cultural Perspectives and Applications* (2nd Edition), has a more developmental and psychological take and is not interested in the discussion of moral panics at all.

In fact, of all the recent publications revolving around the complexities of cultural construction of youth and childhood through the dissemination of moral panics, it is Charles Krinsky's (2008) *Moral Panics Over Contemporary Children and Youth* that exhibits a broader, cross-cultural approach. Here, we wish to build upon and expand this line of work in order to cover a wider cultural reach on concerns about children and young people. It brings to the fore state-of-the-art, updated international research and discussion on children and youth while adopting the notion of 'discourses of anxiety' instead of the more controversial of moral panics.

Chapter Outline

The volume is internally organised as follows: it is head-started by work revolving around neoliberal notions governing children and youth–a trend we see permeate and dominate contemporary perceptions of 'the young'.

More specifically, in **Part I: Neoliberal Self-Governance, State Regulation and the 'Child at Risk'**, **Martin Barker's** chapter 'The UK "Video Nasties" Campaign Revisited: Panics, Claims-Making, Risks, and Politics" (Chapter 2), accounts for the emergence of moral panics in eighties' Britain by revisiting the 'video nasties' campaign. Through Stanley Cohen's original concept and Stuart Hall's 'mugging' scare, Barker discusses how the term quickly became 'shorthand for a widespread and powerful emotional campaign' and was used by journalists to describe 'any apparently exaggerated fear-claims' (p. 42). He then discusses the process of claims-making as part of a reconstruction of the field of the sociology of social problems and shows how claims evolve and 'bounce' in the public sphere through the construction of a 'rhetoric', before he embarks on the notion of risk management. He re-opens the video nasties campaign by looking into the case study of the Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry, and concludes pointing out the conflict of interest between private and public rhetorics; the manipulative and hidden agenda that laid there with the intension to generate an 'appropriate level of panic'; and the way critical questioning and

public debate on the issue was carefully avoided. Barker makes a poignant remark as to how public scares seem to share a recurrent feature—the claim to be unprecedented—and stresses the need for careful, responsible, scholarly, evaluation (and debunking) of wilfully exaggerating claims-making.

The sexualisation of youth, especially girls', in Quebec features in **Elisabeth Mercier**'s chapter about 'Youth Hypersexualization Discourses in French-Speaking Quebec' (Chapter 3). She takes the Foucauldian perspective of 'problematization' to discuss how 'hypersexualization' is discursively framed as a 'problem' for youth requiring the implementation of 'solutions'. She notes how various narratives of sexual control take shape and regulate young girl's practices and conduct, even in French-speaking Quebec which thinks of itself as less puritanical than its Anglo-Canadian and American neighbours. In her analysis, Mercier highlights the ways in which media discourses take part in the construction of 'youth hypersexualization' by articulating issues about sexual intimacy, pornography and online media. She contends that such sexualising discourses (e.g. pornography, reality TV, sexy fashion) produce 'normative intimacy' by collapsing the distance between adult sexuality and youth, and in so doing, they secure hierarchical social and sexual relations and traditional heteronormativity. She also discusses how the fashion of removing pubic hair, practiced by youth, is also invoked as evidence towards shrinking boundaries of intimacy, of hypersexualisation and of the blurring of boundaries between children and adults. What undercuts all these narratives is online pornography, said to cloud young people's understanding of what good intimacy and good sexuality is. Mercier stresses the paradox that although discourses which claim to be left and progressive and denounce hypersexualisation, condemn neoliberalism and the commodification of bodies and sexualities, yet they call for a private space for sexual and family intimacy without taking into account that family and the privatisation of intimacy are the foundation of capitalist ideology.

In Chapter 4, 'Child Protection Anxieties and the Formation of UK Child Welfare and Protection Practices', **Gary Clapton** examines how social work with children and families has altered over time and it has become imbued by the prevalence of risk—which real it may be sometimes, at others, it is merely constructed. Through a critical history of child protection in the UK, he discusses child welfare and protection agencies, showing the way in which child protection and moral panics

have been in close association, often leading to parent blaming and intense family interventionism. Looking into the 1970s increase of local authority provision of family welfare, he shows the way in which child protection has been dominated by a rescue mind-set which positions parents as a risk for children. Within this renewed emphasis on child rescue, child protection systems are put in place with the sole purpose to protect children from parents, not from neglectful government policies and systemic injustices. Clapton traces the rhetoric of anxiety which has resulted in a significant upward trend in child referrals, though the findings suggest that a large number of families who find themselves in the system are needlessly 'risk assessed'; he points towards mounting evidence which suggests that once 'rescued' and in public care, children are worse off and calls for the business of child rescue to be wound up. This is followed by a chapter that looks into how the domestication of baby monitoring devices both heightens and normalises parental anxieties about babies' health and well-being.

In Chapter 5, 'The Quantified Baby: Discourses of Consumption', **Donell Holloway, Giovanna Mascheroni, and Simone Inglis** explore the amplification of parental accountability and responsibilisation through the incorporation of baby wearables within expected parental practices. Though these technologies are presented as 'empowering' mothers in taking control of their babies' health, the way in which they pressure—women especially—towards 'intensive mothering' is rarely being addressed, and so is their tendency to discredit expert knowledge in favour of personal experience, accumulated via exposure on multiple points of expert referencing on the internet. The authors question also the way in which personal information about babies is stored online and turned in to a valuable corporate commodity, raising serious privacy and surveillance concerns in the process and point towards constructions of 'insufficient' and 'bad' parenting for those parents who refuse or omit such technologies. The chapter employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse fifteen video advertisements regarding baby wearables, only to find that dominant discourse within them is one of risks and responsibilisation, which exploits parental anxieties; that advertisements allude to medical expertise and technology, without claiming expert medical knowledge though; and that they incorporate gendered and heteronormative stereotypes about caring and nurturing.

In Chapter 6, **Sheryl Clark** works on public health concerns around childhood obesity within a broader trend towards 'healthification',

(Responsible Girlhood and "Healthy" Anxieties in Britain: Girls' Bodily Learning in School Sport). She draws on scholarly research on the body and schooling, as well as on longitudinal research into girls' sports involvement in the UK, in order to make sense of how young girls construct themselves as 'healthy subjects' and perform 'successful girlhood'. Clark sees 'risk' as a regulatory discourse which constructs specific versions of girlhood as acceptable, desirable and, importantly, responsible in ongoing efforts to avoid certain dangers, such as obesity. She situates this within a broader context wherein health is considered as a personal imperative. Obesity becomes thus a 'discourse of anxiety' and consequently comes to regulate girls' activities and available identities, particularly where they are 'acted upon' by external forces such as dieting regimes and advertising campaigns.

Part II is interested in **Cultural Practices and Media Discourses of Childhood**. Chapter 7, '(De)Constructing Child-Focused Media Panics and Fears: The Example of German-Speaking Countries' by **Christine W. Trueltzsch-Wijnen and Marketa Supa**, offers a social constructionist contextualisation of media panics debates in Germany, Austria and (marginally) Switzerland in the attempt to build upon the body of work around children and media from a non-UK/ non-USA perspective. The authors explore different worldviews as to the role of the media in children's everyday life and learning, classified as culturally pessimist, media euphoric and critical-optimistic. Then, they draw upon examples of media fears and panics and their possible impact on media education development in German-speaking countries in order to demonstrate how history, politics and culture intersect in East and West Germany, Austria and Switzerland, from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The authors adhere to the view that child-related fears are a complex and continuous social phenomenon, rather than a set of isolated ones. This is followed by **Bronwin Patrickson**'s chapter, 'Free to Roam? *Pokémon Go* and Childhood Anxieties' (Chapter 8) where she first explores the ways in which viral media challenge previous models of moral panics by being participatory and social and presents *Pokémon Go* as a case study with which we can analyse the social fear of datafication. Patrickson ploughs through different approaches to Pokémon peer culture, a culture largely incomprehensible to adults and non-initiates, ranging from accounts of implicating children in capitalist consumption and trade while dehumanising and extorting them, to others that talk about the game's participatory agency, creative

production of fan texts and provision of skills and training for the realities of life within commercial capitalism. By applying Goode and Ben-Yehuda's criteria of moral panics, she illustrates how *Pokémon Go* media panics are set apart from more conventional moral panics. Yet, alongside airing critiques about the game's ability to dump down or to enact a type of predictive analysis and surveillance, Patrickson argues that it inspires playful behaviours while its audiences partake in social and collective urban experiences. In addition, she contends that personal and social surveillance can be seen as empowering and contributing to self-knowledge, subjective experience and learning; at the same time, the experience of shared social presence in real space amongst family members should not be underestimated. Overall, she argues that database cultures and locative game-play are complex and contradictory; in the case of *Pokémon Go*, 'game-play in partnership with narrative and social dialogue can generate humanist environments that accommodate a wide variety of subjectivities, as well as social and cultural practices'.

Chapter 9 comes from Mexico; in 'Children's Grasp of Crime Discourses in the City of Monterrey, Mexico', **Beatriz Inzunza Acedo** looks at how escalating violence in everyday Mexican society was addressed by the media and in popular culture, and at how sixth graders in Monterey, Mexico represented notions of crime and insecurity. The aim of the chapter is to identify the role different sources of information played in constructing young children's discourses of anxiety about crime and violence through the employment of a visual methodology—the critical analysis of children's drawings of 'the criminal'. The study sheds light in young tween's perceptions of threat and insecurity in that it reveals that sixth graders reiterate socially constructed stereotypes of 'the criminal', regardless of the former's socioeconomic status and gender, as male, poor, poorly educated, young, usually working in low-key posts and carrying 'visible' signs of 'criminality', such as piercing and tattoos. The inherent class and gender bias in the depiction of the criminal revealed in this study shows the normalisation of discourses of anxiety about the 'dangerous classes' among young tweens in Mexico.

Part III addresses **Public Anxieties About Children's and Youth's Sexual Health**; in Chapter 10, 'Risk, Anxiety and Fun in Safe Sex Promotion in Australia', **Alan McKee, Johanna Dore, and Anne-Frances Watson** discuss how sex education within an Australian, British and American context is inherently a 'risk' and, by means of focus groups interviews with young 14–16 year-olds, wish to offer an

alternative view of safe sex communication in manner that keeps sex as something pleasurable and fun. Keeping in mind how difficult and complicated is at present to talk openly to young people about their sexual development—in itself the result of the culmination of efforts by various stakeholders and institutions—, the authors stress the way in which the notion of the young in 'need of protection' from sexual knowledge has gained credence. Concurrently they confer that using the term 'risk' in sexual health often suggests that 'risk' is conceptualised in terms of disease and pregnancy, while other aspects of it are left untouched, such as being in a bad, unsatisfying or emotionally abusive relationship; having bad sex; or that risk is a vital part of learning. In order to overcome the problem of having discussions about sex turn into discourses of anxiety, this chapter offers a way for young teenagers to be able to talk about sex, and safe sex, in terms of fun instead of fear through the appropriation of a 'Yes, no, maybe' list of practices and experiences which sexual partners of a young age fill in, rate and discuss with each other. It is believed that such an approach will increase informed and consensual sexual decisions between young partners as it privileges young people's sexual agency over biological approaches to sexual health and development.

In Chapter 11, 'National Contexts for the Risk of Harm Being Done to Children by Access to Online Sexual Content', **Lelia Green, Catharine Lumby, Alan McKee, and Kjartan Ólafsson** bring together findings from cross-national research conducted in 26 countries comparing young children's aged 9–16 experiences with sexual content. Reworking findings from the EU Kids Online survey, Norway and the Australian Research Council, the authors offer a new analysis of data coming from a face-to-face interview-based survey, this chapter suggests that the notion of 'risk' through which youth's experiences with sexual content is often conceptualised, does not do justice to the uses young people put these materials, nor to the role online sexual content may have to play in their healthy sexual development. Building upon McKee et al's Chapter 10, this chapter argues that exposure to risk has become increasingly accepted as important in building resilience and that risky behavior need not be equated with negative outcomes nor harm—instead, within western culture where sexual imagery has become mainstream, the capacity to manage sexual images is an essential skill. The authors explain there are differing responses of children in different national contexts to sexual imagery and, drawing from other research

contexts, that same-sex-attracted young people have been identified as benefiting from sexual content that presents same-sex-attraction as an acceptable orientation. Contrary to such positive feedback from encounters with sexual content from same-sex attracted youth, sexual content may be perceived as troublesome by youth who identify with mainstream heteronormativity.

Bethany Rose Lamont discusses the contentious issue of child sexual abuse in Chapter 12, 'Uncertain Abuse and Insider Credentials: Examining Ambiguous Cultural Representations of Childhood Sexual Abuse in the 2005 British Comedy Series "Nathan Barley"'. She unpacks constructions of victims and perpetrators of child sexual abuse in twenty-first-century Britain and the way these intersect with broader anxieties about race, gender, class, cultural capital, youth culture and the mass as well as marginal media by means of a close textual reading of the sitcom *Nathan Barley*, in order to reveal the contradictory public debates that surround child protection today. The show moves between comic misunderstandings and ethical transgressions and uses comedy, satire, parody and exaggeration to open up the debate about how to represent such a traumatic experience.

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli addresses more anxieties fuelled by children's consumption of popular culture, in Chapter 13, 'Teenage Perspectives on Sexting and Pleasure in Italy: Going Beyond the Concept of Moral Panics'. With many studies treating teenage sexual cultures and their use of technology as inherently problematic, teenagers' sexting practices are often pathologised and hushed. Taking a cultural studies perspective, Scarcelli proposes to read sexual communication between teenagers within the context of intimacy and sexuality, wherein they are active users and producers of media culture. Working closely with 16–18 year-olds, he discovers that sexting is a far more nuanced sexual practice than popular media and adult society tend to present it, connected to body and gender representation, desire, cultural and subcultural scripts, 'good' vs 'bad' sexuality, among others—otherwise put, 'sexting is a more complex inter-social practice than popular anxieties and panic make it out to be'. Therefore, we need to distance sexting from readings of moral panic if we are to make sense of young people's 'intimate citizenship'.

The last section of this volume focuses on parental concerns about children's practices and uses. It starts with **Elisabeth Staksrud's and Kjartan Olafsson's** chapter 'Is It Me, or Is It You? Exploring

Contemporary Parental Worries in Norway', whose aim is to explore the distribution of worries among Norwegian parents (Chapter 14). Through an original analysis of empirical data from a representative sample of Norwegian parents and their children (9-year-olds), **Staksrud and Olafsson** look into wider societal concerns and subsequent media panics, regulations and restrictions; more specifically they are interested in the kind of things that make Norwegian parents worry about their children. Focusing on which factors could explain technology- and media-related worry in parents, the authors are interested in parental characteristics as well as their children's actual media use. They find a clear correlation between time spent on the smartphone and parental worry about their offspring's exaggerated phone use.

Taking cue from how young people use social media for self-expression, for gender and sexuality, **Monica Barbovschi, Tatiana Jereissati and Javiera F. M. Macaya** investigate anxious parenting in Brazil, in Chapter 15, 'Parental Anxieties and Double Standards in Their Discussion of Young People's Use of Social Media: Perspectives from a Qualitative Project in Sao Paulo, Brazil'. They focus on a new kind of emerging anxiety—the 'social networking moral panic', where they discuss two kinds of child-at-risk discourses, that of the child-at-risk from sexual predators, and of the sexualised child. They then follow this up with how social anxieties are being reproduced by exploring how Brazilian parents talk about their offspring's social media use. They argue that underneath the proliferation of moral and media panics reproducing stereotypical depictions of the child-at-risk in present-day Brazil, lie the lack of appropriate knowledge about youth's internet and social media use, a low level of digital skills and literacy, and ineffective parental mediation. They conclude that parental views in Brazil show highly restrictive and paternalistic attitudes in relation to boys and girls and their social media practices, further reiterating gender asymmetries. The authors push towards the need to build digital literacy and media education among adults. They also press the need to train various stakeholders in the discourse of 'normalisation' wherein young people are allowed to have sexual agency, as well as the need for educational programmes on sexting to steer away from victim-blaming and discuss issues related to abuse and coercion versus consent instead.

Teresa Sofia Pereira Dias de Castro and Cristina Ponte's Chapter 16, locates the discussion in Portugal. Given the centrality that risk management has come to play in how we construct childhood in the West,

the authors' point of departure is how adults seem to be either 'afraid for' or 'afraid of' children. Notwithstanding how research in parental mediation overlooks the voice of children, they are interested in how children themselves make sense and reflect upon parental mediation of their digital culture and consumption. Working with young tweens from low and medium socioeconomic class, they delve into parent–child interactions and argue that when it comes to questions about how parental perceptions and mediation are moulded by discourses of anxiety around children's digital media consumption, it appears that the media reiterate risk-based messages that impact upon how parents monitor their offspring digital activities. Furthermore, they suggest that, while acknowledging worrying as part of parenting, children contend that parents should respect their digital citizenship and online participation. The authors stress the mismatch between parental reactions to outdated digital threats, and children's accounts of sheltering themselves from adult prying and surveillance, something that drives a wedge between generations and does not account for actual needs and expectations of both sides.

In the conclusions (Chapter 17), we account for the ways in which the different voices in this volume develop the discussion over moral anxieties regarding childhood and teenage life within different social and political contexts and across different countries, by contextualising contributions under three themes: the politics of children's protection; childhood sexuality and the fear of media effects.

Notes

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-britain-the-safest-place-in-the-world-to-be-online, 'Making Britain the safest place in the world to be online', Press release, 11 October 2017.
2. Within 'transmediated continuity', stories flow and intensify across diverse media platforms such as the internet, tabloids, cultural critics, fans and anti-fans, paparazzi, anonymous commentators, expert opinion, social media, or retail (Jones and Weber 2015).
3. https://popaganda.gr/art/black-mirror-4i-sezon-apo-to-chirotero-sto-kalitero/, *The Black Mirror*, Season 4, ranked from worse to best (in Greek), 6/1/2018; https://www.lifo.gr/now/media/209855/to-black-mirror-epistrefei-me-nea-sezon-kai-ena-epeisodio-poy-tha-einai-diadrastiko, *The Black Mirror* returns, Season 5 (in Greek), 1/10/2018; https://www.ratpack.gr/buzz/features/story/11390/black-mirror-

ta-3-epeisodia-poy-stoixeiosan-ti-skepsi-mas-gia-deytera, How *The Black Mirror* became our favourite nightmare (in Greek), 4/6/2019.

4. Leon Hunt suggests that whereas the 'permissive' sixties were made possible by a proliferation of liberalizing legal reforms, the early 1970s saw a law-and-order package, intended to deal with an 'ungovernable Britain'. Hence the campaign for the return to 'family values' in the seventies was supposed to tackle the trickling down of the 1960s sexual revolution to a wider audience which consumed *The Sun*, sexploitation films and the porn industries in Soho and the provinces (Hunt 1998, 16–33).

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PART I

Neoliberal Self-Governance, State Regulation and the 'Child at Risk'

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CHAPTER 2

The UK 'Video Nasties' Campaign Revisited: Panics, Claims-Making, Risks, and Politics

Martin Barker

Introduction

In the early 1980s, a powerful campaign erupted in the United Kingdom which sought to control the production and circulation of pre-recorded videos. The rise of home video technology, of which the UK was an early adopter, was linked to the fast spread of small, locally owned video rental stores, and also to the release of both back-catalogue and newish films from various sub-genres: horror films and 'documentaries', American drive-in movies, Italian gialli, and exploitation movies, along with a number of other harder-to-categorise individual movies. Collectively, they were dubbed 'video nasties' in 1982. This name, with its vague but disturbing implications, stuck. The campaign in Britain had particular input from a number of evangelical Christian groups which had grown after the late 1960s (headed by Mary Whitehouse and the National Festival

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of Light). Through the mouthpiece in particular of one mid-market newspaper the *Daily Mail* which mounted a loud campaign to 'Ban The Sadist Videos', there was a rising demand on the recently elected Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher to take urgent action.

The campaign succeeded. In 1983, a junior minister Graham Bright resigned his post in order to sponsor what was presented as a Private Member's Bill—a stratagem which kept any controversy at arm's length from the Government itself. The resulting Video Recordings Act, which became law in 1984, imposed the duty of classification on the British Board of Film Censors (to the annoyance of Mary Whitehouse, who despised the BBFC), but imposed a particular duty in such classifications to ensure that videos were 'suitable for viewing in the home' (a phrase promulgated by Whitehouse as a way of enshrining 'family values' in law). The Act listed a series of kinds of act which should never be shown in a film, as a way of specifically outlawing the 'video nasties'.

Some 30 'video nasties' were banned outright, and a number of confiscations and prosecutions followed. The BBFC for a time was pushed to a more censorious position, before changing radically in the late 1990s after the retirement of its long-term Director James Ferman. Since then, however, either uncut or with a few alterations, almost all these films have eventually re-emerged and gained BBFC Certificates. But the expression 'video nasty', and its associations with danger and corruption of children, has lived on—despite even a *Daily Mail* reviewer acknowledging in 2003 how 'absurd' many features of this campaign had been (Egan 2007).[1] It reappeared strongly in 1995 following the killing of 2-year-old James Bulger by two 10-year old boys. The judge at the conclusion of their trial suggested that they might have been damaged by being allowed to watch violent videos. One in particular, *Child's Play III*, was 'fingered' even though there was no evidence the boys had seen it, and even though—as anyone who has watched it knows—the film's narrative centres on the efforts of a teenager to save the life of a threatened small boy. The following day, the most tabloid of Britain's newspapers, the *Sun,* led with the banner headline: 'Burn Your Video Nasties'.

Across this period, I was involved both as an activist (trying to intervene on the arguments being made) and as an analyst (examining and writing about the processes) (Barker 1983).[2] I was recently prompted to revisit the period and its events, to reconsider the campaign in the light of subsequent debates. Re-examining the evidence, I relate it to the main

available theorisations of campaigns of this kind. My argument is that none of them satisfactorily addresses certain key features of the 'video nasties' campaign.

Theorising Moral Campaigns

Three major paradigms have emerged for understanding campaigns such as this: moral panics; claims-making; and risk-management. Each has made substantial contributions to our ways of researching and understanding such phenomena. The three approaches are sufficiently well-known in general terms that I have limited the time I spend on each.

Moral panics: This concept has a specific source, in Stanley Cohen's study of the controversy over the Mods and Rockers' disturbances in Britain in 1968. Cohen (1972) recounts the ways in which minor disturbances at some seaside resorts were taken up through a circuit of journalists, police, politicians, lawyers, and moral spokespeople, until minor incidents were being treated as apocalyptic—and severe actions and punishments were seen to retrieve Britain from disaster. Cohen built a distinctive model of these events, deploying a number of terms (e.g., 'folk devils'—groups who pose major threats to 'decent society') and stages (e.g., 'amplification'—a term borrowed from labelling theory to depict the mutual reinforcement critics give to each other). This detailed model did not necessarily carry forward within the very wide impact that the general concept had. Perhaps most famously, Stuart Hall with colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies applied the concept to the scares over 'mugging' (street robbery) in the UK, but enlarged it to encompass both mounting series of such scares, and wider ideological tensions and purposes around immigration and 'race'.

Many individual studies have deployed the term, with more or less critical precision. Sometimes, as had been noted, the term 'moral panic' is used simply as shorthand for a widespread and powerful emotional campaign. No specific mechanisms, or processes, or stages are implied. The term entered general discourse, and was widely used by journalists as shorthand for any apparently exaggerated fear-claims—to the point where it became, for some, little more than a generalised term of dismissal for distrusted claims. A number of critical re-evaluations of the concept and its history have appeared (e.g., Thompson 1998; Critcher 2003).

Perhaps most persuasively in recent times, Chas Critcher (2003) has re-theorised 'moral panics' as a special case—even perhaps an ideal-type in the Weberian sense—of what he terms 'moral regulation'. Moral regulation refers to all the processes whereby any society debates and declares its shared rules and prescriptions. A 'moral panic' is thus understood as a moment in any society where tensions over those normally operating rules mount uncontrollably. Critcher (2003) has also usefully brought together a series of some of the most interesting applications of moral panic theory to media processes. A number of the essays here reveal the tensions which Waddington trenchantly criticised in Hall et al.'s work: that fears only become 'panics'—that is, non-rational outbursts—when someone can claim 'superior knowledge' which proves the fears exaggerated, even absurd (Waddington 1986).[3] So, for instance, Stephen Stockwell's (2006) examination of the Australian case of Martin Bryant who went on a shooting spree, after—so it was claimed—watching thousands of horror movies. Stockwell feels able to call it a 'panic' after introducing the official evidence that in fact most of his films were musicals. And Suzanne Ost's (2006) examination of fears of child pornography has to make a case that claims of its *influence* are exaggerated before she can identify public concerns as a 'panic'.

Claims-making: Cohen's work was taken up in the USA, within a very different intellectual context, and became associated with the rise of social constructionism. Following Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) eponymous book, the concept of 'moral panic' shifted sideways into an interest in how public moral rhetorics are constructed, asking for example: who makes public moral claims, using what kinds of language and explanatory frames; where and how these receive attention; what organisational means are used; and how claims clash and resolve. This approach did not in fact limit itself to moral campaigns, but addressed also political, medical, and scientific claims. A great deal of powerful empirical work within the sociology of science and culture has unpacked the processes of claims-making, and the operation of persuasive rhetorics within these.

This was all part of a reconstruction of the field of the sociology of social problems, in particular through the work of Malcolm Spector and John Kitsuse (1987/2017), who initiated an argument in the 1970s that all social problems are in fact *constructions*, rather than naturally occurring conditions. Their work took over from the looser 'labelling theory' of the 1960s, proposing a focus on how issues come to be defined as 'problems': hence the name for the approach, social constructionism.

The struggles within the American Psychiatric Association over the issue of homosexuality became one touchstone for this. For a very long time, it had been presumed that homosexuality was a problem, but the rise of Gay Rights organisations put this presumption at risk. The battle over this came to a head with the planning of the third (1980) edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III). Joel Best recounts the historical impact of Spector and Kitsuse's work (1990). He also notes the impact of one critique, which played a role parallel to Waddington's for moral panics. Steve Woolgar and Dorothy Pawluch (1985) criticised what they called 'ontological gerrymandering' in social constructionism. This involved pointing up the inconsistent claim that *other people's* claims about 'problems' were social constructions while sociologists' critiques of these claimed to transcend social conditioning.

A good illustration of the tensions around this can be seen in Best's (1990) work on 'threatened children'. Best recounts the evolution of claims about the 'rising numbers' of missing children in the USA, emphasising its construction as a story, and the wider concerns it was linked with. At one level, Best is insistently descriptive, simply identifying argumentative steps without overtly judging the truth or otherwise of the claims. Yet in various ways, it seems to me, implicit judgements are made. He emphasises their *persuasiveness*—by which he does not mean empirical proof. He draws out their *selectivity*—choosing strongest cases, best illustrative stories, and so on. And he cloaks the whole account in one key term: 'rhetoric'. He closes by proposing that an excess of rhetoric amounts almost to bad faith on the part of claimants: 'as claims-makers assess the response to their claims, or as they address new audiences, claims may be revived and reconstructed in hopes of making them more effective. In such cases, even the most ingenuous claims-maker must become conscious of doing rhetorical work' (Best 1990, 41). Even, then, in the most cautious and anti-evaluative work, judgements can slip through.

Risk-management: Deriving from the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens on the general character of 'modernity', the concept of a 'risk society' became yet another in the line of 'large theories' of contemporary society (think, for example, of the Network Society, Postmodern Society, Information Society, etc.). This approach derives in particular from Beck who, in his ground-breaking book *Risk Theory*, emphasises the way in which the industrial and scientific complexity of contemporary life produces many indefinite threats, which can become the source of stress, and which have to be seen to be managed. Beck

(1992) emphasises three processes: the increasing importance of science and scientists in the *calculation* of risks; the process of their becoming *visible*; and *increased stress and unhappiness* at the heart of contemporary social dynamics.

A large proportion of risk-inspired research has attended to cases of health, environmental, and general scientific fears and scares. Far fewer have addressed specifically media-centred fears—which may partly be explained by something to which Graham Murdock et al. (2003) have drawn attention. They argue persuasively that within certain strands of risk theory is a persistent 'stimulus-response' model, a hangover from an American mass communications approach, which thinks of the media as essentially 'messages-carriers'. On such an approach, the key questions are about 'noise' coming between experts and audiences, and the 'attenuation of messages' as distance grows between speakers and hearers. Murdock et al. argue that the mass media are, rather, sites of key mediating frames of reference, within and through which audiences encounter risk claims. These, therefore, don't just stand between risk claims and their hearers; they shape the way they both appear and are attended to. And indeed, I would add, effective claims-makers learn to orient their pronouncements to the appropriate frame-bearers. Claims-makers who wish to be heard, and to be heard by particular groups, learn to speak in the right registers.

Given these problems, it is interesting to consider the attempt by one researcher working within a European cultural studies frame to show the benefits of a risk theory approach to media-focused scares. Annette Hill (2001) argues that there is a tradition in the UK of calling metaphorically upon discourses about 'environmental pollution' to frame recurrent fears about 'media violence'. She shows the presence of talk of 'risks' within much of the writing about television violence. Using in particular the case of James Bulger, she argues that this constituted a classic 'risk event' generating what she calls a 'ripple effect' (2001, 217). Setting this within Kasperson's theory of the social amplification of risk, she argues for a process of *symbolic framing*, in which the killing of this small boy became, through the work of a series of pressure groups, illustrative of ever-wider problems and risks. Her argument is interesting, but seems to me to be caught on a disabling division. On the one hand, she shows well the role of a series of fundamentalist Christian groups who wanted to use the case to mount a generalised 're-moralisation' campaign, but disguised their intentions behind claims to 'science'—an invitation, surely, to approach this almost as a conspiracy (her talk of 'political tools' (2001, 217), for instance, might suggest this direction). Yet curiously

her framework can appear to naturalise their actions, insofar as they become essentially expressions of broader processes of risk-management in contemporary society. The tension between these turns, I believe, on the issue of the *truthfulness* and *trustworthiness* of the campaigners' claims—an issue that is somewhat problematic not just to risk theory, but also to moral panic and claims-making approaches.

The Current State of Debate

Between them, these three theories have generated valuable research into a huge array of topics: from localised outbursts about bad behaviour to fears about child abuse, sex trafficking, through scientific scares and scandals, medical and health crises, to moral concerns about sexuality, abortion and family decline, political issues such as crime and immigration, economic crises, and many an etcetera. In recent years, there has been considerable debate between the three approaches. Closer consideration of the claims and implications of each has led to a number of people identifying problems and limitations in each, and suggesting cross-overs or revisions (Ungar 2001; McRobbie and Thornton 1995).[4] While many of these are valuable, these reconsiderations appear to share one characteristic: all are conducted at the level of general theorisation. I have not to date found a case where these debates show a concrete difference a paradigm change would make either to methods of research, or to specific empirical claims. Nor do I know of a case where the different perspectives have been tested out on the same case study.

My re-examination of the video nasties campaign centres on three issues which seem to me unresolved in these theoretical reconsiderations:

1. The issue of *detachment* versus *involvement*: either the task of analysts is simply to provide working accounts of the processes, or to take sides through evaluation of the campaigners' claims;
2. Whether we understand scares as simply naturally occurring excrescences—points where societal tensions just overflow for a time; or as interventions—purposive attempts to pump up emotional volume, for strategic purposes[5];
3. How we address the status of claims-makers' public discourses, and their relations with their 'private', that is undeclared, intentions.[6]

Some other more detailed issues emerge from my reconsideration of the campaign.

The 'Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry' as a Case Study

I re-examine the 'video nasties' campaign with particular reference to one specific 'player' within it: the Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry (PGVE). The PGVE played a vital role at one key moment in the campaign. It was of course not alone—and indeed its relations with other 'players' are an important part of this story. But I choose this because, unusually, we have a great deal of information about its workings, and how these affected its role and impact. One of the problems with a good number of analyses of public scares, I believe, is that they depend upon rather distanced information, often mediated via press and television. In some ways, this is for good reason: organisations like the PGVE can go out of their way to be secretive—with the result that their motives have often to be judged from their public assertions; whereas part of my argument is that public rhetorics at least in some important cases are *disguises* for quite other, often more political, purposes. In the case of the PGVE, because one man Brian Brown 'broke cover' and told his story, we know a good deal, if still not quite enough, about the sources, purposes, and actions of this Group. Brown was Head of the Television Research Unit at Oxford Polytechnic, and also a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. It was his Team which was initially employed to provide an evidential base for the PGVE's interventions.

Much of the basic history of the PGVE has been told by Brown (1984), and I only retell it in brief here.[7] The PGVE was founded, quite abruptly, in June 1983, at a meeting organised in the House of Lords by several Conservative peers, at the behest of two people in particular: Dr. Clifford Hill, a former lecturer in religious sociology; and Raymond Johnston of the Order for Christian Unity—both Christian evangelists. In fact, at back of the PGVE lie a series of evangelical individuals and organisations, a number of them with long careers of moral campaigning (for instance, Lord Swinfen, and the Bishop of Norwich). The meeting sought to do two things in particular: to bring on board the mainstream churches to add urgency to the ongoing campaign for video censorship; and to mount a research project to provide the evidence that this campaign wanted. This research, it was planned from the beginning, would be released in three phases, to coincide with stages of the Parliamentary discussion of Graham Bright's Bill.

It is to Part One of the Report, released to a well-primed Press on 23 November 1983, that we need to attend. Its impact was substantial.

Every single newspaper, all TV channels, and radio stations covered it in detail, and almost entirely uncritically. Its most immediate impact was on MPs, who were that day to debate the Second Reading of the Bill. The effect was an almost total absence of questioning, let alone opposition.[8] This fear of querying the Bill continued through all stages of the Parliamentary process.[9] There is no doubt that the contents and tenor of the Report, as carried forward by the media, created an atmosphere in which questioning seemed horribly inappropriate. Front page reports spoke of '40% of six-year olds' watching video nasties. The campaigning *Daily Mail* led with the banner headline: 'SADISM FOR SIX-YEAR OLDS: Videos replace babysitters … and the children's party conjuror' (and here as so often the line between 'nasties', and videos generally, vanished). These claims became watchwords for MPs and campaigners for a time.[10]

On the surface, all three approaches could readily help us identify important features of the PGVE Report. A 'claims-making' approach would point to the apparatus of science used persuasively within it. A methodological introduction, the frequent use of Tables, and so on: all work persuasively to set a status for the Report. Within that approach, it would not be difficult to go further, having access to background documents, to note that these are indeed rhetorics in the pejorative sense of the word. Taking just one other example of the ways in which this simply was not 'research' in the senses we would normally recognise. A Planning document from July 1983 had declared with confident intent that 'Particular focus will be placed upon two questions: choice of favourite three films, and the list of best remembered videos. If these contain X-rated or DPP-listed videos the data becomes highly significant'. The list which *can* be extracted from the Report is not focused on at all—the list of favourite and best-remembered videos for 7–10 years featured the following: (1) *Star Wars*; (2) *E.T.*; (3) *Jaws*; (4) *Superman*; (5) *Return of the Jedi*; (6) *Rocky*; (7) *Annie*; (8) *Octopussy*; (9) *Empire Strikes Back*; and (10) *Grease*. If the claimed scientific status had mattered at all, it would have had to feature this non-result. It was of course simply ignored.

A 'risk' approach could with ease point to the presence of such calculations within the Report. And a strong and overt concern with risks associated with 'class' can be seen in the Report, as here: 'Social class seems to be a relevant variable. A first glance at the parents' questionnaire revealed some differences in social class in terms of availability

and access to video nasties. Working-class children, especially those from large families, appear most at risk in watching the '"nasties"'.[11] Of course, the fact that data on class had not been analysed at all at this point, and that no data were even collected on size of families, only emphasises the strategic role that 'risk-talk' is playing here.

A 'moral panic' approach could attend to the frankly apocalyptic aspects of the Report, which closes with this prognostication: 'A final question that may be answered for us by history rather than research is, does the adulation of violence that is revealed in this survey mean that we may be priming a time bomb of violence that could explode upon our city streets in some 5 to 10 years time?'[12] And once again insider knowledge of the processes could accentuate this. A comparison of the draft Report with the published version reveals a shift from a definite *claim* that there would be blood on the streets within ten years, to the less testable, yet in some ways stronger, *declared worry* that it might do.

But a series of features of the campaign and the Report raise issues which outrun all these. Within days of Part One's release, two stories began to circulate. One related to the curious removal from the project, days before the Report's release, of the Research Team at Oxford Polytechnic who had designed and carried out a National Viewers' Survey intended to provide data to the Group. Without warning, Clifford Hill had descended on the Team's offices and removed all the research materials. Then, when the Team examined the data in the published Report, they realised that a number of the Tables contained impossible results—the most significant being that widely circulating figure that nearly 40% of six-year-olds had been watching video nasties. Simply, there were hardly any responses from children this young at the time the Report went to press. Something was very, very wrong with the Report.[13]

Any theoretical approach to the video nasties campaign has to take adequate account of this essentially bogus nature of the Report, and has to be able to ask what motivated and enabled this to happen, how the deceit was made possible, and how indeed it was concealed.

Secrecy and the Management of Presentation

The conditions of the successful management of this process were that (a) conditions of secrecy should apply, so that critical investigators should get as little forewarning as possible; (b) links with mainstream

organisations (in this case, the established Churches) had to be emphasised, while links with 'extreme' organisations (i.e., the evangelical churches) should be invisible, and (c) the Report should *appear* to come from reputable sources, with appropriate guarantees of its propriety. All these were carefully managed, as the following indicate.

One person was notably absent from the Group's founding meeting: Mary Whitehouse. Whitehouse was by now a veteran campaigner. She had emerged as a formidable figure in the 1960s, with the 'Clean up TV' campaign. This transmogrified into the National Festival Of Light, which more openly sought to promote 'Christian values' against the 'forces of decline and darkness'. Whitehouse, a prominent figure in the wider video nasties campaign, and a close friend of Raymond Johnston, played no overt part in the PGVE. Although we cannot be sure, I believe it is a reasonable deduction that Whitehouse deliberately stayed clear of the PGVE, in order that it could appear 'neutral' and simply 'concerned' (Brown 1983a).[14]

Right up until November 1983, the PGVE shunned publicity, and sought to retain a high level of secrecy about its plans. The reason given to the mainstream Churches, as reported by Brown, was that they did not wish to forewarn the video industry about their research. There are several reasons to think this is not the whole story. Internal memos of the PGVE indicate that they particularly did not want the *Daily Mail* in particular to know of their plans. The *Mail*, as is well known in the UK, had for some time set out to become the distinctive voice of a 'Middle England' concerned with loss of traditional values. It had launched its campaign to 'Ban The Sadist Videos', and was in all obvious senses a natural ally for the PGVE. To seek to conceal their work and plans from the *Mail* has to be because again they wanted it, when it appeared, to be untainted by association with the *Mail*'s campaign. A sudden release at the right moment ensured that less sympathetic journalists would have no opportunity to probe either the validity of the research, or the nature of the commissioning Group. Critical questioning might trigger challenges within Parliament. As Marsh et al. note, in an essay on the political processes in the affair: 'What stops a Private Members bill succeeding? There is in fact an adequate one word answer to this question: opposition. Almost any degree of opposition will prevent a bill becoming law' (Marsh et al. 1986, 181).

It is important to note that the PGVE knew this, and was by no means sure of its success. One month before it released Part 1 of its

Report, a meeting was held in the House of Lords. There was a general update on progress, and a restatement of the timetable for intervention in Parliament's considerations—stating very directly that 'The aim of the research is to produce evidence that will be used in the debates on the Graham Bright Bill'. But the PGVE's leaders were concerned: 'The chances of the Bill completing its stages and becoming low are said to be slim. Although it is anticipated that the second reading will be unopposed it is likely that there will be considerable opposition to the Bill and that opponents will "talk it out" at the Report stage. In that eventuality the Government will bring in their own Bill as they pledged in the Manifesto. But that is unlikely to be before next [Parliamentary] session' (PGVE 1983, 22). They were deeply concerned not to let this happen. This made the management of the tone and impact of their Report ever more important.

Sensitivities stretched to the naming of the Inquiry. Initially, it was proposed to call it the 'Family and Children Media Inquiry', a name which at least half-hints at the moral purposes and reasoning underpinning it.[15] The eventual name, the 'Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry', conjured a feeling of official legitimacy, and was assuredly one of the grounds of the lack of critical attention it received upon publication (Lord Nugent of Guildford 1985).[16] Interestingly, the survey conducted on behalf of the Group by Oxford Polytechnic solved the issue in another way, announcing itself as a 'National Viewers Survey'—a title suggesting complete neutrality, and a purely fact-finding status (Brown 1983). There is no doubt at all that schools' willingness to participate in the survey would have been greatly diminished had there been the slightest hint of the evangelical origins or purposes of the research—renewing, perhaps, the urgency with which early documents emphasise the importance of secrecy.[17]

The removal of Brown and his team from the project is truly remarkable. Some aspects of this will, I suspect, always remain undisclosed. But an educated guess would point to three reasons. First, there were financial conflicts. A budget for the research produced by Oxford Polytechnic costed the project higher than the Group had initially expected. In the end they had to 'pay off' the Team for work done, to save money. Second, Hill was evidently furious at the Team's highly critical response to his first draft, dropped off for them to consider just days before publication. But thirdly, there is reason to think that Brown had upset them

in other ways as well. One of the triggers for the removal of Brown's Team from the research was his report, submitted in early October 1983, of his visit to the Cannes Film Festival. The 'innocent' Brown reported his conversations with video producers and distributors, including those involved in 'soft porn', at VIDCOM 1983. Brown reported their concerns over the 'Bright Bill', and appeared to accept the distributors' claims that compared to the USA, 'even under the present voluntary ad hoc arrangements the British market is more "family orientated"'. Brown (1983) further emphasised that he had insisted on remaining academically neutral, throughout these conversations: 'As a research Unit our policy has to be such that we maintain academic neutrality and objectivity in all our investigations. There is clearly an arguable case for the industry and as a Unit we must at all times respect that in presenting any evidence' (Brown 1983b).[18] Granting that the industry had an 'arguable case' was never going to be acceptable to the PGVE's evangelical crusaders.[19] Brown's Cannes report was relayed just three days before the divisions within the PGVE emerged sharply. This importantly reveals the *urge to purity* that underpinned Hill's actions.

For the founding documents reveal that such contact and consideration would be regarded as simple 'contamination'. There were deep evangelical commitments behind the Group. At its initial meeting, Raymond Johnston submitted a Consultative Document which posed the problem as one of reasserting 'Christian concerns' in the face of predominant 'libertarian and secular ideals'—and emphasising that it is the fact that here, this time, 'the fact that it is the health and safety of *children* which is at stake suggests the possibility of public and Government support for a new initiative if clear evidence *compels* attention'. The *requirement* for the research was that it would supply that evidence.

Clifford Hill in particular was then and has remained ever since an ideologue for a particular brand of evangelical Christianity. At the time, Hill was clear: 'It is worth remembering that of the 27 civilisations the world has so far known each one has collapsed through moral disorder and corruption. … The same fate will overtake Britain in the near future with the systematic perversion of our children and the corrupt personal morals of large numbers of our citizens' (Clifford Hill, 'Address to the Order of Christian Unity', 1984). Looking back over his extended 'ministry' more recently, Hill drew the connections into the open:

> Like Jeremiah I seem to have spent most of my ministry looking with dismay at the decaying moral and spiritual state of the nation, the godlessness of political leaders and the impotence of spiritual leaders. I'm not alone in this. … Many farseeing Christians have been warning of the consequences of the changes taking place in our society for thirty years. Our warnings about the effects of abortion, of unregulated divorce, of the corrupting power of pornography, of explicit sex education in schools, of uncontrolled discipline among young people, of the drink and drugs culture, of the influence of violent videos and DVDs, of the addictive power of computer games and many other social forces - have all gone unheeded. (Hill 2010)

The politics in here are interesting, which amount to a transference of blame from specific social actors to 'us all', as here: 'Britain is not simply suffering from economic woes. The underlying cause of the financial crisis is primarily moral and spiritual. That was the conclusion of a meeting of Christian leaders from church, business, politics and academia in the House of Lords in December 2008. They recognised that the responsibility for the present state of our nation does not primarily lie with the bankers and the financial traders, but we all bear some responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of the nation' (Hill 2009).

The Report, meanwhile, works hard to present itself as a piece of science, with all the apparatus of methodological summary and Tables galore. But these devices are repeatedly undermined by thinking which is not just inconsistent, but also blind to its own inconsistency. For instance, it comments on the impact of that police compilation on MPs, as follows: 'It is relevant to note that when a number of MPs were shown a 22-minute film consisting of short clips from a number of different videos many of them were unable to stay to the end. Yet there is a major difference between watching short clips and watching the entire story. In a full length film the characters are developed and the viewer identifies with them as specific human beings. Then when they commit violence or are the victims of violence there is a heightened degree of realism from the mere viewing of a single sequence' (Clause 11.4). This is of course an empirical claim, and one which could in principle be explored and tested. But just four Clauses later, the Report in effect argues the exact opposite—and doesn't know that it is: 'Another point requiring further investigation is the effect upon children of re-running many times scenes of horrific violence that become firmly imprinted in their minds. In interviews with children who spend many hours watching "video nasties" our

researchers found that they not only re-run favourite scenes but slow them down to watch the most gory details in slow motion' (11.8).[20]

At other levels, the Report displays high levels of simple ignorance. The most glaring and revealing example of this comes, in fact, in Part Three, published in 1985. At one point, this lists films declared favourites by one class of children. She dubs these 'almost all horror or pornographic' (Wynnejones 1985).[21] This list is hilarious. Alongside titles such as *Emanuelle II* (1975, which can at least class as a sex movie), *House near the Cemetery* (a 1981 Lucio Fulci horror film), and *Phantasm* (1978, a straightforward horror-test movie, about a boy who has to save his brother from the 'Tall Man'), it includes titles such as: *American Graffiti* (George Lucas' 1973 sophomore movie celebrating the 1960s); *Lemon Popsicle* (a 1976 coming-of-age movie about teenage boys in 1950s Israel); and the 1974 British sex comedy *Confessions of a Window Cleaner*. Nothing unites the list except an author's dislike of the *idea* of them.[22]

This degree of ignorance is both common and symptomatic. It can of course only function if the Report's readers are as ignorant as its writers. It reveals, particularly, a parlous state of debate about media matters in political circles, whose participants frequently almost delight in their own detachment. This 'public sphere' celebrates its own lack of knowledge. But for us, the simple act of naming such ignorance has to be to take an evaluative, critical stance towards it.

Conclusion

Where do I believe this re-investigation of the PGVE takes us? First, let us note that this account is only possible because of the *level of detail* which, unusually, has become available. But having that detail enables us to see several vital features: (1) the conflict between declared and actual motives, private and public rhetorics; (2) the highly purposive, cynical management of processes in order both to conceal these, and to try to ensure the generation of an 'appropriate level of panic'; and (3) the dependence on avoiding critical questions, allied to a low level of public knowledge and debate on the topic. These are not issues readily dealt with any of the three main theoretical approaches to such public scares. Crucially, to understand the PGVE is to evaluate them as deceitful, manipulative, governed by undeclared motives—and ruthless.

What wider arguments or positions are thereby implied? I offer the following broader propositions, in conclusion:

1. There needs always to be an investigation of *both* the public positions and rhetorics of claims-makers, *and also* of their motivations, purposes, and wider commitments. The latter may be harder to research, but that is not a reason for ignoring them and simply taking public discourses at face value.
2. The relations between public and 'private' declarations need careful examination. How do claims-makers adjust and refocus their 'private' positions in order to help them fit more shared public frames? What is changed, or hidden, in the process? This is not, I would stress, something peculiar to conservative organisations. My examination of the gap between rhetorics and purposes in the 1950s British horror comics campaign showed the same kind of concealment being used by the British Communist Party, as it sought respectability for its wish to attack 'American cultural imperialism' (Barker 1984b).
3. What *conditions for truth-testing* exist within the public frames? How and by whom are claims assessed? What tests of plausibility and coherence exist? What tests *could* they be subjected to? What do the answers to these questions reveal about the state of contemporary debate on the issues involved?
4. Finally, and most controversially, I believe that there is a fundamental issue about our relations as researchers to such 'scares'. The 'video nasty' scare was in some ways a special case. Its intensity, localisation, particular players, etc., are all distinctive. This has two important implications. First, it is arguable that *all* such cases are special and highly individuated. Indeed, perhaps the most recurrent feature of all public scares is their *tendency to claim to be unprecedented*. 'This change', 'this development', 'this danger' is unlike any we have previously encountered. But that tells us something rather important. Genuinely new situations, if such can be conceived, would come with little or no existing relevant knowledge. Existing expertise declares itself redundant, if not tainted. There is, if you will, a wilful ignorance in such 'scares', a conviction that old knowledges just don't apply, which we as researchers cannot afford to let go by. We have seen the way the issue of *truth* and *reliability* keeps recurring in the debates over the three broad approaches, and in the history of the PGVE. Under whatever

banner our research into public scares proceeds, we cannot duck our responsibility to evaluate claims. Claims-makers—speaking often with the force of moral conviction but from the ignorance of the already certain—will exaggerate, distort, and sometimes lie. They will offer concepts and propose theories designed to resonate in public debates. This surely is the point at which our *descriptions* of these processes necessarily spill over into evaluation. No doubt scholars will be more or less happy to be directly interventionist. But any such investigation is to some degree an intervention unless we choose to keep it deliberately obscure and unavailable outside closed academic circles. We should not frame our concepts in a way which hides this. To this extent, Waddington (1986) is surely correct in his critique of the apparent 'neutrality' of moral panic theory.

5. The second implication is that there may simply be limits to the extent to which a *general theory* of such events can help us. Each new 'scare' both claims, and in some ways has novelty, even uniqueness. It is their local conditions and specific circumstances which demand our close attention. In a recent essay about the state of American society, Toby Miller (2006) has recapitulated some of Hall et al.'s ideas, postulating a link between moral panic and risk theorising. Miller argues that America has become a society especially prone to 'panics', focused around a deep-seated and recurrent fear of youth. Among the conditions producing this, he argues, is the very high level of simple endemic ignorance.[23]

Of course, to intervene is to risk our own knowledges, to distinguish the things we can say confidently from those where we have not yet done the research. But ideally, I would argue, this could encourage us to take on the responsibility that flows from this: to pin down the things on which we don't have (sufficient) evidence, and to try to design the research which could then make that difference.

Notes

1. See Egan (2007), p. 3. Egan's book is the most important re-evaluation of the campaign and its aftermath, to date.
2. In late 1983 an article of mine, 'How nasty are the video nasties?', was published in *New Society*, a magazine of social commentary. The

publication date coincided with the second reading of the Video Recordings Bill in Parliament. Later, in 1984, I edited a collection of critical and reflective essays on the campaign (Barker 1983).

3. See Waddington (1986).
4. See for instance the influential essay by Ungar (2001). See also McRobbie and Thornton (1995) who claim among other things that a rising level of *resistance* by those labelled 'folk devils' has undermined the power of moral panics.
5. This tendency has always seemed to me to be built into the selective use of Cohen himself, and in particular into his endlessly quoted opening definition of a 'moral panic' which begins 'Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic'. Making 'societies' the subject of the sentence, and thereafter writing mainly in the passive voice, easily allows a slide to seeing these almost as natural processes.
6. This recently became an issue for me in quite another connection, in research I undertook on a cycle of films about the Iraq war. My exploration of these led me to the use of the concept of 'post-traumatic stress disorder', and the literature on the construction of 'medical expertise' that is embodied in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). A number of researchers have brilliantly unpicked the ways in which competing forces, with incompatible motivations, led to the production of the category 'post-traumatic stress disorder' in the 1980 revision to the Manual. See for instance Scott (1990), Mayes and Horwitz (2005). My application of these to the films was published in my *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (2011).
7. See Brown (1984). Until Brown's revelations, none of us involved in trying to respond to the campaign had any idea how deep-going the distortions and untruths were.
8. Clearly there were other influences. One was the result of a collaboration between Mary Whitehouse and the police, who put together a video compilation of the 'worst bits' of the video nasties, which they screened to MPs. MPs were duly 'sickened'.
9. One person who tried was the Labour Lord Douglas Houghton, who met Brian Brown and learned something of the PGVE's methods and purposes. In letters to me, he makes clear the extent to which the Bright Bill was a Government initiative under the guise of a Private Members' Bill: 'You will see that we are making little impression, simply because the Government (and Nugent) are afraid that any amendment which might arouse strong opposition among Conservatives in the Commons would cause trouble'. When Houghton refused a strong request to let the Bill be rushed through, he was put under pressure and accused of filibustering. He notes with regret that 'the opponents [of the rushed Bill] are lamentably few: I cannot explain why' (Personal letter, 30 April 1983).

10. One member of the Oxford team, Janet Stockham, took notes of what was said at the launching November 23rd Press Conference. It was here that these phrases first appeared: videos were 'replacing the babysitter, and the conjuror at children's parties' Stockham's (1983) notes added her personal comments that in the research 'no questions were asked about the frequency with which parents used babysitters, or whether a babysitter or VCR is employed. Even if they were asked, the parents' data has not yet been analysed. [S]imilarly, we have no data about conjurors at birthday parties'.
11. This language of 'risk' intruded into the Parliamentary debate itself, but with a subtle shift, when one campaigning MP denounced middle-class parents for their lax attitudes: 'I bitterly regret that those middle-class people who sit on beanbags wearing Gucci accessories in their Hampstead flats which are bedecked with Laura Ashley decorations and talk about world affairs should allow their children to see the type of video films with which we are dealing' (Jerry Hayes, MP).
12. In significant ways this is redolent of the infamous speeches on race and immigration made in 1968 by the Conservative politician Enoch Powell. Where Powell had spoken of seeing within a generation the black man gaining the 'whip-hand' and, like the old Roman, seeing the 'Tiber flowing with much blood', now the 'enemy within' was of a different order. But the scale and language of the fears is strikingly similar.
13. It is worth recalling that, shortly after the publication of these claims, in a neat reversal communications researcher Guy Cumberbatch surveyed schoolchildren in Birmingham with a list of films. The difference was that Cumberbatch included in his 'list' a number of non-existent titles, to make the point that children are inclined to report things they *would like to be thought to have seen*. Cumberbatch found two-thirds of children claiming to have seen films which do not exist. Bizarrely, Clifford Hill denounced Cumberbatch for unethical use of the children he surveyed.
14. Notes of their October 1983 meeting reveal this with a wonderful blandness: 'We have, therefore, not given any information or interviews to the Christian press. For the research to be efficiently carried out it is essential that we do not receive any publicity until the survey has been completed and all public responses obtained' (Brown 1983). Just weeks later, concern was being voiced after the *Times Educational Supplement* queried the purposes of the research, suggesting that it actually was 'researching video nasties in an indirect way'.
15. See 'Children and Video—A Danger and a Proposal' (Confidential Briefing Document, May 1983), p. 4.
16. Revealingly, the third part of the Report, published the following year, retreats from this claim to calling the group an 'informal Group of

Parliamentarians and Churchmen'. By this time, the bogus status-claim had done its work, and could be dropped (Lord Nugent of Guildford 1985). In the meantime, the Group's pseudo-Parliamentary status could be of use in other ways. After Brown's team, and a number of the mainstream Churches protested at developments, Lord Swinfen offered an enquiry, to be led by a retired University Vice-Chancellor. When this report became available, it was declared not only confidential but governed by Parliamentary privilege, thus preventing any examination of its contents.

17. Indeed, a number of local authorities and schools did protest when they saw how their pupils' responses were being used and the frame within which they were being set.
18. Brown's (1983) own major summary of the problems and breakdown records that Clifford Hill declared to Brown's secretary, in his absence, that 'Brown is an evil man and is working for Satan'.
19. In a Memorandum to Hill setting out his rising concerns Brown quotes another document I do not have, which records a view from which Brown (1983) dissociates himself and other members of the Working Party: 'There was strong feeling among the Sponsoring Group that the proposed Bill would not go far enough'.
20. It has to be noted again that, as Stockham recorded, the survey included no questions about repeat viewings, let alone their impact.
21. Wynnejones (1985), p. 145.
22. One title, *Going Steady*, does not appear to exist at all: the only likely candidate is 1984's *14 Going Steady*—but that isn't even in English.
23. Miller (2006), pp. 299–318.

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CHAPTER 3

Youth Hypersexualization Discourses in French-Speaking Quebec

Élisabeth Mercier

Introduction

In the mid-2000s, the "sexualization" of youth, particularly girls' sexualization, emerged as a new issue of public, feminist, and media concern in Quebec and elsewhere in the Western world (Mercier 2013). Literature usually traces the emergence of sexualization as an object of concern back to government reports, academic papers, and media discourses produced in Anglo-Saxon countries (Egan 2013; Jackson and Vares 2015; Tsaliki 2016). Notably, in Australia, an institutional report about the "sexualization of children" came out in 2006 under the alarming title *Corporate Paedophilia* (Rush and La Nauze 2006), and in the United States, the American Psychological Association (APA) published its *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* in 2007. Both these reports played a decisive role in securing the "sexualization of youth problem." However, they also raised a number of criticisms (Egan and Hawkes 2008; Lerum and Dworkin 2009), particularly in the academic world where a counter-discourse has developed, challenging

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the very notion of sexualization and taking into account girls' agency and perspectives on sexuality (Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Renold and Ringrose 2011).

Furthermore, anxieties and debates about the sexualization of youth can be found across different cultures (Tsaliki 2016), and traces of discourses about sexualization can even be found prior to its wider diffusion throughout the Anglophone world. More specifically, in Quebec, a special feature in the French-speaking daily *Le Devoir* in 2005 became a turning point in placing the "hypersexualization" issue on the public agenda. The featured articles depicted a phenomenon of sexual debauchery where young girls "distribute fellatios on the school bus" and boys wonder whether their "12-year-old girlfriend would enjoy fist fucking" (Chouinard 2005a).[1] This phenomenon was said to be directly tied to an alleged "tidal wave of sexuality" in the media, resulting in a loss of bearings and values in youth, especially in relation to sexuality: "sexuality is losing its meaning in a society plagued by pornography" (Chouinard 2005a).

In French, *hypersexualization* is usually the preferred term over *sexualization* and it is more common than the latter. Although the term has multiple meanings and may designate what is perceived as excessive sexualization of the female body, early sexual activity, and/or the pervasiveness of sexual representations in the media (Caron 2009), the phenomenon it describes is often considered to be self-evident. For instance, hypersexualization refers to what is considered to be a sexist, excessive, and consumerist pornographic culture that has taken over popular culture, advertisement, and fashion, and that is targeting mainly young girls. In addition to this preoccupation with the "pornographication" (McNair 1996) of the media and public space, the trivialization of what is referred to as "extreme sexuality" on the Internet and the redefinition of intimacy are also issues that are put forward as causes of the "problem of hypersexualization" of youth, and hence as evidence thereof.

I argue that the ways in which online pornography is used in the discursive framing of hypersexualization as a problem requiring the implementation of solutions, should be considered in the light of what Foucault (1984) terms "problematization": the set of meaningful practices that makes an object enter the domain of thought as a problem. From a Foucauldian perspective, objects are constituted and naturalised as problems notably through the proposition and the implementation of "solutions." Indeed, various solutions have been put forward and concrete measures have been taken in response to the "problem" of youth

hypersexualization in Quebec—thus producing the problem as serious enough to necessitate solutions—including a "vast dress code reform movement initiated by high schools in order to eliminate the sexy look fashion" (Caron 2009, 8). In 2005, even the Quebec Liberal Party's youth wing came out in favour of legislation prohibiting thong wearing in schools (Robitaille 2005). Furthermore, at the federal level, the Conservative Government under Stephen Harper passed Bill C-22 in 2007 amending the Canadian Criminal Code to raise the age of sexual consent. Whereas the initial intent was to address concerns about hypersexualization and cyber pedophilia, in practice, this bill resulted in "criminalizing consensual relations between adolescents (between the ages of 14 and 16) and adults, where the age difference is over five years" (Desrosiers and Bernier 2009, 13). In addition to this is a range of sexual and media education initiatives and advocacy in favour of strengthening parental authority and Internet monitoring, relying on and producing at the same time the idea that online pornography is a source of danger, particularly for teenage girls, that must be contained and prevented.

In this chapter, I propose a reflection on youth hypersexualization by means of a critical analysis of media discourses that produce it as "the focus of concern and debate, and potentially public action" (Neveu 2015, 7) in French-speaking Quebec. It should be noted that, when it comes to sexuality, *Québécois* like to think of themselves as being more liberal and less puritanical than their Anglo-Canadian and American neighbours (Chung 2011). Therefore, there is a lack of public arguments in favour of abstinence or calls for strong enforcement of sexual laws. However, many sources of sexual control exist, whether feminist, progressive, or scientific, and the majority of discourses about hypersexualization in Quebec comes from media institutions and actors that are deemed to be more liberal than conservative. For example, the independent daily *Le Devoir*, which has been at the forefront of the hypersexualization "panic," is known to be rather left-wing as well as more rigorous and less sensationalist than other newspapers.

First, I will present the conceptual and methodological framework of this research, clarify my use of the concept of "media discourse," and point to some of the texts that are included in my analysis. I will then move on to the findings of my analysis and highlight how media discourses participate in the production of the problem of youth hypersexualization in Quebec via articulating issues related to sexual intimacy, pornography, and online media. In the conclusion, I will address what I

call "normative intimacy" in greater detail, a condition both produced and regulated by hypersexualization discourses. The latter denounce, among other things, the shrinking of the boundaries of intimacy and the blurring of the boundaries between adult sexuality and the world of youth at the crossing of pornography and online technologies.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Addressing the issue of youth hypersexualization as a set of discourses that have implications and repercussions in relation to both representation and regulation requires thinking more broadly about issues of power and relationships that organise these discourses. I take a critical theoretical approach to examining the various modes of exercising power outside the traditional institutions and understanding thereof, focusing rather on where it seems to occur naturally and where it is taken for granted (Foucault 1976). This entails taking into consideration not only the discourses that construct youth hypersexualization as a social problem, but also their conditions of emergence, as well as the conjunctural power struggles and mechanisms that intersect in these discourses. For example, what role do the various hypersexualization discourses play in a conjuncture marked by a widespread feeling of anxiety towards digital technologies and the opportunities that they provide for the production, distribution, and consumption of sexual content?

Needless to say, sexuality has a great social and political importance: it has an impact and it motivates meaning-making processes that go well beyond erotic desire and bodily practices. Foucault (1976) has shown the extent to which sexuality, has been essential to the moral and symbolic order of society (family, citizenship), charged with meaning, and encompasses each individual's "truth" since the eighteenth century. Thus, the "true discourse" regarding sexuality has both a normative and a regulatory function. For example, it is used to establish and justify the "hierarchical system of sexual value" that Gayle Rubin (1984)[2] identifies as being one of the axioms of conventional thought about sex. Consequently, anything that undermines, challenges, or contravenes the social, moral, and sexual organization will trigger strong reactions and anxieties that later justify the implementation of new control measures.

In light of this, analysis of sexuality discourses and their normative and regulatory functions acknowledge the radically plural nature of moral or ethical issues, as well as the fact that one of the functions of exercising

power is to determine what is "true" (Foucault 1994). Therefore, the main objective of the theoretical and methodological framework developed in this chapter is to think differently about youth hypersexualization, neither from a place of indignation, which is often the response it triggers, nor polemics, which usually shape these discourses, allowing "for no possibility of an equal discussion" (Foucault 1984) and forcing participants to take a stance: either against or in favour. To this end, I have used two key concepts that allow to transcend the binarism of polemics as well as moral issues in general: problem and conjuncture. Again, I use the former term within the meaning of Foucault's "problematization." Focusing the analysis on the ways in which certain objects are constituted as problems at a certain time and/or spaces, has the advantage of not remaining constrained within the confines of the terms of the problem—especially those that are naturalised to the extent where they are never questioned and are only discussed in relation to "solutions." This also helps to avoid the trap of counter-discourse, which can sometimes result in formulating other responses, in this case, finding other solutions to the "hypersexualization problem," without calling into question the construction and reality of the problem itself.

In addition, I have used the concept of "conjuncture" (Hall et al. 1978) in order to take into consideration the problem's socio-historical and contingent roots. By directing the analysis towards the operating voices, trajectories, and forces that define a concept historically and culturally, the conjunctural approach makes it possible to grasp some of the tensions that characterise the problematization of youth hypersexualization, including those related to online pornography. The key stage in conjunctural analysis is contextualization (Grossberg 1997): where, how, and due to whose action is hypersexualization produced and acknowledged as a problem? A range of contexts of problematization of youth hypersexualization in French-speaking Quebec can be reconstituted, and the media are one of them. On the one hand, the commonsensical notion of media influence on young people is consistently cited as the main culprit for hypersexualization and so-called moral decay; on the other hand, media actors, in particular news media, are directly involved in keeping the issue of hypersexualization high in the agenda. In fact, researchers from France have attributed the use of this term within the French-speaking world directly to Quebec journalists and media (Liotard and Jamain-Samson 2011). In short, the media are at the same time subjects and objects of discourse: they include major arguments, actors,

institutions, and power relationships that are constituent parts of the problematization of hypersexualization in the current conjuncture.

I have therefore chosen to focus my analysis on the media as a specific context of problematization of youth hypersexualization in French-speaking Quebec. In this regard, the power that media have in contemporary societies to "name" (Couldry 2003) reality is a case in point: hypersexualization becomes a problem as soon as it is named as such and by dint of their capacity to name, media participate in the production and definition of the problem of hypersexualization. In addition to this, by consistently hinging it on issues of pornography and digital technologies, the media discourses concerning hypersexualization seem to put forward a particular understanding of the problem, namely in terms of a pornographication of the public media space.

The designation "media discourses" used in this chapter thus refers to the involvement of media institutions and their specific actors in producing youth hypersexualization as a problem and an object of public concern. Aside from journalists, columnists, reporters, and commentators, a range of actors presented as experts on issues of hypersexualization are regularly invited to contribute to the debate (educators, sexologists, psychologists, and so on). Their status as "socially accredited experts" (Cohen 1973, 9) and the authoritativeness of their knowledge may rest either on research they have carried out, their lived experiences, or social status which possibly implies that simply working with children may be accepted as a guarantee that the individual possesses expertise and knowledge in relation to youth sexuality. In addition, the expression of this expertise can take various forms, depending on the context in which it is presented: comment, opinion, account, or advice. Consequently, the context in which experts are being recognised as such is not limited to the media, but may also include books, scientific research, or conferences. A range of discourses and statements by media actors are therefore presented as "truths" rather than simple "enunciations" (Foucault 1971, 22) of contingent and situated knowledge, values, and norms.

In addition to these experts, there is another type of actor that I refer to as "public figures." These figures enjoy substantial notoriety and visibility in the media not only because the latter give them attention, but also because they produce popular cultural content themselves (books, movies, blogs) and appear on a variety of media platforms (see endnote 2). Their reputation adds leverage to the weight they already hold in the media and elsewhere: this distinguishes statements by public

figures from those of experts who generally remain relatively anonymous. Furthermore, the expertise that the status of public figure is sometimes coupled with not only gives authority to their discourse, but also legitimises the need for authoritativeness. In other words, it produces the issue of hypersexualization as important enough to draw interest from experts and public figures.

In summary, this chapter offers an analysis of media discourses that produce youth hypersexualization as a social problem within a conjunctural perspective. The body of analysis comprises, on the one hand, of texts produced by major French-speaking print media in Quebec, including factual articles, columns, editorials, letters to the editor, and online comments; on the other hand, it includes documents originating from a range of actors (experts and public figures), whose discussion of hypersexualization is picked up in the media: scientific articles and reports, conference proceedings, books, and statements made in interviews. Sampling strategies included theoretical saturation criterion, purposive sampling (documents or individuals that are widely cited, have the greatest impact or enjoy significant credibility), and "snowball" sampling (one reference leading to another). In total, 91 texts have been analysed.

The body of documentation is gathered around but not limited to the year 2005, which is a pivotal year in the agenda-setting of youth hypersexualization in Quebec. In addition to the large number of articles and news reports that appeared in the media on the subject, in 2005, the *Office québécois de la langue française* (the agency responsible for seeing to the application of the Charter of the French language) approved the use of the term hypersexualization, in the public administration documents as well as everyday language. Among the analysed texts, I paid particular attention to a special feature that the French-speaking daily *Le Devoir* devoted to hypersexualization (Chouinard 2005a, b, c, d; Rioux Soucy 2005a, b) and to the proceedings of an initial symposium on hypersexualization that brought together a substantial number of experts from various backgrounds (sexologists, social workers, educators, physicians, and feminist researchers) and which was held in Montreal (Goldfarb and Kebbouche 2005).

I analysed the documents collected using Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault 1971) in order to reveal the power relationships, processes, and issues that produce the problem of youth hypersexualization and its specific "truths." First, I identified and classified the main statements made in relation to hypersexualization (key themes addressed, regular or

rare use of terms, tone, and stances taken). Following that, I identified recurring and rarefied elements of discourse as well as the main objects and subjects of discourse (who can speak, about what, for whom, with what authority). Online pornography stood out as a recurrent issue in discourses and this is why I chose to focus my analysis on the use of new media and pornography in media discourses concerning youth hypersexualization. Furthermore, I stressed the effects of these discourses in terms of representation and regulation, including the definition and delimitation of a normative intimacy.

Analysis

Media discourses about youth hypersexualization often deplore the fact that the practices and aesthetics of pornography are flooding public space, in particular the culture that youth are immersed in:

> Pornography has become widespread. It is invading school grounds, clothing, tattoos, sex bracelets, music, computers. (Robert 2005, 213)[3]

In addition, the so-called pornographication of public space is perceived as a major cultural and sociopolitical change, resulting from the encounter between pornography and technological development (Attwood 2010). In fact, access to consumption, dissemination, and production of pornographic content facilitated by new technologies and digital media (Internet, webcams, smartphones) are a key part of discourses that construct the problem of youth hypersexualization in terms of excess and risk (Tsaliki 2016), as shown in the following excerpt:

> Young people use the Internet excessively and, somewhat naïve parents should know, not only for school! Addicted to online chatting, they get indecently easy access to images of a pornographic nature. Can this cyber frenzy explain the trivialization of sexuality, which youth begin to practice at an increasingly early age? (Chouinard 2005c)

This excerpt touches upon a range of elements that I will bring up shortly in my analysis. Firstly, pornography is presented as particularly dangerous at the intersection of online technologies, in particular because it penetrates the world of young people but escapes parental scrutiny and control. Moreover, these discourses place youth

hypersexualization within the broader social concern about the contemporary "over-exposure of intimacy" (Tisseron 2002) whereby what should be kept private is understood to be made excessively visible.

Pornography at the Intersection of Online Technologies

Henry Jenkins (2007) has argued that when it comes to pornography, the medium is indeed the message. The advent of printing and subsequently of photography, cinema, and video brought about new modes of representing, broadcasting, and consuming sexuality as well as a redefinition of the public–private boundaries. For instance, video recording made it possible to reduce production costs, giving rise to "amateur" pornography, and to consume sexual moving images in the privacy of the home. The accessibility of means of production and the possibility for private consumption offered by video have marked what constitutes a genuine revolution in the world of pornography, and even in society as whole: a new range of people and social groups became able to consume and produce pornographic content.

The development of the pornography industry is therefore closely tied to technological advancements and this relationship is the source of concerns that are expressed in media discourses about youth hypersexualization. Furthermore, this social unease relates not only to a given cultural content, but it results above all from the relationship between communication technologies and sexuality. It should be noted that those who oppose pornography do not perceive it as a complex set of cultural practices, but rather as an instrument of oppression that commodifies women's bodies and sexuality (Attwood 2006; Segal and McIntosh 1993). Consequently, pornographic or explicitly sexual content and the presumed negative effect thereof on the moral integrity of society as a whole, and that of youth in particular, are consistently mobilised in discourses of youth hypersexualization:

> youth hypersexualization goes hand in hand with the pornographication of social codes. **Pornography creates models for sexual conduct and, aside from sex, women's and men's behaviour**. (emphasis in the original, Poulin and Laprade 2006)

This type of comment strongly echoes a direct media-effects approach, which is now largely discredited and dismissed by media

scholars (Gauntlett 1998) but still finds its way into discourses of anxieties about youth hypersexualization that share policy-making objectives in several matters concerning youth and sexuality (Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Tsaliki 2016).

Although it is true that each technological advancement also made pornography more accessible to some degree, the Internet has made it more available than ever, in particular for underage individuals. Online pornographic content not only seems to be produced by amateurs, but it is also considered to be more extreme than traditional pornography, namely because it exhibits bodies and sexualities that run counter to heteronormative codes of "good sex" (Rubin 1984) (see endnote 3). Since the advent of the digital and wireless media, the spaces for pornographic production and consumption have been reconfigured and have blurred the boundaries between producer, distributer, and consumer, as well as between the places that used to be reserved for pornography, with clear distinctions between private and public (Jenkins 2007). VHS tapes had already allowed for private pornography production and consumption, but they were nevertheless associated with the domestic sphere, and a specifically "adult" one at that. Mobile technologies enable whatever used to be private to enter the public sphere and the entire domestic space, reconfiguring and redefining the traditional conceptions of both (Mowlabocus 2010). Thanks to new technologies, said pornographic culture has also penetrated the world, spaces and places, of young people.

In this sense, an article published in the education section of the daily *Le Devoir* began with a statement intended to offer a clear and objective observation of young people's (girls in the first place) "great dismay" that an excess of sexuality accessible via online pornography would have caused:

> By emphasizing a trivialised, accessible, and somewhat mechanical sexuality, Quebec society is sending youth a very ambiguous message resulting in a startling transformation. Today, adolescents make love and dream of falling in love, whereas in the past, they used to fall in love and dream of making love. The first victims of this growing trend are girls. (Rioux Soucy 2005b)

The photograph accompanying the article depicted the back of a young girl, sitting at her desk, baring her shoulder in front of what appears to be pornography on the computer screen. The blurry photo was taken from behind, showing the door frame of the teenager's room: a gateway to a mysterious, opaque, and somewhat dangerous or risky

world. The caption read "Sex education for many young people comes from visiting porn sites without any filters" (Rioux Soucy 2005b). The picture and the caption illustrate a world where teenagers stand apart, removed from parent supervision. Parents, as well as society as a whole, should address this issue if they wish to protect their children, or rather save their daughters from the dangers of the "wrong" kind of sexuality on the Internet. The first of these dangers concerns the moral plane inasmuch as these discourses assume that sexuality has taken over love in the life of young girls, referred to in the article as the "first victims" of this so-called loss of sexual values. The bedroom, which escapes adult supervision, becomes a dangerous place, especially if there happens to be a computer with an Internet connection, a webcam, and other digital technology. This reiterates once again the dominant perception of girls being "at risk" from a "sexualizing" culture; a perception that relies on a simplistic and outdated media-effects approach, in addition to being highly moralizing (Hier 2008).

Moreover, the analysis of media discourses about youth hypersexualization points to three elements which are commonly produced as the main dangers of online pornography (Carroll et al. 2008): accessibility, immediacy, and anonymity, associated with the idea of luring. Again, girls are said to be particularly vulnerable to these dangers, starting with the accessibility of sexually explicit content. Historically, concerns in this regard were initially formulated with respect to working-class people accessing pornography, which until then had been a privilege of the elite (Slayden 2010). Digital technologies later made it available to other groups which had little access to sex shops and erotic movie theatres, such as women and minors. Furthermore, fears related to depictions of sexuality occasionally emerged with the advent of each new technology, but the groups deemed to be vulnerable—and hence requiring protection against pornographic proliferation—remained the same, that is, women and children, as well as the working class.

The self-production of sexually explicit content that is facilitated by access to new media is often perceived as amplifying the threat of hypersexualization, especially the danger for girls who expose themselves in the public sphere:

> A growing number of schools are faced with unfortunate situations where, after having chatted online with a stranger, a girl sends photos or videos to her interlocutor only to find them later on in the vastness of the Web.

> […] I tell young people "Would you publish a photo of your vulva in the Journal de Montréal [Montreal based newspaper], with your name and address below? No? Well, this is exactly what you are doing when you send an image of yourself naked on the Internet!" says Louiselle Roy, director of the Media Awareness Network French program. (Chouinard 2005c)

This excerpt is a good example of how traditional media (the newspaper) are perceived as posing no imminent threat for girls who would already know how to self-regulate in this respect (they would not publish a photo of their vulva in the newspaper), unlike the Internet, within the content of which they would still prove "naïve." Ironically, this naivety is attributed to the generation of "digital natives," that is said to be born with new technologies and massively moving away from traditional media (Prensky 2001). The contradiction is striking and yet recurring in discourses about youth hypersexualization: it reveals perhaps certain adults' own ignorance and distrust of new technologies (Egan 2013). In addition, the threat posed by the increased accessibility of pornographic content is reinforced by the danger of immediacy. These images are not only accessible to the broad public, but they can also be accessed accidentally through pop-ups and websites, which are thought to be "so easily accessible that adolescents are sometimes exposed to them inadvertently" (Sympatico/MSN 2008).

According to the discourses about hypersexualization, the two constituent dangers of accessibility and immediacy would lead to inopportune encounters with the "wrong" kind of sexuality, one that is considered to be more extreme than ever:

> At the local video store, it is impossible to stumble upon a tape bluntly displaying bestiality. On the Internet however, it's a piece of cake: all you have to do is type characters on a keyboard—b-e-s-t-i-a-l-i-t-y—and you will have appalling images jump at you. (Chouinard 2005c)

In this excerpt, the former video store is presented as being safer than the Internet because it is more strictly regulated. Indeed, prior to the proliferation of the internet, pornographic movies in video/DVD stores were almost always set apart, in the back of the store or behind a creaky door, where mostly adult men dared to tread (McNair 2002). Video stores are thought to be safer also on the ethical level because they were believed to not offer certain content deemed extreme. By comparison,

in a large number of media discourses about hypersexualization, the Internet is depicted as a place of all extreme and atypical sexualities, directly contaminating young people's world.

In addition, video stores were public places, where clients had to put up with their peers looking at them. Paradoxically, fearful discourses about youth hypersexualization condemn the fact that pornography has become too "public" but advocate for greater supervision of consumption, production, and dissemination of pornography ("private" here not being taken to mean out of public view). This supervision presupposes not only a certain degree of discipline, or at least "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1994, 313), but it also poses the video store as a community space. Conversely, the Internet is qualified as being the "supreme individualistic tool" (Robert 2005, 61), visited alone and in private. Therefore, the Internet offers anonymity that is part and parcel of the danger of pornographic content accessibility by, among other things, allowing teenage girls to forego the supervision existing in video stores, erotic movie theatres, and sex shops. The danger of anonymity is also associated with luring: discourses of hypersexualization rearticulate fears of cyber-predators that may pretend to be someone that they are not, such as an adult man passing himself off as a young girl in chat rooms, for example.

At the Frontiers of Intimacy

Media discourses about youth hypersexualization in Quebec consistently call into question the commodification of sex as well as recreational sexuality, in particular in relation to online pornography, that would desacralize the love/sexual relationship. It seems that it is above all against this desacralization that young people (girls) should be protected:

> The impact of cybersex seems to be almost unavoidable: it trivialises sexuality and removes the sacredness that certain people attribute to relationships. Children and adolescents should be protected, and critical thinking should be developed. A forceful response must be mounted against cybersex. (FQPN 2004, 11)

The pornography industry, like the advertising and marketing industries, is seen as amoral, ready to commodify even sexuality, which is understood as one of the last bastions of sacredness that should therefore be preserved. Again, many of these discourses are claiming a leftist and

progressive stance and are part of a broader criticism of the neoliberal system. One of these critics, sociologist Richard Poulin, is a high-profile expert in the media, as well as in various academic and activist events, who consistently challenges patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism in relation to the sexualization and sexual exploitation of women and children:

> Capitalism commodifies sex and everything seems to indicate that with neoliberal globalisation, tariffed sex, i.e. sex as a commodity in all its forms, is extending its grip over social life, it is finding legitimacy, and unprecedented normalisation and trivialisation. (Poulin 2005, 13)

However, such criticism of a sexuality deemed commodified, excessive, and public, reveals the workings of what I call a "normative intimacy," which secures hierarchical social and sexual relations, throughout youth hypersexualization media discourses. In fact, a large number of discourses attribute great value and authenticity to sexuality as a highly intimate experience. Likewise, these discourses construct intimacy as a sacred space for sexuality, which is sacralized as well. Thus, discourses about youth hypersexualization are suggesting that the boundaries of intimacy are being pushed, in particular by online pornography and its intrusion into the world of youth. This would seem to be part of a social phenomenon of "sexual extimacy" (Julien 2009) that is characterized by excessive individualism and visibility of what should belong to the intimate sphere:

> Showing as much of their bodies as possible, girls and a growing number of young men, symbolically claim that they have nothing to hide. This phenomenon of *extimacy* […] is said to respond to the 'need to draw interest to oneself in an individualistic society where each person's focus is directed towards themselves.' Youth are so familiar with the codes of reality TV, which is focused on revealing what is naturally intimate, for example, that they perceive shyness as antisocial behaviour and they confuse exposing their body with authenticity. In addition, being *straight* and happy is not any *cooler* than being shy, because disturbing and deranged behaviour has the privilege of drawing media attention. (italics in the original, Julien 2009, 10)

The conflation of shyness, happiness, and conservatism (or rather being "straight," which in everyday speech designates correctness and conformism, as well as a heterosexual person) in this extract is striking.

Consequently, deploring the fact that nowadays youth perceive "shyness as antisocial behaviour" in a society of extimacy, the author presents shyness and intimacy as a boundary that is constituent of (good) society. Pornography, reality TV, and sexy fashion are part of the "wrong" forms of sexualization—in opposition to a normative intimacy which guarantees hierarchical social and sexual relationships.

Another practice that is frequently invoked as evidence of the shrinking boundaries of intimacy, as well as the problem of hypersexualization and the direct impact of pornography on behaviours and attitudes, is the integral removal of pubic hair:

> practiced by the vast majority of young people, it results in voyeurism and gives extreme visibility of genitalia while conveying the image of an infantilised, sterile, prepubescent, even virgin, body. (Julien 2009, 10)

A large number of hypersexualization discourses denounce this practice for making genitalia, or "intimate parts," more visible but also for blurring the boundaries between children and adults:

> Integral removal of pubic hair, which erases every distinction between adults and children, has become a widespread practice, including among young men, clearly demonstrating the influence of pornography on people's mentality and on social and intimate practices. (Poulin 2005, 18)

The relationship that is established between age and sexualization in and through media discourses of youth hypersexualization shows a blatant paradox. If youth is accused of adopting sexual behaviours and dress codes that are improper for their age, these same behaviours and clothing are deemed to be too "youthful" for older adults:

> *looking young* has become more important than having a distinguished demeanor or seeming intelligent! Adults, baby boomers in particular, do not want to age and copy young people's clothing and hairstyles. (italics in the original, Julien 2009, 11)

In other words, young people seem to imitate adults, who borrow young people's codes because they resist aging. In both cases, sexualization is deemed improper and excessive because it transgresses the norms of the right sexualized body and the "good" sexuality, understood in particular in terms of age.

More specifically, it is not so much the age that these discourses call into question, but rather the different parts of a life cycle with the specific sexual conduct and social role associated with each stage:

> Children are behaving like adolescents, adolescents like adults, and a good number of adults are going through a puberty crisis… There is a loss of intergenerational bearings, as well as a blurring of social roles. (Poulin 2009, 14)

This quote from a text addressing "'porno chic' ads" specifically suggests that there is such a thing as normality and moments that are delimited within a timeline, presented as the natural rhythm of any person's life. The artificiality of sex as a commodity is considered to be corrupting this natural order of things by rocking, among other things, its age categories and life stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood. The text berates a society deemed consumerist and pornographic that pushes youth to consume and practice adult sexuality too early. However, it refers to a heteronormative life cycle and a bourgeois temporal axis based on procreation, family, and the economy, identified as such by queer literature: "birth, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, marriage, reproduction, child rearing, retirement, old age, death and kinship inheritance" (Taylor 2010).

Even when it is not explicitly mentioned, age is a category that follows and punctuates a heteronormative timeline in the discourses about youth hypersexualization. This timeline informs, in particular, the boundary between the adolescent and the adult worlds, with their respective norms and sexualization. According to media discourse, this is a boundary that should be reinforced because it is being undermined by young and older people's hypersexualization. Furthermore, the "natural age" of sexuality is considered to be jeopardized:

> Sexuality no longer has an age! It is etched into everything for all age groups: children, adolescents, adults, and seniors. Viagra fits perfectly in this context! […] young people today and their parents listen to the same music. They often dress alike. They dye their hair the same colours. Youth are cool like their parents. And they practice sex like their parents. (Gazette des femmes 2005, 18)

This passage suggests that if there is a time in the cycle of life where sexual relationships are considered to be occurring too early, there is also a time where it would be natural to stop having a certain type of sexual relations. At the very least, it would be unnatural to stimulate artificially one's sexual

capacity by resorting to the use of Viagra, for example. Such discourse implies not only that adults refuse to age, but that they refuse the fatality of ageing itself. Much like adolescents who are considered to have sex too early, adults would run against what is natural for their age. In addition, this type of statement revives a biologizing conception of sexuality which in turn essentializes age and gender categories. Girls, like older women, would transgress not only what is appropriate for their age (stage in the heteronormative cycle of life), but also for their gender, which entails that they favour love over sexuality and procreation over pleasure:

> not all the women [who wear hypersexualised dress] are of reproductive age, since young girls, girls in their early teens, adolescents, and menopausal women all follow this trend. (Julien 2010, 89)

In sum, youth hypersexualization media discourses reproduce deep-rooted tensions related to female sexuality, including sex without procreation and public sexuality. These discourses rearticulate the persistent idea that equates the public demonstrativeness of female sexuality with the danger of sexual promiscuousness.

Conclusion

My analysis of media discourses constructing youth hypersexualization as a public problem in Quebec shows how the "democratization" of pornography, enabled by digital technology, create social anxiety and the redeployment of specific power relations around groups that have traditionally been considered to be at risk if in contact with explicit sexual content, specifically teenage girls. The relationship between sexuality and technologies has long been a source of concern, but online pornography is at the heart of the issues and tension that inform the discursive production of youth hypersexualization as a current problem. By facilitating an unprecedented access to pornography, the Internet is said to represent a key obstacle to parental education and social transmission of values relating to sexuality: the norms of "good sex" that should be practised in an intimate setting and within the confines of a monogamous, heterosexual, romantic relationship (Bozon 2012). According to concerned discourses about youth hypersexualization, the Internet and new media enable the omnipresence of explicit and extreme sexual representations, the effect of which is to curtail the boundaries of intimacy. In addition,

"bad" forms of sexuality (public, adult, or outside the norm) have crept into the world of young people through their use, deemed excessive, of new technologies, away from their parents' prying eyes. And it is precisely on this basis that a range of control and surveillance measures have been warranted, as "solutions" to the "problem" of hypersexualization, starting with reinforcing parental authority:

> The Internet is a new outside influence that makes its way into adolescents' intimacy better than their parents can. They have turned it into an identification symbol for their generation. However, this new outside influence, which is capable of the best and the worst, is subject to little, if any, parental control. In order to ensure the continued protection of youth, it is important to recognise the seriousness of the issue of their hypersexualization, to become informed, and involved with adolescents, take a stance, negotiate limits, affirm our values, and to ensure that they are respected. (Brouillette and Courchesne 2008)

Media discourses that construct youth hypersexualization as a contemporary social problem accuse online pornography of blurring the public–private as well as adult–adolescent boundaries. Even more importantly, online pornography is said to cloud young people's understanding of what the good intimacy is, and hence the good sexuality. In addition, in a large number of discourses, pornography, at the intersection of online technologies, is used to illustrate certain manifestations of excess that are embodied in and translate in terms of exposure of intimacy, age, predation, and lure, to cite a few. Excess is brought into places where it can easily be exposed (online pornography) and contained (parental supervision, and so on).

On the flip side, discourses that deal with online pornography point to the fact that aside from blurring the adult–youth boundaries, it also confuses what can be made public and what should remain intimate. Moreover, it challenges the neoliberal system control procedures, in particular regarding the accessibility to consumption, production, and distribution of pornographic content that it permits. It is conceivable to advocate stricter regulations for sexist or sexually explicit content in traditional media, but the Internet is seen as an elusive and ungovernable world. Consequently, the solutions that are usually put forward in order to contain the negative effects of online pornography, in particular on girls, will target the private sphere, the family, and education:

> Education must include a moral dimension in order to complete the educational triad Media, Morality, and Mutuality. (Lamb 2009, 48)

This quote shows once again to what extent the discourses about youth hypersexualization adopt a moralizing tone and assume that the media have direct effects on behaviours and attitudes.

The paradox is striking in most discourses denouncing youth hypersexualization and online pornography in French-speaking Quebec that claim to be on the left and progressive end of the political spectrum: they condemn neoliberalism and the commodification of bodies and sexualities but they advocate for a private space for sexual and family intimacy. However, conjugality, family, and the privatization of intimacy are the foundation of capitalist ideology (Berlant and Warner 1998). Marriage and the traditional family model form an institution whose role "is not only to sexualise certain types of relationships such as the couple within the family, but also to desexualise other areas and institutions of social life" (Daoust 2005, 98). In addition, the hegemonic process through which intimacy is confined to the private sphere serves heteronormative culture by denying the pertinence of sex as a form of mediation, participation, and representation in the public space. This results in limiting the access of certain minority sexual groups to both public status and intimacy institutions (Berlant 1997; Warner 2002). A large number of experts and other media actors who address the topic of youth hypersexualization seem to consider that the personal is political primarily as the privileged space for sexual intimacy. According to them, nowadays, this space is attacked, invaded, and corrupted by online pornography in particular.

Notes

1. This and all other quotations are the author's translation, unless otherwise noted.
2. This is the case for sexologist Jocelyne Robert, for example, who enjoys substantial renown and is regularly invited to speak in the media as an expert on youth sexuality and hypersexualization. She is also very active on online social networks and a best-selling author (cf. Robert 2005).
3. Despite the fact that it was written before the advent of the Internet, I use the work of Rubin to show how the discursive production of the hypersexualization problem is closely intertwined with the social construction of "good sex"—a construction which still prevails today when speaking about online pornography.

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CHAPTER 4

Child Protection Anxieties and the Formation of UK Child Welfare and Protection Practices

Gary Clapton

Introduction

Today, social work with children and families helps neither children nor the families in which they live. First acknowledged over twenty years ago (Mellon and Clapton 1991; Department of Health 1995), social work with families has become a narrow, unhelpful and reactive form of child protection. There is a 'generally perceived crisis of child welfare and protection services' (McGregor 2015, 1631) that can be seen in a proliferation of works that have sought to re-frame (Smith 2002), re-visit (Cree and Morrison 2016), re-imagine (Featherstone et al. 2014), re-invent (*The Observer* 2013), reform (Lonne et al. 2008), reclaim (Davis 2013; Goodman and Trowler 2011), or review child protection (Munro 2011). Elsewhere the crisis is echoed by practitioners ('Why I Quit Social Work', Faulkner 2016).

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Evidence is mounting of the cost of this to children and family social workers in depression (Truter et al. 2017), shame (Frost 2016), burn-out (Stalker et al. 2007) and feelings of futility (Featherstone et al. 2014). Clapton et al. argue that there is a rise of cynicism amongst state social workers and describe a 'coarsening of attitudes' (2013). Featherstone et al. use the phrase 'muscular authoritarianism' to describe a new, oppressive, partnership-free form of social work with parents (2014).

At the same time, an accumulation of accounts from families has pointed to the social worker as someone to be afraid of. Mellon argues that 'We have built a child protection system which is experienced by families as a modern version of the Spanish Inquisition' (2009, 22). The upshot is that few parents are likely to approach statutory social services for help (Darlington et al. 2010).

Even if all these troubling indications of crisis were to be set aside for a moment, in the 'best interests' of children, and solace sought in the system's ability to protect them, is there evidence that children are safer? It seems not. Bilson and Martin argue that there is a 'lack of evidence that the child protection system reduces harm to young children' (2017) and cite a substantial study of child protection systems published in *The Lancet* that failed to find clear evidence, relating to the UK, for 'an overall decrease in child maltreatment despite decades of policies designed to achieve such reductions' (Gilbert et al. 2012, 770).

In crisis, feared by families, and futile? How has this happened to social work? To engage with these questions, it is necessary to step back and acknowledge a number of key influences on how social work with children and families has altered over time.

An Age of General Anxiety, an Age of Specific Anxieties About Children

The sociologist, Ulrich Beck was one of the first to identify anxiety as a feature and consequence of modernity (1992). Writing in *Anxiety: A Short History*, Horwitz, considers anxiety 'a major aspect of Western culture' (2013, 118). Anxiety regularly takes the form of a heightened sense of the prevalence of risk. Warner et al. argue that 'the language of risk is everywhere: in debates about health, childcare, pensions planning, banking, child protection, crime, what we eat, how we use our leisure time, what we buy' (2017, 1). Whilst not confined to children and childhood,

ideas of risk are especially widespread when related to both children who may be at risk of harm from others (Furedi 2001), and to young people's behaviour that might expose them to harm, e.g. use of social media, or be harmful, e.g. illegal drug-taking or provoke alarm, e.g. organising raves (Critcher 2003).

Warner et al. make an important distinction between 'real' risk, that is risk that is measurable, and risk that is 'constructed', i.e. determined by social and cultural forces (2017) and whilst this is not to say that no child is at risk today, it is **constructions** of risk that contribute much to the present culture and practices of social work with families in which there has been a considerable increase in the numbers of families experiencing investigations for suspected abuse (Bilson and Martin 2017), at the same time as the majority of such investigations finding no actual abuse. Devine and Parker echo this and have found a significant upward trend in referrals but **no** corresponding upward trend in either the number of substantiated cases of child abuse and no increase in the estimated prevalence of child abuse (2016). It can be suggested that there appears to be little evidence of **increased** child maltreatment (by and in families—maltreatment by society is another matter). Yet whilst there seems to be little evidence of increased danger to children, the main, if not sole focus of attention by social workers, is risk. What has caused the dominance of unfounded anxieties over child safety and risk to eclipse supportive activity by statutory social services?

Out of the Past: Towards a Critical History of UK Child Protection

First a warning to the reader. History is messy and not linear. Any critical history will always be subjective and selective, some phases and periods overlap. Individual choice features. Pelz notes 'The logic of narration is more fictional than scientific' (1990, 765). So it will be for any history of child protection, especially one that sets out to be critical.

It is generally agreed that UK child protection in its modern form begins with a reaction to the general absence of state welfare provision in the nineteenth century and continues to a post-World War II welfare state, with 'cradle to grave' provision. We see the rise of socially interventionist local and central Governments, the foundation of the National Health Service and the introduction of universal welfare benefits, then

the emergence of neoliberalism, state roll-back and Thatcherism epitomised by Thatcher's declaration 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families' (the continuing dominant narrative of twenty-first century). The consequences of the interplay between state and non-state children and families social work agencies, it will be argued, is one of the under-recognised but central influences on modern children and family practice and policy. And so this history sketches two parallel timelines: that of the fortunes of local government (state provision of child and family support), and those of the child welfare and protection charities (non-statutory agencies). First the child welfare and protection agencies.

One Hundred and Thirty Years of the Business of Children

Of the child welfare charities that began in the late nineteenth century, The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Barnardos, and Action for Children (formerly the National Children's Home) are the largest still in existence (*The Guardian*, 2012).

Clapton et al. point to the emergence of these agencies in a combination of zeal and child rescue and argue that, in the case of the NSPCC, its establishment came about as a result of moral panic (2012). Clapton et al. (2012, 2013) and Clapton and Cree (2017) have gone onto suggest that social work, in particular child protection, has continued with a propensity to either fuel moral panics or, indeed as in the case of the NSPCC, be involved in the inception of them and this discussion will return to a variety of cases in which child protection and moral panics have been in close association. For now it is important to briefly set out what a moral panic is and is not.

Forty-five years ago, Stanley Cohen was one of the first chief architects of moral panic theory and his definition holds up today. A moral panic is in course when:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; …Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folk-lore

> and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself. (Cohen 1972, 9)

Cohen was at pains to point out that 'The argument is not that there is "nothing there" … but that the reaction to what is observed or inferred is fundamentally inappropriate' (2002, 172). In other words, there is 'disproportionality'. Goode and Ben-Yehuda suggest the following criteria need to be satisfied in order for an episode to be classified as a moral panic: (1) Volatility: there is public expression of concern as evinced via the media but it is mercurial and capable of subsiding very suddenly (2) Hostility: in the course of an eruption of media concern, 'folk devils' are identified and endure intense scrutiny. They are cast as outsiders, enemies of society, and deserving of harsh punishment (3) Measurable concern: The extent of public concern must be considerable and measurable through opinion polls, frequency of contributions in the media, etc. (4) Consensus: There is broad social and political unity that the grounds for concern are significant and that action must be taken (5) Disproportionality: In the circumstances of moral panic, the measures instituted to address the problem are exaggerated and out of proportion to the magnitude of the threat posed (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 33–39).

Cohen's notion of 'interest group' as source of moral panic is of special note and he draws attention to a collection of interested parties such as charities, rights groups, local councillors and religious leaders that he describes as 'moral entrepreneurs' and states that any change in social policy or legislation following a moral panic is likely to be consistent with the moral entrepreneurs' definition of the problem. Goode and Ben-Yehuda suggest that Cohen's moral entrepreneurs belong in their interest group model, with the moral panic explained as the unintended outcome of moralising projects undertaken by such interest groups in an effort to draw public attention to a specific 'moral evil'.

Behlmer's critical history of the NSPCC certainly suggests a capacity for fuelling moral panic and pulls no punches describing the NSPCC's propaganda as the 'politics of pathos' (1982, 3). Parent-blaming was a recurrent theme, 'illustrations of parental inhumanity' (ibid., 70) abounded:

> The National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) locate the root cause of abuse in the abusive parents' failure to feel proper regard for their children rather than in the parents' necessity (for child begging). (Flegel 2009, 133)

Parent-blaming reached its logical conclusion in child rescue which often meant institutionalisation and in thousands of cases between the late 1800s and 1967, shipment to the colonies such as Canada and Australia (Bean and Melville 1989). For decades from the end of the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century, interventions in families were predominately led by children's charities imbued with the notion of child rescue. Crucially these charities set the template for twentieth century casework. Ferguson refers to the NSPCC's 'pioneering child protection practices' (2004, 37), although it stretches the imagination to conceive of Barnardos' involvement in child shipment overseas as pioneering.

The increasing responsibility for children's welfare that gradually accrued to statutory agencies from the middle of the twentieth century began to eclipse the casework of the children's charities and although in the beginning local authority social workers and workers from the children's charities operated side-by-side (Clapton 2009), soon the latter came to be regarded as anachronisms associated with the cold hand of charity (rather than entitlement), and do-gooding (rather than professionalism). The 'voluntarism' associated with the children's charities was patronizing 'a means of salving the consciences of the rich, of papering over the cracks of an unjust society, and of denying the poor their true entitlements' (Finlayson 1990, 188). The children's charities and the children's shelters and homes associated with them, were replaced by council social work professionals and local council-run children's homes (Holman 1986). A slow withdrawal from direct involvement with families on child protection grounds took place. Holman writes of the leading child care charities' 'loss of leadership and influence' in this period. By the 1960s, children's charities like the NSPCC were in financial crisis. Hendrick explains the 1968 foundation of the NSPCC's Battered Child Research Unit:

> In its search to become a professional childcare agency the Society found itself competing with the expanding local-authority Children's Departments. The NSPCC found itself facing a financial crisis in 1964-5 when its expenditure exceed its income by more than a quarter of a million pounds. This, then, was the context in which the Society established its 'battered child' research unit. (1993, 226)

The certitude of the 1880s gave way to crisis of existence in the 1960s and a process of specialisation, e.g. NSPCC now runs the call centre Childline, Barnardos and Action for Children concentrate on providing

foster placements. Today, all three are very active in various campaigns against child maltreatment, some of which, Clapton and Cree have argued, spill over into making thinly evidenced claims as to the extent and depth of whatever aspect of child maltreatment is the focus (2017). I will return to the twenty-first century role and activities of these leading charities but suffice to say here it seemed to this newly qualified social worker in the 1970s that children's charities had outlived their usefulness and been replaced by more visionary practices that were not steeped in Victorian-era attitudes that condemned parents and rescued children.

The same period that witnessed the rise then fall of the influence of child protection charities, saw a steady increase to a post-World War II high in the 1960s and 1970s of local authority provision of family welfare services, but then a contraction of statutory sector services and the replacement of preventive social work with children and families in trouble with a concentration on investigation and monitoring activities.

The Rise, Then Narrowing, of Local Government Social Work Service Provision

The post-World War II boom produced an expansion of the Welfare State. Alongside progressive measures such as increased social housing and universal health provision, social work developed rapidly. Fuelled by the social-reform ideals of Fabianism and inspired by radical thinkers such as Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1968), Sasz (*The Manufacture of Madness* 1970), Greer (*The Female Eunuch* 1970) and Illich (*Deschooling Society* 1971) and a burgeoning women's movement and local struggles such as that waged by claimants unions (the first of these active campaigns for benefits-rights was formed in Birmingham in January 1969), a generation of young people who had matured during the civil rights struggles and European revolts of the 1960s, and were committed to challenging structural inequalities, began training as social workers. It is difficult to capture the excitement and spirit of this period when it seemed that life and work could merge in a progressive balance of commitment to change **and** a belief that social work was a profession that could enable this. 'Social' (Worker) and 'Socialist' have never felt closer together than at this point in history.

The progressive nature of social work, and those entering the profession, during this period was evidenced in the emphasis on the promotion

of social welfare, community activism being regarded as part of the social work role (and taught as such), the foundation of the radical magazine for social workers, *Case-Con* (1970–1977) and a range of other publications such as *Radical Social Work* (Bailey and Brake 1975) and *Social Work Practice Under Capitalism* (Corrigan and Leonard 1978). On the ground, the Community Development Projects (1970–1978) held out the prospective of social and community workers being involved alongside tenants and residents in developing radical critiques of official housing and poverty strategies.

Also, crucially, progressive legislation emerged (the 1963 and 1969 Children and Young Person Acts), the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and resources were dedicated to supportive family work. Legislation was expansive in its scope, e.g.:

> We recommend a new local authority department, providing a community-based and family oriented service, which will be available to all. This new department will, we believe, reach far beyond the discovery and rescue of social casualties; it will enable the greatest number of individuals to act reciprocally, giving and receiving service for the well-being of the whole community. (The Seebohm Report 1968, 11)

The Seebohm Report argued that social workers should work with voluntary organisations and local people to promote community involvement (Dickens 2011). The Seebohm Report's radicalism was also reflected in Scottish legislation which laid a duty on social workers to promote social welfare. Butler and Drakeford describe the provisions of the 1969 Children and Young Persons Act which was formulated on the basis of the Seebohm Report, as 'the final flowering of family-orientated, preventive treatment ideology' (2002, 79). Other leading social work writers have made a similar assessment. For example, Parton: '1971 marked the high point of optimism and confidence in social work' (2014a, 23) and Adams describes the late 1960s/early1970s welfare legislation as 'a highwater mark' (2002).

What happened after the early 1970s to end this 'high water mark', to transform social work from 'first resort to last ditch' (Pinker quoted in Barclay 1982)? Winter and Connolly (1996) draw attention to a process involving the decline of the economy, the rise of Thatcherism and neoliberalism and the retrenchment of the welfare state that began in the early

1970s that forms a context for the evolution of social work after its high water mark and offer a children's rights perspective on the developments together with a broadly defensive of account of social work. To understand the present state of UK child protection, a more critical version of social work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is necessary.

Tragedies and Panic

Writing of child protection, Parton describes 'a sense of crisis (that) has been almost perpetual since 1973' (2006, 28). This state can be attributed to a number of child deaths and tragedies. It is not that before the early 1970s, there were no tragedies, but a succession of children's names or places can be easily recalled by most social workers. The depth of impact on public interest, policy, practice and judicial circles has made certain events stand out. Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford, Cleveland and Orkney, Victoria Climbié, Baby P are familiar names and places. Why is this? Innes argues that some events go beyond the concerns and attention of immediate circles and become fixed in the collective memory because they combine key factors. They become signal events because they are:

> …events that, in addition to affecting the immediate participants (i.e. victims, witnesses, offenders) and those known to them, impact in some way upon a wider audience. (2003, 52)

The following choice of signal events in child and family social work can be questioned, why omit the death of Kimberly Carlile in 1986? Indeed some timelines include her death and that of others not already mentioned.[1] More recent events such as those in Rotherham in 2016 involving the sexual exploitation of children that were looked after by the local authority have been described as the 'biggest child protection scandal in UK history' (Gladman and Heal 2017, 28) may well be added to any timeline of significantly influential 'signal events', however the long-term impact of earlier events on social work policy, practice and thinking is more easily discernible. These events have some overlap with Butler and Drakeford's 'landmark instances' (2011, 226) and are best characterised as having reset social work attitudes from practitioner through manager up to policy-maker levels. They are the scandals that 'tend to set the social work agenda' (Bamford 2015, 180).

This agenda-resetting, but also the involvement of the media, politicians and the far-reaching influence on social worker's attitudes, are what has made them 'signal events'. Here is this author's list.

Maria Colwell

Parton dates an 'increasing sense of moral panic' around child protection from the time of Maria Colwell's death in 1973 and the subsequent inquiry (2006, 59). Butler and Drakeford view her death and the inquiry as 'a critical moment in the history of social work in the UK' (2011, 8).

Although there were other child deaths in the same year, Maria Colwell's became famous because of the reaction—involving campaigning locals, councillors, press, then politicians—that touched on the state of the nation's morals in the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Hendrick 1993, 227). The trial of Maria's stepfather led to a firestorm of media coverage dominated by a search for scapegoats and calls to reinstate the recent abolished death penalty (Bamford 2015, 40). A number of the classic factors involved in the creation of a moral panic, referred to earlier, were present in 1973. The Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971. The Act, subsequently consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, made it possible for the first time for divorce to be petitioned for on the couple's separation. Divorces began a steep rise from 1973 and although it is difficult to establish figures and the connection can only be suggested, the early 1970s may have seen a rise in remarriages and a consequent increase in step-parenting, accompanied by concerns about the quality of step-parenting (clearly disastrously evident in the behaviour of Maria's stepfather). Innes's 'wider audience' and the moral aspect of Cohen's panic theory combine here.

Whatever the causes for this tragedy to stimulate widespread concern, there is agreement that Maria Colwell's death 'can be seen as watershed in the contemporary history of social work' (Parton and Thomas 1983, 56–57). Clapton et al. date the connection between child protection and moral panics much earlier in the 1880s' inception of modern child protection (2012) and Clapton and Cree point to evidence that moral panics may be generated from **within** social work (2017) as we will see when events in Cleveland and Orkney are discussed.

However, moral panics have not been the only feature surrounding child protection's 'signal events'. The 1980s saw a second high-profile, influential death of a child.

Jasmine Beckford

In 1984 Jasmine Beckford was killed by her stepfather. The report of the subsequent enquiry makes Jasmine's death a 'signal event' because in it, local authority social workers were publicly criticised for holding 'the rule of optimism' (Brent Borough Council 1986). This 'rule' was said to be one in which social workers were too ready to believe the best of parents and not be alert to the latter's untruths about the welfare of their children and dangers posed to children minimised. According to Corby, the Beckford Inquiry report joined the impetus, and gave legitimacy, to the reframing of preventative work with families as that of solely child protection (1993, 33). Clapton et al. have argued that such a categorisation of social workers' assessments as harmfully optimistic has inexorably led to the domination of the **opposite**, that is, a default 'rule of pessimism' amongst child protection practitioners by which social workers begin a child protection investigation by believing the worst of parents (2013).

There are other 'signal events' that mark any history of child protection in the twentieth century; these do not always involve deaths of children; with few exceptions, the subject of sexual abuse emerges. Two of our next signal events are tragedies but do not, thankfully, involve deaths. They show in stark light, social work's propensity for reacting to moral panics and an inner capacity for, if not generating such panics, fuelling them.

Cleveland and Orkney

Over a five month period in 1987 in Cleveland in the north of England, 121 children were removed from their families after what was eventually to be found to be erroneous diagnoses of sexual abuse. Similarly erroneous assessments, this time of 'satanic abuse', were the reason for dawn raids on families in Orkney in 1990. Clapton et al. have argued that the events in Cleveland and Orkney were expressions of a readiness to believe exaggerated claims of sexual abuse and that these removals of children: 'may be indicative of what we believe, is a permanent state of readiness to panic – and a readiness to intervene, often to the detriment of the lives of children and families' (2012, 205). As such it can be argued that, beginning with the signal event of the death of Maria Colwell, the Cleveland and Orkney removals of children were confirmation that

a paradigm of child rescue (from neglectful and abusive parents) had returned but that also, just like in the nineteenth century, social work was capable of fuelling moral panic.

Sarah Payne

In 2000 Sarah Payne was abducted and murdered by a paedophile. Although there was no social work involvement in any aspect of the tragedy, the NSPCC, became involved and, it is suggested the rise of anxiety over paedophilia that had been developing found a useful interlocutor, and the NSPCC found a national platform. A 'Summit on Sarah' was called in 6 August 2000 and it involved the tabloid newspaper *The News of the World*, criminal justice agencies and the NSPCC. Whilst the NSPCC has always included campaigns against child sexual abuse, Clapton et al. have argued that a step change occurred in early 2000s with NSPCC collaboration with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (now the National Crime Agency) and continued with the Metropolitan Police on Operation Yewtree investigating Jimmy Saville's behaviour. Clapton et al. also go on to suggest that, the NSPCC has revived the notion of parent-blaming, especially in relation to neglect of children and young people's on-line activities. At the beginning of the millennium, the big children's charities had recovered their voice. In 'Communicating Concern or Claims-making?', Clapton and Cree argue that on a range of issues, campaigns by children's charities shade into providing fuel for moral panics (2017). In keeping with Clapton and Cree's suggestion of a financial motive in stoking alarms, McLaughlin has pointed out the reason for a concentration on bad news about children:

> Within social policy there is often fierce competition for limited funds, creating the paradox that "good news" may not be something that the organisation wishes to significantly publicise. After all, if children really are safer than they have ever been, it could be argued that the NSPCC and similar organisations such as AFC require less government funding and public donations than they currently receive. (McLaughlin 2015, 243)

And in turn, bad news about risks to children contributes to a pervasive risk and rescue culture. However, to return to this brief sketch of the milestones in the history of child protection and the main parties, the year 2000 also witnessed another child death.

Victoria Climbié

Although it is argued that a renewed emphasis on child rescue was the dominant motif emerging since the 'high water' mark of social work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, every so often a call has been made for preventative resources to be offered to families to avoid any suggestion of peremptory child removal. The enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié did just that when it argued for parent and family support to be given priority:

> It is not possible to separate the protection of children from wider support to families. (Laming Report 2003, 1.30)

However the consequent legislation that followed the Inquiry ('Every Child Matters') did not reflect this. Munro argued that the legislation betrayed a 'wholesale lack of trust in parents' (2004).

Peter Connolly (Baby P.)

Reaction to the death of Peter Connolly in 2007, also confirmed an increased emphasis on 'better safe than sorry' culture, parent-distrust (which has taken the form of the emergence of the phrase and concept of 'disguised compliance', a formulation that suggests that parents who co-operate with social services may, paradoxically, have something to hide) and, child rescue. The steep rise in receptions into public care, both in Haringey where Peter was killed, and throughout England and Wales indicate this (Parton 2014b).

The next discussion argues that the convergence of the timelines of the local authority social work (now nervous and defensive) and children's charities (now confident and outspoken), has not been good for children and family social work.

Twenty-First Century Child Protection: Beset, Exhausted and Bereft of Imagination

The introduction to this paper described twenty-first century child protection as in crisis. This is not a new state of affairs. Over twenty years ago, Cooper et al. drew attention to a 'siege mentality' in local authority social work departments:

> When French social workers participating in our study first walked through the doors of a London area office, they were astounded by the fortress atmosphere of the reception area. (Cooper et al. 1995, 111).

The evidence of an 'us and them' mentality (us = social workers, them = clients) has mounted. Three years later, Croghan and Miell's study found that service users' experience of social work was negative and distressing. As one 'bad mother' said:

> My warning to people now is that if you need help the last people you should go to is to social services. We warn anybody we can. They are not there to help. (Croghan and Miell 1998, 454)

In a similarly depressing observation, Jones noted in his study of perceptions of statutory social work that 'In many disadvantaged and marginalised working-class places, social workers are seen as part of the problem and not as part of the solution' (Jones 2001, 558). Such antagonism has grown (Lonne et al. 2008; Office of Children's Commissioner for England 2010) and 'fortress social work' has intensified in the years since. Alongside this state of siege, there is 'compassion fatigue' (Richardson 2011), hopelessness (van Heugten 2011) and extremely low practitioner morale (Martin et al. 2010)—all have been noted amongst child protection workers (Local Government Association 2009) and a decline of optimism (Clapton et al. 2013, 809). A complex set of pressures involving the morphing of family support into child protection as a result of the effect of the accumulation of the signal events discussed earlier, and the influence of children's charities in promulgating an ever-expanding list of worries (many of which are not unfounded so much as disproportionate) has led to 'net widening' or an expansion of items on the 'child protection radar'. A Perfect Storm in which social work finds itself. Daily alarms about children buffet Social Work and goad policy-makers into producing new guidance and drafting fresh legislation. Twenty-first century child protection concerns and risks to children and young people are now legion and include historic abuse, Female Genital Mutilation, child sexual exploitation, 'sexting', cyber-bullying, the internet, childhood obesity, emotional neglect, childhood trafficking, with the existing information about each one being described as 'the tip of the iceberg'. The list could continue for a page more. In three consecutive days in October 2016 in one UK newspaper, the following alarms appeared:

We are wobbling behind in the race to address obesity
11.10.16
Human trafficking strategy launched by Scottish Government
12.10.16
Child abuse calls in Scotland soar against rest of UK after Jimmy Savile inquiry
13.10.16

Not every worry directly relates to social work, however alarms such as these are a contributory factor to the generalised heightened sense of anxiety that exists (Clapton and Cree 2017) and 'a toxic climate of suspicion and fear of blame in children's services' (Jowett 2016). These are the conditions that have led to the return of child rescue as an intervention.

The Return of Child Rescue, Net-Widening and the Problem of the Phrase 'Child Protection'

> I am set primarily for the saving of children. (Dr. Barnardo, quoted in Holman 1986)

The call by Lord Laming for family support to go hand-in-hand with child protection and Government initiatives such as 'Think Family' (Cabinet Office 2007) seem to be blips in a child protection history that has been dominated by a rescue mind-set that is suspicious of parents, in Bob Holman's words, 'a reluctance to pursue prevention' has been the standpoint of child care practice for virtually all its history (1986, 2). The short-lived period in the 1960s and 1970s when social workers' emphasis was on family support seemed to have been just that, over quickly. 'Child protection' is now the main, if not the only, reason for local authority social workers to be involved with families, to the extent that supporting families is not even seen as part of the role of social workers in safeguarding the welfare of children (Scourfield and Welsh 2003). Social workers regularly counterpose the welfare of families with that of children, and interventions are badged as 'for the children'.

In an illustration of how children's charities can set the social work agenda, in 2010, Action for Children resurrected the combination of child neglect and child rescue (from their parents) with an urgent call to: '…rescue the thousands of children who live with its devastating effects every single day' (Action for Children 2010, 2).

and the AFC campaign subsequently bore fruit with Government guidance:

> Social workers, their managers and other professionals should always consider the plan from the child's perspective. A desire to think the best of adults and to hope they can overcome their difficulties should not trump the need to **rescue** children from chaotic, neglectful and abusive homes. (HM Government 2013, 22, emphasis added)

Note also the reference to avoiding optimism.

A renewed emphasis on child rescue, voiced by the 'cheerleaders for removal' (Featherstone et al. 2014) is in keeping with other child-saving trends, for instance championing adoption (PIU 2000; Department for Education 2011), that emphasise that child protection systems are designed to protect children from parents, not from neglectful government policies and systemic injustices such as having to rely on food banks. Bluntly put the social work message is 'We are here for your children not you' (social worker quoted in Office of the Children's Commissioner for England 2010, 21).

The effect of a risk-rescue paradigm on child protection practice (and parents and families) is far-reaching.

Net Widening

A growing body of research across what have become known as Anglophone countries with similar systems (Lonne et al. 2008) suggests that there has been a considerable increase in the numbers of families experiencing investigations for suspected abuse in the last decades (Trocmé et al. 2013; Bilson et al. 2015; Devine and Parker 2016). In fact it seems that the vast majority of such investigations do not uncover actual abuse and/or result in help being offered to families (Trocmé et al. 2013; Featherstone et al. 2016, 2).

Of all the children born in England in 2009/10, by 31 March 2015, Bilson and Martin (2017) draw attention to the following:

- 22.5% had been referred to children's services;
- 17.0% had had an assessment;
- 14.3% were identified as a child in need;
- 6.3% were subject of a strategy discussion;
- 5.4% were subject of a section 47 enquiry;
- 3.5% were subject of a child protection plan.

The number of children investigated and **not** found to have been significantly harmed increased from 45,000 in 2009/10 to 98,000 in 2014/15. Devine and Parker have looked at a longer span (1991/1992 to 2013/2014—22 years) and found similar examples of a 'net widening' process that increase the number of families investigated by social workers. They find an 311% increase in the number of referrals to Children's Services Departments in England increasing from an estimated 160,000 to 657,800 a year and argue that this is not explained by population increase. Nor, they argue, has there been a proportionate increase in child abuse in the referred children—they find a consistent **downward** factor progressing beyond each threshold stage (referral, assessment, deemed 'in need', strategy, child protection plan). In short a significant upward trend in referrals has occurred but with **no** corresponding upward trend. They conclude:

> …the findings suggest that a large number of families who require support services are needlessly 'risk assessed', potentially without their consent, causing resourcing issues for the social work profession and contributing to a fear of the consequence of missing a serious case of abuse. This scenario may be deterring families seeking services and damaging those who do. (Devine and Parker 2016)

The irony is that at the same time as one in five children in England and Wales is referred to children's services, 'there is little or no evidence that this growing culture of high levels of suspicion of abuse provides better protection for children and some evidence that unfounded investigations are in themselves harmful' (Jowett 2016).

'Child Protection'

'Child protection' has always posed an unsaid question, 'protection from what'? Child protection has rarely meant protection from poverty and the effects of poverty such as malnutrition, homelessness, poor educational achievement and bad health, nor is it protection from bullying, from racism or from risk of road accidents. Child protection means protection from parents. It:

> …involves a very different conception of the relationship between an individual or group, and others than does care. **Caring** seems to involve taking

> the concerns and needs of the other as the basis for action. **Protection** presumes the bad intentions and harm that the other is likely to bring to bear against the self or group and to require a response to that potential harm. (Tronto 1993, 105–106)

Evidence is mounting relating to the damage that child protection measures can cause to **children** and that once 'rescued' and in public care, children's lives tend not to have good long-term outcomes (Ofsted 2010). Such child-focussed evidence of the detrimental effects of child protection is damming and has led to damnation, not from the expected media quarters but from fellow professionals. One memorable paper is headed 'Has child protection become a form of madness?' (Gregoire and Hornby 2011). The authors conclude that it has.

Conclusion

So if UK child protection operates in a toxic climate of parent-blaming and—ultimately questionable—child rescue, and is beset and exhausted and ineffectual, what is to be done?

Featherstone et al. point to the central importance of the connection a child has with its parents and argue that the extended family and his or her community have been 'decoupled'. They argue that the assets of families are often overlooked and call for understanding the family as the primary protector of children:

> Children are not free-floating individuals. However tempting it looks in the face of another tragedy, there is no easy moral mandate to rescue more and more children from impoverished families and communities. We need to understand and work with the relational ties of blood, kin, friendship, place and community. These are the primary contexts for the resolution of children's needs. (Featherstone et al. 2013)

However such a 'Think Family' option, as indicated, has not gained traction in the past, nor might an 'Act Family' prove any more resilient. Neither should the 'high water' mark of family support in the 1960s and 1970s be seen as something to be returned to. That clock cannot be turned back. Practice then was not exemplary. For example, the effects of domestic violence and child sexual abuse were barely understood and there was little explicit attention to listening to children. For social work

to survive and thrive, struggling mothers and fathers must cease to be seen as the problem and, the—perhaps initially satisfying to social workers—business of child rescue be wound up. If contemporary child protection is a form of 'madness' then it must stop, it cannot be reformed.

Note

1. See for instance Batty's Catalogue of Cruelty, available at https://www.theguardian.com/society/2003/jan/27/childrensservices.childprotection.

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CHAPTER 5

The Quantified Baby: Discourses of Consumption

Donell Holloway, Giovanna Mascheroni, and Simone Inglis

Introduction

Hospital-based digital surveillance devices that monitor newborn babies' health and well-being are making their way into family homes. Companies are developing health tracking devices intended to alleviate parental fears about their babies' health and well-being—especially while babies are sleeping. There are concerns, however, that the domestication of these monitoring devices will heighten parental anxiety around their babies' health and well-being and normalise these fears (Nelson 2008;

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Leaver 2017), rather than fulfil the promised "peace of mind". In addition, Lupton (2013) notes that these technologies also amplify parental accountability for their babies' health and development:

> The infant's body becomes the focus of the intense, anxious parental gaze in the context of a culture in which parents - and particularly mothers - are held accountable for any harm that may befall their infants or any failure to conform to accepted measure of health, growth and development. (p. 46)

Baby wearables can be described as monitoring devices that are fastened close to babies' bodies, and collect and provide information via Bluetooth and wifi technologies about babies' health, location or identity. Among these:

> a new class of infant physiologic monitors marketed to parents for use in the home has emerged. Smartphone applications (apps) integrated with sensors built into socks, onesies, buttons, leg bands, and diaper clips have the capability to display infants' respirations, pulse rate, and blood oxygen saturation, and to generate alarms for apnea, tachycardia, bradycardia, and desaturation. (Bonifide et al. 2017, 353)

The data produced from babies' bodies, via these monitors, mobilise parents and carers into action. They are alerted to deviations in babies' physiologic data so they can intervene to provide urgent care for their babies. The domestication of these technologies turns parental surveillance of their babies' bodies into a new parenting practice to cope with or utilise these technologies. They extend the manner and mode of parental responsibilisation into new digital spaces, and tend to normalise these digital caring practices (Johnson 2014). The use of these devices in "everyday life also opens up questions about who gets to be a knowledge producer" (Nafus 2016, 384), and about the nature, source and methods of information and authority.

This chapter will examine commercial discourses regarding baby wearables using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, in order to critically evaluate how the use of digital technologies to track babies' bodies is framed as a virtuous parental practice.

Background

Most advertisements and infomercials analysed for this paper tend to be consistent with the neoliberal approach of individual responsibilisation. Over the last few decades, neoliberal ideals, in which individual responsibility and risk management is emphasised and proposed as the best solution to social problems and "systemic contradictions" (Beck 1992, 137), have prevailed in many countries. Neoliberalism locates healthcare within this market discourse and assumes:

> the efficacy of the free market and the adoption of policies that prioritize deregulation, foreign debt reduction, privatization of the public sector… and a (new) orthodoxy of individual responsibility and the "emergency" safety net - thus replacing collective provision through a more residualist welfare state. (Hancock 1999, 5)

Thus, citizens are viewed as consumers of healthcare with an emphasis now placed on individual responsibilities as opposed to healthcare rights, with little distinction "between our roles as consumers and citizens" (Horton 2007, 3). The personal management of health is part of being a "good citizen". For parents, this responsibilisation extends to their children as a "responsibilisation of the self-for-others; being-intimate-for-others" (Johnson 2014, 332). Parenting then becomes a risky enterprise where children's health and well-being is the result of individual choices on the part of parents (Shirani et al. 2012; Phoenix 2004). In practice, this responsibilisation tends to be highly gendered with mothers generally held more accountable for their children's health and development (Johnson 2014; Shirani et al. 2012). At the same time, however, parents are often positioned as inadequate managers of their children's well-being and in need of expert advice or guidance.

Baby wearables epitomise a specific manner in which women in particular connect with neoliberal responsibilisation. These devices are constructed as "empowering technologies" through which women can take control of their babies' health and well-being with the promise of becoming better and more relaxed mothers (Johnson 2014). Via "push responsibilisation" (Ibidem), baby wearables promise to provide mothers with true knowledge, not subjective, embodied judgements that can be deceptive or unreliable. Baby wearables datify baby's body with the

promise of turning mothers in experts. According to Johnson (2014), in doing so, babies' tracking devices couple the neoliberal ideal of the expert patient with contemporary ideologies of intensive mothering, thus producing a gendered responsibilisation. In addition to this:

> This "device-ification" of mothering purports to turn it into an administrative and calculable activity, valuing data over subjective experiences and changing the meaning of what it is to mother and be a mother. (Johnson 2014, 346)

However, in promising to turn mothers into experts—or, at least, into the source and depository of the truth regarding their babies—baby wearables also concur to the contemporary cultural process in which expert knowledge is discredited and dismissed in favour of "personal experience as the privileged source of knowledge" (Van Zoonen 2012, 62). Van Zoonen labels this process as I-pistemology, and explains I-pistemological discourses within popular culture as also being the result of exposure to multiple and contrasting representations of expert knowledge, especially via the internet:

> the truth claims that come from I-pistemology now have much wider and much more intense platforms than ever before. The internet is a great multiplier that not only offers easy access to everyone who wants to vent her or his truth, but also enables quicker connections between these truths. (Van Zoonen 2012, 64)

Representations of expert knowledge are often cherry-picked and merged with people's own experience and the experiences of others through word of mouth (WOM) or electronic word of mouth (EWOM) on sites such as Mumsnet. In similar vein, baby's wearables facilitate the bricolage of self- and expert knowledge in I-pistemological discourses. They allow mothers to: (1) master expert medical knowledge and language; (2) combine it with their day-to-day personal experiences of tracking and managing their baby's health; and (3) compare it with the experiences of other digitally monitoring mothers shared on the internet.

Hence, while the practices and discourses associated with baby wearables can be seen to "intersect with others concerning individualisation […] the neoliberalist privileging of self-responsibility and the importance of attaining knowledge" (Lupton 2014, 8), they also

intersect to some extent with Van Zoonen's I-pistemology where self-knowledge, facilitated by digital technologies and data generation, turns into a source of truth (Du Preez 2016).

Moreover, scholars have linked the practice of technologically mediated monitoring of baby's health with the process of datafication and dataveillance, which transform social practices, social relations and ultimately people "into online quantified data, thus allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis" (Van Dijck 2014, 198). Information about babies' bodies and behaviours is being tracked, digitised, aggregated and eventually monetised by the companies that produce and sell baby wearables. Indeed, as Leaver (2017) notes, typical baby wearables devices involve two commodities:

> first, the app, monitor, wearable, or device which is sold initially to individual customers, and, second, insights and analytics produced from the aggregated and analyzed data generated by the customers using these devices. (p. 3)

In this process of commercial surveillance, personal information is stored on online corporate platforms (and often shared with third parties) and turned into a valuable commodity, in exchange for free and customised services. As a consequence, the ownership of data is unclear, with parents owning the device but having little, if no, control over the information it collects (Holloway and Green 2016). Just as pregnancy apps (Lupton and Thomas 2015) and internet-connected toys (Holloway and Green 2016; Mascheroni and Holloway 2017) are of concern, baby's wearable technologies also raise serious privacy concerns.

The very commodification of babies' data can also be seen to have a transformative effect on parent–child relationships and parenting practices, though the legitimisation of a normative model of first-time motherhood (and parenthood more generally). As Van Dijck (2013) points out in her critical analysis of social media platforms, automated systems that now permeate almost every social activity, ultimately "engineer and manipulate" social connections (p. 12). More specifically, through the above described processes of datafication and dataveillance, baby monitoring technologies contribute to the normalisation of parental practices of surveillance, or "intimate surveillance" (Leaver 2017; Lupton and Williamson 2017). Intimate surveillance can be defined as "the purposeful and routinely well-intentioned surveillance

of young people by parents" (Leaver 2015, 153) which enables parents to more efficiently enact their role as both care-givers and expert patients (Johnson 2014). Indeed, baby wearables and the associated apps normalise a culture of parenting which equates the tracking, measurement and sharing of babies' biometric data with good parenting (Leaver 2017). Mothers who monitor their baby with the aid of these technologies conform to appropriate levels of care; by contrast, it is suggested, parents who avoid technologically mediated care are irresponsible.

Therefore, following Lupton and Williamson (2017), we can conclude that

> Such practices inscribe children within an ever-intensifying network of visibility, surveillance and normalization, in which their behaviours and bodies are continually judged and compared with others. (p. 7)

Method

A CDA approach was employed to analyse fifteen video advertisements regarding baby wearables. Based on Fairclough and Wodak (1997), CDA deems discourse as "a form of social practice" that needs to take into account the context in which any discourse is produced, distributed and interpreted, as well as the social and historic environment involved (1997). Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model was used to frame the analysis. This three level model/framework involves: "text analysis" where the analysis involves description of the text which includes all semiotic indicators such as images, sounds, music (i.e. multimodal text); "processing analysis" which identifies the motives or objectives of the producers of these texts; and, "social analysis" where the wider social or historical context is taken into consideration in order to understand the kinds of social practices or discourses taking place and how they are interconnected (Fairclough 1995).

Analysis of Advertisements

Fifteen video advertisements were analysed and all were found to have a "risk and responsibility discourse" embedded within the advertisement, some very obvious and others more subtle or laid-back in approach. We have chosen four of these videos to present as case studies in the variety of ways in which "risk and responsibilisation" discourses are

presented to parents. The four advertising videos are about wearables that monitor babies' heartbeats or breathing rates. The case studies show a range of contexts in which "risk and responsibilisation" discourse can be couched. They reference expert medical knowledge to varying degrees as a way to minimise risk, while others promote baby wearables as conduits through which personal-expert knowledge is digitally mediated. Typical also within these advertisements is a heteronormative marketing schema in which mothers are positioned as carers and logistical managers of others within the heteronormative family.

Limitations

One major limitation to this analysis is the interpretive scope of media texts. There can be more than one interpretation of media texts and these can co-occur in any one text (Jensen 1995, 75). This means that there is not only one correct meaning or interpretation of any media text, with the meaning interpreted or constructed by audience members or readers of the text who read the text in a way that is compatible with their own worldview (Ritson 2003). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, we assume that advertisers ascribe a principal meaning to the goods or services they are promoting and anticipate "the grasping or extracting of prespecifiable meanings from the message" (Mick 1992, 411). These prespecifiable (or main) meanings are the meanings we will be analysing within the advertisements.

A second limitation may be traced in the nature of the sample collected for this study. Consistent with qualitative research methods such as CDA, we did not aim at exhaustiveness. Rather, we adopted a case-study design and focused on the advertisements of the wearables devices that are more frequently mentioned in public commentaries about babies tracking, and/or through searching for the brands names on YouTube. While the sample should not be considered representative of the whole market—also because new products are continuously being launched on the market—the patterns of discourses identified in the following case studies are sufficiently consistent and recurrent to be assumed as indicative of the advertising strategies in which both parents and children are positioned as (health) consumers within a neoliberal ideology.

Findings and Discussion

The Table 5.1 outlines in detail the analysis of four of the fifteen advertisements analysed for this study. Five main discourses were embedded in the texts: a *risk and responsibilisation* discourse where parents are positioned as fearful and anxious about their babies' health and are encouraged to consume baby wearables as part of their accountability/responsibility to care for their babies; a *medical* discourse where medical authority is indicated through the referencing of medical technologies that are already being used in hospitals; a *gendered* discourse where males voices are the only voices of authority; and, another *gendered, heteronormative* discourse where women are often positioned as more accountable for their babies' health and well-being. In addition to this, an *I-pistemology* discourse runs alongside these other discourses with the use of narratives that evoke (quasi) peer experiences, as well as the promise of gaining personalised knowledge about babies' biometric data.

Risk and Responsibilisation Discourse

A risk and responsibilisation discourse runs through all advertisements analysed. In these advertisements parents are viewed as responsible for their children's welfare, and the use of baby wearables is explicitly characterised as a "normal" or the "right" way to care for babies who are at risk when asleep. These commercial discourses heighten parent's sense of anxiety by referencing either these risks or parental anxiety about these risks. Parents (usually mothers) need to contain these risks and are accountable if harm prevails. These "risk and responsibilisation" discourses can be explicit or implicit.

Advertisement 1. Using phrases such as "something wrong" or "problem with heart" apprises parents that their babies' lives may be at risk. Along with the images of concerned and tired parents, this advertisement uses an obvious risk and responsibilisation discourse. The sweet lullaby music and gentle male voice-over alongside the product assuages any sense of anxiety and creates a sense of peacefulness and trust in the Owlet.

Advertisement 2. This Mimo advertisement centres on "Mommy Brain", where exhausted mothers become confused and make silly mistakes. Explicit within the advertisement is that "Mommy Brain" is caused by anxiety around the welfare of sleeping babies and associated

Table 5.1 Discourse analysis of four baby wearable advertising videos

1. **The Owlet** is a slip-on boot/sock for newborns that measure the pulse oximetry and heart rate of the baby in the same way the monitors in a hospital do. The parents can then be alerted via their smartphone, tablet or a stand-alone tabletop alarm if the child's oxygen levels are too low or their heartbeat is not within the correct levels. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLKsur76wJQ		
1st Dimension: Text Analysis—Description **Words/Phrases**: "sleeping peacefully", "something wrong", "problem with heart or oxygen", "proven, safe", "Doctors and Nurses", "rest", "Less to worry about", "big deal" **Voice-over**: male v/o is gentle and uses reassuring tones **Imagery**: Soft lighting, loving heterosexual couple looking at and caring for the baby together, sleeping baby, couple sleeping on couch **Music**: very "sweet", almost a type of lullaby **Overall**: The ad points out what worries and fears new parents have, engendering parental concern and need for a solution—peaceful sleep for baby and parents	2nd Dimension: Processing Analysis—Interpretation Anxiety/concern is bought forth through reference to terms like "problem with heart or oxygen". The use of reassuring words of doctors, nurses and pulse oximetry, etc., are to create a sense of trust in the product. Transferring the power relationship from the unknown and uncontrollable to one where the parents are taking control—taking the "power"	3rd Dimension: Social analysis—Explanation **Risk and Responsibilisation Discourse**: Parents are responsible for baby's health. Babies are at risk of SIDs **Expert medical discourse**: At home medical technology mitigates the risk **Gendered Authoritative Discourse**: Male voice-over used **Gendered Responsibilisation Discourse**: Heterosexual couple seemingly both responsible **I-pistemology Discourse**: Parents are offered intimate, reliable "expert-like" knowledge about their babies without need of expert help

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

2. **The Mimo** is a wearable monitor that is incorporated in an item of baby clothing. It is an organic cotton kimono style outfit fitted with a non-contact, machine washable sensor. This sensor measures the baby's respiration. When used in conjunction with the Mimo Turtle, respiration, skin temperature, body position and activity level is recorded. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55y6Dp8vwkA

1st Dimension: Text Analysis—Description	2nd Dimension: Processing Analysis—Interpretation	3rd Dimension: Social analysis—Explanation
Words/Phases: "worst feeling", "not being able to sleep", "everything is PROBABLY OK, but I can't help checking", "suffering from Mommy Brain", "I'm exhausted", "restless nights, interrupted sleep", "relief from heavy anxious feeling on your stomach", "Clear and accurate information" and "Waking up in the morning refreshed and energized" **Imagery**: Confused, tired, anxious, unhappy mom makes silly mistakes. Then (via Mimo info) mommy smiling and then goes to bed relaxed and peaceful **Voices**: Exhausted mommy talks to camera while voice-over male provides solution to her problems **Music**: slow piano cords (mommy's problems), upbeat banjo music (Mimo solution), upbeat piano music (technical/medical information)	The "stressed" mommy confessional and male voice-over (with Mimo as solution) offers moms a solution to their worry filled, stressful, tiring lives. Targeted to women, it implies that their insecurities and neuroses are caused by worrying about their sleeping babies. The Mimo is marketed as a solution to SIDs or other sleeping problems with an emphasis on women's emotional well-being The power behind this ad is in making the mother feel as though it is her own insecurities and behaviour patterns that is creating this "Mommy brain" and "heavy, anxious feeling" The (Mimo) technical solution offers knowledge and respite from these feelings	**Risk and Responsibilisation Discourse**: It is an exhausting responsibility. Babies are at risk of SIDs and mothers are at risk of physical and emotional exhaustion **Expert medical discourse**: At home medical technology mitigates the risks to babies and mothers **Gender Authoritative Discourse**: Males (voice-over) offer a rational solution **Gendered responsibilisation Discourse**: Mothers are responsible for their baby's health. Women (new mums) can be irrational **I-pistemology Discourse**: Technical solution promises personal knowledge that will give respite from anxiety about babies' welfare

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

3. The **Sproutling** is a monitor worn around the ankle of the baby. It monitors the baby and their environment. It also learns and predicts a baby's sleep patterns. Sproutling measures heart rate, skin temperature, motion and the baby's position. It sends data to an application on the users' phone letting parents know if a child is sleeping soundly. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slyXHix8hLg		
1st Dimension: Text Analysis—Description **Words/Phrases**: "You are a fully formed, dare we say skilled human being. Your baby isn't", "so why are you so scared of your baby?" "Sleep is like maybe never happening again", "you just want to know if his little heart is beating", "be strong, be life living, sleep having, baby raising badasses", "you got it", "you can actually do that" **Voice-Over**: Humorous narrative using male voice-over only **Imagery**: A 20/30 something hetero hipster couple and their baby carrying out everyday activities in funny manner. Parents only look concerned when watching baby sleep. Sproutling is introduced and parents return to pre-baby days (social life, sex life is back) **Music**: Upbeat banjo like music, silence during the "scared of your baby narrative", and return to upbeat music	2nd Dimension: Processing Analysis—Interpretation The text used is humorous and slightly self-deprecating in a light-hearted manner. The serious "scared of your baby" section is short but effective. The intention of the text is familiarity and empathy for the lost "adult" time. The intentions to make the viewer feel they are doing OK but just need "a little help" The hipster couple are depicted as in control, but wishing to get their old, pre-baby life back. Sproutling will help them "not be scared of their baby" (sic worried) and return to the good old days	3rd Dimension: Social analysis—Explanation **Risk and Responsibilisation Discourse**: Parents are responsible for baby's health and safety, especially when babies are sleeping **Expert medical discourse**: Medical technology mitigates risk to babies and relaxes parents **Gender Authoritative Discourse**: Male voice-over offers solution to humorously depicted "new parents" scenario **Gendered Responsibilisation Discourse**: Both on-screen actors depicted as heteronormative and relatively equal in terms of caring and workload **I-pistemological Discourse**: The Sproutling constructs parents who will hold enough personal knowledge about their baby to take control of their lives

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

4. The **Owlet**: second video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2ERuoksiSA		
1st Dimension: Text Analysis—Description	2nd Dimension: Processing Analysis—Interpretation	3rd Dimension: Social analysis—Explanation
Words/phases: "choking", "blue", "formula stuck in his nose", "blue around the mouth", "hospital technology of pulse oximetry", "don't worry we've got you taken care of", "reliable", "convenient", "real time" **Voice-over**: Calming male voice-over **Imagery**: Documentary style. Women's testimonials—head and shoulder (medium close-up) shots of women talking about their babies' near death experiences saved by Owlet. Owlet pitch—lots of shots of gadget and technology associated with it, split screens. Mid shot of developers discussing Owlet in office environment **Music**: Mothers' testimonials—quiet, slow piano score. Owlet pitch—up beat repetitive piano score	Mothers' testimonials—convey their fears and put the listener into the "shoes" of the mothers recounting their stories Owlet pitch—creates a sense of trust, security and faith in the technology of the product that is said to be based on long term, highly reliable, medical technology and backed by academic research The ad instils fear, then knowledge and trust in Owlet technology. The "what if" scenarios render parents powerless unless they monitor their sleeping babies with Owlet technology	**Risk and Responsibilisation Discourse**: Mothers who use Owlet are responsible mothers who can save their babies' lives **Expert medical discourse**: Strong reference to medical technology that eliminates risk of SIDs or other sleep related problems **Gender Authoritative Discourse**: Male developers offer a rational, reliable, technology-based solution to mothers' worst nightmare **Gendered Responsibilisation Discourse**: Mothers only are responsible for their babies' health and well-being **I-epistemological Discourse**: When mothers monitor their sleeping babies with Owlet technology, they hold more personal knowledge about their babies and can take control

Source Authors

sleep deprivation. Phrases like "relief from heavy anxious feeling in your stomach" and "restless night, interrupted sleep" normalises this anxiety about babies.

Advertisement 3. The Sproutling advertisement takes a humorous approach to parenthood and focuses on lost adult time when there is a baby in the house. However, implicit within the advertisement is a sense of underlying anxiety about the baby's welfare. Phrases such as "so why are you scared of your baby" and "you just want to know if his little heart is beating" underscores the health risks associated with caring for babies and tends to normalise this anxiety.

Advertisement 4. The second Owlet advertisement amplifies the risk babies are at when they sleep. Testimonials from mothers whose babies have been saved by Owlet technology are used. Words and phrases such as "choking", "blue around the mouth" and "formula stuck in his nose" are used. A documentary style is used in the advertisement to create a sense of truthfulness to the advertisement which heightens the sense of anxiety. The piano score adds a sense of doom and gloom to the mothers' testimonials.

Medical Discourses

The analysis of baby wearable advertisements reveals the ongoing medicalisation of child rearing practices, and in this instance, one in which parental responsibilisation for their babies' care is associated with the commodification of medical technology. In this context, babies' health and well-being is viewed "as a consumption activity operated in a free market" led by biotechnology companies, as well as pharmaceuticals (Gong 2016). The advertisements use the authoritative power of up-to-date medical technology as a selling point and solution to parental fears and anxieties regarding SIDs or other sleep problems their babies may encounter.

Advertisement 1. Within this Owlet advertisement, both the verbal language used and imagery allude to the trustworthiness of Owlet's technological performance and its use by medical professionals. For example, voice-over statements such as, "It [Owlet] uses proven, safe technology called pulse oximetry that doctors and nurses have used for decades" and the use of many tech shots (of screens and base stations) that glow comfortingly in the semi darkness of the babies' room—in a manner similar to hospital rooms at night—combine to allude to a safe, hospital environment.

Advertisement 2. The Mimo advertisement references the accuracy and quantity of digital information available via the Mimo onesie rather than directly referencing the medical origins of the technology used. This is tacitly inferred. Screenshots of the working app shows various visualisations of baby's biometric data which includes "respiration, skin temperature, body positioning and activity". Voice-over statements include, "clear and accurate information", "monitors your baby", "real time", "set notifications", "smart baby monitor" emphasising the communication technology that affords the transmission of baby's biometric data via the smart phone.

Advertisement 3. This Sproutling video has little direct reference to medical source of the technology used. It does, however, show repeated images of the smartphone screen with various biometric data visualisations—an allusion to the up-to-date medical technology used. The advertisement ends with the voice-over and graphics stating "introducing the first sensing, predicting baby monitor".

Advertisement 4. The second Owlet video uses a documentary style with speech and imagery that make reference the reliable medical technology in use in the monitor. For example, "the Owlet uses hospital technology of pulse oximetry", "it's used in about every hospital on earth". The imagery features many shots of the technology in use in hospitals and at home often within a split screen. The developers also discuss their ongoing connections with medical research: "Owlet is a collaborator on a 1.5 million dollar grant from the National Institute of Health working with a handful of hospitals and universities to further infant research".

The commodified packaging of these medical technologies for parents signifies the further commercialisation of healthcare, as well as the ongoing medicalisation of childhood. Within the advertisements analysed, the anxieties of new parents seem to be reiterated and heightened—with their anxiety resolved through the use of medical technology.

Gendered Discourses

Many of the advertisements analysed for this paper use cultural scripts of traditional gender roles. The advertisements typically featured women actors with male voice-overs. Women were positioned as accountable for their babies' welfare and often constructed as anxious or stressed. Authoritative male voice-overs were used in all the advertisements

offering technical solutions to parents' problems. These voice-overs help maintain traditional role portrayal that associates technology, authority and masculinity. They are also reminiscent of accounts of "scientific motherhood" occurring between the 1900s and 1940s where mothers were urged to conform to experts (male) regarding new scientific knowledge and technologies that were considered necessary in understanding the complex task of child rearing (Thurer 1994).

The few times adult couples were portrayed, they were heteronormative couples. All the advertisements analysed feature Caucasian women or Caucasian couples.

Advertisement 1. A male voice-over is used within this Owlet advertisement offering a calming, authoritative, technical solution to any risk to babies' oxygen levels or heartbeat parameters. A concerned, heterosexual couple care for their baby.

Advertisement 2. An exhausted mother with "Mommy Brain" is portrayed in this advertisement. Her confusion is caused by worrying about her sleeping baby, thus positioning her as responsible for her baby's welfare. A male voice-over provides reassurance and a technical solution to alleviate her anxiety and "Mommy Brain".

Advertisement 3. Within this Sproutling advertisement, a heteronormative couple are portrayed as overtired and in need of more adult time away from their baby. They are also concerned about, and frightened for their baby. The advertisement portrays them as relatively equal in terms of childcare. Nonetheless, a male voice-over offers a technical solution to their concerns, making a subtle link between masculinity and technology, as well as authority.

Advertisement 4. Women are positioned as responsible for their babies' health within this documentary style advertisement for Owlet. The female actors talk about their babies' near death experiences and how they were saved by Owlet technology. The two male developers are positioned as authoritative figures as they then discuss the Owlet in an office environment.

I-Pistemology Discourses

Van Zoonen reasons that contemporary ways of knowing are influenced by a relatively new "cultural attitude" that replaces expert knowledge or guidance with knowledge that comes from personal experience (2012). The advertisements analysed for this chapter use narratives which portray

at-home, personal experiences and voices of other parents (or quasi peers) as influential voices through which to market their product. They tend to tap into parent's desire for more personalised knowledge about their babies. The advertisements also promise an empowering experience, a technology that will turn parents into experts about their own babies. This knowledge is mediated through personally owned baby wearable technologies and circumvents the need for reliance on expert guidance or knowledge. In democratising access to medical devices and portraying parents as experts themselves, the infomercials reinforce I-pistemology in that they invalidate, to some degree, expert knowledge held by health professionals and corroborate preference for personalised, intimate information mediated through the technology embedded in baby wearables.

The personal knowledge and experience that baby wearable technologies offer is portrayed as a highly reliable and truthful source of knowledge for parents, one that compensates for both the fallacy of personal judgements and need for medical professionals. This knowledge relieves parental anxiety around babies' health and well-being by mitigating the need to be hypervigilant around sleeping babies.

Again, the I-pistemology discourse embedded in the adverts analysed in the table above contributes to the gendering of parental responsibility, given that it is mothers who need their personal and experiential knowledge to be corroborated by technologically collected data.

Advertisement 1. Within this Owlet advertisement, a heteronormative couple is portrayed as concerned or anxious about their sleeping baby and exhausted by their increased state of vigilance or hyperawareness. These parents are offered intimate, reliable knowledge about their babies through the Owlet without need of expert help.

Advertisement 2. This humorous Mimo advertisement depicts a stressed-out mother who suffers from "Mommy Brain"—a relatable (quasi) peer experience. The mother's anxiety and resulting confusion and grogginess is alleviated through the device which will alert her, and give her knowledge about any anomalies in her own baby's breathing. Thus, the (Mimo) technical solution offers personalised but trustable knowledge as well as respite from these feelings of anxiety and tiredness.

Advertisement 3. This humorous Sproutling advertisement portrays a hipster couple who are somewhat fearful and worried about their sleeping baby, while at the same time confident in other areas of their lives "You are a fully formed, dare we say skilled human being". The narrative

depicts parents triumphing over uncertain circumstances with voice-overs such as "…be strong, be life living, sleep having, baby raising badasses" and "…you can actually do that". Thus, through the use of Sproutling technology, these parents obtain enough personalised knowledge about their sleeping baby to take control of their lives again.

Advertisement 4. This documentary style advertisement uses testimonials by "everyday" mothers whose babies' lives have been saved by Owlet technology. These distressing, personal stories bring to life parents' worst personal imaginaries. The narrative arc then offers safe outcomes for those who do use Owlet technology. This is because the individualised knowledge/data provided by the Owlet wearable and app should alert them to life threatening events during the night.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the discursive regulation of parenthood that emerges from the different discourses embedded in advertisements of babies' wearables.

Infomercials combine and remix four contemporary normative discourses (a discourse of risks and responsibilisation, the medicalisation discourse, a gendered discourse and I-pistemology), in ways that retain and amplify the normative power of each.

The dominant discourse is a discourse of risks and responsibilisation, which exploits parental anxieties and positions parents as the sole agents responsible for their baby's health. Parenting is framed under a neoliberal, market-driven logic that urges parents to master medical knowledge and individually manage children's health through the aid of technological devices that turn them into empowered social agents. In so doing, they develop a normative understanding of parenthood, whereby responsible and successful care-giving is equated with the use of such technologies. As a consequence, as first-time parenting is reified into a distinct set of consumable objects, so children too are constructed as a consumable.

The advertisements analysed for this paper referred to or alluded to medical authority associated with medical technology used in the medical profession. By making these links, "connections are made between medicine and the organisation of the body" (Johnson 2014, 334). Within the advertisements, however, direct statements claiming that baby wearables diagnose, prevent or treat disease are avoided.

The manufacturers do not claim directly that their devices prevent or reduce the cases of SIDs. In this way they are not compelled to register their devices with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Bonafide et al. 2017). Beyond this, however, the advertisements do reference and allude to medical technology that is used in hospitals.

The advertisements also incorporate heteronormative and gendered stereotypes in relation to caring for babies' health and well-being. Gendered stereotypes were played out within the advertisements in two ways. Firstly, stereotypes of mothers taking on prime carer responsibility is often embedded within narratives presented in the advertisements and secondly, only men were presented in the advertisements as voices of authority or knowledge while women were depicted as product users only. Even though there were some variations within the advertisements analysed in regard to the narratives' analyses (and where sometimes two parents are seen as carers for their babies), these apparently neutral advertisements still reveal stereotyping. For example, within advertisements that feature couples, only heteronormative, Caucasian couples were depicted.

The use of narratives with actors depicted as parents within the advertisements help engender I-pistemological ways of knowing. This is because parents themselves share the concerns and worries that the actors (quasi peers) portray and in doing so share a need to resolve these problems. In addition to this, parents are promised individualised, expert knowledge about their babies which by-passes the need for expert knowledge or guidance. Wearable technologies, in other words, disintermediate access to expert knowledge and, by promising to empower parents, they disempower, if not replace, expert medical knowledge. The I-pistemological discourse evident in these advertisements adds momentum to neoliberal risk and responsibility discourses by positioning parents as autonomous agents who are responsible for their babies' well-being and who are able to take decisive action when using the information provided by these technologies.

In spite of potential contradictions (for example, between the medicalisation discourse and I-pistemology discourse), the four discourses embedded in baby wearables advertisements complement each other well. Their combination concurs to shape the current normative model of the "technologically supported responsible parent", in which parents are constructed as individually responsible for growing healthy and empowered children; mothers are particularly invested with the task of "being-intimate-for-others" (Johnson 2014, 332); and baby's tracking as a form of

intimate surveillance (Leaver 2015, 2017) is equated with good parenting. The result is an ideal mother who, relieved from parental anxieties and empowered by tracking devices, skilfully manages the infant's health by mastering medical knowledge without the need for medical experts.

Future research could explore how parents using wearable devices conform to, negotiate or resist this normative model, and how alternative discourses emerge and are represented.

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CHAPTER 6

Responsible Girlhood and 'Healthy' Anxieties in Britain: Girls' Bodily Learning in School Sport

Sheryl Clark

Introduction

This chapter situates girls' involvement in sport in the UK within the context of public health concerns around childhood obesity and its generation of 'discourses of anxiety.' Growing anxieties around obesity in the developed world more broadly have recently turned public attention towards young people's physical activities within an increasingly influential health agenda (Fullagar 2009; Leahy 2009; Evans et al. 2008). Media concerns around childhood obesity have generated headlines ranging in tone and moral uproar from 'One in 25 children aged 10 or 11 severely obese'[1] to the condemnatory, 'If your child is fat, then you are a bad parent'[2] to the sensationalist, 'Warning of "absolute crisis" in child health'.[3] These concerns have been echoed in UK government policy interventions including the

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Healthy Schools initiative,[4] the Change4life public health campaign[5] and the National Child Measurement Programme (DfH and DCSF 2008; DfH 2016). Increased physical activity has been a key strategy of such initiatives and as an underrepresented group in UK sport participation (WSFF 2012), girls are of particular interest to policymakers and stakeholders (Chawansky 2012; Chawansky and Hayhurst 2015). Accordingly, attempts to persuade girls in particular to increase their physical activity levels have been the impetus of media campaigns such as 'ThisGirlCan',[6] where health is an intended benefit. A more regulatory approach to public health is reflected in the UK government's *Childhood Obesity Strategy*, which seeks to evaluate schools in their efforts to 'prevent obesity by helping children to eat better and move more' (DfH 2016, 8). This reliance and emphasis on individual young people and their families in the prevention of obesity has been identified as a broader trend towards 'healthification' (Fusco 2007), where keeping fit has come to be seen as a new form of civic responsibility within a growing 'fitness culture' (Sassatelli 2017). This chapter focuses on how girls came to understand and learn about their bodies as 'healthy subjects' within a wider context where obesity and its threat as a discourse of anxiety have taken on a growing significance in our everyday understanding of health as a personal imperative.

For the purposes of my research, health and its enactment, for example through physical activity, are understood as a form of embodied 'identity work' (Shilling 2008), which allows individuals to narrate personal choices in processes of self-making as 'healthy citizens' by moving and shaping their bodies within particular cultural discourses. I draw on recent work on the body and schooling (Shilling 2008, 2010; Evans et al. 2008; Paechter 2006), which emphasises the embodied aspects of such identity practices where bodies simultaneously act on the world and translate cultural codes (such as morality, attractiveness and value) to others. Drawing on longitudinal research into girls' sports involvement in the UK, this chapter thereby considers how girls came to see sport and physical activity as practices of a 'healthy lifestyle' and therefore as important in their constructions of 'successful girlhood'. My research suggests that the obesity discourse, as it intersects with discourses of successful girlhood, is manifested in girls' responsible 'body projects' in contexts where bodies become intensely managed and scrutinised. The data also suggests other ways in which sport could, or did, act as a site of gendered bodily learning.

Healthy Bodies as Risk Management

The research is situated in a growing body of critical gender, health and family leisure studies which have sought to understand children and parents' health choices within particular cultural contexts including schools (Evans et al. 2004, 2008; Fullagar 2009; Wright and Harwood 2009). I make use of the concepts of 'risk' (Beck 1992; Furedi 1997), 'responsibilisation' (Kelly 2001) and 'body pedagogies' (Evans and Davies 2004), which I elaborate later on, in attempting to understand how girls learn to take up responsible, embodied subjectivities through participation in healthy lifestyles.

The concept of 'risk' has largely been adopted from Ulrich Beck's (1992) work in attempting to understand and characterise modern Western societies as preoccupied with the future and therefore with potential dangers therein. Medicalised notions of risk and individual health prevention strongly underpin the characterisation of childhood obesity as a problem or a 'discourse of anxiety' (Evans et al. 2008). Gard and Wright (2005) describe the 'obesity epidemic' discourse as an alarmist set of truth claims steeped in a pervasive biomedical model and concerned with the calorific 'ingoings and outgoings' of physical bodies, which are simultaneously gendered in notions of the 'perfect female body' (Bordo 1993). Within this context, he suggests, anxieties around obesity and its risk(s) take on both a moral and common sense urgency that at the same time fails to recognise social contexts and structural inequalities. Obesity has been perceived as particularly problematic within the rise of 'healthism' where emphasis is placed on the responsibilities of the individual in managing their bodily health by regulating their own physical activities and eating patterns (Benson 1997). As Harrington and Fullagar (2013, 3) describe, risk aversion in this context includes the cultivation of healthy lifestyles within a neoliberal model of responsibility which draws on 'flawed notions of personal choice' and where those with less capital to realise such bodily regulation are deemed irresponsible with significant class implications. Peter Kelly has further argued that 'risk' has become a dominant means of regulating childhood and youth as policies and strategies seek to target children 'at risk' (Kelly 2001). 'Responsibilisation' in Kelly's understanding, refers to the ways in which young people are particularly subject to fears and anxieties steeped in risk and thus come under increasing regulation around their potential activities and self-constructions. A gendered analysis of risk, further

suggests that current constructions of girlhood rely on distinctions of 'at risk' versus 'successful' girls whose orientation to the future relies on a willingness to embrace instability with a 'can do' attitude (Harris 2004). Drawing on empirical research, Rich and Evans (2013) found that girls' imagined futures were constructed around their (unequal) access to 'healthy lifestyles', where some girls were engaged in intensive schedules of physical activity and instructed in the pursuit of 'healthy eating' and others were less able to maintain such forms of regulation. Thus, risk avoidance or 'keeping healthy' operated as a 'future proofing' strategy involving investment in both bodily and academic achievements. These insights jointly express concerns around the structural inequalities that beset access to health provision as well as the shifting cultural understandings of health which themselves can be potentially damaging to young people, for example in leading to eating disorders or sports injuries in extreme scenarios.

Childhood obesity as a 'discourse of anxiety' is granted a particular urgency in what Philip Jenkins describes as the 'child-as-victim' trope where obese or 'at risk' children are represented as victims of 'bad parenting' or of irresponsible food marketing.[7] This perspective has been documented in media analyses through what Evans et al. (2008) describe as a particular 'child-saving movement' located within a range of sensationalist news stories and television programming where familiar tropes of 'fast food diets', and 'too much television' serve to visually invoke the threat of the 'morbidly obese child' (2011, 3). Within these representations, the body of the 'overweight or obese child' is cast as both victim and as spectre of future health problems. Therefore 'childhood obesity' and its construction within the UK in particular might be regarded as a traditional moral or 'media' panic in which fears around broader social problems (in this case public health and sedentary lifestyles) become located in particular 'spectres' of blame—in this case the body of the obese child. Here I seek to unpick the complex social contexts in which decisions around girls' physical activities are made and the very different structural positions from which they originate. In other words, apart from the individual (sedentary lifestyle) and collective (public health) implications, girls are burdened with yet another set of blame in failing to adhere to an 'ideal feminity' by not taking part in individual body projects. Girls' relationships to their body have been described in previous research (Frost 2001; Oliver and Lalik 2001) as characterised

by insecurity, bodily anxieties and as subject to the take up of disciplinary bodily regimes within a 'cult of slenderness' (Bordo 1993, 212). 'Risk' in this sense might therefore be understood as a regulatory discourse which serves to construct particular versions of girlhood as acceptable, desirable and importantly *responsible* in ongoing efforts to avoid certain dangers, including obesity. Obesity as a 'discourse of anxiety' therefore comes to regulate girls' activities and available identities, particularly where they are 'acted upon' by external forces such as dieting regimes and advertising campaigns. However, the concept of risk may be less able to explain how girls 'act back' upon such forces or use their bodies in particular ways within different contexts and I therefore draw on the concept of 'body pedagogies' to further elaborate on girls' ongoing bodily identity work.

Body Pedagogies

In line with Evans et al.'s (2008) work, I seek to situate girls' bodily learning or 'body pedagogies' within a competitive UK schooling system where health is increasingly managed and monitored through programmes such as the Healthy Schools Campaign and the National Child Measurement Initiative. Recent research describes a rise in community and school-based health interventions which target young people in particular (Wright and Harwood 2009; Tinning and Glasby 2002; Barker-Ruchti et al. 2013; Rail 2009; Wright et al. 2012). Paechter argues that a Cartesian split in schools has meant that overwhelmingly, 'children's bodies feature in school as things to be policed, subdued and got out of the way' (Paechter 2006, 6). Evans et al.'s (2004, 2008) research argues that body pedagogies (or messages about the body) in schools meant that 'achievement' could be equated with emaciation and bodily deprivation through 'perfection and performance' codes in an already intensely competitive school setting. As Shilling (2010, 154) opines, body pedagogies have evolved where obesity has come to represent a deviation from the health role which 'equates obesity and infirmity with moral culpability'. The process of 'keeping fit' in this sense becomes an ongoing set of practices haunted by the spectre of obesity as moral failure or the 'unhealthy other' (Crawford 1994, 1347). As a result, Shilling suggests that 'body maintenance' practices act as 'thoroughly daily affairs to be reflected upon, worked upon and routinised as an integral part

of everyday life' (2010, 155). This daily identity work can be described as individual 'body projects' (Brumberg-Jacobs 1997) undertaken by gendered subjects within particular contexts such as schools, sports clubs and families where young people learn about and engage with their bodies. The avoidance of 'risk' in this context, by taking up responsible practices and identity work such as sports participation and weight management, may thus be one means of constructing versions of 'successful girlhood' (see also Tsaliki 2015 as linked to the politics of sexuality in constructions of girlhood and femininity). This focus on health and risk may represent an emergent kind of relationship between sport and the construction of young femininities.

Sport and its construction as a practice of hegemonic masculinity has been understood as leading to many girls' marginal participation and positioning therein (Hargreaves 1994; Choi 2000). However, recent feminist analyses have also suggested that sport is increasingly becoming a site for the production of 'successful alpha femininities' through achievement discourses ensconced in a neoliberal postfeminist sensibility (Azzarito 2010; Heywood 2007; Cooky and McDonald 2005; Chawansky 2012). Thorpe et al. (2017, 370) suggest that within a neoliberal postfeminist sensibility, 'young women are invited to perform' their gendered selves as an 'unproblematic celebration of individualism, bodily capital and consumer choice' so that sexy, sporty personas become one more way of marketing the self. As they point out, not all bodies are able to capitalise on such performances and size; ethnicity and physical beauty provide differential value(s) within the cultural and media landscape. Some research suggests that health and fitness increasingly dominate young women's understandings and motivation for participation in sport and physical activity (Flintoff and Scraton 2001; Garrett 2004). Robyne Garrett (2004) describes how girls came to conceptualise themselves as 'good body, bad body, different body' within the health norms and codes of their physical education lessons. Research in other settings also suggests that sport can act as a site of gendered and embodied resistance to social norms, where young women's physical abilities can be expanded by using their bodies in ways that challenge a learned physical incapacity in resistance to social norms (Theberge 2003; Evaldsson 2003). As Maddie Breeze's (2015, 4) research on women's participation in roller derby argues, it is likely that gender 'is both crossed and preserved' in sporting sites where stereotypes

can be both challenged and reinforced (2015, 4). Here I am particularly interested in girls' relationships to their bodies engendered through sport, within the context of schooling in particular.

Researching Sporty Girls at School

The qualitative, longitudinal research this chapter draws on took place over a period of four years in which I traced the sporting and identity practices of six 'sporty girls' through their experiences in Year Five (age 10) to Year Eight (age 13) as they attended various schools in London, UK. The transition to secondary school is a particular point at which many young women decide to drop out of sport (WSFF 2012). Accordingly, the qualitative, longitudinal research approach taken served to illuminate some of the shifting and complex meanings and processes whereby young women came to understand themselves through their relationships to sport over time (McLeod and Thomson 2009). The girls had originally attended two primary schools—here given pseudonyms. The first school, Holly Bank, had an intake that was affluent and middle class with a primarily 'white British' ethnic composition. The second, Benjamin Laurence primary school, reflected a less well off, and much more ethnically diverse group of children, many of whom lived in government subsidised housing near the school. At the transition from primary school, my research followed up with girls from both schools as they moved on to a variety of single and mixed sex secondary schools throughout the city with varying access to extracurricular activities. Girls (ages 9–10) at each school chose their own pseudonyms (often in Year 5) and these do not necessarily reflect their ethnicity. The research involved twice yearly interviews with the girls as well as interviews with many of their parents, friends, classmates and coaches. I also carried out ongoing observations at lunch breaks, school PE (physical education) lessons, extracurricular activities the girls attended (including sports days) as well as sports clubs they attended outside of school. In total, I carried out 29 semi-structured interviews with 18 girls and 'informal' interviews with 6 teachers and 2 parents as well as 45 observations at PE lessons and after school clubs over a period of two years. All interviews and field notes were subsequently written up and transcribed and these were entered into NVivo where they were coded thematically using inductive, emergent coding.

Growing up as a Process of Bodily Surveillance and Scrutiny

In the United Kingdom, the transition to secondary school or Year Seven (age 12) of the schooling system, simultaneously marks a point at which young people enter the phase commonly understood as 'adolescence' and the expected onset of puberty. The transition is both a point of trepidation and excitement for many girls and their families as they seek to understand what this new phase of both schooling and development will hold (George 2004). Nancy Lesko has argued that the 'development-in-time' narrative functions as a key means through which 'adolescents are known, consumed and governed', thereby coming to understand their own experiences (2001, 35). She therefore suggests that age-graded schools and the transition between phases of schooling accordingly function as 'an intensification of age and related norms' (Lesko 2001, 49) in relation to phases of 'normal physical development'. Bodily changes and their relationship to sport were already being highlighted in primary school by girls involved in the research. Best friends Nadine and Chevonne explained one of the reasons they no longer wanted to engage in playground football with their male peers.

> *Nadine*: Yeah cos now we've got our period [whispered] now we've grown up a little bit…
> *Chevonne*: We're into like girly stuff, but not as much now.
> (Year Six interview, Benjamin Laurence School)

In common with many of their female peers, Nadine and Chevonne constructed football as a 'childish' pursuit that would need to be put aside as they 'grew up' and moved to secondary school. In their Year 7 interviews, many girls further suggested that their bodies had become the site of increasing evaluation and judgement and this intense gaze was often exacerbated in PE and sports contexts where bodies are more obviously 'on display' (Cockburn and Clarke 2002). The schools themselves placed an overt emphasis on girls' physical appearance by outlining restrictions around comportment and particularly school uniform. This is in line with broader disciplinary shifts in UK education (e.g. Morris 2017) in which students' correct adherence to the school uniform is taken to be a primary means of behavioural enforcement. At lunch and other points of the day, I frequently observed teachers stopping girls to

roll down a skirt, do up a button or simply to ask them to walk instead of running. The message to girls seemed to be that their bodies were both increasingly visible, subject to surveillance and potentially dangerous/unruly. I interviewed Fiona, Mary and Rehana who attended a private (fee paying) girls' school and described the emphasis put on their physical appearance by the school. This involved both purchasing the requisite uniform components, as well as wearing them in the right way, thereby managing sometimes varying sets of expectations around their bodily presentation. The regulation of girls' bodies through school uniform and other moralising expectations has been shown to operate through wider discursive anxieties about girls' hidden sexuality (Raby 2010; Allan 2009).

Fiona: The school wants us to look smart, both kinds of smart.
… [later]
Mary: Cos no one ever takes their jumper off cos you have to tuck your shirt in and it looks really odd if you've got a white shirt tucked under a grey skirt.
Sheryl: Really? Do you get in trouble for not having your shirt tucked in?
Fiona: I do.
Mary: Yeah, I do.
Rehana: It's kind of quite scary cos in our first Latin lesson with the head mistress, I don't know what year it was. This girl hadn't got her shirt tucked in and she said 'can you tuck it in please?' She saw her go in and not do anything about it so she said 'excuse me a minute' and took the girl outside.
Fiona: Cos they take appearance quite – seriously [others repeat this].
(Year Seven Interview)

Within the scenario described by the girls, their bodies are taken to be physical representatives of the school, both smart as in 'intelligent and clever', as well as correctly turned out. Research by Alexandra Allan (2009) and Rebecca Raby (2010) has also documented the complex negotiations girls undertake in balancing codes of 'sexiness' and 'being a lady' in the operation of normative gender and sexuality codes. Similarly here, the girls' appearance is measured through an ongoing self-scrutiny undertaken in the context of both teacher and peer evaluations. Tucking one's shirt in 'looks really odd' to your peers and yet is expected by school regulations and thus the girls undertake a complex, even duplicitous negotiation of adjustments, subterfuge and conformity

in relation to the weather, physical comfort and the visible spaces of surveillance in and around the school. The fear of being made an example of, like their classmate in this scenario, seems to remind the girls of the need for vigilance through threat of public humiliation and discipline. The monitoring of both girls' clothing and physical comportment (such as running on school grounds) was common at each of the research schools I visited. The surveillance it represented was also repeated in their peer cultures where girls were frequently being evaluated by boys and other girls alike. Lindsay and Gazza, who were close friends in primary school and now attended a comprehensive (non-fee paying) mixed sex secondary together, described the intense scrutiny their bodies had become subjected to within the sexualised and heteronormative environment of their peer cultures. The school was located in an area of relative economic deprivation in inner city London with a larger than average ethnically diverse intake of students. In primary school, both Lindsay and Gazza had avidly enjoyed playground and extracurricular football, but neither felt comfortable engaging in these activities at their secondary school and they noted the increased surveillance they felt subject to. Peer hierarchies and the normative demands around appearance had become of increasing importance to the girls and thus a more frequent topic of conversation in our interviews.

Sheryl: So what makes a girl popular in school?
Lindsay: It's how you dress. Like, I wanna wear what I wanna wear but if I wear something really disgusting then the girls start laughing or talking behind your back, or backbiting and you just feel, weird.
Gazza: And it's just if you're popular with the boys as well. These boys are really fussy for like little things.
Sheryl: Like what?
Lindsay: It's like, what you're wearing, dunno.
Gazza: They take the mick out of you like, if like…
Lindsay: If you're ugly or not, if you're pretty or not.
Gazza: And it's like, if you have no boobies. [laughs] Like that.

The girls here describe experiences of both bodily shame and scrutiny as their appearance and bodily development are inscribed within evaluative hierarchies of school peer cultures against a normative backdrop of bodily development. The premium placed on cultural markers of beauty 'if you're ugly or not, if you're pretty or not', has both a divisive and evaluative function—to mark out girls in relation to other

girls and to evaluate their looks accordingly. The development of breasts as 'normative pubertal processes' in Lesko's (2001, 39) phrase, are here translated both as markers of sexual maturity and desirability against a 'messy, sexualised adolescence' full of innuendo and the risk of rejection. In this scenario, not to have breasts is constructed as both a failure of development and of heteronormative attractiveness, something the girls must guard against. Lindsay's sense that the boys 'are really fussy for little things' similarly describes a panoptical gaze in which the female body is permanently at risk of being scrutinised and judged as 'failing'. The impossibility of bodily acceptance and normalcy manufactures—what Tincknell (2013, 83) describes as a 'relentless drive for physical perfectibility' within modern feminine identity constructions. Lindsay also struggles here with her desire for self-realisation through dress as personal style—'what I wanna wear' and the fear that her own choices will be judged harshly—'you just feel weird'. Lindsay, whose family had emigrated from Pakistan, had in other interviews described her discomfort at wearing a headscarf in a school with few Muslim girls and she decided in Year 8 to remove the scarf, at least temporarily. Thus ethnicity, alongside social class and bodily physical capital, further created hierarchies and divisions within the heteronormative economy of the school. The pervasive sexual harassment often used to reinforce social peer hierarchies has been documented extensively in primary, secondary and higher education contexts (Renold 2002; Draper 1993; Phipps and Young 2015; Youdell 2005; Ringrose and Renold 2009). Similar to Oliver and Lalik (2000), I am here concerned with the forms of bodily learning taking place through the ongoing scrutiny of the female body and its sexual objectification within the school. In this context, the body is both the potential site of value within the heteronormative economy and yet constantly at risk of being deemed unattractive, unacceptable and shameful. Thus bodies become a site of self-scrutiny as the potential for judgement and evaluation is imagined and anticipated on an ongoing basis. When I asked Nirvana, who had recently entered Year 7, about the transition to secondary school, she described the daily process of getting ready for school and the ritual this entailed.

> *Nirvana*: Well it gets kind of annoying cos you always gotta try and look right. So I spend a couple of hours, seriously, on my fringe. Not hours, but I get really annoyed with it. It never really looks right. And my hair is really bugging me cause it's like super thick. Yeah, I dunno…

The bodily maintenance Nirvana describes here represents again a large investment of time and energy in the presentation of self. Investing in one's appearance could bring both social approval and recognition, but, importantly, avoidance of critical judgements and ridicule. Obesity or excess body weight in this context acutely intensified the possibility that the body might become a site of shame and humiliation. This type of instance occurs in the following incident recounted by the girls in a group interview which took place following observations in PE class.

> *Lindsay*: And also they laugh at Joana because she's got a big belly.
> *Sheryl*: Was that what was happening today in PE?
> *Lindsay*: Yeah, remember when she stood up and did the jumps and her shirt went like that and they started to laugh about it.
> *Danny*: Yeah, cos she's not exactly popular. And, cos like everyone cusses her about the way she dresses and things. But like she's tried to improve and I just think, obviously, if you don't like someone you can say it to someone else.

In the heteronormative economy of the school, fatness in particular took on a pariah status and the bodily display involved in PE and other sporting activities particularly risked exposing this 'excess'. The stigma surrounding fat and the ways in which school PE and other sporting sites marginalise non-normative bodies, have been documented in research on young people's experiences of sport and PE (Sykes 2011; Wellard 2006). Obesity discourse can be said to have further stigmatised particular bodies by constructing fatness or obesity as an individual moral failing or lack of responsibility. Here the girls suggest that Joana has 'tried to improve', but this is an impossible, unachievable goal since self-improvement as bodily project is, as Shilling (2003, 188) surmises, 'meaningless in the absence of moral criteria' and thus subject to continual interrogation. Over the course of Year 7 then, and in the process of transition, the girls learned that their bodies were increasingly being evaluated and on display, as well as a site of responsibility and identity work—something they could work on in order to demonstrate their commitment to self-improvement. Danny's suggestion that Joana has 'tried to improve' is offered almost as a form of redemption and yet she comes back to the legitimacy of 'not liking someone' even if this is only due to a lack of conformity. As friends, the girls frequently engaged in shared projects of self-improvement by suggesting a new

hairstyle to one another, different clothing and occasionally alongside affirmations that each *was* beautiful, despite any lack of sexual approval or a harsh judgement from others. Attempting to change one's dress, to 'improve' or to lose weight, were nonetheless understood as a form of self-management, a personal body project through which a girl could demonstrate her commitment to the project of 'successful girlhood'—here constructed as a particular beauty project. The addition of sport or physical activity as identity practice could further act as a form of responsible body project, and while some girls gave up sport in order to concentrate on their schooling, others incorporated sport as a means of constructing versions of successful girlhood. This difference in participation was specifically linked to the schools that girls attended where girls at middle-class schools in particular were frequently involved in intense extracurricular schedules. Girls at less affluent schools were less likely to have the fees for lessons or had long journeys home by bus that stopped them from participating in after-school activities. Faced with budget cuts and teacher workload as well as external regulating factors such as OFSTED, schools themselves often made difficult decisions about which activities to prioritise and which could be removed from the extracurricular provision.

Responsible Girlhood and the Role of Sport

Further to an increased scrutiny of their physical appearance and the self-management this entailed, an additional feature of the transition to secondary school involved for many of the girls an intensification of their already busy schedules. Academic, health and sporting achievements have been described as a means of creating social distinction or 'concerted cultivation' through extracurricular activities (Maxwell and Aggleton 2013; Vincent and Ball 2007). This 'overscheduling' of extracurricular activities intensified in secondary school where longer journeys and higher fees combined with an emphasis on academic achievement. Here Nirvana attempts to recount for me the after-school activities and clubs she has been involved with.

> *Nirvana*: Okay, well…this could take a while. Um, I'm trying to remember everything. I used to do cross-country and netball and maybe that was it, I'm not sure. Oh yeah, badminton. Um, and I did Orchestra, I did my flute lessons, I did my piano lessons. I had a singing lesson and I did my Youth Music Trust on Saturdays.
>
> (Year 7 Interview)

With both parents in professional employment and a secure housing and income situation, access to the range of activities described above was readily available and even expected of similar middle-class children at Nirvana's school. The girls often greatly enjoyed their participation in these extracurricular activities and they were frequently sites of friendship, accomplishment and pleasure for them. Extracurricular activities were also of course, sites of identity work where the sense of being a 'sporty', 'musical' or 'academic' girl (and, indeed frequently, all of these) was performed and practiced by the girls. As the girls approached secondary school, there was increasingly a sense that they would need to focus on one or two of these activities in which they were particularly 'talented' in (Clark 2012) as a complement to their academic achievement. Thus Nirvana described how she no longer participated in sport or cross-country running and instead focused on her musical pursuits which she particularly excelled at. Sport was linked both to a discourse of achievement as well as a bodily project of 'keeping oneself fit'. This was often mentioned by the girls as they described why they enjoyed sport or continued to undertake physical activities despite other time commitments and pressures. Rhiannon, who participated in football, trampolining, running and a range of Scouting activities, expressed a sense of bodily pleasure in the way that sport made her feel about her body.

> *Rhiannon*: I definitely feel better about my body when I've been running cos it makes me feel a lot fitter. And able to do more things.

Wellard (2012) has argued that bodily pleasure in sport acts as a sustaining motivation for young people and yet is often overlooked or ignored in many youth sport contexts, including physical education classes in school. There is somewhat of a discursive slippage here for Rhiannon in thinking about her bodily pleasure—does she feel good because she is fit (and this is perceived as a worthwhile pursuit), or because physically her body is more capable and stronger? This latter sentiment is expressed when she says that she is 'able to do more things' and thus seems to experience a stronger sense of capacity and overall wellness through her participation in sport as a form of physical capital. A similar kind of pleasure is expressed by Spirit below, who at the same time seems to experience a sense of expectation and commitment that is external to her own expressed goals within running. Spirit's running at primary school had

been deemed impressive by coaches and teachers when she regularly placed first in races, which led to an invitation to join the nearby athletics club. The club itself, set within an affluent middle-class (and predominantly white) suburb of London, was overtly competitive and particularly invested in its youth division. Her coach had described Spirit's performances to me as 'disappointing' given their expectations for her ongoing improvement. She described in Year 7 why she had continued with the sport where many of her friends had dropped out.

> *Spirit*: Well I've got a lot of history behind it, obviously. It's like, I don't know I just keep it up. Plus it keeps me fit, which I like. Cos I like knowing that my body feels good as well. But then I dunno, it's just cos I've got such. Cause in my old school all the PE teachers were like 'You're doing really well. Don't stop, just keep going.' So I kind of don't want to stop cos I don't want to let anybody down and stuff. It's like, I just don't think about stopping.

The idea of history here seems to relay an expected trajectory that Spirit feels she should continue on because not to do so would be disappointing to other adults who have invested in her success (and perhaps to herself). Lesko (2001, 51) suggests that youth are contained within an 'expectant mode' which creates experiences of 'becoming but not being' within a development model of adolescence. Certainly, Spirit was aware of expectations of both her career and sporting achievements and the idea that activities undertaken in youth represented a particular investment in one's future adult self. Here, the expectation of future achievement in sport serves to carve out a particular path that has little to do with Spirit's own experiences of running and more with the intensified expectations of others. The project of health and fitness for Spirit was also undertaken through her relationship to food, and she described later in our interview how she had begun running in Year 4 in an attempt to lose weight. Managing food, including the need for 'balance', had become a common experience for her and a means of controlling certain elements of her life. She explained later in the interview, 'I mean I eat healthy food, I eat my nuts and stuff. But then occasionally I have a little treat. But I mean like, you're supposed to have that really'. Spirit's relationship to her running and to her body within this context conveys a strong sense of responsibility and perceived expectation around the types of progress and achievements she should be making.

Spirit displayed a highly conscientious approach to her project of selfhood which balanced a tight schedule of sport, school, homework and family. She described the project of managing expectations at her private school, her elite running club and with her parents who 'want me to go to [Oxbridge]'. Simultaneously, the project of successful girlhood included the ongoing work of 'keeping fit', which for Spirit here seems to act as a form of both pleasure and accomplishment—a bodily undertaking that allows her to manage both her appearance and size through food and exercise.

This same idea of 'balance' is expressed by Danny, below, who suggests that sport allows her to eat what she likes. The idea is initially presented by her friend during our group interview.

> *Gazza*: Assuming she eats so much, look how skinny she is. And she eats basically like that everyday.
> *Danny*: [laughs]
> *Gazza*: No offence.
> *Danny*: No cos I do so much sport that it just runs off me. So I eat more each day. I think, so it doesn't matter.
> *Gazza*: If she sat on her bum she'd be like that [motions huge belly with her hands]
> *Danny*: Yeah, I'm not overweight. But if I didn't eat and did so much exercise, I'd be underweight. So I gotta balance.

Danny was active and highly achieving in a wide range of extracurricular sports including figure skating, cross-country running and football. Although Danny's family were not particularly wealthy and she did not possess the middle-class capital of some of the girls at the other schools, her family were still able to invest in her sporting pursuits to a great extent. They transported her to lessons and paid for expensive figure skating outfits and other equipment. Danny expressed in other interviews the pleasure she took in her sporting accomplishments, especially since she did not consider herself to be particularly academic. Here she describes the physical capital that sport affords her within a peer context of bodily scrutiny. Danny's self-construction here as a 'responsible' (not overweight) subject is clearly invested in a wider obesity discourse where calorie consumption and physical exercise form a simple idea of 'balance' and self-regulation/moderation. Danny's friends described her as (unusually) confident about her appearance, something

they struggled to be, and here Danny seems to relate this confidence to her participation in sport and the normative (slender) body shaped in and through this participation.

Conclusion

The project of girlhood and its construction within a modern, 'postfeminist' era in the UK and elsewhere has been described as a particularly complex and often contradictory process of self-making in which discourses of female achievement or 'successful girlhood' are still beset by ongoing structural inequalities and divisions (Bettie 2003; Pomerantz and Raby 2011; Ringrose 2013). My research also situates the obesity discourse and its role in girls' embodied identity constructions within the context of schooling and the heteronormative peer economies therein. These bodily hierarchies served as a particularly relevant backdrop to the girls' ongoing sports participation. In line with Nancy Lesko's (2001) work, I have suggested that age and gender in particular formed powerful narratives through which girls came to understand their bodies and their role within the competitive, heteronormative economy of the school. The girls' bodies were judged particularly harshly within this context where sized, gendered, age-based (physical development), racialised and class-based norms created particular bodily hierarchies. The sexualisation and objectification of girls' bodies against this set of normative demands created a particular kind of self-conscious body work in which the girls both sought validation and more importantly, the avoidance of shame and humiliation.

Checking their hair, adjusting their skirt length, changing the way they dressed or trying to lose weight by playing sport or eating less, were all practices through which girls could demonstrate their commitment to self-improvement and the important project of girlhood within the punitive hierarchies of their school environments. However, these norms were also constantly shifting and unstable so that hypervigilance was required in a quest for 'physical perfectibility' as an impossible yet necessary ideal. Thus an important form of bodily learning that took place was achieved through the ongoing scrutiny of girls' bodies and their growing awareness of how they might adjust and manage their bodies in this context. This hypervigilance was upheld both through their peer culture and the school itself, which actively monitored and scrutinised girls' physical appearance as a means of creating 'successful'

pupils who were 'both kinds of smart'. This relentless competitiveness is increasingly engendered in a schooling system modelled on market forces and where students and schools are pitted against one another in a high stakes achievement 'game' (Ball 2003). Involvement in sport and other extracurricular activities and the physical and cultural capital accrued therein might thus be seen as a 'risk avoidance' strategy in an increasingly competitive and unequal schooling system and society.

Within this chapter, I have argued that the increasing influence of obesity and healthism discourses as a means of framing young people's sports participation has created particular tensions for gendered subjects already under heightened scrutiny. Discourses of risk and obesity served to underscore girls' understanding that they were increasingly responsible for their bodies and the choices they made in relation to their health and schooling. Therefore, the project of successful girlhood could include managing food intake, scheduling and attending a host of extracurricular activities and academic achievement, alongside a focus on one's appearance and 'looking the right way'. Girls' bodily learning frequently included the need to be responsible for their own bodies by carving out and managing particular schedules and healthy practices. In this context, the project of 'keeping fit' and managing one's body could be undertaken as a particular project of successful girlhood. These 'healthy' anxieties, generated in the context of obesity discourse, may thus be seen to take on an enormous psychic and emotional toll as girls attempt to successfully manage the project of girlhood as responsible, healthy subjects. Commenting on the limitations of modern body projects, Shilling suggests that they are subject to fluctuating goals and fashions as well as engendering a 'chronic reflexivity' so that satisfaction or 'body confidence' are unattainable (Shilling 2003, 188).

Discourses of anxiety around childhood obesity seem both to overstate the prevalence of the problem and to underestimate children's (and girls in particular) willingness, and indeed compulsion, in managing their bodies through an endless scrutiny further amplified by the pervasive forms of gendered harassment and surveillance already taking place at school and sports clubs. However, some of the girls' experiences in sport also suggested that this involvement could create heightened feelings of bodily capacity, pleasure and strength and thus act as a possible means of resistance towards the increased objectification of these bodies within their peer hierarchies. This potential might be explored through critical physical literacy approaches which seek to situate and understand bodies

within contexts of racism, sexism, sizeism and other forms of discrimination in ways that engage young people in such discussions.

Notes

1. BBC News headline (2018), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-44261065.
2. *Telegraph* article (2015), https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/11985974/If-your-child-is-fat-then-you-are-a-bad-parent.html.
3. *Mail Online* article (2017), http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4968222/More-4million-British-children-obese-overweight.html.
4. The National Healthy Schools Programme was initiated in 1999 by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and set out guidance for a whole school approach to 'health and wellbeing'.
5. A social marketing campaign by the National Health Service designed to combat obesity, https://www.nhs.uk/change4life.
6. ThisGirlCan is a National media marketing campaign developed by Sport England, which aims to encourage more women and girls to take up sport by sharing positive images and messages of participation, http://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/.
7. An example is the recent sugary drinks ban in the UK as reported in media accounts such as Meikle (2016), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/mar/05/nhs-england-prepares-sugar-tax-banning-adverts-unhealthy-food.

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PART II

Cultural Practices and Media Discourses of Childhood

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CHAPTER 7

(De)Constructing Child-Focused Media Panics and Fears: The Example of German-Speaking Countries

Christine W. Trültzsch-Wijnen and Markéta Supa

Introduction

Much attention has historically been paid to the role of media in children's life and development, in which fear and anxiety has been central and repeatedly fuelling society's concern surrounding any media-related innovations and changes. Such fears and anxieties have in some cases led to *moral panics*, generally defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2011, 21) as "the outbreak of moral concern over a supposed threat from an agent of corruption that is out of proportion of its actual danger or potential harm." When media is positioned as an agent of corruption and disproportionately framed as a threat upon one/more social groups, we can talk of *media panics* (Drotner 1999; Kinsky 2013). At the same time, the media is in itself a defining factor in the process of

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framing and defining a phenomenon as a media or moral panic (Cohen 2002). As Buckingham (1993, 8) explained:

> [T]hroughout history, assertions about negative influence of popular cultural forms have served as a focus for much broader anxieties about moral decline and social disorder [in which] the medium is seen as an attack on 'authentic' or 'essential human' values, and on 'true' art and culture.

Moral as well as media panics have often been concerned with social changes in the lives of young people, which older generations might consider as threatening to individuals and society (Drotner 1992, 1999). The overall aim of this chapter is to acknowledge child-focused media panics and fears as an ongoing phenomenon, but at the same time to argue that it is difficult to define, identify, and discuss them without acknowledging their social constructionist nature and their contextual complexities.

We will at first illustratively apply a commonly used retrospective theoretical approach to the analysis of media panics. This approach focuses on how new media is rejected and demonised in the beginning, while they are accepted and incorporated within the broader media culture at a later stage; technology is therefore centrally located within this discourse (Süss et al. 2018). Our intention here however is to focus primarily on people and then on technology, which is why we will offer and apply a *social constructionist approach and one deriving from new cultural history*, as alternative approaches to media fears and panics analysis (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 425).

Being inspired by a *social constructionist approach* to the analysis of moral panics, we will first discuss selected social constructs—concretely *childhood* and *(media) education*—in tandem with the child-focused media fears and panics. Secondly, to move beyond this important but generalising discussion about the social construction of child-focused media panics and fears, we will highlight the importance of the historical and cultural context of media panics debates on the example of German-speaking countries—Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. A focus on German-speaking countries is expected to contribute to the ongoing need for "internationally comparative work on debates around children and the media" and for studies available in English that do not "come predominantly from the USA and Britain" (Critcher 2008, 92).

Retrospective Approach to Media Panics

Human anxieties are infused with social and cultural influences; thus when anxiety is attached to a particular object, event, or situation, we generally call it *fear* (Horwitz 2013). Such fear stems from our subjective evaluation of a given thing or situation as *threatening* (Akhtar 2013). The levels of fear however vary. Grand (2002, in Horwitz 2013) identified four levels, (1) mild fear termed as *apprehension*, (2) alarming fear as *dread*, (3) overwhelming and consuming fear called *panic*, and (4) extreme fear or *terror*. Diverse fears of diverse levels can be observed as soon as "new" media (e.g. film, TV, internet), content (e.g. TV series, computer games), media-related services (e.g. social media), and devices (e.g. smartphones), grow popular and become widely used. These are often labelled as "media panics," although most of them arguably stay at the level of apprehension or dread. To evaluate the levels of fears concerning diverse issues and topics about children and the media is however very challenging.

One possible way is a retrospective outlook, because diverse media-related fears have a long tradition. This approach was used, among others, by Critcher (2008) who portrayed the recurring nature of anxieties across time, space, and diverse media, drawing upon Starker's (1989) seminal work *Evil Influences: Crusades Against the Mass Media*. One could, for example, go back to Ancient Greece and Socrates who questioned the value of images and letters to learning and knowledge. He saw them as inferior, and possibly also dangerous, when compared with oral narration (Rowe 2001). In the dialogue with *Phaedrus*, Socrates talks about the Egyptian God Ammon's ("Thamus") reaction to the invention of letters, when introduced by the God of Knowledge and Hieroglyphs, Thoth ("Theuth") (Plato ca. 370BC [2004], see also Schmitz 1985, 9):

> *O most ingenious Theuth, the parent of inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own intentions to the users of them. (…) [F]or this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learner's souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to external written characters and not remember themselves. (…) [T]hey will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing.*

This example from Ancient Greece can be used to highlight the recurring tendency to doubt the "usefulness" or "corruptive nature" of media inventions that can be traced back to the beginning of arguably

any medium. According to McLuhan (1964, 113–114), for Plato it was poetic language and songs that were considered as "a poison, and an enemy" of young people's "impressionable minds" and an "obstacle to reasoning." The Archbishop San Carlo Borromeo accused the sixteenth-century Italian play writers of "stimulating [unfortunate] passions" in their audiences. Starting with complaints against the written culture and pressing ahead with the discourse on potential negative effects of reading (addiction, manipulation, insurrection), shortly after Gutenberg's invention of the printing machine and the rise of literacy among the masses (Hüther and Schorb 2005, 269), anxiety and moral panics deriving from embracing "new" media have been a constant companion of the technological evolution and rise of various media from film, radio, and television (Heins and Cho 2003, 7; Vollbrecht 2001, 29–30; Tyner 1998, 136) to computer games, the Internet, and digital media (Critcher 2008). For example, as Socrates feared "forgetfulness in the learner's souls," Spitzer (2012) nowadays cautions against "digital dementia" described as the weakening of cognitive abilities such as memory, as a result of excessive use of digital media. Or as Socrates was worried that learners would trust external—thus invalid—sources, so are we today concerned with the phenomenon of "online disinformation" and "fake news."

A retrospective outlook such as this usually hopes to, or often successfully does, ease media anxieties, fears, and panics. However, Buckingham and Jensen (2012, 420) criticised that such a perspective is based on "false logic"; that is, if today's mainstream medium was yesterday's pariah, then today's pariah will be accepted tomorrow. Just because the claims about harmful role of media keep recurring, it does not mean that there are necessarily false, in contrast, it might mean that there is some truth in them (ibid.). Furthermore, this approach tends to interpret past events through the lens of present-day values, while taking them out of their historical and cultural context. The authors subsequently suggest an application of social constructionist and new cultural history approaches, which is what we will do next in our analysis of the current and the past child-focused media fears and panics in general, and in the context of German-speaking countries in particular.

Social Construction of Child-Focused Media Panics and Fears

Media are an integral part of children's life, thus it undoubtedly has "materially real causes and consequences" (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 417). However, the intention of a social constructionist approach to the "competing claims about the nature and seriousness of harmful and threatening conditions" potentially caused by media use (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2011, 24) usually is not to prove or disapprove them. Instead, it is to explore and critically evaluate the ways in which problems are socially defined and constructed. From this point of view, a social problem exists primarily in the way it is conceived and collectively defined in a certain society (Blumer 1971, 301–302):

> Social problems are not the result of an intrinsic malfunctioning of a society but are the result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked out and identified as a social problem. A social problem does not exist for a society unless it is recognized [sic] by that society to exist.

The ways in which society recognise the role of media in people's everyday life and learning processes varies according to several scholars among *culturally pessimist*, *media euphoric*, *and critical-optimistic* worldviews. For example, the fear-based reaction to the introduction and spread of a new medium or technology falls within a *cultural pessimist* worldview, which arguably dominates public discourse on children and media (Süss et al. 2018; Aliagas and Castellà 2014; Trültzsch-Wijnen and Aliagas 2017). Through this lens, media is seen as evil and dangerous social actors, or as *folk devils* (Cohen 2002). Once media panics emerge, they are further exacerbated by fears about the power of media on people and concerns for those seen as powerless, such as children. Cultural pessimism is often embedded in a cause-and-effect media tradition still prevailing public discourse about children and media. For instance, Starker (1989) grouped adults' child-focused media related fears into three areas—also applying to new media today: The first group is linked to the new ways media might represent the reality, second is the level of media's immersion into our lives, and the third is our immersion to media and stories. The latest anxieties that combine all three types of media-related fears could for example linked to the children's use of virtual reality

(for critical review and research see e.g. *Children and Virtual Reality: Emerging Possibilities and Challenges* by DigiLitEY [2018]).

In contrast to cultural pessimism, *media euphoria* tends to over-celebrate the potential role of media and communication technology in children's lives (Süss et al. 2018; Aliagas and Castellà 2014; Trültzsch-Wijnen and Aliagas 2017). On one hand, traces of media euphoria can be found in (new) media's educational potential for children and media, as celebrated within a range of public, academic, and policy discourses (e.g. Beck and Wade 2004; Johnson 2006). Such optimistic educational views were for instance developed with the advent of film (Schorb 1995) only to be pressed on with the focus on TV (e.g. Sesame Street; Paus-Haase 1986), videogames (Gros 1998), computer technologies (Pietraß 2002; McCain and Jukes 2001), touchpads (Gleason 2017), and recently with codeable smart toys and artificial intelligence (Seldon 2019).

Cultural pessimism and media euphoria thus represent two binary oppositions, one of many in debates about children's media life and learning. The most obvious and persevering examples of dualism in media panics are the socially constructed divisions of (1) good/educational media vs bad/harmful media, and (2) the adult- and child-appropriate media texts, associated with certain uses and behaviours. This can be illustrated in the public discourse around the popular text of *The Hunger Games*. This is a case where although the books have received several awards in children's literature categories, the films have been widely criticised for being inappropriate for children. For instance, after the second film's premier in November 2013, the *Daily Mail* film critic Brian Viner (2013) wrote:

> *There is plenty of violence in this film and some decidedly disturbing images, not least a pack of frenziedly savage monkeys that might make even adults think twice about heading to a safari park, let alone impressionable children. (…) [T]he inescapable fact [is] that the heroine is both an inspiration to millions of teenagers and a killer. (…) A 12A certificate means that youngsters of nine and ten will see The Hunger Games: Catching Fire, and as a father myself, that makes me uneasy. (…) [A] 15 certificate might have been more responsible. (…) It is a breathtaking sci-fi romp with all the bells and whistles. (…) But be circumspect about taking young children.*

The *Daily Mail* reporter Brian Viner reserved adult privileges in accessing media content by suggesting that the "breath-taking" aspect of

The Hunger Games trilogy shall be enjoyed only by those minors who have reached a certain age, while younger children should be left with the novels, thus revealing a cultural hierarchy in which "reading is ok, but watching is not." Such a construction of books as culturally more significant and thus appropriate for children, and the cultural hierarchy between good and bad media (justified with various arguments) is commonly used by both, cultural pessimistic as well as media euphoria approaches.

In-between these two oppositional approaches lays the third *critical-optimistic* worldview, which denies any cultural hierarchy and instead focuses on the active individual. This critical-optimistic approach puts the child at the centre of the media experience and stresses the risks and opportunities of all media alike (Süss et al. 2018; Aliagas and Castellà 2014; Trültzsch-Wijnen and Aliagas 2017). The critical-optimistic approach is supported by empirical studies in various fields focusing on children and young people's experiences with media texts and technology in different formal and informal spaces, as well as in media practices, discourses, and ideologies (Aliagas and Margallo 2015; Chaudron 2015; Galera et al. 2016). With regards to the above-mentioned example of *The Hunger Games*, this would mean discussing the risks and opportunities of books as well as films and taking also into account factors such as age and developmental tasks in the process of text interpretation.

Woodfall and Zezulkova (2016), however, criticised all media-related binary oppositions, including media risks and opportunities, and pointed out that they are all grounded in adults' reductionist platform-oriented beliefs which do not reflect children and young people's holistic and dialectic nature of media experiences. Rather than one medium and/or media activity being overly significant to the child's life and learning, the individual child engages with diverse media in diverse ways for diverse purposes and with diverse outcomes. Despite that, as children grow up and engage with diverse social performances—including those usually associated with adults—they possibly embody adult-constructed media dichotomies and binary oppositions (Woodfall and Zezulkova 2016), which sustain the reductionist approach to media and fuel media panics despite its irrelevance to young people's lived experiences and media practices. Yet some children not only repeat adults' reductionist and elitist views on media texts, platforms, and behaviours, but also experience fears about the potential impact that media could possibly have on them, such as the fear of becoming violent

because they play videogames or the fear of being kidnapped if careless in their online use (Zezulkova 2015).

Another socially constructed oppositional binary, fundamental to media-related fears and panics is the adult–child dichotomy. Returning to Viner's review of *The Hunger Games*, the reporter reserved for himself the adult privilege of being capable to watch the films without being exposed to any danger. In this dichotomy, the children, and childhood itself, represent the easiest target of adult fears as they can be superficially defined "through what they lack" and through their perceived emotional and intellectual inadequacy (Bragg 1997, 93) rather than being treated as experts in their own lives (Clark and Moss 2005). As Cunningham (2006) argued, the "history of childhood can easily become a history of what adults have done to children" (163).

Adult concepts of childhood, which differ across time, space, as well as individual and collective worldviews, play a significant role in the construction of media panics and fears. Children and teens often function symbolically as vulnerable victims in discourses on anxiety and moral decline with regards to technological innovation and media developments. Buckingham (1997, 64, 66) takes a critical stance towards this adult perception of children as "a homogeneous social group" of which "vulnerability, ignorance and irrationality are regarded as part of the inherent condition." Beazley et al. (2009, 368) also suggest that childhood is "perhaps the most heterogeneous stage in the life cycle" and, as advocates of the New Sociology of Childhood postulate, childhood should rather be understood as a social artefact than a biological necessity (e.g. Qvortrup 1993; James and Prout 1997; Moran-Ellis 2010; Tisdall and Punch 2012; Baader 2016; Raitelhuber 2016).

Looking at childhoods as social artefacts, Zinnecker (2004, 296–297) identified four types of adult perceptions of childhood in modern (Western) societies, (1) postmodern, (2) advanced modern, (3) traditional modern, and (4) fundamentalist childhood. Zinnecker's classification is only one example for describing and characterising various concepts of childhood. Other approaches may have different foci—as concepts of childhood do change. However, for the purposes of this chapter we use this classification as an illustration of how approaches to public discourses on children, media, and media panics might be, among other factors, socially constructed around, and influenced by, various understandings of childhood.

First, the concept of *traditional modern childhood* relies on the perception of children not as *beings*, but as *becomings*. Those who agree with this concept, approach media as social agents and thus evaluate media's role in children's life predominantly based on their developmental and educational potential. Second, the concept of *advanced modern childhood* blurs the borders between children and grown-ups, as media is seen as a necessity for both the adult and the child in achieving their immediate and long-term personal, social and work or school goals. Here children are seen as *beings* first. Furthermore, the concept of *fundamentalist childhood* refers to niche childhoods constructed within small communities that practice alternative forms of children's upbringing and pedagogy, for example, the Amish childhood. In the context of fundamentalist childhoods, if and how media is discussed, depends on the shared conviction of the particular commune.

Finally, the concept of *postmodern childhood* suggests that children are equal to adults, which provokes oppositional views in public discourse. On one hand, from the point of view of human rights, children being treated as citizens equal to adults might be a reason explaining the shift towards the concept of media euphoria. An example might be the recent raise of influential child and youth rights activists manifesting their public voice (e.g. the Youth Rights Movement) and claiming in that respect rights to citizenship. On the other, cultural pessimists see the loss of innocence for postmodern children and youth in children's engagement with "risky" media content (e.g. excessive use of SNS, sexual content), and in adopting adult lifestyles (e.g. outfit cultures, smoking, drinking). Anxiety in this context is equal to fears about *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman 1982) or *Children Without Childhood* (Winn 1984), with media being seen as one of the forces driving this societal change (Zinnecker 2004, 305).

Oppositional views on postmodern childhood are similar to the oppositional views on media education. Although children mostly learn about media and digital technologies in informal and naturally occurring social situations (Schorb 2005; Paus-Hasebrink 2017), the outcomes of such learning might be inconsistent with adult perceptions of what kind of media and digital skills and knowledge children should foster. Media education is then seen as a way of nurturing the child's "ideal" form of media literacy. Debates residing on moral panics are especially prone to identify and position media education as *the solution* to the immediate anxieties and moral panics. Media education is subsequently seen as

almost "a pedagogic equivalent of a tetanus shot" (Bazalgette 1997, 72), protecting against "a disease" (that of media itself) by arming children with critical awareness, as a way of dealing with media effects.

The protectionist approach to media education stemming from cultural pessimism has been, however, widely criticised on the grounds that "education should not be a behaviour modification therapy, a means by which adults prescribe how children are to see the world, or a moral crusade that makes teachers responsible for social ills that lie beyond their control" (Gauntlett 1997, 105). Empowerment is then often seen as an oppositional approach to the protectionist media education. This approach to media education leans more (but not entirely) towards media euphoria and suggests that the dominant role of media education programmes should be personal, social, and civic empowerment focusing on participation and social inclusion. However, Hobbs (2010) argues that "rather than view empowerment and protection as opposing points of view, we must see them as two sides of the same coin," which might be an example of a critical-optimistic approach to media education.

Looking at the social constructionism of fears about media and children in general, and at the same time in the context of childhood and media education in particular, we can now argue that media fears, and especially those that reach the level of media panics, have an inherent reductionist nature. This reductionism is apparent from the widely used oppositional dichotomies such as utility–inutility, good–bad, harmful/risky–beneficial, inferior–superior, adult–child, and empowerment–protection. Since these oppositional binaries are socially constructed, they also have their own histories that are equally important to the understanding of child-focused media related fears and panics. We will therefore now turn to the historical and cultural context of media fears and panics on the example of German-speaking countries.

Relevance of Historical and Cultural Context: Case of German-Speaking Countries

In principle, new cultural history helps to explain "why *these* people make *these* arguments at *this* time, rather than seeing them as somehow timeless or irrational" (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 425, *italics in original*). By drawing upon examples of media fears and panics and their possible impact on media education developments in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, we will now explore how the understanding of, and

attitudes towards the role of media in children's life and learning are also "conceptualized [sic], talked about, theorized [sic], explained, legislated against, reported on, evaluated, feared in certain historically and culturally specific ways" (Best 2000, in ibid.). The examples we chose mainly show the interplay of history, politics, and cultural peculiarities in conjunction with the more general developments and approaches towards the construction of child-focused media panics and fears.

To begin with, politics have played an important role in the history of media-related fears in German-speaking countries; it might even be considered as instruments of ideological hegemony, although not exclusively. First of all, media panics shaped by political factors in German-speaking countries arguably share medium specificity and the preoccupation with vulnerable groups. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, German clergy and aristocracy feared the spread of ideas of Enlightenment and social revolution through books and newspapers among the lower classes (Vollbrecht 2001, 29). The higher classes constructed through discourses of anxiety, warning about the negative influences of (mis)reading and reading addiction, leading into censorship framed as protection of vulnerable groups (Hüther and Schorb 2005, 269; Müller-Doohm 2000, 69), even though it primarily served to protect the hegemony of the upper class. On the pretext of pedagogical media critique, censorship aimed to control every kind of media text and its uses among the lower classes, while constructing the cultural hierarchy of diverse media texts and their readers.

In the long-term, social order was believed to be challenged by concrete literary genres—dime novels and popular fiction—which were accused of degrading moral values. Although such discourses underpin similar anxieties within the American and Anglo-Saxon context during the same times (e.g. Springhall 1998), this chapter focuses primarily on German-speaking countries and therefore we will not engage with similar discourses in other European countries. In Austria and Switzerland, it was mainly teachers who fought against "immoral literature" from the beginning of the nineteenth century, which meant that the attention had shifted towards youth. Various institutions and initiatives were established with the aim to replace "bad" literature with more "appropriate," socially acceptable options. For instance, the *Schweizer Jugendschriftwerk* (Swiss Association for Youth Literature) published special youth journals to contrapose the devalued literature (Moser 2005; Süss et al. 2018). These early media fears in German-speaking countries were therefore set

within the traditional modern concept of childhood and the protectionist approach to early media education, where children were required to distinguish between "good" and "bad" media content.

Cultural pessimism framing media as folk devils continued with the advent of film at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was negatively perceived as purely entertaining and with no educational potential. In German-speaking countries the fear over advancing communication technology, combined with fears regarding societal changes (entertainment above education), served once again as an argument favouring censorship and control of the then a new medium of film (Vollbrecht 2001; Wijnen 2008). It was an assertion of political interests welcomed by the former Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, the military state of former Prussia, as well as by the Weimar Republic in Germany. Here, early media panics, if we can see them as such, were used as means to divert public from political and social problems, as well as to legitimise combatting of political opposition (Kolfhaus 1994; Vollbrecht 2001). Besides the argument of degradation of moral values grounded in the dualism of "good" and "bad" media, these constructed media panics were being further reinforced via presumed negative media effects. Examples were the assumed rise of aggressive behaviour among young people, rising crime rates, as well as academic and popular discourses about media use, and the impairment of cognitive performance and stimulus satiation (Schorb 1995; Vollbrecht 2001). This drew upon, and reciprocally strengthened, the traditional modern concept of childhood and further legitimated the protectionist approach to media education.

The strong political influences on the perception of media and their role in children's life are therefore apparent in the case of German-speaking countries. The period after the Nazi Germany (the Third Reich, 1933–1945) during which media were being intensely used for political manipulation and propaganda in Germany and Austria can serve as another example. In the subsequent West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany [FRG])[1] (Vollbrecht 2001; Knauf 1994) and

[1] Regarding the history of the perception of media and childhood as well as approaches to media education a clear distinction must be made between the two German states (FRG and GDR) until their reunion in 1990. When we are talking about "Germany", then we are referring either to the united Germany *before and during the Third Reich* or *after 1990*. For the time in between we are differing between the FRG and the GDR.

in Austria (Blaschitz 2008; Seibt and Zobl 2008, 356), media were regarded as dangerous within the public discourse and young people were being warned of their manipulative nature and potential unwanted media effects. From a platform-centred perspective, particularly still and moving images (photography, film, TV, comics) were seen as more dangerous than books, partly because of the ongoing intense fear of the power of images then linked to the spread of fascism (e.g. through propaganda films or biased "news" on the radio or in the cinema). Rooted within a perspective of modern childhood, children and youth were seen as *beings*, who could be potentially targeted by media manipulation and propaganda.

However, the traditional modern concept of childhood approaching children primarily as *becomings* had also persisted. The fascist propaganda machine as an example of the manipulative power of the media in Germany and Austria, the forces of the allied occupation in the post-war period in the FRG, as well as in Austria, also tried to use the media as a vehicle for an ideological "re-education" (Vollbrecht 2001, 39). This served as another argument for turning back to the discourse of fears and media panics of the nineteenth century. From there, similar arguments that were established against books and films were postulated against television in the 1950s. This also led to various changes in the field of child welfare and the protection of minors (ibid., 42), as well as to a long tradition of inoculated approaches (Masterman 1985, 1998) to media education with the effect that the majority of teachers strongly disregarded popular media like comics, films, TV series as well as popular literature at least until the 1980s. Therefore, cultural pessimism, as a concept of traditional modern childhood and protectionism could be located in this cultural-historical context.

Yet alongside these developments, the critical theory of Frankfurt School started to ascend in the 1960s and remained relevant during much of the eighties in the FRG. Fear is perhaps not the right term for this, but advocates of the Frankfurt School criticised the media as ideological instruments of the politics of that era. Instead of the promotion of ethical or moral values, the focus shifted to political categories like emancipation and empowerment from ideologically oriented media. Children were thus not seen as in need of "protection" by censorship anymore. Instead, they were supposed to be emancipated (or empowered) by becoming critical thinkers thanks to media education based on postmodern concepts of childhood. Young people had to learn to

discover the hidden messages and ideologies of media and to look for political factors influencing the media system and the production of media content (Hüther and Podehl 2005; Süss et al. 2018). The former West Germany therefore is a good example of how at a certain spatial and temporal moment, a number of childhood concepts can penetrate media panics discourses and influence related educational developments.

In contrast to the plurality of media panics voices in the West Germany, the former East Germany (the German Democratic Republic [GDR]) is an example of a single imposed idea about the role of media in children's lives. The GDR government pushed forward media euphoria. Media continued to be used for political manipulation and propaganda there after the end of World War II, now carried on by the socialist regime. Consequently, the construction of media-related fears, even panics, was not as strong as it was in the FRG or in Austria during the same period of time. Various kinds of alternative "good" media content (e.g. TV series, films, comics, youth magazines) were produced, and film clubs for adults as well as for young children (Becker and Petzold 2001) were installed in order to promote and teach values of the new (socialist) political system (Wijnen 2008). Media education had been overridden by education *with and through* media and the concept of childhood was mostly fundamentalist as the main purpose was to raise young socialists devaluating anything that "came from the West." Yet at the same time it was partly postmodern, as young people were seen equal to adults in their moral and political "resistance" against "capitalist values" (in the sense of self-protection). Despite of, or maybe due to, its manipulative and propagandist origins, the approach to children and media was less obviously protectionist in GDR than in FGR. It used media censorship as "secret" protection.

Interestingly, whereas in West Germany the Frankfurt School of thought was contributing to media panics in the second half of twentieth century, Christian values were at the centre of discourses of anxiety relating to children and media until the mid-1970s in Austria. Applying a critical-optimistic approach and the traditional modern concept of childhood had led to a division between "good" and "bad" media based on Christian values, instead of a critique of the cultural and media industry which played a central role in West Germany. This Christian protectionist and discriminating approach to media education was promoted by various institutions that specialised in the rating and appraisal of media (Blaschitz 2008, 2009). Austrian media education scene was strongly

influenced by Catholic institutions until the late 1980s, and traditional perceptions of media anxieties survived much longer and turn up again with every media innovation (e.g. computer games, the Internet etc.). Although the Catholic Church was not as strong in Switzerland as in Austria, it was also highly engaged in the rating of media content in the mid-twentieth century (Süss et al. 2018).

The key difference therefore was that in the context of FRG, Austria and Switzerland we could speak of a shared media pessimism translated into three main developments; one following the concept of advanced modern childhood and leading to external protection through media education, another based on the postmodern concept of childhood and leaning towards internal protection and empowerment through critical media education, and the last rooted in traditional modern childhood and focused more on education through media rather than on media education. The third type of development was then also observable in the context of the GDR during this period. Interesting though, in GDR these developments were built on the grounds of media euphoria rather than media pessimism and the protection was to be secured not through media education but through media censorship.

After the 1990, a parallel existence of media pessimism, media euphoria as well as critical-optimistic approaches can be found in the German-speaking countries. With regards to ICTs and especially the internet, media pessimism is found among those who share a concept of traditional modern childhood which is often compared with a pessimistic view on technology and societal change. This is promoted by popular science authors like Spitzer (e.g. 2012) who argue against digital media by drawing on biased interpretations of studies in the field of neuroscience and addiction research. Such one-sided and conservative perceptions are often found among teachers (Trültzsch-Wijnen et al. 2019).

At the same time media euphoria can be noticed with regards to new learning environments drawing upon an advanced modern concept of childhood. This is particularly the case in Austria, where the Ministry of Education in collaboration with a strong community of informatic teachers is promoting a digitalisation strategy that is focussed on the teaching of computational thinking and digital skills starting from primary education up to the end of secondary school (Trültzsch-Wijnen 2018). Here once again a relationship between approaches to media education, societal developments, and policy strategies becomes more

visible because the main motivation of this strategy seems to be an investment in future work forces which is also heavily pushed by the Austrian industry.

Therefore child-focused media related fears in German-speaking countries currently have "multiple voices" and are "multi-mediated," which leads to "a multiplicity of micro-issues and micro-panics" (Tisdall 2015, 31). Their impact for example, on (media) education is however less direct and more limited in comparison to earlier developments. One of the reasons might be that there now exists a good community of media education practice (NGO's, educational institutions, teachers, pedagogues, researchers) that is well connected among the German language area. This results in a critical optimistic discourse that confronts and questions single-sided approaches, although it still struggles to move beyond reductionism and binary oppositions.

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the social constructionist nature of fears (and panics) about children's media life, closely linked to social views on childhood and education in general and to historical, political, and cultural contexts in particular. Rather than looking at such fears as a set of newly emerging isolated phenomena, we aimed at illustrating how they could be approached as one complex and continuous social phenomenon. To achieve so, one should however take a holistic rather than reductionist approach, which would address children's media life as a complex and dialogic whole (Woodfall and Zezulkova 2016). We attempted to do so by drawing upon Buckingham and Jensen's (2012) criticism of media panics, as we tried to avoid the overly simplistic comparisons of media panics across time, space, and technology. This was proven as greatly challenging and difficult, but it allowed us to personally experience the media panics' "theoretical baggage" (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 426), which we had gradually begun avoiding through shifting the focus from "panics" to "fears."

To move beyond the general discussion about children and media-related fears and media panics through social constructionism, we then applied the new cultural history perspective to the discussion about political and cultural history of media-related fears in Germany, Austria, and marginally Switzerland. Although the ideological hegemony common within moral panics discussions has also been embedded in our

discussion, we tried to apply diverse worldviews on children and media, as well as the concepts of childhoods, to illustrate how they can be invariably used and applied (e.g. in education or policy) under different, as well as same circumstances. Through this we portrayed how "at any given time, the public debate on such issues is criss-crossed by a range of competing discourses or constructions" (Buckingham et al. 1999, in Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 423), as well as contradicted the notion of media panics and fears as timeless and irrational.

However we have not managed to elaborate extensively on the distinction between *children* and *childhood* and the emphasis on children as active and autonomous *social actors* (Oswell 2013). We focused on childhoods as permanent social constructs, which we analysed and applied (Qvortrup 1993). Consequently, our chapter was more about notions of childhood rather than about individual children (Tisdall 2015). The chapter may lack a critique of top-down approaches to children, their life and education, within media panics and fears discourses and their practical implications yet contributes, however to a cultural-historical framework of analysing the concept of media panics in relation to childhood. As Tisdall (2015, 35) observed, the rhetoric usually is that "children will be empowered, rather than empower themselves." Future discussions on child-focused media panics and fears should acknowledge children as social actors further, as for example, by being preoccupied with children's own media-related fears and concerns rather than with those of campaigners, media, politicians, caregivers, and researchers.

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CHAPTER 8

Free to Roam? *Pokémon GO* and Childhood Anxieties

Bronwin Patrickson

Introduction

In 2004, after observing the rise and fall of the global *Pokémon* craze, commentators declared the brand 'dead' (Tobin 2004, 253), but they were wrong.

Twelve years later, an American-produced mobile game, a licensed derivative of the *Pokémon* brand developed by Niantic, a Google spin-off company went 'viral' (Rushkoff 2010; Jenkins et al. 2013). That game was *Pokémon GO*, a mobile game that spread like a flash fire through social media. Within weeks of its official U.S. launch on 6 July 2016 *Pokémon GO* had gained 45 million daily active users and broken all records as the most downloaded mobile application of all time.

Far from the first augmented reality mobile game,[1] *Pokémon GO* was nevertheless the first to capture the global imagination—in part because it was already a sequel: the latest chapter in the enduringly popular *Pokémon* series. For the last twenty years the *Pokémon* portable, social gaming franchise has continued to popularize Japanese media worldwide.

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In both *Pokémon* and *Pokémon GO*, players catch and collect as many virtual *Pokémon* creatures as they can find. The original game was played on Nintendo DS portable pocket controllers with the emphasis upon trading *Pokémon* creatures amongst friends outside the home in order to expand the collection. The free-to-download *Pokémon GO* mobile application also enacts a virtual treasure hunt of *Pokémon* creatures. At specific locations around the city, virtual creatures known as *Pokémon* that are as endearing as they are fiesty, can be tracked. Once tracked using the smartphone's combined GPS and mapping functionality, the *Pokémon* is caught by tapping the screen and catalogued in a Pokédex, which is a personal database of each player's *Pokémon* collection.

Concerns regarding the commercial motives behind this equally creative media franchise have always been complex and are now complicated even more by the challenges posed by ubiquitous, mobile media. As *Pokémon GO* burst into the open, its extraordinary popularity fuelled widespread anxiety about street play:

> "Viral smartphone game is blamed for rising cases of 'pavement rage'. Players experience unconscious spikes in anger and frustration (Gray 2016)". This headline from a November 2016 article in Mail Online is indicative of the sorts of dire warnings of terrifying dangers (Cockroft 2016) that "the dark side" of *Pokémon GO* inspired. According to reports, this new craze was unleashing a social storm of "inappropriate gaming" on city streets (Williams 2016). Whilst media coverage regarding the dangers helped to alert players to the potential risks of locative media game-play, the controversies also seemed to guarantee the game's notoriety. Who is responsible for public rage, entrapment, accidents, or trespass and where are the boundaries? How much can designers control players at large? Can public and private spaces be protected from commercial appropriations?

In this chapter I consider these questions with reference to two main theoretical frameworks. Firstly, I explore the ways that viral media processes challenge previous models for understanding moral panics. Originally, these extreme fear-mongering campaigns, turned 'witch hunts' (Ungar 2001, 279), were explained by the influence of mass media broadcast. However, contemporary media is also participatory and social and, as I will explore, this has transformed the ways that moral panics intensify.

Complementing this, *Pokémon* is a compelling case study with which to analyse the social fear of datafication. In the original *Pokémon manga*

(Japanese comics) and *anime* (Japanese animation) series the *pokédex* is depicted as a talking, hand-held encyclopedia that catalogues all known *Pokémon* species. The child *Pokémon* trainer Ash Ketchum, a lead protagonist of the original anime series refers to it throughout his travels to help him identify the various *Pokémon* in his path. A major premise of the games is that a respected scientist who has been studying the *Pokémon* creatures needs help finding and cataloguing them all. Nevertheless, the player's ultimate goal is to collect and train all the *Pokémon* linked to each new game release in the series. Effectively, the *Pokémon* video games apply a narrativized and also playful framework to a central logic of digital media: the database.

In the second part of this chapter, I therefore consider the algorithmic logic of *Pokémon* games with reference to the commentary of Japanese popular culture theorist Hiroki Azuma who argues that fans are essentially being dumbed down by database cultures which he characterizes as exploitative and potentially dehumanizing.

Moral Panics in the Age of Viral Media

Both the original 1990s release of the *Pokémon* Nintendo Gameboy games and also the later 2016 release of the *Pokémon Go* mobile game inspired a global craze and in turn, frenzied media coverage.

When 'Pokémania' (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999) first became a worldwide sensation in the late 1990s, the intense merchandizing push linked to *Pokémon* themed media became a concern for many parents bemused by the appeal of the franchise. At the height of its popularity in 2000, the extended *Pokémon* media mix of Gameboy games, trading card games, TV series, manga comics, movies and an extensive array of related toys and paraphernalia became the most profitable children's media craze of all time, reputedly generating $US7 billion worth of profits (Buckingham 2011). Based on extensive research into children's play cultures 'the texts of *Pokémon* were not designed to be merely "consumed" in the passive sense … [but] to generate activity and social interaction. Indeed, they positively depend on it' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003, 379). Linked to the portability of Nintendo's historic gameboy controller, *Pokémon* are animal like pocket monsters that players can collect and trade at large. They need to be cared for like beloved pets (also companions and property) at the same time that they are trained for battle. Designed to appeal to a broad range of ages and

tastes, incorporating traditional 'girl appeal' (via an emphasis on nurturing and cuteness), as much as 'boy appeal' (via the emphasis on collecting and competition), the portability of this popular game also helped to embed it in daily life (Buckingham 2011). The more popular it became, the more pervasive it grew.

Consuming the *Pokémon* mix involved engaging in social activities linked to children's consumption of a broad range of related *Pokémon* themed media. These activities included swapping insider tips about the world, as much as social trade of *Pokémon* collectables and strategic battle play. This knowledge, so essential to mastery of the game was also largely incomprehensible to adults and other non-initiates (Buckingham 2011), so it generated a type of insider peer culture. In order to master the game children needed to understand and also apply their knowledge of the various strengths and weaknesses of all the *Pokémon* creatures. The slogan 'Gotta Catch 'Em All' become a catch-cry driving the global explosion of 'Pokémania' (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999). That these collectables included purposefully designed and artificially rarefied, expensive trading cards was a particular concern for those who felt that the game exploited children's playfulness (Yano 2004; Buckingham 2011). Yet, as has been apparent since the early days of the franchise, *Pokémon* is many things at once (Tobin 2004). *Pokémon* may implicate children in capitalist practices like consumption and trade, yet it is also a highly creative media identity. As Buckingham (2011) points out, this active and for a time ubiquitous play culture incorporated at least some level of participatory agency. He cites a number of field studies that document the ways that children actively reinterpreted the game for their own contexts, such as Aboriginal children in Australia who reworked the game to replace competitive elements with collaborative play, or children in England who created their own *Pokémon* related fan texts (Bromley 2004; Willett 2004). Whilst some theorists (Cooper and Speakman 2000) complain that the playful imperative to collect expensive game artefacts amounts to a form of extortion, others (Reilly and Holder 2016; Gregory et al. 2016) have argued that trading games such as these provide useful training mechanisms for the realities of life within commercial capitalism.

Issues such as these ensured *Pokémon*'s notoriety. Historically there have been so many controversies linked to the game that Bulbapedia, a fan curated wiki now keeps a running complaint list (Bulbapedia). That list includes debates about perceived nazi imagery, flashing lights,

violence, gambling, racism, animal cruelty, materialism, gender equality, satanism, a potential Zionist plot and *Pokémon Go*. In 2016, the widespread anxiety provoked by the sudden explosion of *Pokémon GO* street play propelled a significant proportion of that critique into the realm of hysteria. Two days after the game was released a gamer (HamsterBomb 2016) posted a warning discussion on YouTube about reckless player behaviour entitled '*Pokémon Go: The Most Dangerous Game Ever Made'*. The next day a story in dailymail.co.uk also referred to *Pokémon Go* as 'the world's most dangerous game' (Cockroft 2016), reporting on the potential risks of the game. The sensational headline was soon picked up by the Mail Today Bureau and distributed across the newswires to be reprinted in msn.com and businesstoday.in (Mail Today Bureau 2016). This time the craze extended beyond children to include large numbers of the general population who, mobile in hand, took to the streets to play *Pokémon GO*. As player groups turned into crowds, the game was widely criticized and linked to the risk of 'crime, accident and death' (Cheung 2016), through robbery, child neglect, assault, vandalism, car crashes, trespass, brawls, shootings (Cheung 2016) and even phone hacking (Sinha 2016), not to mention the public nuisance caused by a critical mass of distracted crowds, and the commercial appropriation of public space. At the same time that it was vilified, the gamed was also lauded as 'the world's most important game' (Chamary 2018) due to 'health benefits' (Varandani 2016) linked to its ability to get players to go outside (Varandani 2016; Vega 2017), enjoy sunshine, explore nature, be social (Virtue 2016; Chamary 2018) and engage anew with their local neighbourhoods (Texas A&M University 2016).

Over time, the anxieties were outnumbered by the viral and increasingly prominent pleasures of *Pokémon GO* play. Contextualized by growing familiarity with the game, the public fears only seemed to fuel the game's notoriety, lending it the somewhat thrilling image of playful renegade.

The irony that social anxiety is now a potential marketing tool emphasizes questions previously raised by McRobbie and Thornton (1995), whether historic models of moral majority panics are still relevant. As they point out, in postmodern cultures characterized by multiple, niche and micro-media, 'the multiplicity of voices, which compete and contest the meaning of the issues subject to "moral panic", suggest that both the original and revised models are outdated' (McRobbie and Thornton 1995, 560). When a moral panic generates debate it also propels those

at the centre of the storm into the spotlight. As a result, rebellious youth subculture identities (along with their entertainment industries) are now manipulating these sorts of shock tactics in order to generate excitement about their own entertainment media (McRobbie and Thornton 1995).

Previously, in Stanley Cohen's (Cohen 1972/2002) seminal analysis, moral panics were linked to the mediatized explosion of an increasingly hysterical and morally indignant cultural reaction to change (Cohen 1972/2002). In his study of the ways that the 1960s youth subcultural groups, the 'mods and rockers', were socially reconstructed as folk devils, he identified media stereotyping, exaggeration and denigration as crucial aspects of this process. As an almost kneejerk reaction to broad-based social anxieties, troublemakers were identified as threats and vilified by a newly constituted moral majority until order was restored. As well as giving communities the bond of a common enemy, by its nature the panic also promoted media sales and state controls. Sociologists Goode and Ben-Yehuda, later extended this analysis to identify 'five crucial elements, or criteria' common to moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010): concern, hostility, consensus, volatility and disproportionality. Applying these criteria to this case study helps to illustrate the various ways that the media panics about the *Pokémon GO* craze differ from commonly defined moral panics.

Almost all of these five characteristics are present in both of the *Pokémon* game-play crazes.

Concern

As the first globally popular mobile game, *Pokémon GO* highlighted that this type of play requires care and clarification, particularly of such issues as the right to privacy, as well as the lines of responsibility for public accidents, or trespass.

> Think pieces are clogging Twitter and Facebook expounding the virtues of the augmented reality game that has lead distracted pedestrians off cliffs, into muggings, and straight to a corpse, while simultaneously and dramatically taking away attention from more pressing topics like, say, police brutality. (Karody 2016)

These debates were also complicated by the fact that the game ran head long into many of the prevailing tensions of public life such as

inclusion (because *Pokémon GO* play reportedly favoured white urban residential areas), equity (because both games made a lot of money out of the unpaid engagement of private lives and public spaces) control (of public spaces and social behaviours) and safety issues.

One of the more prominent concerns expressed in media reports was that by encouraging street play, the game put children at risk. For example, when the *Pokémon GO* app launched in the UK, the head of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NPSCC), Peter Wanless, labelled it 'deeply troubling', complaining that 'basic safety standards appear to have been overlooked' given the 'numerous accounts of children being placed in dangerous situations because of the geo-location feature', and teenagers being 'lured to a particular spot' by armed robbers (Robertson 2016).

Despite extensive evidence to show that children are in fact more endangered in the home, than in the street (Critcher 2003), this sort of commentary gained extensive coverage.

Many soon decided that lines of play needed to be drawn. In America, measures have since been taken to ban *Pokémon GO* play from roads, (some) stores and work places, whilst the American military has also banned all its personnel from playing the game due to security concerns about locative and photographic data leaks (McDonnell 2016).

Hostility

In some countries, the reaction to such challenges has been particularly strict. In Iran and Egypt the game is banned outright, due to unspecified security concerns. In Saudi Arabia it is seen to promote gambling and has been deemed un-Islamic, due to what is believed to be religious imagery in the game (BBC News 2016). This sort of blanket repression has previously led commentators to suggest that mediatized moral panics can only develop in Western democracies with a free press (Critcher 2003).

In Western countries, one of the main reasons that there was so much hostility towards the game (apart from the numerous early drop outs due to system overload), can be traced back to a decision by Niantic to simply port the PokéStop and gym locations from its previous locative game production, *Ingress* (Niantic 2013), explained immediately below, into *Pokémon* (Prell 2016).

Ingress was a location-based augmented reality game with a science-fiction style conspiracy fiction. Two teams battled it out for world domination, primarily by capturing portals located at sites of public interest. In addition to known public venues, the game also created portals based on player requests (many of those players were white, middle-class adult males). As a result, there was a distinct imbalance between portal locations, with few being found in multicultural neighbourhoods, or rural areas. Not all of those locations were safe, nor considered appropriate for game-play. This tension was exacerbated by the fact that when *Pokémon Go* was first released there was no clear in-game mechanism enabling site-owners to remove themselves from the play map.

Whether this was due to a lack of forethought, or a calculated effort to gain publicity is unclear, but it led to a spate of trespass lawsuits (Burns 2017). During *Ingress* game-play, smaller audiences were more readily tolerated—but when the *Pokémon GO* application went viral these tensions became strained.

Volatility

As games researcher Brendan Keogh explains in his account of an incident when Sydney residents water-bombed a flash mob of *Pokémon GO* players at a local park: a distracted horde can be as destructive to a park, as it is disruptive of the peace (Keogh 2016).

Whether Niantic is liable for these sorts of incursions has become a legal question. Niantic has argued that—at least in terms of trespass—if they expressly ask players not to enter private property, they then shouldn't be liable for transgressions—otherwise no locative game-play would ever be possible. Others counter that by making an engrossing game and placing PokéStops in inappropriate real world contexts that either stress local facilities, or tempt players to disregard legal boundaries, they share culpability for the results (Keogh 2016). Relevant to this is whether it is even fair for a gaming company to make money from civic spaces to which they make no financial contribution (Abboud 2016). In February 2019 Niantic agreed to a class action settlement with people who had PokéStops placed outside their home that included assurances of more considerate controls, speedy removal and complaint resolution and the promise of reminders for larger groups to be mindful of their public impact.

I would argue that the safety, or otherwise, of locative media, is a complex adjustment that involves not only game designers, but also the players themselves, as much as the rules that govern behaviour in public places. Like road safety, for example, safe locative media play is a serious concern that can never be guaranteed, but is both possible and manageable.

Nevertheless, unlike road safety rules, when the rules that govern locative media play are still being negotiated confusion can result and panic can set in.

Disproportionality

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2010) identify disproportionate reactions as a key factor shaping moral panics. Extreme reactions were readily apparent in the wake of *Pokémon GO* with headlines citing terrifying dangers (Cockroft 2016), and a long list (Cheung 2016) of crime, accident and death related game-play incidents. This is not to deny that trauma occurred during play, often due to negligence, such as the numerous accidents caused by people trying to drive whilst playing the game (Sharwood 2017). Reacting to these incidents *The Sun* newspaper dubbed *Pokémon GO* the 'Gotta Crash 'Em All' game, citing a study that concluded that therefore the game was 'responsible for THOUSANDS of car crashes and road deaths' (Finnerty 2017). Yet at the same time, again due to the sheer number of players involved, these isolated events were suddenly reported so regularly that it could create the impression that these sorts of experiences were the norm (Titcomb 2016; Cheung 2016).

In Russia, the reaction was even more extreme. Russian media portrayed *Pokémon GO* as 'either a cunning Western plot to destabilize Russia or the spawn of Satan. And quite possibly both' (Bennetts 2016). A vlogger Ruslan Sokolovsky, who filmed himself playing *Pokémon GO* inside a Russian orthodox church, days after a state warning not to play the game at religious sites was shortly thereafter arrested for inciting hatred and causing offence. Meanwhile, high-ranking Russian officials described the game as a 'psychological operation' to manipulate the minds of young people that 'could lead all the way to revolution', or worse, because the game 'smacks of Satanism' and could lead players astray into a virtual netherworld (Bennetts 2016). Belief in the corrupting power of media seems to have gained formal sanction with Franz

Klintsevich, a senior Russian security official explaining that '(t)here is a feeling that the devil came through this mechanism and is simply trying to destroy us spiritually from within' (Klintsevich in Bennetts 2016). Sokolovsky, the errant player arrested for playing the game in church was lucky to eventually receive a suspended sentence, rather than the three and half years prison term recommended by the prosecution (Bennetts 2016).

Consensus

Unlike previous moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010), consensus regarding the assumed risks of locative *Pokémon* themed play was not present during the *Pokémon GO* craze. For the vast majority, the fun was infectious. Apart from its potential risks, *Pokémon GO* is also a social, locally engaged and family friendly activity that is free to download and easy to play.

As player numbers ballooned, marketers started advising businesses to use *Pokémon GO* as a way to promote their business by becoming a PokéStop, for example, which would show up on the Pokémon GO player's map as a place to gather in order to find Pokémon, eggs, and other treats (AdvertiseMint 2016). Locative suggestion services like Yelp, flagged PokéStops placed near relevant destinations within their directories. Even the high-profile science journal *Nature,* encouraged *Pokémon* players to also identify and photograph real species during their mobile play hunts (Nature Editorial 2016).

In other words, the moral majority was already out on the street and playing the game.

Why Were *Pokémon* and *Pokémon GO* so Popular?

Hall et al. have observed that once set in motion, moral panics tend to amplify via a process they call a 'signification spiral' (Hall et al. 1978/2006, 44). Within this context, the nominated 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972/2002) are made to seem even more deviant through the use of descriptive terms that link them to other problems. Students, for example, may be referred to as 'student hooligans', or linked to a series of problems described as merely 'the tip of an iceberg', likely to break through legal, or violent thresholds at any time (Hall et al. 1978/2006, 44–47).

This sort of response can be seen in the extreme reaction to the provocations of Russian V-logger, Ruslan Sokolovsky, cited earlier. In more tolerant contexts however, critique of the game was strongly countered by the realities of play being experienced by an increasing majority of people. Whilst media reports warned of a dangerous new game hitting the streets, people on social media shared a vastly different story.

Does this mean that social media discourse is more directly influential than the official press coverage? According to social network researchers, Kleineberg and Boguná (2014) when it comes to the evolution of online social networks (in terms of the number of participants and the links between them), virality, or viral social media influence is 4–5 times stronger than mass media influence. Their research also shows that both influences work in combination with existing social structures. This reflects earlier studies which indicate that online social networks work in collaboration with real world networks, rather than replace them (Lampe et al. 2006; Ellison et al. 2007). Nevertheless, online networks change the way that social influence spreads. When it is possible to instantly share media with large networks of people around the globe, online social networks spread information further, faster.

In the case of *Pokémon GO*, this meant that even though the game had little in the way of an official marketing campaign, it went viral almost instantly (Morrison 2016). Targeting word of mouth/anticipation amongst the existing *Pokémon* fan networks, the official marketing for *Pokémon GO* included a pre-release September 2015 trailer/press conference uploaded to the *Pokémon* YouTube channel (Nintendo 2015), a couple of pre-release interviews with Niantic, and teaser stories for the American venture capital technology themed website, VentureBeat[2] (Takahashi 2015, 2016) as well as the official *Pokémon* site (Nintendo 2016a). The continued extension of the *Pokémon* franchise was also celebrated in a SuperBowl *Pokémon* themed advertisement in February 2016. Insider expectations were boosted by beta releases for field testers in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. between March and June 2016. There were no TV, or radio advertisements, although Nintendo did release preview details at the June 2016 E3 Video Game Expo in Los Angeles (Nintendo 2016b). Niantic tweeted once when the game became available in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand and retweeted a couple of mentions of the game from others, such as Nintendo, producers of the original *Pokémon* games (Morrison 2016; TheSilphRoad 2016–).

This approach, which targets insider knowledge networks applies the dynamics of what network theorist Zizi Papacharissi (2010, 3) refers to as 'power law distribution':

> Most actors have only a few links to other actors but there are a few major hubs that hold the whole network together… (and) new nodes prefer to link to highly connected nodes. The Web is the best example. There are a trillion pages out there. How many do you know personally? A few hundred, maybe a thousand? We all know Google and Yahoo, but we're much less aware of the rest of the trillion which are not so highly connected. So, our knowledge is biased toward pages with more connections…we're more likely to connect to a node with a higher degree… So, big nodes will grow faster than less connected nodes". (Papacharissi 2010, 8–10)

The *Pokémon* franchise was already known and loved by players worldwide, many of whom were first introduced to the game as children in the late 1990s and continued to play the game well into adulthood. Although Niantic rarely comments about its marketing strategies for the *Pokémon GO* game, it seems likely that the pre-release teasers broadcast on YouTube, the VentureBeat website and the SuperBowl would have been researched and carefully chosen to target a particular player base. The buzz about this game was also spread by a network of more intermediary and weak social ties online (Papacharissi 2010), as well as via shareable news reports and the real world presence of players in local communities. Whilst linked to the more complex *Pokémon* game tradition, *Pokémon GO* game-play was free to download and relatively easy to play. Thus, although it used novel technologies it was also much more accessible for the public at large. As this online player review demonstrates, the sociality of the play experience was a large part of its success:

> *Phil Kollar*: *Pokémon Go* doesn't exactly have a lot of gameplay, in any sense of the word…The social experience is everything in *Pokémon Go*. It's the reason the game has blown up, and it's the reason I'm interested in sticking with it.…Obviously I've played games that have forced me to interact with real people before.. But I've never played a game where I've been compelled to interact with other people in the real world.
>
> *Allegra Frank*: The core appeal of lies in how great it is at starting conversations and connecting you with other players, even if those all occur

> outside of the game itself.… Right now, it feels fresh and exciting; everyone is talking about it and playing it and thinking about it, and so I am, too. (Kollar and Frank 2016)

In the months following its release *Pokémon GO* became an increasingly noticeable feature of life on city streets—indeed the game only worked when players were mobile and out searching for *Pokémon* in the real world, which meant that the social buzz about this game was local and also increasingly ubiquitous. Within a week of its release in America, *Social Media Today* reported that 'Pokémon GO's daily user count has surpassed that of Twitter' (Fouts 2016). A July 2016 *BuzzFeed* spot survey found that at least one third of people in the vicinity of Times Square, New York were playing the game (*BuzzFeed_Multiplayer* 2016). The virality had spilled out into real world encounters and according to reports at the time this created a palpable sense of community. The buzz was as much about the transformative, social and playful experience of urban living (Fouts 2016) made possible by this virality, as it was about the game itself. One media marketing analyst concluded at the time that the *Pokémon GO* experience showed that community building was now the most effective marketing campaign (Suša 2016).

In this analysis, I am more interested in the intensification of discourses of anxiety about youth in social media networks. Sociality is a tradition of the *Pokémon* franchise. It was the ethos of the original design developed by Tajira Satoshi who wanted the game to direct Japan's often overwhelmed, post-Industrial children back towards more simple, traditional pleasures like collecting insects that he himself had loved as a child. Dismayed by what he saw as an increasingly atomized society in danger of losing its humanity, he emphasized social interaction as a modality of play (Buckingham 2011). The game he developed was therefore released in two different versions, *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue*, that could be played independently but also forced trade between players in order to capture all of the first 150 *Pokémon* using a game-link cable (Tobin 2004; Allison 2006). Through these linked media and the related, inter-textual media mix of cards, toys, TV serials, magazines, video games and countless other merchandizing items (Tobin 2004; Allison 2006), the *Pokémon* franchise generated a rich array of daily 'cultural practice(s)' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003, 379).

Yet, this same virality became a trigger for alarm in and of itself—in other words virality amplifies the reputation of popular culture practice through force of numbers and intensity of coverage, as much as

extremity of language. As Sampson (2012) argues, even the metaphor of a virus and the sense of a biological contagion being unleashed expresses social fears of the new sorts of assemblages made possible by social media (Sampson 2012). Yet, rather than a disease, social media spreads joy, as much as fear. For example, a study of the diffusion of the 2014 viral ice-bucket challenge meme that helped to raise money for medical research found that it was accelerated by a range of factors including a sense of purpose, emotional and novel appeal, celebrity engagement, simplicity, combined with the capacity for ready personalization and the call to share further (Schlaile et al. 2018).

Viral media can be likened to a musical accordion that creates notes. If people like the sound of it, it will draw them in regardless—and the more that crowds start to congregate in response, the more people will notice and come to find out what all the fuss is about. This is the amplification (and eventual saturation) effect of social media: the power of popular appeal, driven by media engagement and the propensity for that media to be shared. In events discourse, this sort of social buzz in relation to technological installations in public spaces has been dubbed 'the honey-pot effect' (Kelly et al. 2019), and events producers, as well as mobile game designers increasingly seek to make these sorts of engagements publicly visible in order to help stir that pot.

To a certain extent this appealing ambience can be designed—like the *Pokémon Go* lures that ensure a crowd will gather at a designated location. Network marketing tools were also embedded in the game, such as the capacity to take and share photos that pose *Pokémon* in real world environments alongside human players, prompting a contagious culture of humorous and seemingly magical *Pokémon Go* photo stunts (Media 2016). In addition to this, the open-ended, portable context of this mobile game ensures that these virtualities are embedded in the daily social life of players. In effect, they create shared social imaginaries, which by the virtue of their playful atmosphere and public prominence, spread like a virus to form a type of ubiquitous presence.

The sheer level of ubiquitous public mobile game-play across all ages that *Pokémon GO* generated created fascination as much as panic. This feedback loop continued to drive a bubble of exaggerated excitement, or expectation about the game known as a hype cycle (Fenn and Raskino 2008), a phenomena often linked to social media.

Given that pro-active and creative sharing practices are a characteristic feature of social media networking (Jenkins et al. 2013), corporations

now hire people to attempt to generate this same amount of social impact by making viral content for them on demand (Scott 2009). Techniques include producing content that showcases quirky modifications to everyday scenes, or humorous stunts, or the power of provocative, emotional appeals and the race to be first, to name a few common strategies.

Street Animals at Large

Appeal is not guaranteed however. The original *Pokémon* craze, followed by its long-term, participatory fan base, thus provides an interesting test study regarding what Japanese philosopher and popular culture theorist Hiroki Azuma has described as the 'databaseification' (Azuma in LaMarre et al. 2007, 181) of social culture. Azuma frames Japan's fan cultures as vanguards of the future mainstream consumer. In a bid to link these youth cultures to theories of postmodernism (Lyotard 1984; Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Baudrillard 1994; Ōsawa 1996) and deconstructionism (Derrida 1997), Azuma argues that the parallel forces of economic globalization, in combination with the rise of network cultures have transformed Japan's media fan culture practices. Fuelled by the logic of databases that deconstruct narrative visual media into its various parts, to be stored and remixed by fans (such as, in the case of visual comics/manga iconography, cat ears, or antenna hair), Azuma argues that over the course of just a few years, actively engaged media fans have become less concerned with narrative and are instead now consumed by their own efforts to acquire and reconstruct character data. As a result of this practice, Azuma argues that otaku (the Japanese term for intensely devoted media fans) are more likely to seek sensation and emotional affect, rather than deeper meaning.

Pokémon play cultures are diverse, global extensions of Japan's media fan cultures. Similar to western participation cultures, Japanese fan cultures are generally social, technologically enabled and playfully engaged. At the same time however, whilst deeply enmeshed with global information flows they are also distinguished by their particular commercial and collective cultural context. For example, Japanese corporate culture is generally regarded as more hierarchical and patriarchal than American and European counterparts. By these standards it is also considered to be collectivist, rather than individualistic. Corporate identity

and responsibility tend to be prized, along with the value of hard work and a striving for excellence (Hofstede Insights 2018). Against this backdrop, intense participation in youth cultures such as media fan cultures has been regarded as a pathway for rebellion (Kinsella 1988; Iida 2000; Rankin-Brown and Brown 2012; Mathews and White 2012), as much as a social problem (Suwa and Suzuki 2013; Kam 2013; Mangan 2017; McAlpine 2017).

Japan's media entertainment industries are also highly commercialized. Intense, almost blanket merchandizing through all possible related media arms and accessory objects is used to both fund, as well as promote the media production networks linked to popular titles. For consumers, these media character enterprises can create a fantasy escape, as well as a type of tangible, fantasy companionship, 'a mechanism for interacting with the world through the imagination' (Allison 2004, 43).

Perched between the historic view within Japan that *otaku* obsessions pose social problems, versus an appreciation for manga and anime fan cultures internationally (Ito 2012), Azuma's position is complex. On one hand, whilst he takes *otaku* seriously and applauds their subversive media remix proclivities, he is also critical of their obsession for consumer, capitalist culture expressions. 'The database does not give us meaning' (Azuma 2001/2009, 94) he argues, using the term 'animalization' to describe what happens when narratives become interactive feeds that merely seek to create an affective response in order to channel the participatory drive towards endless consumption.

Azuma applies Kojève's (Kojeve 1969) use of the term 'animalization', that rather than carve out a sense of meaning in life, individual consumers instead channel their drive for fulfillment towards endless consumption. His analysis extends that reasoning to explain what he sees as a focus upon basic needs fulfillment (data for remix), rather than narrative enrichment.

To conclude his argument, Azuma makes the intriguing suggestion that network database cultures are somehow creating a new grand tension between forces of mind-numbing control and social, 'humanesque' intervention (Azuma in Lamarre et al. 2007, 187). Nevertheless, his repeated assertion of the animalizing influence of the postmodern, networked condition, simultaneously assumes a potentially deterministic viewpoint that grants technology the power to control human action and thought. My focus here is upon the implication that networked cultures may somehow be dumbing down future generations.

In the *Pokémon* franchise, the *pokédex* or game-database of captured virtual *Pokémon* creatures is a key element in an intricate web of narrative mirrors designed to inspire playful behaviours (and also sell products). *Pokémon* players are not engaged in the same sorts of creative visual expression that amateur *manga* artists pursue, but they do playfully 'remix' game elements by collecting, training, nurturing, swapping and comparing monsters, building teams and strategies for both trade and battle. This practice is simultaneously gamified and systematized—and has been similarly critiqued. Legal theorists Shum and Tranter, for example, recently posited that by further de-emphasizing narrative within the mobile version of the game, *Pokémon GO* reframes players as 'monster(s) possessing base freedoms of seeing, moving and accumulating, but located in an overdetermined present unable to prudently plan and work towards a better life' (Shum and Tranter 2017). These assertions need to be interrogated.

Is Datafication Dangerous?

Since the release of *Pokémon GO* millions of people around the world have taken part in a unique and by all accounts largely enjoyable social and collective urban play experience—but was this game merely a lure to hook players into an exploitative and dehumanizing practice? Azuma's thesis suggests that social and personal meaning is being sacrificed to digital quantification. More generally, critique of database cultures focuses upon loss of control. For example, education researcher Ben Williamson argues that database cultures are taking over the virtual education landscape, to the detriment of both education and children: 'A key concern for researchers of data systems is what data does to people… Re-articulated as numbers by database machines, children can be counted and controlled' (Williamson 2014, 2–3).

Database cultures encompass more than simply the digitization of media. Datafication according to Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) is what happens when the things that people do and say are increasingly quantified and tracked online through transaction accounts, social media engagements and mobile phone records, making it possible for that trail of data to be used for predictive analysis. As Van Dijck (2014) observes, for some these data trails are seen as 'a revolutionary research opportunity to investigate human conduct' (Van Dijck 2014, 198). Others fear 'dataveillance' (Simon 2002, 2), a notion linked to

the metaphor of the Panopticon, a hypothetical eighteenth-century design for a circular prison where a central, all-seeing watch-tower creates the impression of constant surveillance in order to promote a type of subjugation, or mind control by suggestion. Foucault described the Panopticon as 'a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form' (Foucault 1977, 205), a symbol of the sorts of mechanistic oppression and social control that he argued were already widely institutionalized.

In order for a Panopticon to subjugate a population, however, the surveillance must be potentially total, always visible and beyond control. As the popularity of games like *Pokémon GO* indicates, contemporary society is not captive, but mobile and fluid. Neo-Foucaultian theorist Simon (2002) argues that digital systems are now so pervasive that even large, distributed and mobile populations have effectively been contained by digital tracking and analysis mechanisms. Like the Panopticon gaze, the application and analysis of personal data is typically beyond personal control. However, the practice of surveillance is more often obscured, rather than revealed by the contemporary, user-friendly interface (easy, welcoming, companionable). Related to this, the individual experience, of datafication is often very different to its social and political context. As a result of this disjuncture, the related theoretical debate has switched focus to instead investigate data doubles, those 'dividuals' (Deleuze 1992, 4) that emerge when people are no longer treated as conscious subjects, but instead objectified and manipulated as a type of data output, so that the method of surveillance becomes data analysis (Simon 2002).

According to Simon's (2002) argument, when people are able to independently track and form relationships with their own data double, they enact a type of super-panoptocism whereby they are subjugated to the dispersed identity of data flows. The fear is that predictive analytics apply particular types of assumptions to the way that people are classified online (through recommender systems on Amazon, for example) which influence, or mould their sense of identity, and that therefore people are being categorized and reconstructed by those systems (Williamson 2014). Furthermore, as Boyd and Crawford (2012) have demonstrated, when individual futures are decided by mysterious and potentially presumptive, and prejudiced big data analytics (through civic decisions such as promotions, or sentencing), grave injustice can result. As they argued, the apparent objectivity of this data is a masquerade. Raw data

is meaningless until it is interpreted, yet doing so necessarily introduces perspective bias (Boyd and Crawford 2012).

System affordances such as fluid identity play, non-synchronous conversations and collapsed contexts (such as time and space) shape online behaviours, but they do not determine them. As the Japanologist Thomas Lamarre (Lamarre 2009) points out in his detailed critique of Azuma's argument, the particularities of database systems are simultaneously negotiated by subjective perceptions and identities. To assume that digital culture participants are subjugated whenever they engage with these systems ignores that computationally enhanced events (such as global group chat via Twitter) are unfolding over time as part of an emergent and fluid process in multiple and variable spaces for collaborative engagement (Jenkins 2007). These networked event spaces create a fragmented, but also fluid ecosystem, a type of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2012) where people can engage as well as remix public discourse (Jenkins et al. 2013), perform the self (Goffman 1997; Turkle 1984), form and enact social identities (Fraser 1992) and recraft relationships (Moores 2004). Participants are 'implicitly and explicitly contending with these affordances and dynamics as a central part of their participation' (Boyd 2010, 55).

Given this, a number of theorists (Ball and Wilson 2000; Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2002; Koskela 2002; McGrah 2005; Albrechtslund 2008; Whitson 2013) argue that a top-down, hierarchical view of surveillance is an inadequate explanation of everyday digital cultures. Albrechtslund uses the term 'participatory surveillance' (Albrechtslund 2008, online) to highlight that surveillance culture takes many forms, even including social networking practices like following friends and reading open discussion threads. Personal and social surveillance is also 'potentially empowering, subjectivity building and even playful' (ibid.). Indeed, members of the quantified self-movement embrace personal data-monitoring practices as a form of self- knowledge (Wolf 2010; Lupton 2016) and are more likely to argue that data doubles are caring confidantes. Data tracking in this context becomes an informative tool that can potentially reveal unknown, or unacknowledged aspects of daily life (Rosenbaum 2015; Wolf 2010).

Agency is a key aspect of this debate. Agency requires the ability to make meaningful choices, or gain influence within a system that only arises 'when the actions players desire are among those they can take (and vice versa) *as supported by an underlying computational model*

(original emphasis)' (Wardrip-Fruin et al. 2009, 1). Agency does not exist in a vacuum. It is relational and therefore complex, layered and negotiable. When participants operate from a position of agency, everyday surveillance practices can be experienced as 'comical, playful, amusing, enjoyable practice' (Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2002, 216). Yet, as the Cambridge Analytica scandal[3] demonstrates, whilst people may freely swap their data in exchange for a valued service, nevertheless if they believe that their data is being taken without their knowledge and applied in mysterious, or covert ways that may be potentially disempowering, or manipulative, then they are likely to protest (Grind 2018).

Concerns have been raised that gamification techniques, or 'the use of game design elements in non-game contexts' (Deterding et al. 2011, 10) are being appropriated in order to perform agency when none in fact exists (Bogost 2015). Through the mechanisms of progress bars, graphs and charts in games, for example, data surveillance and analysis become playful. But according to some theorists, in games like *Pokémon GO* these mechanisms are merely a distraction for mind-numbing subjugation.

> This is a digital subject beholden to code, locked into a global system of meaningless movement and accumulation; a data peasant with no future and no past, just an immediate, frenzied present involving automated simulation and impulsive responses. The basic rights of liberalism have become uncoupled from the idea of self-development or narration. The capacity to be prudent, to plan, strategise and seek out ends, has been deprogrammed. Seeing, moving, catching and accumulating have become not freedoms but meaningless compulsions within a formless world of commensurable data. Ultimately, *Pokémon GO* reveals a monstrous being; an uplinked digital/physical cyborg seeing, moving, catching and accumulating in a placeless present. (Shum and Tranter 2017)

Some of these issues implicate game design considerations, such as complaints about the poor design of corporate gamification efforts (Bogost 2015), dubbed 'pointification' (Robertson 2010). Whilst these are compelling concerns, the suggestion that non-narrativized game systems are devices for subjugation by default is a much more extreme provocation that needs to be questioned. As gamification proponent Jane McGonigal argues, games are rule-driven systems that create challenges and invite encounters that can be playful, as well as serious. Similarly, digital narratologist Janet Murray (Murray 2005) points out that these rules

are not devoid of context. They are complex, cultural containers for emergent practices intimately connected with daily life and social discourse. In other words, the rules can and will be interpreted differently and generate new meanings. As Malaby describes them games are 'social artifacts… always in the process of becoming' (Malaby 2007, 95). For young people, games are a serious form of interaction that require and develop new forms of literacy incorporating 'systems logic, social psychology and culture hacking' (Zimmerman 2015, 22). Games are stages for collaborative processes that create their own kind of experiential rhetoric—and one of the reasons for this is that whilst narrative may no longer dominate, it still influences a larger 'distributive field' (Lamarre 2009, 124) that also includes play centred logics and broader cultural, or psychological dimensions. For example, when young people play a locative game like *Pokémon GO*, they can come to understand the identity of a location in an entirely new way (Rivers 2016). New media theorist Lev Manovich (2001) argues that the best database-driven interactions in fact transform the logic of static, modular (object) organization into dynamic subjectivities. In other words, young people who play data-driven games are making their own meanings about that data through play, engaging in a type of learning that is grounded within their own, subjective experience and transformed in turn by a complex network of reflections, discussions, negotiations, subjectivities and social relationships. In his *Manifestato for a Ludic Century*, games theorist Eric Zimmerman and Chaplin (2013) proclaims that whilst previous eras may have been defined by stories, this century is defined by games—which is why these expressive formats are such important new literacies for young people (Zimmerman 2015).

Azuma's (2009) argument underestimates these values. According to his reasoning, the dissolution of unified narrative, which he equates with ideological structures, has meant that people are now more inclined to retreat into fiction, rather than deal with a potentially confusing and chaotic real world existence. Thus, Azuma (2009) asserts that partly as a result of datafication and also perhaps as a result of cultural media conditioning, Japanese otaku are often more interested in those media elements that inspire *moe*, a desire for realms of the imagination that only fictional elements such as cartoon identities can embody.

The official *Pokémon* games may not be overtly sexualized, but they do share a similar drive for character acquisition, potentially devoid of real world context. Observing this sort of consumption drive, Azuma proposed a bi-layer structure of database consumption where meaning is

only manufactured amidst smaller narratives on the surface (for example, through the production of derivative works), revealing at most 'different expressions' (Azuma 2009, 32) of the deep inner layer, the database.

> My Pokémon have become easily tradeable data, critters which have more in common with the stock market than a puppy or friend. Most trainers online, meanwhile, are nothing more than a means to test my own strategic wit. Bonding not necessary. (Hernandez 2013b)

This complaint about the shift away from face to face contact and towards social media networking within the franchise over time illustrates that strategic interactions can indeed start to feel more functional than social, which fits Azuma's (2009) critique of the information-driven, animalized society. Yet, as the overall history of the *Pokémon* franchise demonstrates, this is a matter of design, not necessity. *Pokémon* play culture is distinguished by its conscious push *against* a retreat into fiction. The world it created, the space that children could claim for themselves, existed as much in the everyday, playful practice of collection, knowledge exchange and trade, as it did in the imagination. Even though it lacked the extensive trading features of the original *Pokémon* games, *Pokémon GO* is nevertheless also characterized by the experience of shared, social presence in real world spaces. Indeed, (Sobel et al. 2017, 1483) a survey of 87 parents who played the game with their children (Sobel et al. 2017) revealed that for many, the game-play experience was a social and cultural revelation. Those who might have previously harboured concerns about the extent of their children's screen time discovered by playing this game together as a family, that in reality 'not all screen time is created equal' (Sobel et al. 2017, 1483). Mobile games like *Pokémon GO* that encourage families to 'hang out' together through joint participation and game-play are more likely to motivate social, physical and outdoor activities (Sobel et al. 2017). It enabled families to learn more about their surrounding areas together and provided a safe way for children to occasionally take the lead. By providing a shared and entertaining topic of conversation, numerous parents also reported that the game facilitated a deepening bond with their children that might otherwise be inaccessible. Whilst safety concerns often motivated these shared family excursions, most parents were able to effectively manage those safety issues through a combination of rules, or guidelines such as time-limited play, or requirements that a parent be present and keep control of the

mobile phone until *Pokémon* were discovered, at which point the phone would be handed back. Whilst many parents were keen to ensure that their children didn't talk to strangers on the streets, quite a few also noted how the public game-play sessions became an opportunity to experience first-hand the sense of being part of a friendly play community (Sobel et al. 2017).

As cultural scholar Liza Tsaliki (2016) argues, effects research all too often endorses a simplistic response to complex social issues which rather than take a holistic view, starts with the presumed scapegoat—media—and then seeks to evidence that hypothesis:

> (T)he debate about imperilled childhood is used as a means to communicate and articulate broader concerns regarding societal change… (which) deflects attention from the growing moralization of childhood, and the concomitant call for intensified regulation of media content altogether … Inextricably linked with the notion of moral panics is an intrinsic fear of popular culture, as morally debasing, lacking in cultural status and massively produced, as well as a concern about leisure and culture". (Tsaliki 2016, 22–34)

Long-term fans of the *Pokémon* franchise have been obsessing about database animals for decades, yet can they reasonably be described as being dehumanized by the association? Animation theorist David Surman (2009) argues that the ongoing fascination with the original game lies in the tension between mechanics and personal achievement. In other words, the player's ambition to master the game's intricacies, which requires that they play it repeatedly, becomes the enduring motivation over time.

With over seven hundred *Pokémon* in the mix, catching 'em all requires a serious participatory commitment, demanding detailed and complex media literacy skills. The pokédex is thus a core motif of a play framework that enacts and also dramatizes the metaphor of an encyclopedic network. As cultural anthropologist Anne Allison argues, once codified by the pokédex, the *Pokémon* develop a double epistemology, known to players both by sight and data profile (Allison 2006, 213–214). With so much data to remember, *Pokémon* play success requires knowing which facts need to be filed away for future reference and how to access those facts quickly (Neiburger 2011). Over time, *Pokémon* mastery, evidenced by the combination of expertise and virtual acquisition

becomes a marker of game-ful maturity, as much as a legacy to be handed down.

The core *Pokémon* fan base has been maintained over the years by a strategic combination of regular bi-annual updates that introduce new ways to collect, breed and trade these cute creatures. Major innovations tend to be tested in licensed off-shoots, like the mobile augmented reality play that characterizes the *Pokémon GO* edition. The longevity of the central *Pokémon* game series is the result of a carefully studied combination of multiple, small innovations that refresh a constant core game-play modality. *Pokémon Bank* is another example of this. As of 2013, players could use the bank to securely store up to 3000 Pokémon online, enabling transfer of *Pokémon* from one game to the next, or even for future grandchildren so that they will 'remember that their grandma fought battles using Charizard' (Hernandez 2013a).

Conclusion

Database cultures and locative game-play are transformational innovations, but like many cultural practices that accompany new advances, they are complex. Both engage variable subjectivities across a network of corporate interests, collective action, broadcast agendas and independent social media channels.

Newspaper reports regularly warn of the dangers of gaming, social media use and datafication. In the case of social and playful locative media identities like *Pokémon GO* as well as the original portable *Pokémon* franchise, their very popularity and heightened presence in daily life caused extreme panic. The beauty of the *Pokémon* franchise is that from the beginning sociality has been a focus of both the design of the game and the play culture that it encouraged. This mass network of play can be enchanting. It can also be exploited—and if it is not managed properly, it can become a nuisance, or worse, a safety risk. In this chapter, I have argued that nevertheless the risks of social, locative game-play can also be managed. Whilst *Pokémon* games literacy includes the need to be aware of these complexities, it also provides a great deal of pleasure for thousands of players worldwide.

Although *Pokémon GO* was a popular and also disruptive urban game, the fear that it dehumanizes players is not supported by empirical evidence. Those players who acted negligently, or displayed a lack of location awareness were more likely to be suffering from a lack of

familiarity with locative games. The social discourse that the game inspired helped to address these risks but was also over-reactive. In other words, there is more at play here than a dangerous game. Digital database cultures are emergent eco-systems that collaborate with a wide network of influences. As Buckingham has argued 'the notion of cause-and-effect is itself a narrow and misleading way of conceiving of the role of social and cultural factors (and of media) in children's lives' (Buckingham 2011, 52). Over many years, social science research has repeatedly shown that communication technologies don't make people more or less social, instead they make them more connected, so that the contexts that they engage with (whether civic space, narrative, media broadcasts, or road safety) are also complicated by social concerns (Papacharissi 2010).

Networking technologies have shifted the role of narrative, but they have not rendered it redundant. *Pokémon GO* is a case in point. The game may have enacted a simpler version of the traditional *Pokémon* strategy games in order to also accommodate the demands of real world, social movement. Even so it was inter-networked with the history of the franchise, not to mention the cultures of local neighbourhoods. In the character designs, the play mode and the enactment of the real world hunt to fill a pokédex, the identity of the original franchise is recalled. Narrative and context are not lost, merely transformed from a top down, dominant definition into a network of emergent social and discursive processes. In other words, as is so often the case in participatory media, the story of the original game became an experiential conversation dispersed across a network of related media, locations, technologies, subjectivities and cultures.

In this chapter, I have challenged Hiroki Azuma's assertion that media datafication and participatory culture combine to create database animals on the grounds that his perspective does not account for the wealth of experiences and subjectivities in play in computer-mediated environments. Neither the original *Pokémon*, nor the related *Pokémon GO* craze were merely an escape into fiction, but also an enchantment of daily life that struck a chord worldwide. Within that augmented game-space, the mechanics of play were designed to strengthen social ties between players. This social experience was also inextricably linked to commercial agendas that sought to profit from these playful associations. Nevertheless, via an enduring and rich, creative treatment of *Pokémon's*

fictional and cultural legacy, the franchise has maintained the loyalty of its fans primarily because it has continued to delight them regardless.

Certainly depth, humanity and empathy are important design themes for our times. As the *Pokémon* franchise demonstrates, however, game-play in partnership with narrative and social dialogue can generate humanist environments that accommodate a wide variety of subjectivities, as well as social and cultural practices. These emergent and playful expressions won't necessarily be either good, or bad, but they will be meaningful.

Notes

1. In augmented reality applications virtual data is mixed with, or layered over real world locations.
2. According to Business Wire, "The highly-targeted audience for VentureBeat includes potential investors, business decision makers, tech industry leaders and consumer enthusiasts with a keen interest in the latest innovative products and services" (Business Wire 2018).
3. Cambridge Analytica (CA), a former United Kingdom-based data consulting firm used data gathered from the uninformed, extended friend networks of several hundred thousand participants in a web-quiz app design for academic research, 'This Is Your Digital Life", resulting in their extended access to the data of over 50 million Facebook users. Cambridge Analytica used this data to specifically target individuals with political ads during the 2016 UK Brexit vote, as well as ads promoting Donal Trump and Ted Cruz during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election campaigns.

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CHAPTER 9

Children's Grasp of Crime Discourses in the City of Monterrey, Mexico

Beatriz Inzunza Acedo

Introduction

For decades, Mexico has been facing problems regarding drug trafficking. In 2006, President Felipe Calderón officially declared a "war on drugs." From his conservative ideological position, this war was supported by the use of the army in cities to fight members of organized crime, although there was a debate as to whether Calderón had used this mechanism to legitimize his controversial electoral victory, since he surpassed his left-wing opponent by less than 1% (Salas 2012).

At the time when this war between the State and drug trafficking occurred, there was also a dispute over territories between seven cartels in the country (BBC 2012), which spread over President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration (2012–2018). Monterrey is among the three

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most influential cities in Mexico due to its population, level of industrialization, concentration of wealth, and proximity to the border with the United States. From the perspective of organized crime, it is a strategic point because of the domestic market and its purchasing power, as well as its proximity to border cities.

It is important to mention that cartels were not entirely dedicated to drug trafficking. Buscaglia (2010) identified at least 22 types of crimes that contributed between 62 and 65% of the total income of criminal organizations, including: terrorism, contraband of various goods and services, assassinations of public officials, extortion, falsification of money or documents, credit card fraud, aggravated homicides, money laundering, prostitution, piracy, pornography, vehicle theft, kidnapping and the trafficking of arms, undocumented persons, etc.

Regarding homicides, the figure reported by the Federal Government (Secretaría de Gobernación 2014) in September 2011 was 47,000. Other sources such as México Unido contra la Delincuencia reported figures up to 80,745 between 2007 and 2011 (Esquivel 2012). However, a problem brought up by Noticieros UNIVISION (2012) was that according to their survey, only one in 10 Mexicans reported crimes of which they had been a victim or witness, due to distrust in the authorities. This coincides with the 2011 INEGI data, which indicates that 91.6% of crimes committed, such as robberies, assaults, extortion, and fraud, were not reported to the Prosecutor's Office. This data implies that there is no reliable or real number regarding total homicides (or other crimes) for these dates.

Particularly for the state of Nuevo León, 75% of the crime reported by the Secretaría de Gobernación (2014) were common theft, 10% were malicious injuries, 6% were property damages, 5% were threats, 3% were intentional homicides, 1% were sexual crimes, and less than 1% was extortion, kidnapping, and bank robberies. More specifically, for Monterrey and its metropolitan area, the El Norte newspaper recorded a daily Crime Map, where it located incidents related to organized crime in different municipalities of the city, with data such as injuries, deaths, and direct access to the full incident report (elnorte.com 2012).

Among all the municipalities in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, San Pedro Garza García recorded a significantly lower number of incidents (elnorte.com 2012). This may be due to the emblematic proposal of the then Mayor, Mauricio Fernández, who promised to "shield San Pedro from organized crime," which was understood as agreements with criminal organizations (Colín 2009).

The increase in crime rates around Mexico caused changes in the population's routine (Petrella and Vanderschueren 2003, 216). Casas (2011) conducted a study on the impact of a narco message that circulated mainly through the social networks of residents in the city of Cuernavaca. She found that 85% of respondents, regardless of whether they considered the message reliable, chose not to leave their homes during the weekend that a violent attack was announced. The attack did not happen. In Monterrey, some newspapers (Garza, March 10, 2011; Expansión, September 27, 2011) documented how areas with a high concentration of bars, restaurants, and nightclubs suffered closures due to low attendance of people walking at night, such as *Barrio Antiguo* in the city center.

Given the social, economic, and political impact of this conflict, the issue of violence, insecurity, and drug trafficking was widely covered by the media. On the one hand, journalists saturated the media with daily reports on homicides, shootings, and other crimes, which in turn spread virally on social networks (Casas 2011). On the other hand, fiction was inspired by these events to develop film narratives (El Infierno, El Cartel de los Sapos, Salvando al Soldado Pérez), soap operas or television series (La Reina del Sur, El Señor de los Cielos, El Cartel de los Sapos), and video games (Grand Theft Auto). While the media content was aimed at adult audiences, this topic was addressed in elementary and secondary schools when students performed drills in case of a shooting, which means that minors were also, to some extent, aware of the situation of violence in the city.

In this context, we conducted a study with the objective of exploring the social representations formed by 6th grade Monterrey children from the area of San Pedro Garza García about insecurity and crime, in the year of 2013. This chapter presents the results concerning the following research question: In what kind of imagery and stereotypes about crime are sixth-grade children's discourses immersed? The theoretical basis of this study are theories of audience reception and of social representations, with the aim of identifying not only the images that depict crime and incidents of insecurity (Inzunza 2015), but also the role that different sources of information played in structuring these images (Inzunza 2017).

This chapter seeks to analyze children's interviews through the theory of moral panics. In the first section, the theoretical framework revises this theory, particularly from the perspective of new cultural history (Buckingham and Jensen 2012) in order to make sense of the discourses around the stereotype of the criminal formed by 6th graders in San Pedro. The methodology section explains the dynamics of

the interviews, as well as the analytical process. This is followed by a discussion of the stereotypes participants share regarding the image of the criminal, as well as of the attitudes embedded within them. Finally, the conclusions discuss the discourses in which the imagery of criminals are immersed in.

Moral Panic in the Social Construction of Criminals

Moral panic theory revolves around the supposed threat of "folk devils," defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) as a category of people who allegedly have malicious practices and are blamed for threatening a society's culture, lifestyle, or core values. For the same authors, fear implies concern or hostility toward a folk devil that is disproportionate to the threat it actually represents. The drug dealer has been a folk devil figure par excellence in various public policy discourses in Mexico from many perspectives. Not only is the dealer a criminal that puts society at risk, but they also pose a threat to public health and children, and are usually associated with an increase in violence of addicts as well as those involved in smuggling (Reinarman and Levine 2004).

In this case, the moral panic is related to an actual threat which is based on a wave of genuinely documented crime in the city of Monterrey, as discussed above. The folk devil is also a real evil figure, in the sense that the offender does represent a threat to society. What might be considered disproportionate is the attitude of suspicion about who is behind the criminal's mask: Which social groups are stigmatized as alleged criminals? How are they identified? How do they express their anxiety about this threat? Who is society suspicious of?

Since the introduction of the term "moral panic" in 1972 by Stanley Cohen, empirical studies in this line have focused on analyzing how public debates have contributed to labeling certain forms of behavior and individuals as perverse (Buckingham and Jensen 2012).

Buckingham and Jensen (2012) explore the notion of moral panics in terms of epistemology, structure and intentionality, rationality, history, and politics. Specifically, the aspect of structure and intentionality speaks of panic as the manifestations of structural dispositions that may even be beyond conscious intentions. It also includes producers of media panic, whose interests can range from simple dramatic entertainment to those who are "moral leaders" and seek, as vigilant guardians, to provoke moral panic to promote certain discourses.

This aspect is of interest to this chapter because it is consistent with the theory of mediation, which is defined as "the place from which meaning is given to communication" (Barbero 1987). Orozco (1991) identifies four types of mediation, of which two are related to this study: (1) individual, which in turn is divided into cognitive and structural. The first involves mental diagrams or scripts, includes moral and emotional references; the second sociological variables such as sex, socioeconomic level, age. And (2) institutional, examples include family, school, religion, and the media. Such mediation theory is crucial for interpreting messages and constructing imagery about criminals (Liddiard and Hutson 1998, 60). This research analyzed both structural provisions (individual mediation), and producers (or reproducers) of media panic (institutional mediation).

This particular study found three types of sources that update or provide information to the participants: (1) individual sources, children who have experienced insecurity in some way. This involves direct and indirect testimonies, such as having witnessed a criminal act or being related to a victim. (2) Interpersonal sources, which include discussions with family members, friends, classmates, and other school figures. (3) The media, which includes media such as newspapers, radio, television, movies, video games, and internet content in general. In the reception of these three types of sources, both types of mediation (i.e., individual and institutional) are involved, and they require both cognitive and structural schemes of the individual, as well as the socialization of this message with family, friends, school, and media. Identifying the information sources allowed us to understand the role that each source plays in constructing social representations. Although the media was the most accessible and frequent source about crime for participants, interpersonal and individual sources represented a more reliable and even irrefutable source (Inzunza 2017).

The other dimension of moral panic covered in this chapter is "beyond the binaries," which discusses whether technology and media are positive for children's development. This aspect is important when considering that the Internet is a source of information for children, especially when parents avoid talking about the issue of crime at home (Buckingham and Jensen 2012). Technology and media provide autonomy to children when they seek to understand social problems such as crime and insecurity.

As mentioned earlier, a fundamental element of moral panic theory is the presence of a folk devil, which is defined as "a suitable enemy, the agent responsible for the threatening or damaging behavior or condition. …. Folk devils permit instant recognition; they are 'unambiguously favorable symbols,' that is, stripped of all favorable characteristics and imparted with exclusively negative ones." They are called suitable targets, because the social group to which they belong or their characteristics allows them to be easily identified. There is also the figure of suitable victims, which are defined as "individuals or social circles who are specifically under attack by folk devils. … Children make excellent suitable victims," although this study considers other social groups as well (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) identify five elements of moral panic:

- Concern. Although it does not always manifest as fear, it is a reasonable response to what can be considered a real and palpable threat. In general, it presents itself as collective anxiety. This element was tangible in Monterrey when residents stopped attending nightclubs in fear of violent incidents.
- Hostility. An increase in hostility toward the group considered as folk devils. Their behavior must be described as threatening or harmful to the values, interests, or even the existence of society. There is a Manichean dichotomy in the discourse on folk devils. The creation or intensification of hostility toward a social group is a key ingredient of moral panic, and in this study, it became evident through social groups that are associated with crime in participants' imageries.
- Consensus. There must be a certain degree of agreement within society or segments of society regarding the seriousness or authenticity of a threat allegedly caused by the bad behavior of folk devils. Although there were variations in participants' imageries, there were recurrent characteristics regardless of the socioeconomic status and gender of the children interviewed.
- Disproportion. The term moral panic implies that concern is excessive compared to the actual amount of damage. While the threat of organized crime is real, disproportion can be witnessed in the suspicions held by certain social groups.
- Volatility. It has a behavior similar to fashion, in that it is temporary.

Regarding studies on crime and violence in the media, Blackman and Walkerdine (2001, 124–125) investigated the representation of the criminal, and discovered recurring elements such as risk, danger, mental illness, and death. They also discuss the under-representation of women, since they are not considered "bad enough" to be deliberately violent. In relation to this last statement, as an example, they cite an article from *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom, which shows how women are justified within the legal system if their acts of violence are associated with outbursts of passion or irrationality (140).

From a culturalist perspective, there is also concern about legitimizing violence as a way to impose justice. Penalva (2002) indicates that the media shapes ideological representations about violence through specific examples in which the use of violence is justified, as with the armed forces.

Studies on criminality in Mexico focus on juvenile crime, and organized crime. Gangs are generally identified as groups of young people who live marginalized and in poverty with the following three features: disassociated from the establishment; dedication to the group and adoption of conflicting practices; and a sense of respect (Perea 2007, 4). For juvenile crimes, minors (under the age of 18 years in Mexico) are identified as possessing antisocial behaviors (Barraza 2009; Martínez 2013). Hikal (2012) defines organized crime as "an organization of three or more people, to commit crimes continuously or repeatedly, in terms of applicable law."

Barraza (2009, 4), in particular, indicates that the disorderly behavior of both juvenile crime groups and gangs is due to the lack of values taught by family members and educational institutions. On the other hand, Martínez (2013) indicates that organized crime during the six-year period of 2006–2012 mainly disrupted Mexican youth because the profile of those murdered corresponds to young men between the ages of 20 and 29. According to him, young people who are victims become victimizers because they are a vulnerable group for criminal gangs that recruit adolescents from poor neighborhoods, especially those already belonging to gangs.

Conducting this type of study with children implies starting with the assumption that minors are active observers who pay special attention to content that requires a process of understanding. Gauntlett (1996) indicates that if observers are unable to understand (due to the complexity of the topic), or have all the answers (because it is a predictable

narrative), they may lose interest. This research was based on the premise that the issue of crime in Monterrey was complex enough for children, which is why the object of study was largely the participants' understanding of the topic.

For this research, two studies are considered of special relevance due to their work with children in contexts of violence: Lemish and Götz (2007) and Bar-Tal and Teichmann (2005). Lemish and Götz had the objective of understanding the perspectives that children in Israel, the United States, Germany and Austria had regarding the Iraq war. Thus, they conducted interviews with children between the ages of 6 and 13, using a semi-structured questionnaire and incorporating a drawing activity during the interview. They found that most children understood the conflict from the perspective of heroes and villains. They also expressed emotions such as helplessness, fear, and anger. Bar-Tal and Teichmann aimed to explore the acquisition of imageries of Arab people among children and young people between the ages of 7 and 24. Stereotypes and attitudes toward Jews and Arabs were compared through interviews that also used drawing as an activity. In both studies, it was concluded that the media's role was fundamental to the understanding of violent conflicts in the world.

Interviews and Drawing Technique with Sixth Graders

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective, applying the individually focused interview technique. The interview dynamics consisted first of finding out if the participant had the issue of insecurity in the city in mind, for which a series of questions were asked, such as "If you talked to a foreigner about Mexico, what would you say? What would you tell him about Monterrey? What would you say about the situation in Monterrey? What does Monterrey news normally talk about?" These defining questions had the goal of distinguishing children who did not talk about insecurities on their own because their educational institutions indicated that they did not want the topic to be mentioned by the interviewer first. The 45 participants mentioned the issue of insecurity within these questions, so there was no need to invalidate any interviews.

The next stage was to make a drawing on the subject they mentioned in relation to insecurity after the defining questions. Upon completing their drawings, they told the narrative of what was happening in their drawing, and what happened before and after that scene.

In the third stage, they were asked for a second drawing to illustrate how they imagine the criminal (which usually appeared in the first drawing as one of the characters in the narrative). For this stage, the questions were related to a detailed description of the following elements: physical characteristics and appearance, personality, sociability, spaces, and biography. They were also asked questions about what attitudes they had toward these characters: What should the government do with them? What do their relatives, friends, school, or the media say about such characters? Finally, they were asked about their different sources of information for knowing that this is the way criminals are.

The last stages included questions about conflict resolution where the students proposed ways to reduce crime in the city.

This chapter will focus on the third stage regarding images of criminals, along with the attitudes that the students expressed toward the criminals.

Use of the drawing activity as a form of visual methodology was inspired from the studies conducted by Lemish and Götz (2007) and Bar-Tal and Teichmann (2005). Pauwels (2013) indicates that one of the aspects of participatory techniques in visual research methods is the production of images by interviewees. This allows for more abstract perceptions and values of individuals involved in the represented world to occur. These perceptions, however, require verbal clarifications from the study's subjects to explain aspects about which even the image producers were unaware.

In addition to providing more information than would have been obtained orally through an interview, it helped to develop a rapport more quickly with a sensitive issue such as violence, since the children first met the interviewer on the day of the session.

Regarding the profile of the 45 interviewees, 23 children belonged to the upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level, and the sessions were held in private schools. The remaining 22 belonged to the lower socioeconomic level. They were interviewed in a cultural center and a public library, where a free summer camp for children in the community was being held. Regarding sex, 24 girls and 21 boys were interviewed. The participants were in 6th grade, or, for the summer sessions, they were children who had just finished 6th grade or were about to start it. This resulted in interviewing children from ages 9 to 12 between June and November 2013.

Sixth-grade participants were chosen due to the skills that most children develop after the age of eight with respect to media reception. According to Lemish (2007, 48–49), these skills are children's ability to understand that the media is only a product comparable to reality; the perception of reality represented in the media; the evaluation of the possibility and probability of events that are seen in the media; and the identification of formal characteristics of media content.

In the results, quotes extracted from transcripts will be explained, as well as some of the drawings made by the children. Throughout the next section, pseudonyms chosen by the children themselves will be used for maintaining the confidentiality agreement.

Discourses on the Image of Criminals

Most of the narratives and images contained elements that differentiated the discourses of each participant. However, there were certain common elements in all or most of the images. This refers to an existing discourse consistent with studies on crime stereotypes in other contexts, as reviewed in the theoretical framework. The most frequent stereotypes, regardless of socioeconomic status and sex, were that crime is a male activity, related to poverty, poor quality of education, more associated with young people, with jobs in construction and other elements such as vices or appearance.

Men

The only element that was consistent in all interviews is that the offender is male. This does not mean that they do not imagine criminal women, but they identify them as the partners of criminals, and more in the role of gang members than taking an active role in criminal acts. None of the narratives of insecurity and crime included a woman unless she was a victim.

In that sense, men who are alone in public places arouse suspicion from participants. In Fig. 9.1, Pau drew two girls walking in the street (wherein she presented herself when she narrated her story), and a "suspicious man" in a car. In her interview, she expressed distrust of men who wander alone at night because "it's not normal."

Figure 9.2 shows a drawing where Daniel illustrates himself with another person in a park. The figure on the left is a man alone under a tree that makes Daniel suspicious, and he thinks that it may be a person who has come from a poor community to a wealthy community



Fig. 9.1 Suspicious man in car (Created by the participant: Pau, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)



Fig. 9.2 Suspicious man in the park (Created by the participant: Daniel, boy, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)



Fig. 9.3 Man threatens woman and girl (Created by the participant: Sara, girl, middle to low socioeconomic level)

to sell drugs to minors. In his interview, he indicated that this happens in public schools,[1] where less attention is paid to children (which is consistent with the idea of drug dealer as folk devil; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009).

Consistent with studies by Blackman and Walkerdine (2001), women are not usually present in images related to crime and violence. Women in the interview narratives took the role of a suitable victim (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009), like children. Figure 9.3 illustrates this image of the role of women in a scene of violence and crime.

Mexican culture regarding gender is clearly male chauvinistic, since the role of women in the media and in family routines is still primarily that of housewife, wife, and mother, and in the context of violence, as victim. This ideology clearly permeates children's perception regarding their role in violent scenes, since they do not appear aggressive but submissive and vulnerable.

The Poor

According to Muncie (1999), the most common discourse about crime is linked to social groups related to poverty. In this sense, crimes associated with corporate corruption, white-collar crime, state violence, and human rights violations are underrepresented.

The media representation of young homeless people is frequently related to sex, drugs, and violence. These themes are what makes this

character interesting for the press. However, this is problematic when studies such as that of Liddiard and Hutson (1998) show that the press addresses negative stereotypes without presenting data or evidence as support, such as statistics on the use of illegal drugs, violence, prostitution, sexual abuse, among others. For Gans (1995) and Platt (1999), this media representation is a reflection of society's hostile attitudes, where they classify these figures as villains and undeserving.

Murray (2001, 26) uses the term underclass to speak of a specific social group that, although it does not encompass all poor people, comprises individuals who live in the margins of society, are antisocial and often violent. They may be parents who cannot support themselves, who contribute nothing to society, and whose children become the responsibility of teachers at their schools. Hayward and Yar (2006, 12) distinguish two categories of perceptions on underclass individuals; on the one hand, they speak of the unemployed (when there are job opportunities within that context), and on the other hand, they are criminal men who fail to provide for their children, given their promiscuous behavior that conceives illegitimate children. Their conclusions indicate that both categories of social groups are deemed as being responsible for the subsequent problems of the underclass because unemployment impoverishes a community, promoting crime. Thus, being a role model as a father of a family that practices criminal activity educates a generation of children without discipline and with an antisocial nature.

Regarding this discourse, participants demonstrated an attitude of justification as to why this social group is forced to engage in criminal practices to provide for their family or for their own survival.

Interviewer: Why do you think he started stealing?
GG: Because he didn't have money, out of desperation.
(Galactic Girl, girl, middle to low socioeconomic level)

In the following images, the criminal is explicitly illustrated as poor. Figure 9.4 has a comic format, in which two different moments are represented: when the criminal steals money from a woman, and when the criminal arrives home to provide his family with food (Fig. 9.5).

This image of crime has to do with a social class reading, which permeates both socioeconomic levels. On the one hand, it is interesting that children integrate such a big social problem in Mexico into their imagery about crime. In 2014, 46.2% of Mexicans were living in a state

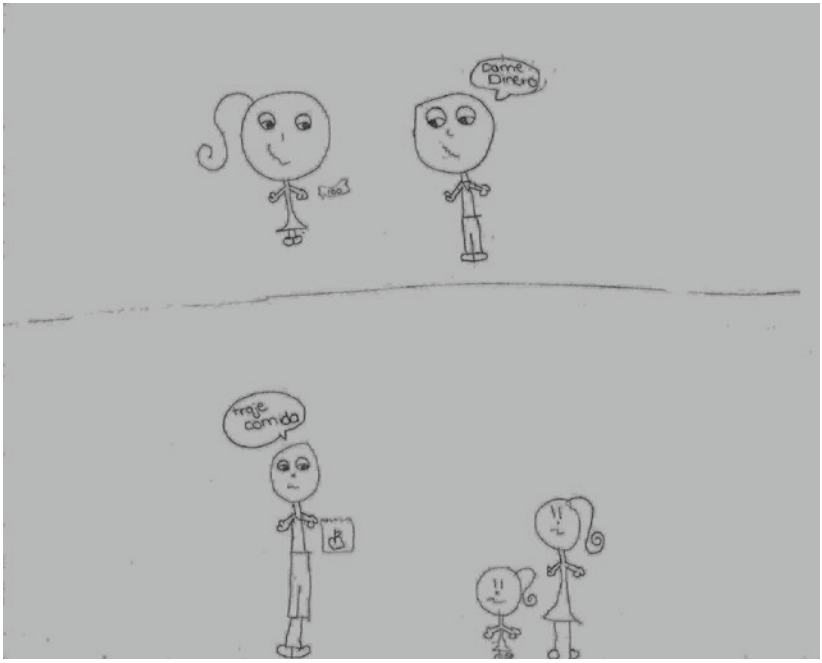


Fig. 9.4 Criminal living in a state of poverty. Conversation: "Give me money" (top square); "I brought food" (bottom square) (Created by the participant: Daniela, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

of poverty (CONEVAL 2016). Recognizing this situation creates a less punitive and more proactive attitude, in the sense that they consider the root problem to be unemployment or lack of education, beyond a simple inherent evil seen in some Manichean discourses. However, only one participant imagined the possibility of a criminal of upper socioeconomic level (Katy, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level). Her narrative explained that the criminal, contrary to what the other 44 participants say, has a professional education that contributed to planning his criminal acts better. According to the majority, the participants do not imagine the possibility of white-collar crimes in the first place, which is consistent with Muncie's (1999) findings in the sub-representation of upper classes as criminals.



Fig. 9.5 Criminal distressed due to poverty. Conversation: "?!!! ("What do I do!!!" "What will I do. There's no work." "Oh no, I don't have any money." "HELP" (Created by the participant: Daniela, girl, upper-middle to upper socio-economic level)

Poor Childhood, Poor Education

Poor education in this context refers not only to dropping out at a particular education level, but also to education on moral principles at home. In general, criminals are associated with problems of single parents, who do not pay attention to their ethical education or good examples at home (Muncie 1999; Hayward and Yar 2006; Barraza 2009).

Similar to the discourse of poverty, participants justify criminals by saying that they had a bad childhood without attention from their parents. In general, most believe that during their childhood, they had a bad relationship with their family or a bad example. Participants

mentioned bad examples related with alcoholism, drug addiction, intra-family violence, and crime.

Interviewer: Why do you think these things happen? Why do you think there are kidnappings and murders?
G: Maybe because they weren't loved or they weren't well-educated on the values they should have.
(Giovanni, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

Among other elements related to childhood, those who have been victims of child abuse or bullying are mentioned. This, according to the participants, could trigger vengeful behavior against society (which is also consistent with what was indicated by Martínez 2013):

Interviewer: When do you think he left school?
M: High school, maybe because they bullied him and because of that … he steals or is angry about something that happened to him before.
I: When he was a kid, what do you think he was like?
M: Well, he could have been good … maybe he became bad because they hurt him, or maybe when he was little, his dad didn't have much money and they hurt him with that … that's why he became bad.
I: And where did they live?
M: In some very poor area.
(Pau, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

Even so, participants recognize the possibility of a crisis of conscience when executing criminal acts. In Fig. 9.6, the criminal is illustrated as a person who, after committing a homicide, reflects on his act and realizes his mistake.

The majority of children indicated that criminals tend to have dropped out of high school (ages 12–15). They are aware that the chain of consequences when leaving school implies that employment opportunities are reduced due to lack of education. However, some do recognize that the potential is greater when talking about their intelligence. Some of the participants do not think criminals are smart. They agree that they were conflicted on being able to accept some qualities of criminals, because they used to characterize the figure of criminals with only negative traits (as indicated in the study by Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009). The other participants associate intelligence with the cunning that criminals have to carry out their plans and stay outside the purview of the law.

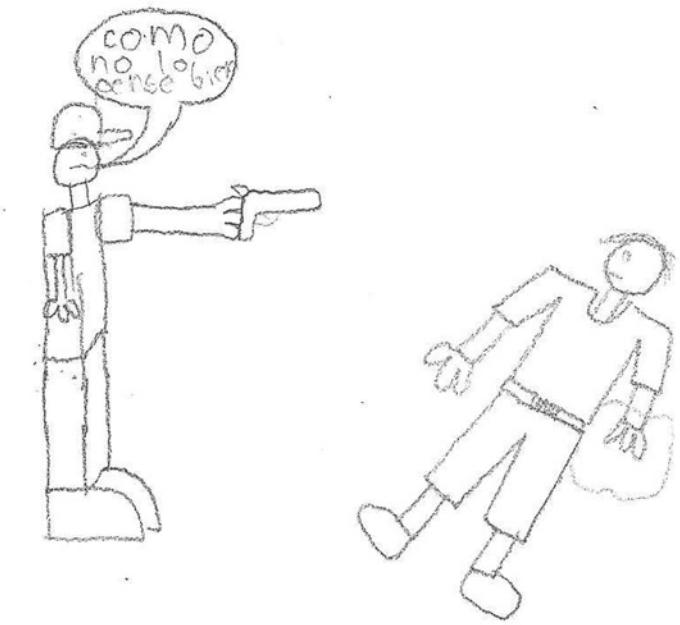


Fig. 9.6 Criminal with crisis of conscience. Conversation: "I didn't think about it well" (Created by the participant: Giovanni, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

Juveniles

This category is related to the previous section because it discusses dropping out of school, which sometimes coincides with the beginning of a career as a criminal, according to what participants indicated. According to Martínez (2013), around 20,000 children are involved in organized crime groups carrying out 22 types of criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, human trafficking, extortion, piracy, corruption. This is reflected in statistics that indicate young people have been responsible for half of the crimes in 2010: 6 out of 10 were between 18 and 24 years old and 9 out of 10 were male; all of them had little or no academic education. Two of the three criminal groups described in the theoretical framework involve minors: gangs and juvenile crime.

This element was not as evident in the drawings. The data was obtained by exploring the elements of the figure of criminals, as was the

biography. In this category, questions were related to a criminal's childhood, youth, and current life at the time drawn.

Some of the children spoke about recruitment by criminal groups:

Interviewer: How do you think he started with this?
SB: Well, maybe he had a financial problem. He didn't have any money and maybe he wanted easy work, and someone blackmailed him as a child and he said "do this and I'll give you this much money." "Okay," he did it and he gave him the money. And when he grew up and began to develop with the killings now yes when he is 17 years old, he said "look, this is a gun, with this gun you will kill people or, I don't know, you will rob with it, whatever."
(Spongebob, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

Interviewer: How old is he?
DB: Around 20.
I: How old was he when he started being a narco?
DB: Since he was 18.
I: How did he start being a narco?
DB: Well, they grabbed him, and they made him work for them.
I: Did they make him, or did he want to?
DB: No, they made him.
I: And where did they grab him?
DB: In San Pedro.
(Dylan B, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

In the conversation with Dylan B, it is important to mention that the interviews with children from low socioeconomic levels were in the community of the municipality with the highest rate of gangs and recruitment by organized crime. That is why our contact with the San Pedro Garza García government explicitly requested that the research project be executed in this neighborhood. The chances that Dylan B is speaking based on a similar experience is high, since it explains a situation the community was going through at the time of the interviews.

For several of the children, the age they imagined the criminals to be was between 20 and 26 years old. The argument is that when they drop out of school, they will have nothing to do but belong to gangs and from thereon, escalate to criminal groups. On the other hand, some believe that as they get older, they cannot escape their criminal acts so easily, so it ceases to be an option.

This is another reason why they occasionally justify criminal behavior; children think that because they are not adults or mature enough, there is confusion about right and wrong (reinforced by poor home education and dropping out of school), and therefore, for them, the right thing would be education and social rehabilitation programs.

Construction Workers

This stereotype appeared only among participants of upper-middle to upper socioeconomic levels. They expressed distrust in construction workers, which could be due to the fact that they are the "strangers" they see most often in their community.

Interviewer: What are they doing here? Those strange gentlemen?
N: They walk around the little store.
E: Where did they come from?
N: Well, they look like workers, construction workers.
(Nemo, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level) (Fig. 9.7)

Even Abe's narrative (boy, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level), which was a story wherein he witnessed an assault at a convenience store, indicated that the thieves were construction workers, especially based on the dirty shoes they wore at the time of the assault. This discourse is not usually associated with any source of mass media, but, in some interviews, the students mentioned that adults in their homes distrusted construction workers who worked in buildings close to their homes. This suspicion is then usually adopted through interpersonal sources.

P: … I'm afraid of construction workers, I feel like they're going to do something to me.
Interviewer: Why?
P: Well where I live, my gated community is new, and there are a lot of construction workers because they are building the houses … and I don't like them going there or walking around, or … it's okay, but I walk with adults because if not, I feel like they're going to do something to me.
I: Have you heard of anything the construction workers have done before?
P: Maybe yes, like I heard something but I don't remember very well. But I don't know, like, their appearance and the way they look at you, I feel like they're going to do something to you.
(Pau, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)



Fig. 9.7 "Strange men" near Nemo's house. Labels (from left to right): "Little store," "Strange men," "Cholo" (gang member), "House," "Bedroom" (Created by the participant: Nemo, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

Given that there is a high probability that participants in the low socioeconomic level have a personal relationship with construction workers, this stereotype is practically non-existent among this group.

Elements Related to Habits and Appearance

There are other recurrent features in the drawings that complement the imagery of criminals. These elements were habits such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and tobacco use, which when perceived as a negative characteristic, are associated with a figure such as a criminal. Drug addiction, in particular, was occasionally mentioned as one of the reasons why they imagine them with a thin build (although the other explanation for this was because they exercise when running from crime scenes).

The topic of habits and vices was explored in the interviews:

Interviewer: Does he smoke tobacco?
M: Yes
I: You told me before that he drinks alcohol, right?
M: Hmmm … like every night, every day.
I: Does he drink a little or a lot?
M: It makes him bad.
I: And does he use drugs?
M: Marijuana … and others, like medication that works for a lot of people who have mental issues, but who take them once a week, but who are very sick and he takes two without a prescription, combined with alcohol.
(Miranda, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

Among the children's drawings, this element only explicitly appeared in two images. Figure 9.8 illustrates a criminal with a cigarette.

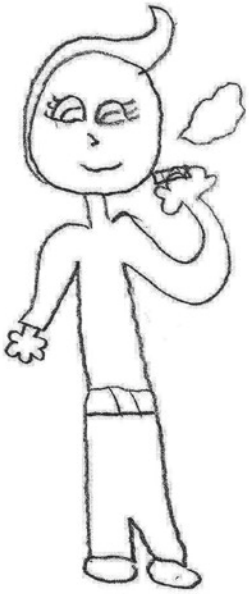


Fig. 9.8 Criminal smoking (Created by the participant: Rihanna, girl, middle to low socioeconomic level)

Another consistent element in interviews involved their appearance and personal style. Their appearance was described according to physical attributes of northern Mexico: tall, dark skin, dark hair, and dark eyes. Clothing was mentioned as the most characteristic of criminal personality: black (or occasionally red), loose or baggy clothing, tennis shoes or boots. The brands mentioned the most were Jordan, Nike, Hollister, Polo Sport, and TC, with a clarification from most that they were "pirated" (imitation) brands or stolen.

The accessories mentioned the most were necklaces or chains with a decorative Saint of Death,[2] Christian crosses, death, skulls, or rosaries. Rings, caps, bracelets, handkerchiefs, glasses, watches, and even weapons were mentioned as accessories. In Fig. 9.9, several of the previously mentioned elements can be seen:

Other recurring elements were piercings and tattoos. Piercings were not part of the illustrations, but earrings were mentioned on the face, such as a pierced eyebrow, nose, ear, tongue, and lip.

Interviewer: You say he dresses like his friends, how do they dress?
J: They dress like "bad guys," they are the ones that get piercings, tattoos, they do that. Because an educated person wouldn't do that.
(Juancho, boy, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

The tattoos mentioned the most were with reference to death (like skulls, the Saint of Death, tears,[3] and names of deceased persons). Snakes, scorpions, dragons, words, phrases, names of people, writing, and satanic elements were also mentioned. Figure 9.10 shows a drawing with detailed tattoos on the arms of the criminal portrayed, which includes writing and skulls.

These other elements associated with appearance and habits are often related to a lack of education and antisocial behavior. For example, in the following conversation, we can see how the connection between the use of tattoos and homicides is validated:

Interviewer: What do you think he likes to do in his free time?
A: Silly things.
E: For example?
A: Get tattoos, kill people, things like that…
(Alejandro, boy, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

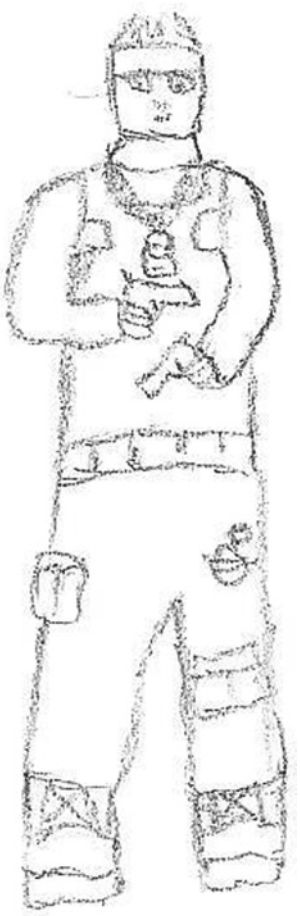


Fig. 9.9 Example of a criminal's clothing and accessories (Created by the participant: Dylan A, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

That is why discourses around habits and appearance are usually understood from a moral standpoint. For the same reason, when they meet solitary men with some of these characteristics, it is enough reason to suspect or distrust them.



Fig. 9.10 Criminal with tattoos (Created by the participant: Selena, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

Anxiety and Suspicion

In the previous section, children's attitudes of suspicion toward certain social groups were explored from different perspectives, considering that certain characteristics make people potential criminals. It is important to remember at this point that a crucial element of moral panic theory is the hostility shown toward certain social groups (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009), which in this case was demonstrated through each of the stereotypes in the previous sections. This section intends to address the feelings and attitudes that children had about the issue of crime and insecurity in their city, based on the images described above.

Two aspects were found regarding the feelings expressed. One group of children expressed indifference regarding the subject, indicating that they do not feel threatened (regardless of socioeconomic level), nor do they believe it to be a problem that directly affects them. The other group mentioned concern, distrust, anxiety, or fear (another element of moral panic; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009). According to what was

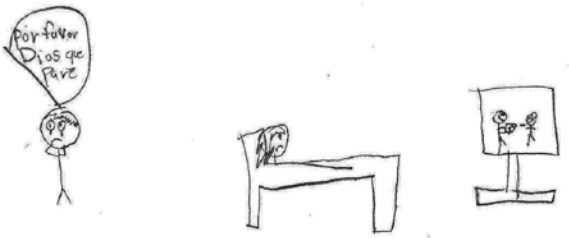


Fig. 9.11 Mom watching news with a shooting incident while the child expresses distress. Conversation: "Please, God, stop" (Created by the participant: Gerardo, boy, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

indicated in the interviews, these feelings are perceived based on the places they walk, but also according to what they hear from conversations between adults. Figure 9.11 illustrates a scene where the child is distressed while the mother watches the news.

However, it is important to mention that suspicion and distrust is not only directed toward these social groups. When asked during the interview about proposed solutions and the causes of crime, there was frequent mention of mismanagement of resources by the government, and of a failed state due to corruption.

> *Interviewer*: What do you think your role is to end this insecurity?
> *SB*: Well, strike against the president, demand more laws, more security, etc.
> *I*: And do you think that the president will do that?
> *SB*: Well, I don't know … because this president is a bit corrupt. He likes money, he doesn't want to do anything. He, the political parties, says what he has to do but no, it's not true … he just wants to win the presidency.
> (Spongebob, boy, middle to low socioeconomic level)

Some recognize that there are threats to police or other authorities that attempt to enforce policies or programs to reduce organized crime, and thus maintain fatalistic attitudes that there are no solutions without the risk of death for those involved. Others reflect on the type of punishments that should be imposed according to the type of crime that is committed:

Interviewer: What would they have to do to spend their entire lives in jail?
K: Stealing, I mean I don't think it's that bad … I don't think it's that serious because it's something material, for example, your iPhone or your device was stolen, but you can go to the store to buy more, so not it's something you're going to lose for a lifetime. Or they take your money, okay, but you can work more and earn more money, and you can buy things, but … if they kill your son, you can't get him back, no matter how much you want to give all the money in the world.
I: So, would you send someone to jail for life for crimes that can't be pardoned?
K: Yeah, because, I think it's okay, they rob you, if they take something they can return it to you when they're imprisoned. But if they kill your son … how …? I don't know if I'm wrong, but I can't think of returning the son.
(Katy, girl, upper-middle to upper socioeconomic level)

Examples like this show how some children achieve a more proactive level of reflection, in the sense that they think from the perspective of the culture of legality. All children disapprove of criminal behavior and believe that, to a greater or lesser extent, they should be punished. Few speak of adopting mechanisms such as the death penalty, but tend to favor harsher or more educated criminal systems (so that there is rehabilitation during imprisonment). However, they also disapprove of the capacity of the government and authorities to achieve security in their country, due to unacceptable behavior such as inefficiency, lack of protection to the authorities, and corruption in high-ranking officials who maintain a relationship with organized crime.

Conclusions

I had some opportunities to present the results of my research outside an academic context on radio programs, during meetings with family and friends, or on forums with people interested in the subject. The most frequent question asked was—what should these children's parents do?

I agree with Tsaliki (2016) in the sense that beyond worrying about the controversial topic of the effects of media as a result of consuming popular culture, we would have to adopt the notion of media literacy to think about potential educators that have popular culture and means of

entertainment to understand something that happens in the city, which, in this case, is the increase in crime rates. From this perspective, the reflection of adults surrounding children should help them resolve their uncertainty and channel their moral judgment on the subject, and not deal with complex issues such as taboos when young people have already somehow perceived them. For this, however, critical thinking developed in adult audiences is also required, so that discourses that are shared with minors are not direct stereotypes of crime.

A significant majority of the children demonstrated a greater understanding than that expected by some parents and teachers or authorities of the institutions visited. That is, the participants had enough information to develop narratives around a crime scene, and regarding the history and description of a criminal. While it is clear that there are stereotypes that permeate from interpersonal and media sources, it is also evident that children have been active recipients of different sources in shaping their imageries, when negotiating attitudes that incorporate social problems such as poverty and corruption.

However, there are discourses that have become normalized, such as male chauvinism and elitism (from a class and education perspective). The challenge would be to question these discourses in a way that mistrust is not disproportionate among these social groups, and the attitude of suspicion is also reconsidered in other areas or toward other types of individuals—e.g., unfamiliar women or white-collar criminals. In the particular case of construction workers, questioning the discrimination that is promoted from the upper-middle to upper socioeconomic levels toward certain trades. From this perspective, it is important to work on the collective hostility that is directed toward these groups.

Future studies could address triangulations with discourses held by parents to compare them and evaluate which ones transcend children's imageries. This study demonstrates the consistency in the two socioeconomic levels, which shows a collective discourse in the municipality of San Pedro regarding the perception of criminals in the city. It is also consistent with discourses on criminality in other Mexican studies, and other cultures such as the North American and British studies that were addressed in the theoretical framework.

Notes

1. In Mexico, public education is closely related with low socioeconomic levels, and private education with middle and upper classes.
2. The Saint of Death is an object of worship in Mexico, which personifies death. It is usually associated with groups such as drug dealers, prostitutes, inmates, and other types of criminal groups, which is why the Ministry of the Interior withdrew its religious association and worship record in 2005.
3. Tears are a distinctive tattoo of the criminal group Mara Salvatruchas, who have a presence in Central America—primarily Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Each tear represents a death or homicide related to or committed by the person who has it.

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PART III

Public Anxieties about Children's and Youth's Sexual Health

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CHAPTER 10

Risk, Anxiety and Fun in Safe Sex Promotion in Australia

Alan McKee, Johanna Dore, and Anne-Frances Watson

Introduction: Discourses of Risk, Anxiety and Science in Sex Education

In Australian, British and American sex education, 'risk' is a key term. This central concept in sex education brings together two important discursive elements. Firstly, it presents sex as a source of anxiety: sex is dangerous; it can kill you. Secondly, it takes a primarily biomedical view of sex: the 'risk' in sexual risk is commonly understood as the risk of contracting STIs or HIV or of falling pregnant, rather than emotional risk, for example. This chapter explores an alternative approach

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to encouraging safe sex communication between sexual partners that tries to avoid both of these discourses, instead presenting safe sex as something that can be fun and pleasurable.

In a series of focus groups to find out what 14–16-year olds in Australia know about sex, and where they have learned that information, it became clear that 'sex' as it was presented to them in school sex education was dangerous and scary (McKee et al. 2014):

16.F.2p: They never talk about having good sex because they don't want us to have sex.
16.F.3: They talk about not having sex.
16.F.5: *Mean Girls*.[1] 'Don't have sex'
16.F.4: 'You don't have sex standing up. You don't have sex'
16.F.5: 'Just don't have sex. You'll get pregnant and die'.

The dangers related to sex were presented to young people in medical and scientific terms—the need for safe sex—rather than wider understandings about healthy relationships:

13.F.6: It's not – it's all scientific though, it's not more …
13.F.2: It's not in relation to your life. It's just …
13.F.4: Yeah.
13.F.6: Education about the disease.
Facilitator: Okay.
13.F.6: Yeah, and how it works. And how it works in your body. And I'm, like, 'Yeah, stuff that'. You wouldn't really talk about in everyday life.
13.F.2: Yeah.
13.F.6: But, 'This works like this because of the two x-proteins and all that stuff like that'.
13.F.4: Yeah.
13.F.6: You wouldn't say that in an everyday conversation.
13.F.4: No.
13.F.2: 'Did you know that the protein coating of AIDS changes that's why they can't cure it?'
13.F.4: Yeah, exactly. (McKee et al. 2014, 656)

Our research suggests that a fear-based approach using a scientific vocabulary does not encourage young people to see safe sex as an integral part of their sexual development. This is not a new insight. Researchers have noted that sex education in Australia, America and

the United Kingdom often focuses on 'mechanics' (Carmody 2009, 42), 'plumbing' (Carmody 2009, 59), or 'puberty, procreation and penetration' (Sorenson and Brown 2007, 34). That this discourse predominates in sexuality education is not surprising: such an approach to sex is 'safe' in the sense that to present sex as a laboratory experiment protects teachers from the ire of conservative religious groups in their communities who might lead attacks should they talk to young people about sex as an embodied practice of pleasure. The current situation in Australia, the UK and (especially) America is the result of an extensive system of forces and institutions that make it difficult to talk to young people about their sexual development. Perhaps most difficult is the confusion of childhood 'innocence' with childhood 'ignorance', despite the significant differences between these terms (McKee 2012, 504). The idea that young people should be 'protected' from information about their changing bodies and developing sexuality has gained an increasingly strong presence in public debates (Faulkner 2010). And although over 75% of Australian parents support sexuality education at school (Quantum Market Research 2008), the small minority who oppose it are 'highly vocal and persistent in promoting their point of view' (Dyson 2010, 7). Newspapers have also found that stories about the 'sexualisation' of young people are an effective selling tool, creating strong emotional reactions in readers (Chronaki 2017). In this context it is not surprising that sex is presented in sex education as dangerous, and that safe sex—in a biomedical sense—is a central part of school curricula. But if safe sex is presented as a scientific practice, driven by anxiety, this information is unlikely to be drawn upon by young people in the everyday contexts in which they are starting to develop relationships and explore their sexuality. As the respondent notes above, 'You wouldn't say that in everyday conversation'. By contrast, this chapter explores a new tool that tries to make safe sex fun, rather than a source of anxiety—emphasizing the 'sex' of 'safe sex'.

Sex in Everyday Conversations

Researchers are familiar with the charge that the construction of teen sex in school sex education is problematic (Bay-Cheng 2003). Of course, it is important to emphasize at the start that there is no single 'correct' discourse of sex. However, the fact that the discourses of sex used in much sex education are about anxiety, based on biomedical dangers,

is problematic as it means that much of the information young people are provided—particularly around safe sex—sits in a register that is far removed from their own interests, experiences and practices of sex. The most recent National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health asked young people how they felt after their most recent sexual encounter:

> Almost half of sexually active students reported that they felt 'extremely' good (46%), happy (43%), fantastic (41%) or loved (44%) after their last sexual encounter. Similarly, students were less likely to endorse the items conveying negative feelings after the last sexual encounter. Relatively small proportions of students reported feeling 'extremely' used (5%), regretful (6%), worried (5%), upset (3%) or guilty (5%) the last time they had sex. (Mitchell et al. 2014, 38)

The discourses of sex education focus on fear and danger. When young people talk about their own sexual experiences, they are more likely to see them as positive. This disjuncture between registers may also explain why young people have high levels of medical knowledge about STIs, though this does not always seem to translate into practice. Levels of notifications for HIVs and STIs in Australia are increasing: the population rate of diagnosis of chlamydia in 2011 was 345 per 100,000 population—a 7% increase over the rate in 2010. Young heterosexual men and women are among the groups with the highest rates of chlamydia positivity (Kirby Institute 2012, 8). Among possible reasons for this increase (along with improved testing rates and more sensitive tests) is increased rates of unsafe sexual practices among young Australians generally (Smith et al. 2009, 1, 2).

At the same time, research shows that young Australians generally have high levels of knowledge about safe sexual practices. The National Survey of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health found that:

> The vast majority of this sample of students knew that HIV could be transmitted by sharing needles (93%), that a woman could get HIV from having sex with a man (95%) and conversely that a man could get HIV from having sex with a woman (90%) … [and] that the contraceptive pill offers no protection against HIV for women (85%) … Similarly, most students were aware that using condoms during sex offered some protection from HIV (83%). (Smith et al. 2009, 13)

Similarly, levels of information about STIs have improved:

> students' knowledge of Chlamydia has improved markedly between 2002 and 2008 … Students surveyed in 2008 were significantly more likely to know that … the infection can lead to sterility for women (55% vs 36%). (Smith et al. 2009, 19)

The scientific discourses of anxiety used in sex education would appear to be successful—in the sense that they have increased the capacity of young people to talk accurately about sex within this discourse. But the same young people do not appear to be integrating this information into their own sexual practice. This is not surprising: discussing the protein coating of the HIV virus is a useful skill; but would we say that it is a *sexy* practice? Is it a conversation one would have with a partner with whom one is exploring one's own body, identity and pleasures? We know that the priorities for young people in sex education are 'how to make sexual activity more enjoyable for both partners' (Allen 2008, 581) and how to understand the emotional side of physical intimacy—how to start, manage and if necessary end relationships, and understand the place of love and physical intimacy in them (Allen 2008; Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Carmody 2009; Halstead and Reiss 2003; Parks 2010; Tacchi et al. 1998). How would one include a discussion of retroviruses into such practices?

This is particularly problematic when we know that young people lack the skills to engage in sexual communication. In focus groups they report that when asking for what one wants sexually—including safe sex practice—they have learned that one should not say explicitly what one wants, but be 'subtle' or use 'hints'. It may be that they have learned this lesson by observing the behavior of parents and teachers who refuse to talk openly to them about sex (as opposed to STIs), and give them the message that it is 'awkward' to speak about such things (McKee et al. 2014).

Making Safe Sex Fun

How might we make safe sex fun? Our proposal is to use a 'Yes, no, maybe' list that brings safe sex into the discursive realm of sexual pleasure, simultaneously promoting sexual communication.

'Yes, no, maybe' lists evolved in the BDSM community (Bondage and Domination, Dominance and Submission, Sado-Masochism)

(Glickman 2010) and have since been developed as sexual health tools (Corinna and Turett, undated). A 'Yes, no, maybe' list is a list of sex acts provided to sexual partners, who then independently rate each act—for example, on a scale of 0 (I never want to do this) to 5 (I really want to do this). Partners then compare their lists, using this as a non-adversarial, fun and sexy way to talk about their sexual interests. In this way talking openly and honestly about what one would enjoy in a sexual encounter becomes part of the fun of the sexual encounter itself (we included 'Dirty talk' in our 'Yes, no, maybe' list). Kink communities have developed practices for promoting communication about sexual desires and practices well in advance of other sexual communities (Easton and Hardy 2009). This is partly because kink practices are outside the mainstream of heteronormativity and so practitioners cannot assume that their sexual partners will want the same thing that they do (a mistaken assumption in much vanilla sex in any case); it also partly because some kinky practices—particularly in the BDSM arena—can be physically dangerous. By learning from the practices of kink communities, a tool like this makes it easier for people to talk about sex in a way that is not aggressive or defensive but rather—and vitally for this article—can be sexy and fun. A 'Yes, no, maybe' list provides us with a model of how discussing what we would like to do sexually with partners can be sexy and fun.

In order to draw safe sex into this practice, we developed a 'Yes, no, maybe' list suitable for a range of sexual identities, not just BDSM practitioners, with fewer 'kink' practices (Morpheous 2008). It also—centrally for this project—included 'Unprotected sex' as one possible option. This option was not separated out from other sex acts, as a scientific or healthy 'safe sex' option; rather it was integrated into the list as one possible sex act among others, about which partners could talk just as they would about kissing, anal sex, bondage or other sexy and fun sexual options, and without having to move into a separate scientific/health conversational register. The aim was to facilitate open sexual communication as a part of this fun, sexy and non-adversarial conversation. Our aim was to take safe sex out of the realm of education—you *should* do this—and into the realm of entertainment—what would you like to do? (McKee 2016, 33). We aimed not to make conversations about the use of condoms part of a fear-driven and anxious approach to sex, but part of a fun conversation about what participants find sexy.

The complete 'Yes, no, maybe' list is attached as an Appendix. The introductory blurb emphasizes fun, and does not draw attention to the safe sex item ('barebacking'):

> You can use this list at any point in your relationship – with your new boyfriend(s) or girlfriend(s) to work out what you're into, with your partner of thirty years to add a bit of spice to your relationship, or with a stranger (or strangers) you've just taken home as you plan what to do for the rest of the evening. Take a copy each and go through it individually. Decide what you think sounds sexy, giving the acts a mark from 0 (Never!) through 3 (Maybe …) to 5 (Definitely!). Be as honest as you can – that's the fun. If there's something that you're not particularly into, but you'd be happy to do it if your partner's really into it, give it a 3. You can skip anything that's not relevant to you because you don't have the right body parts. The list is structured so that it starts with stuff that's suitable for beginners, moves through the everyday stuff, and ends up with the most advanced things. If you're getting uncomfortable feel free to stop at any time. And if there's anything you want to do that's not on the list, add it at the end.
>
> Then go through your lists together and see what you have in common – you might be surprised!
>
> Remember – no judgment. The aim is to find ways to make your sex hotter and more fun – not to attack your partners for their different pleasures.

The possible sex acts were grouped into three categories—'Beginners', which includes practices such as kissing, eye contact and mutual masturbation; 'Everyday', including acts such as blindfolds and handcuffs and 'Advanced', including such practices as the use of strap-ons, rimming and urine play. These categories were introduced following concerns among the researchers that young people just starting on their journeys of sexual exploration might be daunted by a list of practices—particularly kinky practices—that might seem intimidating to them. Of course any such taxonomy will have its own problems—in this case, the very fact of naming them from 'Beginners' to 'Advanced' might imply that there is a necessary teleological element to sex and that everyone, while starting with kissing everyone should end up going to sex clubs and having threesomes. This was not the intent. From another perspective, gay men, for example, might be disturbed to see that we included Anal sex—an everyday practice for many gay men—in the Advanced list. At this point we merely note our acceptance that any such taxonomy will be imperfect and register our openness to continual development of such a list.

The hope is that people using the list will, as they consider the possible sex acts, come across 'barebacking' as one option—it is literally integrated as a sexual option rather than a scientific practice, as something that people having sex might enjoy, or might not enjoy, but might enjoy talking about. If both partners rate this practice as something they don't want to do, this has then already been raised and if, in the course of their sexual encounter anyone wants to change their mind an explicit commitment has already been made that can then be referred to. If partners have different attitudes toward barebacking—one really wants to do it, the other doesn't—then this is signaled as something to talk about in the same way as the other sexual practices on the list. It is something for negotiation, for discussion, in a context where such negotiations and discussions are constructed as fun and sexy—dirty talk, in fact. And—importantly—if both partners agree they want to have unprotected sex then this is an acceptable outcome (this is discussed more below).

Can a 'Yes, No, Maybe' List Make Safe Sex Fun?

In the tradition of classic psychological research, we tested this idea on undergraduate students (Sears 1986). The limitations of such an approach are well known—it is difficult to generalize from such cohorts to make claims about wider populations as they tend to be more homogenous (Peterson 2001, 450), 'have less-crystallized attitudes, less-formulated senses of self, stronger cognitive skills, stronger tendencies to comply with authority, and more unstable peer group relationships' (Sears 1986, 515). We thus make no claims for generalizability or representativeness from this pilot study: it provides qualitative data that begins to explore whether we might be able to move safe sex closer to the everyday discourses that young people use for their own sexual identities and practices.

An email was sent in September 2013 to students enrolled in an introductory business unit at our university inviting them to take part in a project about sex. This email made no mention of safe sex. They received no course credit for taking part, but were offered a small voucher (Aus$20) for a department store. Eleven young people responded. The small number suggests that only the most sexually adventurous were willing to respond. Eight continued to initial meetings with the researchers—three did not respond to logistical emails. Two of the authors met with each of these young people to introduce the 'Yes, no, maybe' list and explain how to use it. At this point no mention was

made of safe sex, and no attention was drawn to the item 'Unprotected sex'. Students were told to take the list with them and use it in their own practice. Three months later these undergraduate students were invited to attend focus groups about the list, where they were introduced to the purpose of the list to promote Health Protective Sexual Communication and asked about whether it had done its job. Six students (ages = 20–27) continued to this data-gathering phase of the project; the other two were unable to arrange a suitable time to attend a focus group. It is worth noting that the focus group members were first year undergraduate students. We did not return to members of our earlier high school focus groups, aged 14–16, or attempt to facilitate their discussion with their sexual partners. The legal age for heterosexual sex in Queensland was sixteen years old, and so we were concerned ethically at the implications of asking people under the age of consent to discuss sexual practices with partners.

These focus groups were conducted in a university classroom, and were video-recorded, transcribed with pseudonyms and subjected to 'interview textual analysis' (McKee 2004, 205). Such an approach treats the interview data:

> as a text to be subjected to poststructuralist textual analysis, making an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text. (205)

It does not take 'a naïve realist approach to [the] data', attempt to measure the 'authenticity' or 'truth' of the speaking positions or 'look for hidden deep meanings of which the interviewees themselves would be unaware' (205).

What Young People Said

The young people who had used the 'Yes, no, maybe' list agreed that it promoted open sexual communication with their partners. Words used to describe their use of the list were 'informative' (Sylvia) and 'honest' (Nigel): 'I probably wouldn't have found out things if we hadn't had that discussion based on that' (Sylvia). Fiona agreed that: 'Like we were talking about all kinds of things cos it was very open and it triggers that communication … we were like, what do you think of that? …'

The respondents agreed that the list had not felt like a scientific 'safe sex' promotion. When asked if they had felt they were being prompted to have a 'safe sex' conversation, Nigel responded 'No, not really', and noted that it was 'probably one of the more timid options' and that he 'didn't really think anything of it' when he was using the list.

Interviewer: You had the discussion about unprotected sex in the same way as you did about other options on the list?
Nigel: Yeah … It was pretty easy to discuss.

Nigel went on to note that:

the list itself gives a list of things to give a sexual partner to find out what they are comfortable with and so having the ability to just outright say yes I want protected, or unprotected sex, I think that opens the door to have opinions voiced on that.

Other young people agreed:

Fiona: It's a good entrance into them discussing about safe sex because you will sort of exchange things and then you can discuss other things, like protection, that sort of thing … it's a good icebreaker.
Mark: It's a good way in general just to start communication about sex in a less intimate way, as opposed to a straight up factual way.
Penny: I would say less emotional. People can get offended like sometimes if you say like to your partner that you want to do something they don't consider, they could get offended – like, you know, you don't think they're good enough or something, you know. Whereas that, you know, there's no judgment, it's just 'Would you like that?'

Sylvia similarly said that:

I wouldn't say it promoted safe or unsafe sex – more knowing what you want … being comfortable enough to talk to your partner about what you want, what they don't want …

One focus group member said that the list promoted 'informed sex rather than safe sex' (Sylvia) and was thus seen positively, not as another attempt by authority figures to preach to them. This is important because researchers

have previously found that young people reject material that they see as being overly didactic or 'preaching' (Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 183).

There was no sense that, even though the list had pointed its users toward thinking about the place of safe sex in their practices—through whether or not they wanted, and agreed on whether they wanted, to have unprotected sex—that this had created anxiety for them, or suggested that they should be fearful about their sexual practice. In fact, respondents said that using the list was 'fun' (Sylvia) or 'super fun' (Tara). This term was not introduced to the discussion by the facilitator, but rather raised spontaneously by the focus group subjects. As noted above, an important advantage of focus groups is that it allows subjects to use their own language to describe issues. The fact that the young people introduced this term from their own vocabulary suggests that they were not responding to experimenter desire but articulating their actual experience of using the 'Yes, no, maybe' list. A central aim of this project was to produce a tool that was not seen as 'scientific', didn't promote a fearful view of sex, and did not remove discussions about safe sex from the realm of pleasurable and everyday sexual practice. The fact that respondents spontaneously used the term 'fun' to describe the list suggests that it meets this requirement.

Risk, Agency and Communication

It is worth noting at this point in the argument that we didn't ask the young people whether they actually changed their sexual practices because of the list—rather we explored whether the tool had made it easier for them to have conversations about what they wanted sexually, including their desires around safe sex. Once again, this is an important shift away from traditional anxious discourses of safe sex, which measure their success in terms of the extent to which young people do what they are told, toward an approach that is based around young people's sexual agency—to what extent are they making informed, consensual decisions with which they are happy. This is a key distinction that bears some explication.

The anxiety of many discourses about young people's sexuality emerges from a desire to protect young people from their sexuality—which is linked to a desire to control their sexual practices (McKee 2013). The 'Yes, no, maybe' list moves away from this anxious desire to control. The measure of success here is not how little unprotected sex

people are having—but rather whether people are making an informed consensual decision to have unprotected sex or not. As we noted above, young people in Australia already have high levels of scientific knowledge about STIs and safe sex: but this is not always put into practice. The fact that formal discourses of sex education in Australia, Britain and the UK often present sex as something to be fearful and anxious about means that for young people preparing for sex by buying condoms, for example, is 'frowned upon' because it means that you have consciously decided to do something bad (have sex)—and have even prepared for it:

> *3.M.1*: Um, because it's kind of frowned upon, I suppose a bit. Like with our age group. Like, you know, if somebody went out and bought like a packet of condoms it would be like oh, you know, what are you expecting? (McKee et al. 2014, 657)

The implication is that it's actually better if sex happens 'on the spot'—because at least then the young person is not *deliberately* planning to do something bad. This project aims to remove this stigma by making the whole process of talking about sex a fun and sexy practice in itself.

The use of the term 'risk' in research into sexual health often suggests that any risky practices are bad and must be minimized. There are many problems with such an approach. Firstly, 'risk' is often conceptualized simply in terms of diseases and pregnancy. A whole raft of 'risks' are ignored—for example, the risk that one might be in a patriarchal and unsatisfying relationship, that one might have bad sex, that one might be emotionally abused by a partner—and excluded as unimportant. Secondly, risk is, in itself, not a bad thing. In fact, risk is a vital part of the learning process—it is only by extending ourselves beyond areas which we already know well and in which we are already confident that it is possible for us to learn anything new. Quite apart from such theoretical considerations, there are clearly points where unprotected sex is a rational act—for example, if one is trying to get pregnant then having unprotected sex is not a negative outcome of sexual negotiation.

From this perspective the desirable outcome of the 'Yes, no, maybe' list is not just a reduction in people having unprotected sex; it is a reduction in people having unprotected sex that is not informed and chosen. This approach privileges sexual agency over biological models of sexual health. Sexual agency refers to:

> more than the ability to say "no". It involves the negotiation of sexual desires, contextual factors, and the ability to assert the resulting decision, whether yes or no. (Bay-Cheng 2003, 65)

The use of a tool like the 'Yes, no, maybe' list requires rethinking what constitutes safe sex, and more widely, what constitutes healthy sexual development. McKee et al. identify fifteen domains of healthy sexual development. Number four is 'an understanding of safety':

> In healthy sexual development, children learn what is safe sexual practice. This is meant in the widest possible sense, including physical safety, safety from sexually transmitted diseases and safety to experiment. (McKee et al. 2010, 16)

That is to say healthy sexual development does not involve avoiding all risky behavior because you have been told to by an authority figure. Rather it involves making informed consensual decisions. As we noted at the start of this article it seems that young people have good levels of information about sexual risk (or at least, about biological aspects of sexual risk—perhaps less about the risks of bad sex). By creating a space that facilitates open communication about mutual desires informed by such knowledge, and without using fear to increase anxiety—by making safe sex sexy and fun—the 'Yes, no, maybe' tool aims to increase levels of healthy sexual practice.

It might be argued that trying to promote higher levels of sexual agency and conversation about sexual desires—including but not limited to desires around safe sex—is too limited a goal for a safe sex project. Our research suggests that this is not the case—that for young people, support in developing the agency, language and skills to talk about what they want sexually is severely lacking in their sex education from schools and parents.

In our focus groups with the 14–16-year olds, when we asked young people how you would ask for what you want in a relationship (including what you want sexually) there was a strong consensus across groups that you shouldn't say out loud what you want:

> *4.M.2*: Oh with the whole how do you ask, ah, taking it to the next level, like usually, like you'd just sort of like suggest it with like body language and stuff. Like it wouldn't just be like, like you wouldn't just like walk up to a girl and just be like like to make out or stuff like that (talking over the top) …

4.M.1: You'd actually say it …
4.M.2: Like you'd just go with what you've already done and just like sort of work your way up slowly.
Fac: Using body language.
4.M.2: Yeah.
Fac: And then how do you judge whether your partner's interested or not?
4.M.2: Well it's like hard to explain really, because if you see somebody like … if somebody like … if you see their body language like you can kind of just like read it and know. (McKee et al. 2014, 659)

They rejected the idea of asking explicitly for what you want, instead saying that you should be 'subtle' or use 'hints'. There was general agreement among the young people that the one thing you should never do is ask explicitly for what you want from a relationship: the more acceptable approach was 'saying something else which suggests what you want to ask' (18.M.2). Researchers have noted the continuing dominance of romantic ideals in Western culture such as 'love at first sight' and 'soul mates' (Hefner and Wilson 2013). One important element of such ideals is an assumption of absolute agreement—that it is isn't necessary to discuss and reach agreement about different desires and needs because the very fact of being in love means that you will agree about everything in an almost telepathic way. The idea of *talking* about what you would like to do sexually can seem like a betrayal of romantic ideals, turning sex into just one more chore to be managed. It is also risky—in the sense that it's much easier to retreat from a position of body language rather than if yu've already exposed yourself by saying what you want out loud. In this context, if we can support young people in having fun, sexy and confident conversations about what they want sexually—including what they want in the realm of condom use and other practices to prevent STIs, HIV and pregnancy—we believe that is an important achievement.

Conclusion

The theme of this volume is 'Sexual Health, Cultural Consumption and Parental Concerns of Children: anxiety over childhood and youth across cultures'. Previous research has shown that sex education in the UK,

Australia and America promotes anxiety about sex—'Just don't have sex. You'll get pregnant and die'. This chapter has described a project that attempts to ameliorate these discourses of anxiety by providing a way for young people to talk about sex—and in particular, safe sex—in ways that are fun and sexy rather than informed by fear. Nigel, one of the young people in our undergraduate focus groups, suggested that:

> the list itself gives a list of things to give a sexual partner to find out what they are comfortable with and so having the ability to just outright say yes I want protected, or unprotected sex, I think that opens the door to have opinions voiced on that.

In a context where much sex education uses a concept of 'risk' to try to manage young people's sexual practices, by presenting sex as a source of anxiety, understood as a biomedical practice, the 'Yes, no, maybe' list tries to shift the register of discussions. It presents the use of prophylactics as one among many sexual options that young people might consider. It lists them as a possible sexual practice that can be talked about, among others that exist purely for pleasure. It encourages young people to develop their own sexual agency, to decide for themselves what their pleasures and preferences are, and to have open and assertive communication with partners about their desires, in a nonconfrontational context that avoids the heat of the sexual moment and allows those conversations in themselves to be sexy. It does not attempt to protect them from their sexual desires, nor to control their sexual practices. It tries to make these discussions fun and respects the decisions they make. Ultimately, the 'Yes, no, maybe' list resolutely does not encourage young people to see sex as a source of anxiety. The feedback from our focus groups suggests that the tool may have been successful in this aim.

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Note

1. A film which parodies this tendency in sex and relationships education.

Appendix: 'Yes, No, Maybe' List

You can use this list at any point in your relationship—with your new boyfriend(s) or girlfriend(s) to work out what you're into, with your partner of thirty years to add a bit of spice to your relationship, or with a stranger (or strangers) you've just taken home as you plan what to do for the rest of the evening. Take a copy each and go through it individually. Decide what you think sounds sexy, giving the acts a mark from 0 (Never!) through 3 (Maybe …) to 5 (Definitely!). Be as honest as you can—that's the fun. If there's something that you're not particularly into, but you'd be happy to do it if your partner's really into it, give it a 3. You can skip anything that's not relevant to you because you don't have the right body parts. The list is structured so that it starts with stuff that's suitable for beginners, moves through the everyday stuff and ends up with the most advanced things. If you're getting uncomfortable feel free to stop at any time. And if there's anything you want to do that's not on the list, add it at the end.

Then go through your lists together and see what you have in common—you might be surprised!

Remember—no judgment. The aim is to find ways to make your sex hotter and more fun—not to attack your partners for their different pleasures.

If you find that this survey raises issues in your relationship, contact ASSERT (Australian Society of Sexuality Educators, Researchers and Therapists)—http://www.jmklug@bigpond.com, 0419 760 852. They can put you in touch with a counselor who can provide support in working through any issues.

Table 10.1 Beginners

SEX ACT (The thing you'll be doing)	Doing it to your partner Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)	Having it done to you Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)
Blow job (oral sex on a man)		
Cuddling		
Cyber Sex (sex over the internet)		
Dirty Talk		
Dry Humping (rubbing your bodies together with clothes on)		
Edging (delaying orgasm)		
Erotic Massage		
Exhibitionism (showing off erotically for one or more watchers)		
Eye contact Feathers (stroking your partner with them)		

Table 10.1 (continued)

Fingering (Anal)		
Fingering (Vaginal)		
Food Play (spreading food on naked bodies)		
Giving compliments		
Going down (oral sex), on a woman		
Kissing (no tongues)		
Kissing (French—with tongues)		
Lap Dance		
Massage (not erotic)		
Masturbating yourself while your partner watches		
Mutual Masturbation (doing each other)		
Nipple Play (tweaking, nibbling, sucking)		
Phone Sex		
Watching pornography together		
Quickies (short, quick sex on the run)		

Table 10.1 (continued)

Role Play (pretending to be different characters)		
Sex in the Dark		
Sexting		
Striptease		
Vaginal sex		
Vibrators		

Source Authors

Table 10.2 Everyday

SEX ACT (The thing you'll be doing)	Doing it to your partner Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)	Having it done to you Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)
69 (mutual oral sex)		
Blindfold		
Butt Plugs/Toys		
Domination and Submission (role playing where one partner orders the other one around)		
Facials (cum on the face)		
Feet (playing with someone's feet, sucking on their toes)		
Group sex (orgies)		
Handcuffs		
Open Relationship (having sex with other people when you are in a relationship)		

Table 10.2 (continued)

Pearl necklace (cum on the chest and neck)		
Positions for penetrative sex – Penetrator On Top		
Positions – Doggy style (rear entry)		
Positions – Side by Side		
Positions – Sitting		
Positions – Standing		
Positions – Penetrator on Bottom		
Spanking		
Titty Fucking		
Tying up (with rope or scarves)		

Source Author

Table 10.3 Advanced

SEX ACT (The thing you'll be doing)	Doing it to your partner Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)	Having it done to you Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)
Anal sex		
Public Sex		
Rimming (licking anus)		
Rough Play (pulling hair, treating each other roughly)		
Sex Clubs		
Sex Parties		
SM (Erotic Pain Play)		
Strap-On Play (using a strap-on dildo)		
Threesome		
Unprotected sex (barebacking)		
Urine Play		
Voyeurism (watching other people)		

Source Authors

Table 10.4 Other ideas!

SEX ACT (The thing you'll be doing)	Doing it to your partner Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)	Having it done to you Yes? No? Maybe? (Score 0-5 – 0 = Never, 3 = Maybe, 5 = Definitely!)

Source Authors

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CHAPTER 11

National Contexts for the Risk of Harm Being Done to Children by Access to Online Sexual Content

Lelia Green, Catharine Lumby, Alan McKee, and Kjartan Ólafsson

Introduction

This chapter explores an international comparative case study of children's experiences of online sexual content. It suggests that the dominant 'risk' framework commonly used to understand these experiences is not the most useful way to construct the uses to which young people put these materials, or the role that online sexual content may play in young people's healthy sexual development. Exposure to risk is increasingly accepted as an important component of building resilience, and

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risk behaviour need not be equated with negative outcomes, or with harm (Chrisman and Couchner 2002, 3). Indeed, in western nations where sexual imagery may be commonplace in popular culture, the capacity to process such images may well be an important skill, as this article suggests. This case study draws attention to the findings of a rare example of cross-national research designed to compare children's experiences of online sexual content in 26 separate national contexts. Although the data were first published in 2011 (Livingstone et al. 2011, 51; Green et al. 2011, 62), this is a new analysis that has not been previously reported. The size and scale of the face-to-face research conducted in the EU Kids Online project (25,142 children from 25 European nations), and the associated AU Kids Online project (400 children from Australia), means that these data remain the best available evidence to inform discussions of the potential influence of national contexts upon children's negative experiences around accessing sexual content online. The children concerned were aged 9–16.

The dominant model for conceptualising young people's exposure to sexual material online is one of 'risk' (see for example Štulhofer et al. 2008; Baker 2016), where riskiness is presented as necessarily negative and undesirable. This project did not assume, however, that children's engagement with online sexual content was necessarily accidental or harmful. Rather than imposing this external paradigm onto their experiences, the ways in which the young people made sense of their encounters with this material became part of the research project itself. Researchers asked the children whether they had been bothered by their engagement with online sexual content. By using this language—designed to be meaningful to the young people themselves—the project was able to explore how upsetting these encounters were to young people in a variety of national contexts. This suggests that if researchers

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wish to continue using the term 'risk' as a means of understanding young people's practices it should be reconceptualised as a neutral, or even actively positive, category.

Materials and Methods

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The EU Kids Online survey was funded by the European Commission's Safer Internet plus Programme (SIP-2005-MD-038229) and, in Norway, by the Norwegian government; and in Australia by the Australian Research Council via the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation. The project was planned, trialled and refined during 2009. Its purpose was to interrogate the internet access and experiences of a representative sample of (approximately 1000) children aged 9–16 from within each of 25 selected nations: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. Consistency was ensured by the use of IPSOS-Mori and affiliate market researchers across all the participating countries. IPSOS-Mori employed established methods to deliver a representative sample in all the countries concerned. Generally, IPSOS-Mori recommended use of the 'random walk' method to identify target research households. The random walk method starts with a randomly generated address which can potentially identify any dwelling in the nation. From that starting point, an on-the-ground researcher would walk in a preset pattern, ignoring a set number of residences and then selecting a set number of residences for attention.

Selected residences were subject to multiple callbacks in an attempt to contact inhabitants who were asked if there were children in the household aged 9–16 next birthday, who had used the internet at any time in the previous year. If children were present in the household, and the parent and child both agreed to participate, the family was included in the research. Both the parent most involved in overseeing the child's internet use, and the child in the family with the next birthday (between 9 and 16) were interviewed separately, generally using computer-assisted data collection but sometimes with paper-based prompts and resources, depending upon usual practice in market research in that country.

Each random address starting point was used to identify ten participant households. The recruitment continued until all ten households for that area had been identified and surveyed. In Australia, because of the size of the country and expenses that ran at four times the European average, the participant pool was capped at 400 children, rather than the 1000 per country aimed for in the European nations.

A headline ethics application was made by Professor Sonia Livingstone, the EU Kids Online Project Leader, to the host institution for the research, the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). That ethics application was granted by the LSE Research Ethics Committee. The ethics approval stipulated that written informed consent must be obtained from the parents in the study: both for themselves, and for their child's participation. Thus, all adults provided written consent. The interviewed child also had to consent, but it was agreed that children's verbal consent would be acceptable. Other institutions across the 25 remaining countries then decided whether the headline ethics approval was sufficient for their purposes or whether further information was required before ethics could be granted. All participating researchers in all participating countries were required to obtain ethics approval.

Data Collection

Data collection was by face-to-face interview-based survey supported by participant access to a computer or prompt cards. Children were interviewed separately from their parents, but with one or more parents in the house. Similarly, children were not present when their parents were interviewed. The interview questions were originally written in English but then double-translated: first into the target national language, and then back into English to check that appropriate meanings had been captured. Where there were significant minority language groups in a country, questionnaires were available in more than one language and specialist researchers were used. This helped capture a diverse range of experiences. Cognitive testing was used in each national context to test the comprehension of children in the target age group, drawn from potential participants. At the start of the research it had already been decided that children in the youngest age group (9–10) would be less able to cope with the length and content of the full survey, and therefore not all questions asked of children aged 11–16 were asked of 9–10-year

olds. All children of the same age group were asked the same questions across the different country contexts.

Amongst other aims, the research sought to identify any discomfort experienced by children as a result of their experiences online. Consequently, the survey set a low threshold for recording children's concerns. Children were asked if they had been 'bothered' by anything they had encountered online in the 12 months prior to the interview, and were offered a range of responses. The prompt question used was:

> In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it.

Possible responses comprised YES/NO/DON'T KNOW/PREFER NOT TO SAY. If the child said 'Yes', they were asked further questions about how frequently they were bothered by online material (Every day or almost every day/Once or twice a week/Once or twice a month/Less often/Don't know). These data were used to identify headline comparisons between countries as to whether children had been bothered by material or interactions they had encountered online. Whether or not they said they had been bothered by material encountered online, all children were subsequently asked about whether they had seen sexual images.

The research team believed it was important to frame children's online encounters with sexual images within the context of all sexual images encountered by children. Before being asked about online experiences, children were first asked about whether they had seen any sexual images in the previous twelve months and where they might have seen those sexual images. The word pornography was never used. As with the experience of feeling 'bothered', a low threshold of 'sexual image' was used, and the question was designed to be delivered in an open and non-judgemental, matter-of-fact way (Livingstone et al. 2011, 49):

> In the past year you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex. You might never have seen anything like this, or you might have seen something like this on a mobile phone, in a magazine, on the TV, on a DVD or on the internet. Have you seen ANYTHING of this kind in the PAST 12 MONTHS?

The same question was asked of 9–10 year olds and of 11–16 year olds. Possible responses to this question were YES/NO/DON'T KNOW/PREFER NOT TO SAY. If a child said 'Yes', they were asked how often they had seen such images (Every day or almost every day/Once or twice a week/Once or twice a month/Less often/Don't know), and where they had seen such images (In a magazine or book/On television, film or video/DVD/By text (SMS), images (MMS) or otherwise on my mobile phone/By Bluetooth/Other/Don't know).

Only after answering the general question about seeing sexual images in any context were children asked 'Have you seen these kind of things on any websites in the PAST 12 MONTHS?' Where older children (11–16) responded 'Yes', they were offered a range of descriptions of sexual content that they might have seen on the internet in the past 12 months (Images or video of someone naked/Images or video of someone's 'private parts'/Images or video of people having sex/Images or video of movies that show sex in a violent way/Something else/Don't know/Prefer not to say): multiple responses were permitted. It was only after gathering data about whether the child had seen sexual images online (all children 9–16), and what kinds of images these were (older children 11–16), that children were asked whether they had been bothered by the sexual images they had seen online:

> Seeing sexual images on the internet may be fine or may not be fine. In the LAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them. (Livingstone et al. 2011, 49)

Where a child responded 'Yes', there was a follow-up question (9–10), or two (11–16), to explore the extent to which the child had felt bothered. All children (9–16) were asked about their most recent bothersome online encounter with sexual images in terms of the intensity of feeling 'Thinking about the LAST TIME you were bothered by something like this, how upset did you feel about it (if at all)?' Responses offered were 'Very upset / Fairly upset / A bit upset / Not at all upset / Don't know'. Older children were also asked about duration—how long the feeling of being bothered had lasted. In terms of the data reported below, these comprise the proportion of children who indicated that they had been bothered in any way, and for any length of time, by the sexual images that they encountered online.

Data Processing

The datasets applicable to each of the countries concerned were checked and made consistent and inter-operable as part of the IPSOS-Mori contract, and were subsequently further checked by relevant members of the EU Kids Online research team, including co-author Kjartan Ólafsson. The resulting datasets are available for further interrogation by interested researchers at the UK Data Archive (Livingstone 2011). Analysis of the data reported here is limited to a frequency analysis, to reveal the proportion of children in each of the national contexts identified that had been bothered in any degree by their encounter with online sexual images. This paper assumes that differences in responses between children from different nations who have seen sexual images online reflect, in at least some part, the national and cultural contexts in which these children have been raised. It may also reflect differing perceptions of risk concerning children's online access to sexual images. Accordingly, this paper addresses the cultural context that frames the way that children process online experiences of sexual images. Such an approach might help identify strategies for minimising harm experienced by children, and also assist in supporting the development of resilience through children's management of risk in response to such materials.

Data analysis was by the overarching research team of the EU Kids Online project—Professor Sonia Livingstone (project leader), Dr. Leslie Haddon (project manager), Anke Görzig and Kjartan Ólafsson. Their final report is available at http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/ (Livingstone et al. 2011). A number of individual countries wrote their own reports, including Australia (Green et al. 2011). Those reports sometimes also included inter-country comparisons, as was the case with the Australian report. This paper builds on that work to draw attention to the diversity in children's responses to online sexual material and critiques the importance of national and cultural contexts as one way of accounting for such differences.

Results

The results presented here take the form of comparative tables across all 25 nations participating in the EU Kids Online study plus the results from the AU Kids Online project. Figure 11.1 compares the 26 nations involved in the research in terms of the percentage of

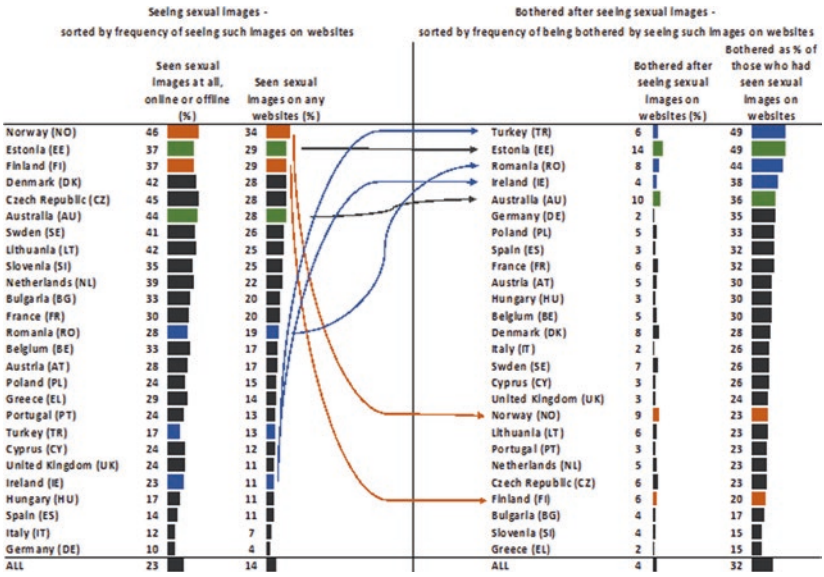


Fig. 11.1 Left hand side: QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual]? And QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? Base: All children who use the internet (*Source* Green et al. 2011, 62)

children identifying that they have seen sexual images anywhere in the past 12 months, compared with the percentage identifying that they have seen sexual images online. Naturally, the children who have seen sexual images online are a subset of the children who have seen sexual images in any location. There is also some indication that the countries where more children have seen sexual images online are also the same countries where more children have seen sexual images in any location. Figure 11.1 is arranged in order of the country where the greatest proportion of children say they have seen sexual images online to the country where the least proportion of children say this.

In terms of recording the proportion of children who have seen sexual images online, from highest proportion to lowest proportion, the order discerned via this project is: Norway, Estonia, Finland, Australia, Denmark, Czech Republic, Sweden, Lithuania, Slovenia, Netherlands,

Bulgaria, France, Romania, Belgium, Austria, Poland, Greece (at 14%, Greek children have the same likelihood as the average child in the EU Kids Online study of saying that they have seen sexual images online), Portugal, Turkey, Cyprus, Ireland, Hungary, Spain, Italy, Germany.

The colour bars and lines in Fig. 11.1 have been used to highlight the ranked order differences between the percentage of children who have seen sexual images online and the proportion of those children who say that they have been bothered by this experience, arranged according to national context. The coloured bars allow the ready identification of circumstances where those children from countries that are more likely to have seen sexual images online are sometimes also the children who are less likely to say that they are bothered by this; and where the contrary is also true. The Figure uses the examples of Turkey, Estonia, Romania, Ireland, Australia, Norway and Finland to highlight these disparities. Estonian and Australian children's likelihood of being bothered by sexual images online is proportionate to their likelihood of seeing such images (more likely). In contrast, children in Turkey, Romania and Ireland are less likely to see sexual images, but more likely to be bothered if they do so; while Norwegian and Finnish children are more likely to encounter sexual images online, but less likely to feel bothered.

In terms of the proportion of children who said they had been bothered by sexual images seen online, the order is (from the highest proportion to the lowest): Turkey, Estonia, Romania, Ireland, Australia, Germany, Poland, Spain, France: Spain and France tied at 32%, and this was also the average likelihood that a child that had seen sexual images online would judge themselves to have been bothered by them. The countries that follow this watershed have children that are less likely than average to say they have been bothered by encountering online sexual images: Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark, Cyprus, Italy, Sweden, UK, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Finland, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia.

If we take higher exposure countries as being above the European average (14%, where this is the proportion of children who say they have encountered online sexual images in the past 12 months) and cross-compare them in terms of the countries where a higher proportion of children say that they are bothered by the sexual images they have seen online (more than 32% of respondent children in the country that have seen sexual images), the following matrix results:

Table 11.1 Cross referencing national rates of incidence of children encountering sexual images online with the likelihood that an above-average proportion of such children will say that they have been bothered by the encounter

Countries compared	*Highly likely to be bothered*	*Less likely to be bothered*
High exposure country	Estonia, Romania, Australia, Poland, France (5)	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Bulgaria, Slovenia (11)
Low exposure country	Turkey, Ireland, Germany, Spain (4)	Hungary, Cyprus, Italy, UK, Portugal, Greece (6)

Children's likelihood of being bothered by their encounter with sexual images online is also related to gender and to age, with girls and younger children more likely to say that they feel bothered by an encounter with sexual images and boys and older children more likely to say that they are not bothered by such an encounter. As Livingstone et al. comment, 'in the Europe-wide study, those who encounter most risk online (often, teenagers, boys) are not necessarily those most bothered or upset by the experience (often, younger children, girls)' (2011, 58). The rigour of the recruitment method, however, means that there is no reason to believe that any country will have had a disproportionate sample of young children, or of girls than boys, or vice versa. It is reasonable to assume that differences in these children's experiences partly reflect the cultural context in which children encounter and process sexual images, including adults' attitudes to the perceived risks around such encounters.

Indeed, this is one conclusion of the EU Kids Online headline attempts to classify different countries on the basis of the way they (and parents within them) approach children's risk-taking online. In a publication examining a range of risks, not solely risks arising from encounters with sexual images, Helsper et al. (2013) take out executive summary notes nonetheless that 'clusters of countries are most clearly distinguished in terms of sexual content risks' (2013, 4). Further, analysis of the 25 European nations in terms of 'classification of online opportunities, risks, harm and parental mediation clusters' identifies the existence of a cohort of where the children are characterised by high-risk-encounter behaviours, but a low-risk-of-feeling-bothered. Helsper et al. call the children within this group of nations the 'supported risky explorers' (2013, 4), because parental practices

('parental mediation') and the cultural context support children's risk taking but also support the healthy processing of the impacts of such risk taking where a child might be bothered by an encounter. This group of nations are predominantly Scandinavian (Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands) and all of them are located in the 'High exposure country—Less likely to be bothered' quartile in Table 11.1.

An earlier EU Kids Online publication investigated different parents' mediation styles and concluded that the parents in these five countries were more likely to 'practice above active mediation of use but below average restrictive mediation' (Duerager and Livingstone 2012, 5). Active mediation in this context is defined as:

> parents talk to their child about the internet, stay nearby or sit with them while they go online, encourage them to explore the internet, and share online activities with them. These activities […] tend to reduce children's exposure to online risks without reducing online opportunities, and they also reduce young children's (9-12 years) reports of being upset when they encounter risks online. (Duerager and Livingstone 2012, 1)

Such mediation is the opposite of 'restrictive mediation', which operates through rules and prohibitions, and which 'reduces online risks [for children], but it also reduces their online opportunities and skills' (Duerager and Livingstone 2012, 1). These connections could be investigated since research with children aged 9–16 was paralleled by research with the child's parent or domestic caregiver most involved in supporting their internet use. Children's risks, opportunities, skills and experiences were matched with what they and their caregiver said about the domestic rules and environment that supported their activities online. It is to be expected that children's parents' mediation strategies and their wider cultural context interact and interrelate in complex but important ways.

Discussion

Key Findings

This data informs discussion around the risks that young people encounter online. Being 'bothered' or more strongly upset by online sexual content is one specific risk that researchers might be concerned about as they seek to understand young people's engagement with a

variety of online materials. But this data demonstrates that children from different national contexts may react to similar encounters in different ways. Children from the countries in this study differ significantly in the rates at which they report encountering sexual content online, and the sense of 'botherment' they feel upon such an encounter. It would appear that the national and cultural context in which such material is encountered might help explain something of the impact of that material. This is Helsper et al.'s thesis with respect to the 'supported risky explorers' (2013, 4) group of child respondents. The comparative capacity of children in these countries to encounter sexual content and not to be bothered by it may reflect societies which are more open to nudity, discussion about sexuality and sexual self-expression (Wentland et al. 2009). Such national contexts may also be less concerned about children's interest in sex (and maybe see this as natural), and they may adopt a 'children's rights' approach to policy (Livingstone and Third 2017).

In a number of countries, and in the framework of the Safer Internet Plus Programme that funded the EU Kids Online study, exposure to sexual content is categorised as a risky behaviour. The reported impact of such exposure in terms of a child (aged 9–16) feeling bothered or not is constructed as one indicator of a health outcome of such behaviour. Exposure to risk is increasingly accepted as an important component of building of resilience, however risk behaviour need not be equated with negative outcomes or with harm. Indeed, in western nations where sexual imagery may be commonplace in popular culture, the capacity to process such images may well be an important skill. Such an open parental approach may also be valuable for some children since a range of studies have identified circumstances in which young people's access to sexual content can be constructed as beneficial and health promoting (McKee 2007; Smith 2013).

There is no reason to assume that, at the time the research was conducted (in 2010–2011), children accessing sexual content in one country had a very different experience to children accessing sexual content in a different country. The internet itself was comparatively accessible and the verbal and linguistic component of sexual content is unlikely to have been an organising factor in terms of children's responses. The use of English as a second language across most of Europe adds some homogeneity for children who might have sought out sexual content in their own language or in English, yet children from the three English speaking countries in the 26-nation study (UK, Ireland and Australia) all recorded

very different responses to sexual content. (UK was low access/low rates of feeling bothered; Ireland was low access/high rates of feeling bothered; Australia was high access/high rates of feeling bothered.) Thus the language of the material that children judge as being sexual content does not appear to determine the proportion of children engaging, or the nature of children's response.

Children in some countries that are generally constructed as socially and sexually conservative (such as Ireland and Turkey) were less likely to encounter sexual images online but more likely to say they were bothered when they did so. This might reflect the negative impacts of guilt, or feeling uncomfortable at the breaking of implicit or explicit taboos. Further, children and adolescents in these national contexts may be less able to speak to adults about online sexual content that might have bothered them, and they may feel that it is less acceptable to construct their own sexuality as a pleasurable part of their identity (Baćak and Štulhofer 2011). They may well fear getting into trouble because of their cultural transgression, and this concern would be separate from and an exacerbating factor in terms of the impact of negotiating the content itself. Studies indicate that active mediation where parent and child can talk openly and easily about the child's online activities is a protective factor in the context of risks online (Duerager and Livingstone 2012).

Although there was no exploration of children's self-identified sexual orientation as part of the EU Kids Online research project, in other research contexts same-sex-attracted young people have been identified as benefiting from sexual content that presents same-sex-attraction as an acceptable orientation. Such materials and experiences can support the child's positive development as a sexual agent in a country where heterosexuality is dominant and queer sexualities are marginalised or discounted (Kubicek et al. 2010). In such circumstances, it is generally argued that material that supports queer and same-sex-attracted sexualities can help a young person feel that they are part of a larger community and that there are places and communities where their sexuality and sexual orientation will be welcomed and supported. In contrast to this positive reading of the potential impacts of sexual content relating to same-sex-attracted adolescents and young people, sexual content may often be constructed as a troublesome influence for children who identify with mainstream heteronormative sexuality.

The material in this paper lifts the focus of analysis from the content of the sexual material encountered by the child and the particular

characteristics of the child him- or herself; and considers instead the cultural context and associated parental attitudes within which the encounter with sexual content takes place. It is reasonable to suggest that where sexual content is made problematic, or a matter of guilty access, that cultural overlay could be part of what causes the negative impact. In Australia, for example, there was considerable talk at the time of the research about a review of the National Classification Standards for media content, and about the sexualisation of children (Lumby and Albury 2010). There has also been an Australian Senate select committee investigating 'the harm done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet' (Australian Senate 2016). Generally, such studies investigate ways in which to prevent children coming into contact with sexual material, but the negative construction of such material might explain part of the reason why children might have a negative reaction when such content is encountered.

The findings in this study suggest that conceptualising 'risk' for young people as necessarily negative and as something to be avoided is counterproductive. Material that might risk bothering a child in one national context might have no such effect on a child from another country. This particular example also makes clear that risk itself can be seen as something to be embraced, as a necessary part of all learning, and as a contribution to the development of resilience: one of the key aspects of healthy sexual development (McKee et al. 2010). Much research using the language of risk seems to suggest that identifying risk is the first step towards removing it entirely. The differing responses of children in different national contexts to encountering sexual materials online suggest quite a different approach: that one way to build resilience and minimise any harm experienced by some children in their encounters with sexual materials online, and in other contexts, is to follow the examples of the 'supported risky explorers' (Helsper et al. 2013, 4) countries. Such a strategy would help remove some of the taboos and prohibitions around acknowledging children's interest in and engagement with sexual content. This would open up a conversation around sexual content in which both adults and children could participate, and which would help children feel more comfortable with their sexual identities as they move towards the chronological benchmarks used by societies to identify adulthood.

Limitations and Shortcomings

This chapter has a range of limitations and shortcomings. Firstly, the EU Kids Online study is now some years old and was mainly conducted with children who did not have access to mobile internet-connected media. Studies have demonstrated that accessing material via mobile media can be associated with an increased incidence of harm. The study is thus likely to underestimate the incidence of children's exposure to sexual content and may also underestimate the proportions of children who feel bothered by such materials. At the same time, there has been no study of equivalent breadth and depth, conducted in such a robust methodological environment and it is difficult to see how the advent of mobile media might undermine the impact of the national and cultural context.

Secondly, although it is possible to use this data to identify that the national and cultural context of children exposed to sexual content is likely to impact upon each individual child's response, only broad-brush conclusions can be drawn from such a general study. The data raises a range of issues in this respect. For example, Germany is not generally positioned as a sexually conservative country yet very few German children identify themselves as having encountered sexual content online. Those that do say that they have done so are likely to say that they were bothered by the experience. This places Germany in the low likelihood/high botherment quartile of results, alongside Turkey, Ireland and Spain. The parameters that separate these individual nations would seem to be at least as significant as those factors that they have in common.

Thirdly, apart from acknowledging that constructing sexual content as negative might be part of the process that creates a child's sense of being bothered, the material presented in this paper lacks the specificity required to develop and validate strategies for minimising harm beyond repeating work elsewhere (Duerager and Livingstone 2012) that notes that active parenting helps develop resilient children who are confident internet users.

Advancing the Field

This chapter suggests that the concept of 'risk' has been used in too homogenous a manner in studies of children's development, and particularly in relation to their encounters with sexual materials online. It has often been presented as necessarily negative and as something to

be avoided. By drawing attention to the national and cultural contexts and the relevant social constructions within which children encounter sexual content it clarifies that the usual focus on the child/children and the materials they access might miss an important component underlying the child's response. The opportunity presenting itself is to investigate one or more countries in each of the matrices of particular relevance to children's response to sexual content. Thus a high exposure country such as Australia might explore that national and cultural context of children's high reported incidence of feeling bothered in terms of a high exposure low botherment country (such as Norway, at the country with the largest proportion of children encountering sexual content) and Ireland (which is low encounter but with a high incidence of children feeling bothered). Such a study might help investigate the high access and the high botherment aspects of the case study since each of the comparison countries (Norway, Ireland) have one aspect of their children's response in common with Australia, but not both.

An investigation of possible costs and benefits of reduced encounters with sexual content and the costs and benefits of decreased response to sexual content might help inform policy settings and developments that would support an appropriate and healthy outcome for this specific risk behaviour in sexually curious children and adolescents in the 9–16-year-old age range. It may also help develop a more sophisticated understanding of the concept of 'risk' that includes its positive elements. This could have important implications for the operationalising of such research by practitioners and policymakers.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors affirm that they have no conflict of interest with regards to this paper, although all have benefited from nationally or internationally competitive funding in the past to research children online, pornography and/or a combination of these areas.

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CHAPTER 12

Uncertain Abuse and Insider Credentials: Examining Ambiguous Cultural Representations of Childhood Sexual Abuse in the 2005 British Comedy Series 'Nathan Barley'

Bethany Rose Lamont

Introduction: The 'Inauthentic' CSA Survivor in Early Twenty-First-Century British Screen Comedy

To approach the contentious space of child sexual abuse (CSA) one must be mindful of the political contexts that underpin such engagements. CSA is understandably a phrase that carries great weight, for all three terms in this phrase, 'child', 'sexual' and 'abuse' are moveable, and rooted in the ideas of acceptability in the cultures we inhabit (Hacking 1991, 1995).[1] They exist not simply as words, but as constantly shifting manifestations of the moral sensibilities of the popular imagination. In the context of early twenty-first-century Britain, the crime of CSA, and the myths and monsters of who can perpetuate such a crime, who can be the victim of such

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a trauma and even, who can occupy the state of childhood, entangle with wider anxieties surrounding race, gender, class, cultural capital, youth culture and mass media (Wilson and Silverman 2002).[2] These fears of naming and identifying such a frightening figure are in turn exaggerated within the British screen comedy of the time, providing a revealing cultural artefact of the confused and often contradictory public debates surrounding child protection during this period (Lockyer and Attwood 2009).[3]

The study comprises of a close reading of the character of Mandy in the 2005 British Channel Four television satire *Nathan Barley*, written by Chris Morris and Charlie Brooker. This is an adult (white, cisgender) woman character whose seemingly fabricated position as a CSA survivor serves as the comic force behind the sixth episode of the series. Tensions of the inauthentic, unreliable survivor will be analysed through this screen comedy, with its performative medium mirroring the suspicions towards the uncertain subject of CSA, East London counterculture and documentary broadcasting in early twenty-first-century Britain. The chapter will recognise how such a paradoxical character evokes what essayist Leslie Jamison defines as the 'joke' of female suffering in her 2014 essay '*Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*' (Jamison 2014).[4] This study is taken with the hope of provoking a wider discussion around the anxieties of CSA cultural representation, closely considering the function of authenticity, misogyny and cultural capital in this humorous example. Whilst, in incorporating both British cultural texts (*Nathan Barley*) and an American theorist (Leslie Jamison), this television study intends to reflect the cross-contamination of CSA mythologies across so-called 'Western', English language speaking, countries. Thus, creating a study of trauma narratives that are both localised and globalised. CSA policy has a similar American-centric history, with US research, theory, criminal terminology and anti-sexual violence movements shaping British understanding and prosecution of CSA (Jenkins 1992).[5]

By selecting an example embedded in the satire and subcultural capital of early twenty-first-century British comedy, the chapter intends to offer a broad introduction to the many incarnations of this previously under researched character trope. This will provide the opportunity to interrogate cultural anxieties of CSA representation within both print and digital mediums. The chapter will use the comic lens of *Nathan Barley* to explore and identify anxieties surrounding the moral worth of mass media of the period, from explicit countercultural magazines, Lolita inflected music videos, and even the seemingly

serious genre of documentary film (Giroux 2000; Bignell 2014; Rothe 2011).[6] Each medium is presented in the television series as entangled and exploitative of the theme of CSA and will be analysed accordingly. Created at a time of moral panic around CSA within British media, the series should be understood in relation to a wider genre of British early 2000s CSA themed satirical comedy. This includes the BBC Three animated series *Monkey Dust* (2003–2005) and the *Brass Eye* special episode 'Paedogeddon!' (2001).[7]

Distinct from the false rape accusation plot line but equally embedded in wider conversations on women as unreliable, unbelievable and inauthentic, this study considers the character trope of a cartoonish adult woman's confession of a fictitious childhood trauma and the humorous elements that underpin this act. To understand the context of these comic inflected would-be victim characters, it is necessary to understand not just the ambiguous and uncertain space of CSA definition but also an existing distaste for expressions of gendered psychological distress. This is what Leslie Jamison, in her 2014 essay '*Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*' defines as 'a broader disdain for pain that is understood as performed rather than legitimately felt' (Jamieson 2014, 190). This disdain, Jamison argues, serves as an attempt to 'draw a boundary between authentic and fabricated pain' and is pertinent when considering the tension between supposed real-life events of CSA and their cultural representations (ibid., 191). These debates of authenticity and falsehood are grounded in a feminist framework of analysis and are contextualised and defined within Simone De Beauvoir's argument of the woman as an unconvincing copy to the 'original' male (De Beauvoir 2010).[8]

Such cultural manifestations are distinctly focussed on cis-centric, middle class, white ideals of the failings and fallibility of well to do women and poor little rich girls.[9] Here the seriousness of the crime and the misogynistic myth of the shallowness of women creates a comical by-pass. CSA is presented as an essentially authentic trauma, with the contradiction that (white) women's work is seen as attention seeking, phony and so forth (Jamison 2014).[10] These issues will be closely interrogated through the character of Mandy, utilising these tensions to analyse broader anxieties surrounding the moral value of British media representations of CSA during this time. This analysis will be developed through the study of the character of Nathan Barley, who functions as a symbol of the fakery of East London 2000s

counterculture, with his appropriation of the CSA subject as a form of provocative cultural capital being a key focus of interrogation. This discussion will be developed further through the character of Claire Ashcroft who symbolises anxieties surrounding the self-righteous and exploitative nature of British broadcasting towards vulnerable subjects (Kitzinger 2004).[11]

Alongside the theory of Jamison, the study will be grounded in the scholarship around early twenty-first-century British CSA cultural representation, focussing particularly on the work of Jason Lee due to his focus on the pop-cultural CSA confession.[12] Social and legal studies of the moral panic surrounding CSA, as well as broader fears surrounding mass media in early twenty-first-century Britain and beyond will be drawn upon. Textual analysis will also be informed through accompanying screen related texts, such as film reviews, interviews and think piece style journalism. This is with the intention of grounding the chosen examples within their relevant historical context, in order to better understand the significance and symbolism of the CSA subject within the time and place of its creation.

'Ambiguous Abuse': CSA Representation as Subcultural Capital in 'Nathan Barley'

The 2005 British comedy *Nathan Barley* is a six-episode series broadcast on Channel Four following the show's self-titled character, Nathan Barley, as he attempts to establish his identity in the mid-2000s world of East London counterculture. Played by Nicholas Burns, the exaggerated antagonist is used to denote the excess and opportunism of counterculture, both online and off. Described by Brooker as an 'an odious twentysomething upper-middle-class media wannabe', the audience is invited to laugh at the various lengths he goes to assimilate and embody this imagined space of cultural cool (Pettie 2005). Whilst straight faced lead characters, such as the siblings Dan and Claire Ashcroft, operate to problematise a simplistic binary of morality in media representation. Here the pious figures of serious media are inflected with villainy, their hypocrisy and self-righteousness nature consistently emphasised. In each episode these characters are set up to lose against our anti-hero Nathan. For as Burns explains, 'Nathan will just not die. Whatever happens, someone like him always comes out on top' (Harrison 2015).

Described ten years after its release as 'less a comedy and more a documentary about the future', *Nathan Barley* presents a satirical vision of self-promotion, performative cruelty, social climbing and subcultural capital (ibid.). The show forms a provocative foundation to interrogate the positioning of CSA representations, with its aesthetics of interpersonal violence, within counterculture. This a key focus of debate within the fifth episode of the series, which explores anxieties surrounding the ethics of CSA representation in both mass and marginal culture, and is the central focus of this chapter. Through comic exaggeration, it provokes wider discussions on the issues of utilising childhood trauma as content for cultural capital and personal branding. This is a conversation that is inherently rooted in uncertainty, the confusion of who is an 'idiot' and who is a 'genius', who is a 'monster' and who is simply a 'poser', playing at the role of the abuser. These uncertainties should be situated within the social anxieties surrounding CSA during this period of British history, with Nathan Barley serving as continuation of Charlie Brooker and Chris Morris's earlier satire of CSA panic, most notably the controversial 2001 *Brass Eye* episode 'Paedogeddon!'[13] Whilst *Brass Eye* lampooned the sensational news reporting of CSA, Nathan Barley interrogates British cultural connections to CSA within the context of the booming creative industries of the time. This industry was concentrated within the East London district of Shoreditch, a space that became shorthand for issues of inner-city gentrification, upper-middle-class entitlement, dot com investments, trust fund start-ups and ironic trendsetters.[14] The ambiguous economics of this space is explained by Neil Boorman, creator of the fanzine 'The Shoreditch Twat'. Boorman argues that Shoreditch, by the very nature of its success was rooted in uncertainty because, 'such was the gold rush to Shoreditch that it became difficult to distinguish between genuine creatives and opportunistic charlatans' (Boorman 2005). This instability between 'good' and 'bad', 'idiocy' and 'visionary', and the power and potential these dubious spaces possess, is uncompromisingly emphasised by Brooker and Morris, who describes Barley as:

> A bulletproof pebblehead assured of his own brilliance; a preposterous, swaggering swingcock who spends more time contemplating ringtones than the difference between right or wrong, or even up and down; creator of the virulently asinine Trashbat website; a DJ, a film-maker, a berk, a goon, a nurk, and a great big galloping fartbox - Nathan Barley could

> be accused of being the principal gushspout of all the world's idiocy, if he were not, alas, merely the principal tool in a shed full of clots. Close equivalents of Barley exist in every walk of life - they are the loudmouthed twits who seem too oafish to do any harm, until you wake up one morning to find one of them has taken your job. (Brooker and Morris 2005)

Morris and Brooker actively problematise the borders between pain and performance, and the endless cycle of violence and vacuousness these structures produce. This vicious system is first introduced through Nathan's career as prank web show host. Here he films cruel tricks on his assistant Pingu (played by Ben Whishaw) to be posted on his website 'Trashbat.co.ck' for his own personal gain. These scenes instantly establish the series' running questions surrounding the borders of acceptability in British entertainment of this time. These are the early twenty-first-century anxieties of who is laughing at what, and why, and how new media such as the internet and mobile phones are pushing these boundaries further, through utilising the position of humour to deflect from accountability for interpersonal harm.[15] Here Barley serves as a fearful warning of the dangers and destruction of such forms of media production.

The writers embrace and exaggerate the contradiction and confusion of early 2000s East London youth culture, through the intentionally absurd dialogue its characters utter. From interspersing nonsensical catchphrases such as 'Michael-fucking-Jackson', 'it's well brown', 'fuck you later', 'well futile' and 'keep it plastic' into casual conversation, to Nathan's declarations that his website *Trashbat* 'is the 9/11 of the mind' and can be summarised as 'two people leaping from the twin towers but they're fucking on the way down'.[16] This is the obscene bravado of the meaningless statement. A provocation posing as insider cool, a point increasingly exaggerated over the course of the six-episode season as we follow the grotesque lengths Nathan will go to ensure his status as an insider of East London counterculture. This is a space of cultural consumption where a reaction is greater than a positive response, because the object of production has no fixed meaning for either its creator or its audience. As the manipulative character of Jonatton Yeah?, played by Charlie Condou, summarises, 'stupid people think it's cool. smart people think it's a joke, also cool'.[17] Working as the editor of the youth culture print magazine 'Sugar Ape', Jonatton specialises in the creation of controversy to stoke sales, particularly through playing with the language

of sexual violence. A point introduced in the first episode through Jonatton's logo redesign, first seen by the horrified Sugar Ape staffer Dan Ashcroft (played by Julian Barratt):

Dan Ashcroft: That's not the new logo is it? Rape?
Sasha: No it's still sugar ape but the s-u-g-a is inside the r.[18]

The language of violence is something to accessorise with, to hide within, the print magazine title nestling within the invocation of sexual violence (Shinkle 2008).[19] It also functions as a trick, a border between the outraged outsider and the smugly in the knowing insider, a point summarised in all its silliness by Sugar Ape staff members, Rufus Onslatt (played by Spencer Brown) and Ned Smanks (played by Richard Ayoade), two supporting characters who function to emphasise the absurdity and exploitation of this countercultural space. The back and forth set up of the dialogue, exaggerating the vision of an elitist in crowd, ignorantly egging one another on:

Rufus Onslatt: They think they're getting pissed off by rape, yeah
Ned Smanks: Except it's not even rape, it's still ape.
Rufus Onslatt: So yeah so they're getting pissed off at ape[20]

The fifth episode pushes these borders of acceptability even further, opening with Sugar Ape's launch of a controversial photo shoot, carefully curated for maximum publicity. We are shown dimly lit fashion photographs of young white women, we are not yet sure of their age but they appear to be in their teens. They are styled childishly with pigtails, knee-high socks and straw boaters, and are shown in various states of undress. Ned and Rufus are shown lurking in the background of each image, providing an increased sense of unease to an already dubious set of images. The shoot is explained in all its ambiguity once again by Rufus and Ned in an online interview for Nathan's website 'Trash Bat' at the promotional party:

Nathan Barley: So what's the fucking concept?
Rufus: Right yeah well the idea yeah was to make it look like these models had been molested in a magazine office, yeah
Ned: When actually that's sort of what was really happening
R: Yeah, only because we're all on it yeah it isn't

N: Except we were actually touching them it kind of is.
NB: Yeah I touched two of them [laughs] they were really up for it though. (Nathan Barley, episode 5)

Here the back and forth dialogue takes a more sinister tone, far from the self-congratulatory standing of the 'Sugar Ape/Rape' conversation, the fast-paced narration of molestation emphasises the uncertain space of sexual violence, the question of who can be proved and disproved of committing a sex crime. The shifting spoken word of sexual violence isn't merely cultural credibility in this scene, it is an uncanny weapon, with the accompanying photographs of Ned and Rufus interacting with these 'molested' models only furthering its uncomfortable affect. Who is in on a joke is one thing, who is in on consenting sex is another. The questionable concept of engaging with abuse aesthetics is developed further when it transpires that the magazine shoot is also exploring (and supposedly actually depicting) themes of CSA. This is explained in a television interview with Sugar Ape editor and mastermind behind the shoot, Jonatton Yeah?:

Interviewer: Printing pictures of topless thirteen-year-old girls is illegal isn't it?
Jonatton Yeah?: It would be if they were thirteen.
I: Well how old are they?
JY: Over 18 etc.
I: And can you prove that
JY: Have you read it?
I: Of course
JY: Even the bit here that says all our models are six years older than there stated age? (ibid.)

The falsified images of CSA are presented as simply another inside joke for the subcultural elite of Sugar Ape, designed to both provoke outrage and skirt accountability. These interpersonal engagements with the ambiguous, and uncertain CSA survivor, whose trauma is seen as performed rather than truly experienced is interrogated through the CSA survivor character of Mandy (played by Ophelia Lovibond). Introduced as one of the 'thirteen-year-old' models, she is characterised by her cocaine addiction and troubled image. Describing herself as 'completely out of control', she explains that 'I have no idea what I'm doing' (ibid.). Her confusing confession of CSA, is played

out against loud music in a club, making this hard to follow story also, quite literally, hard to hear:

Mandy: Look, you really don't want a drink with me I'm quite fucked up.
Nathan: Yeah I do! Fucked up is great! I'm well fucked up!
M: No, I mean really fucked up
N: Hit me
M: Look you really don't want to know
N: I can take it bring it on
M: Well, I have bonobo syndrome
N: Yeah? Really? What's the problem?
M: You know the monkeys that fuck each other all the time
N: Brilliant. And?
M: My Uncle fucked me when I was eight
[uncomfortable pause]
N: I'll kill him!
M: I mean he didn't, I just though he did which is like was doing it to myself and Mummy said that was worse.
N: [uncomfortable pause] Yeah!
M: I mean I don't even have an uncle.
N: Oh what!
M: I'm in music therapy for it.
N: Huh?
M: My therapist gets me to write songs about uncles and we record them (ibid.)

Nathan, embraces this ambiguous CSA experience, thus locating her within the contradictory mythology of the beautifully damaged young white woman in popular culture (Giroux 2000, 69). This is what Jamison summarises as a contradictory 'Janus-faced relationship to female pain. We're attracted to it and revolted by it' (Jamison 2014, 213). The addition of Mandy's 'Bonobo syndrome', references the hyper sexualisation of the unreliable and often unbelieved CSA survivor further, and solidifies her position as a cultural object rather than a nuanced character (Rothe 2011).[21] She is just another trend to opt in and out of, to buy and sell to this increasingly jaded subculture. Describing her with admiration as a 'gorgeous mess' and 'well troubled', Nathan, confident in his creative vision, decides to shoot her CSA story as a lurid music video.[22] He proposes that this should be included in a serious documentary feature about social injustice. This itself serves as a pointed criticism of the opportunistic nature of how survivor's harrowing narratives were

being embraced for mass consumption during this period (Korte and Zipp 2014).[23]

The music video possesses a kinderwhore aesthetic, with a purple, pink, silver and blue palette and a synth style electronic track (Munford 2007, 270). Tinfoil clouds that read 'what about me', 'little mandy', don't wrong me', 'shhh', 'crack head' and 'coke baby', spelled out in childish alphabet fridge magnets, rotate slowly above the oversized cot in which she sings. Mandy is styled in a pink hairband, pink clothing and dark rimmed eyes. A pink dummy is tied to the cot. She pouts and raises her eyebrows in her video performance, hugging a cuddly toy orangutan to her chest to represent both her hypersexuality (Bonobo syndrome) and her sexually abusive uncle. She rubs her tearless eyes theatrically as she sings the simple, repetitive lyrics of: 'bad to have a bad uncle/pain, pain of the monkey/I needed, needed a friend/to help/help me to mend/but I found friends could be bad/with this experience I had' (*Nathan Barley*, episode 5).

Here trauma is translated to a technicolour performance, and the moving coordinates of abuse and age brackets are manipulated for capitalist profit. This culminates in Nathan exploiting Mandy's addiction and confused and vulnerable state for 'sexual favours'. He suggests she can 'pay me back now without money' for the £270 she has borrowed, and spent on substance abuse, through oral sex (ibid.). As she performs this act, the sounds of her gagging are interspersed with her 'Bad Uncle' song that Nathan produced, whilst Nathan dances to the music in glee. In short, Nathan becomes the 'bad uncle' to his self-created CSA survivor. However, his joy is quickly interrupted at the discovery that Mandy is 'thirteen'. At first, Nathan is horrified at the realisation he has engaged in sexual acts with an 'underage' girl. This is a discovery he makes whilst midway through the sexual act, going to comic lengths to hide this incriminating information from others. His shame is deeply felt, and his joy when realising that the 'underage' status of the models was a hoax is palpable. However, still embarrassed by the incident, even after he is safely in the knowledge that he is not a sex criminal, Nathan is mortified when Sugar Ape staffers discover he 'got a blow job off a thirteen-year-old' (ibid.). But far from shaming him, they are thrilled, congratulating him with positive reinforcements of, 'no way', 'nice one', 'respect' and 'that's brilliant mate' (ibid.). Once again, the borders of acceptability for abuse are problematised, and sexual violence is positioned as cultural capital. Thus, Nathan, now safe in the borders

between performance and paedophilia uses this hypothetical CSA act as a bragging point, speaking loudly of this escapade on his mobile phone on public transport:

> *Nathan Barley*: [talking loudly on bus so all can hear] Matt you rapist! How's it fucking gaping? I'm cool. I've been splashing a few tonsils. Guess the age! Younger…younger. Illegal! Technically a Polanski. Thir-fucking-teen! Thirteen. Thirteen! Absolutely fucking awesome! (ibid.)

But Nathan is no singular villain of this system, Brooker and Morris, similarly questions those who deem themselves above such provocative folly, emphasising their own capacity for harm. Dan Ashcroft, who consistently marks himself as above his fellow Sugar Ape staffers, considering them 'idiots', is presented as selfish, cruel and unlikeable, with Brooker and Morris placing him in increasingly humiliating situations to suggest that he is the most 'idiotic' of them all. Whilst his sister Claire, played by Claire Keelan, is an aspiring documentary film-maker of 'London's underclass' (ibid.). Panned by *Times* critic Caitlin Moran, as another clichéd depiction of 'the miserable, furious women', arguing that, over the course of the series, the character has 'nothing more to do than display exasperated disapproval at the boys, slam a few doors and sigh like a punctured haggis over everything they say' (Moran 2005). Moran attributes this character's failing to her position as 'the moral compass for a whole series' and declares her 'one of the worst TV characters this century', serving as an unpleasant testament to the fact that 'male comedy writers can't seem to create funny women' (ibid.).

This is a reductive reading, that misreads Claire's character function as a simple contrast rather than a challenging parallel to the abuse aesthetics of the show's subcultural spaces. On the surface, Claire may indeed seem like a mere 'moral compass', a surface act encouraged by Keelan's restrained acting style against the exaggerated performances of Ayoade, Brown and Burns. However, through subtle character development across the six episodes, it becomes increasingly clear that the character is no do-gooder. Instead we are presented with a hypocritical, judgemental and self-righteous figure, fetishising poverty, addiction and trauma that she has not experienced under the guise of authenticity. Here Claire stands as a villain character, operating as a critique to the self-righteous binary between moralistic true-life genres and an amoral

or immoral counterculture. She serves as a platform to explore the anxieties surrounding the ethical issues of British documentary broadcasting of the period, a space that was increasingly associated with cruelty and exploitation (Nelson 2011, 33; Bignell 2014, 108–109). Claire is disgusted that television producers respond not with sympathy, but with laughter to her grainy documentary footage of a 'junkie choir', with the irony being that she has little respect for the issue of addiction beyond her own career as a 'political film maker'.

Claire's only on-screen interaction with a person suffering from addiction is Mandy, and it is dripping with disdain. She describes her dehumanisingly as 'a sniffer dog in a mini skirt' and argues that she is an inauthentic woman due to her abuse issues, sniping that 'she's so coked up she's probably stropped menstruating' (*Nathan Barley*, episode 5). She sees no value in her story because 'my film is about people with real problems, her only problem is that she had the whole of Selfridges by the time she was five' (ibid.). Claire only takes an interest in Mandy when, tricked by Sugar Ape's 'under age model' hoax, believes her to be only thirteen, highlighting the movable sympathy for the mentally troubled. Unconcerned with the fact that her brother works in a publication that she believes to be producing child pornography, her only interest is the opportunity to capture the stories of the traumatised for her own personal gain. 'She is perfect for my film', 'she's a child on coke', Claire exclaims excitedly to Nathan, making it clear that despite their different cultural positions (the online prankster and sensational music video maker against the gritty documentary creator) they are, in reality, parallel figures (ibid.). When Claire realises she is not a child, she has no relief for Mandy, and only cares that the revelation 'completely blows my story' (ibid.).

In the shifting borders of authentic pain in Claire's judgement of Mandy's worth as a CSA survivor, and as a woman, we see Jamison's theory of female pain realised. In suffering from a trauma she has not literally experienced, Mandy's pain falls into the inauthenticity of affect. This is a system described by Jamison as 'a causeless pain—inexplicable and seemingly intractable', that due to its lack of any clear trauma narrative must be dismissed under the 'sourceless, self-indulgent' failings of young, (often white and middle to upper class) women.[24]

It is these tensions between affect and impact that are at the heart of *Nathan Barley*'s satirical dissection of abuse as commodity and capital. In opening this discussion within the realm of the subcultural,

with its borders between insiders and outsiders, the story fans outwards to problematise the gritty realism of the documentary subject, so often positioned as the truly authentic deserving figure, to be held against the supposedly fake and selfish Mandy's of the world. This is not merely a representation of CSA survivor, whether unreal or otherwise, but a direct accusation of the industry that fuels the creation of these very characters. Thus, Nathan Barley extends beyond its comic criticism of CSA cultural representation, serving as a revealing testament to the overarching anxieties surrounding British media, both mass and marginal, within early twenty-first-century Britain.

Conclusions

The *Nathan Barley* series serves as a powerful example of CSA themed comic criticism within early twenty-first-century Britain, embodying the anxiety and uncertainty surrounding CSA during the period. It can thus be situated alongside the work of other political satires of the time such as *Monkey Dust* (2003–2005) and the *Brass Eye* special episode 'Paedogeddon!' (2001). The series utilises the contentious topic of CSA cultural representation as an exaggerated space to explore ethical issues surrounding British media, both mass and marginal, from misogynistic fashion photography to pious documentary broadcasting. The positioning of the show's Shoreditch setting as an ambiguous place where 'genius' and 'idiots' blur drives the comedy of the show, which hinges so often in comic misunderstandings and ethical transgressions.

As Leslie Jamison (2014, 188) argues 'pain that gets performed is still pain' and though *Nathan Barley* utilises the mythology of the inauthentically damaged woman, with her hypersexual allure and lurid cultural output in the character of Mandy, its embrace of ambiguity and problematisation of an originally authentic subject, subverts the misogynistic roots that such figures stem from. This opens a broader conversation on the limits of representation for such a traumatic subject. Through skilful use of comedy, satire, parody and exaggeration the fifth episode of the series provides a uniquely humorous vision of the positioning of CSA as a desirable experience for either abuser or survivor. This contradictory state is utilised as a comic space in which to analyse interpersonal harm, cultural capital, objectifying clichés and

personal prejudices of the deserving victim, whilst also addressing the viewer's own culpability in the very trauma industry in which they critique.

This is developed through the character of Claire Ashcroft, a self-righteous documentary film-maker who seeks to exploit Mandy's alleged experiences of abuse for her own gain. In analysing Claire's character, negative critical receptions of her as a mere 'moral compass' have been actively problematised. Instead Claire is positioned in parallel to Nathan Barley, thus challenging a simplistic binary between the earnest artist, working for social change and the cynical social climber, driven by personal gain. This provokes a wider conversation on the complex web of interpersonal violence that comes with cultural representations of marginalised social subjects in early twenty-first-century Britain. Thus, *Nathan Barley* stands as a provocative testament to the anxiety of uncertainty, both within the act of naming the contentious crime of CSA, the seemingly moveable space of the CSA abuser and the CSA survivor in this series, and the uncertain borders between throwaway youth culture and supposedly serious adult media.

Notes

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17. *Nathan Barley*, episode two.
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CHAPTER 13

Teenage Perspectives on Sexting and Pleasure in Italy: Going Beyond the Concept of Moral Panics

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli

Introduction

With the advent of converging mobile media (Mascheroni and Ólafsson 2014), the internet holds an important part in teenagers' everyday life (boyd 2014; Livingstone et al. 2011). For young people and adults alike, everyday life is becoming ever more mediated via the merging of online and offline experiences (Livingstone and Helsper 2010). These transformations in the panorama of communication also extend to intimate life. In other words, where technological changes emerge in late modernity, we also find transformations of intimacy (Beck and Beck-gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992) and the intertwining of intimate lives with public space (Plummer 2003; Weeks 1998). Digital media make room for an ample range of activities related to intimacy and sexuality (Döring 2009; Mowlabocus 2010): from finding information to erotic interaction, from access to explicit material to self-expression 'characterized

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by more casual and personal forms of public communication' (Ito et al. 2010, 147).

Research on sexuality and digital media has increased over the past fifteen years, maintaining a focus on the potential effects of sexual content and, in the process, reproducing polarizing views on its positive or (more frequently) negative aspects (Döring 2009; Chronaki 2014). This happens particularly in what concerns studies that focus on minors: teenage sexual cultures and the use of technology are frequently treated as problematic (Livingstone and Bober 2005). In both mainstream media (Haddon and Stald 2009) and in public discourse, moral panics (Thiel-Stern 2009) frequently drive the debate, stealing space from approaches that delve into minors' engagements with sexual matters.

Consequently, young people's sexting practices remain a relatively unexplored area due to cultural taboos as well as ethical and methodological hurdles. In fact, teenage experiences of 'doing, being and becoming sexual are often sensationalized, silenced, caricatured, pathologised and routinely undermined' (Renold et al. 2015, 1), and sexting is inevitably understood in the same context.

The goal of this chapter is to reflect critically upon such a deterministic approach to technology and sexuality and read sexual communication between teenagers via sexting through the epistemological lens of cultural studies. This would mean to critically distance oneself from a media effects approach, which implicitly assumes that correlation is evidence of causality when it comes to audiences' interactions with the media. The focus of this work is to illustrate how young people use digital resources within the context of intimacy and sexuality, considering them as active users of media per se (as well media producers) and moving beyond the reductive question of whether sex in/through media is good or bad. I have a particular interest in media practices that are shaped by a drive to make sense of media cultures, described as the 'collections of sense-making practices whose main resources of meaning are media' (Couldry 2012, 160; 2004). Following Attwood and Smith (2011), who discuss sexual cultures as: 'a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values' evident 'not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour' (Williams 1961, 57), my starting point is the assumption that sexting should be understood within such a mediated sexual culture.

'Sexting Is Cool, if You Are an Adult'

When it comes to adults, sexting is usually described in terms of the advantages it can bring to affective and sexual ties (Hasinoff 2012). Obviously, concerns about them also emerge every now and then, but those are mostly focused on revenge porn, celebrity infidelity, or celebrity scandals.

According to researchers (e.g. Albury and Crawford 2012; Burkett 2015; McDaniel and Drouin 2015), sexting plays a part in people's intimate lives: for example, they might do it because it is a fun and pleasurable way to improve sexual communication with a partner. Mainstream media frequently frame adult sexting as an activity that can be practised and improved with simple rules: these rules focus mainly on how to make photos (content) more winsome and spicy.

There are various examples, such as How to Look Good Naked, a TV show transmitted in the UK between 2006 and 2010 where women were encouraged to take naked photos to improve their self-confidence and erotic charge (Ringrose et al. 2013). More recent articles in magazines targeting both women and men include: *10 Rules of seriously hot sex. There's more to it than just finding a great shot of your boobs* (Woman's Health, 1 December 2014); *How to Sext: The Ultimate Guide to Sexting* (TheCut.com, 1 January 2018); or *15 Women Reveal the Hottest Sexts They've Ever Gotten* (Cosmopolitan.com, 31 October 2018), an article that starts with the sentence 'Sexting is an art form'; *Why Sexting Can Make Your Sex Life Even Hotter. You don't have to be in bed to turn her on, a new survey suggests* (Men's Health, 12 June 2017). There are also a great number of tutorials on YouTube.

In other words, sexting among adults seems to be normalized within a certain cultural scenario (Gagnon and Simon 1984), mainstreamed into a specific frame that specifies expected erotic scenarios and defines indispensable rules for the success of mediated interaction. This comes in stark contrast to teen sexting, which is still seen, as I will explore in the next paragraph, as something dangerous, a trigger for moral panic. This strong separation between the interpretation of teenage versus adult sexting follows other culturally established boundaries between what counts as permissible sexual activity among adults and among minors (both children and teenagers) based on their age.

Sexting, Teens' Everyday Life and Moral Panic

Although adult sexting is discussed in terms of performance and sexual literacy, sexting discourses about teenagers are impregnated with moral panics, namely attitudes that foreclose sensational discussions around new technologies of communication in displaying a certain anxiety about such changes, rather than critical reasoning (Draper 2011).

Many western cultures have a long history of moral panics around teenagers, media, and sexuality (Heins 2011; Potter and Potter 2007; Tsaliki 2016a). According to Cocca (2004), safety and well-being are frequently invoked to legitimize the control of young people. The innocence of children and teens (Robinson 2008) is frequently used as a vague term that works like a shield which some adults use against the hypothetical danger represented by the sexual agency of teens.

This kind of approach does not spare teenage sexting and indeed contributes to its social construction as deviant, risky, and wrong (Hasinoff 2015). Sexting 'is often seen as a technological, legal, sexual, and moral crisis' (Hasinoff 2015, 1). Following Hasinoff, one may identify different spheres that are affected by moral panic about sexting. The first one is the legal sphere. At the moment (early 2019), within certain national contexts, sexting has legal implications for teenagers: for example, in the USA it is often framed as a form of child pornography, because videos and photos shared could contain images of minors. In other words, in the USA (Hasinoff 2015), and in Italy too, if a teenager creates a sexually explicit image of her\himself, she\he might be accused of production and possession of child pornography. If the person who receives those images shares them with others, she/he might be accused of distribution and possession of child pornography.

Concerns about this practice seem to be connected to the risks and dangers sexting poses to young people. In the example of concerns related to cyberbullying and its (supposed) connection to sexting, several teenage suicides gained media attention because of their (supposed) link with the practice, as in the cases of Jessica Logan in 2008 and Amanda Todd in 2012. Both girls committed suicide after cyberbullying actions and in both cases the media frequently linked the suicide to the circulation of their nude photos, originally disseminated during sexting. A sample of news headlines connected to these cases proves this connection: 'Teenager commits suicide after "sexting" a nude photo to her boyfriend made her life a misery' (about Jessica Logan, *MailOnline*,

11 March 2009) or 'Jessica Logan Suicide: Parents Of Dead Teen Sue School, Friends Over Sexting Harassment' (about Jessica Logan, *Huffpost*, 18 March 2010).

Another area of concern is the assumed innocence of young people (Robinson 2008). According to this view, highly influenced by moral panics, teenagers, perceived as children, are thought to lose their innate innocence via sexting, because it gives them access to sexual knowledge and allegedly encourages them to begin acting out (cf. Bragg et al. 2011).

Sexting is also constructed as a moral crisis, an attitude which views the practice as an affront to 'appropriate morality' and, in particular, 'appropriate femininity' (Hasinoff 2015). As Attwood (2018), Draper (2011), Hasinoff (2015), and Scarcelli (2017) argue, much of the news coverage on teen sexting focuses on girls who produce images of themselves: 'because boys' sexual expression is usually expected and tolerated, it seems less newsworthy when boys sext […] unlike girls, teen boys are expected to be sexual, and their behaviour is often tolerated or praised' (Hasinoff 2017, 45). When girls decide to sext, adults (educators, teachers, police, etc.) often assume that they are forced to do it by an external power (a boy, narcissism, etc.). This approach denies girls any sexual agency or desire (Fine and McClelland 2006) and presents them as irresponsible subjects whose sexuality is beyond their control (Thiel-Stern 2009). In the same line of thought, the communication risk model positions teens (especially girls) as 'at risk' in sexting exchanges, while the public debate 'contextualizes young girls who sext as lacking self-esteem and call[s] for self-reliance and resilience in the face of adversity (i.e. sexting)' (Tsaliki 2016b, 2).

Overall, the rationalization of teen sexting by adults and the media is frequently based on a double deterministic approach that focuses on one hand on a biological view of teenage sexual life that is defined by hormones and on the other, it is connected to the use of media technology that is seen (again from a deterministic perspective) as able to radically modify practices and experiences with media. Given that sexting is related to sex and it is related to technology, so it could be one of the 'perfect targets' of hegemonic media effect discourse that pathologizes teens and ignores their sexual agency. From this point of view, sexting per se constitutes deviant behaviour, construed not only as an expression of sexual agency but as a result of teen's ignorance of risks, or of media effects. We can assume then that 'public campaigns around sexting have continued to address young people both as victims and perpetrators of

crime, warning them about the dire consequences for their reputations and careers' (Attwood 2018, 54–55). Framing teens as victims or perpetrators of crime means victimizing teen girls, pathologizing sexting, and in deleting their sexual desire, de-eroticizing young teen girls overall.

A big part of the literature, following mostly experimental approaches, 'is based on the assumption that there is something unusual and troubling about sexters. A number of studies examine correlations between sexting and other perceived risky or unsafe behaviours, such as alcohol consumption and unprotected sex, and the links to undesirable personality traits, such as impulsivity' (Hasinoff 2017, 3). Adults are rarely interested in the place and meaning of sexting in adolescents' lives (Albury et al. 2013). The discussion that follows draws upon my own research and is, instead, an attempt to give voice to boys and girls to better understand why they decide to sext and what they think about it. The objective is to go beyond the concept of moral panic and try to define some strategies that could help boys and girls develop a critical approach to sexting.

Methodological Notes: Working with Teenagers on Their Sexting Practices

This research focuses on the meanings constructed by 34 boys and 34 girls from Italy aged between 16 and 18 who engage in sexting. I never asked them directly about their sexual orientation, but every interviewee talked to me about heterosexual experiences, so I presume that all my interviewees are heterosexual. A qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews was chosen to study the experiences and practices of teenagers as reported by themselves (Lobe et al. 2008).

Theoretical traditions connected to symbolic interactionism and phenomenology have been used to reconstruct the subjective experiences of girls that give form to representation (Garfinkel 1967). Qualitative studies seek to illustrate the character of a phenomenon and its meaning (Silverman 2004). I retain that this kind of approach is relevant in an attempt to explore young people's experiences of and opinions on sexting because qualitative research provides richer and more detailed information given that these methods better capture 'the complexity of meanings that sexuality has for individuals and groups, and the importance of context in the construction of these meanings' (Attwood 2005, 68).

Ultimately, I wanted to use a teenager-centred approach given that 'methodologically and conceptually, teens are free from the process of containment that produces them as "other" and continues to silence them' (Caputo 1995, 33). The purpose is to focus mainly on teens' everyday online practices to better understand the conditions of their usage of sexting. Participants were selected via snowball sampling with the help and support of non-governmental associations, schools, and other institutions in the Veneto Region of Italy. I interviewed girls and boys in the Sociology Department at the University of Padua and every interview took between 1.5 and 2.5 hours.

I have followed Silverman's (2013) suggestions when it comes to research ethics, observing the following four ethical objectives: to ensure the voluntary participation of the people involved, to keep the content of interviews confidential, to protect anyone who takes part in the research from harm, and to ensure mutual trust between researchers and participants. As the sample included boys and girls who were under eighteen years old, parental consent forms were also sought and received.

Interviews were audio-tabbed and transcribed verbatim. Data has been analyzed using thematic analysis as a specific model of narrative analysis aimed at finding common thematic elements across participants and the experiences they report (Braun and Clarke 2006; Riessman 2003).

Sexting, the Representation of Bodies and Desire from the Perspective of Teens

To better understand teens' perceptions of sexting, it is important to investigate peer cultures and the interviewees' understanding of desire and the representation of the body. Body representation—both of women and men—seems to be central within popular culture and for the self-expression of individuals (Attwood 2010). When it comes to the naked body, the boys that I interviewed discussed male nudity as something desexualized that could be interpreted as an expression of masculinity or virility. Sometimes nude pictures of male friends, for example a naked upper body photo of a friend in the locker room, are used to make fun or 'take the piss'.

> It is different to look at a photo of a boy with a naked chest […] he's done it to show off because, for example, he thinks he has a good six-pack. To show to everyone that he is, as it were, fit. The girls do it to… how can I say… to get noticed. [Boy, 16 years old]

> Sometimes we share photos of our basketball teammates in the locker room, for example. We're semi-naked… I mean with slips, not totally naked [laugh]. And we'll share these photos between us as a joke. Or… I do not know how to explain it… It happened that we took a picture of my friend because he is fat and we took a picture of him but just to joke, just for fun. [Boy, 17 years old]

During the interviews the interviewees generally displayed strong heteronormative perceptions about the existence of a binary between women and men when it comes to sexting. Furthermore, both girls and boys displayed different views on the body and desire, as strictly connected to gender roles. In the world of the interviewees, the desire of girls is annulled and it seems that the only perceived form of pleasure and desire connected to sexting is the masculine one. Six-pack for instance is not presented as something exciting, it could just be a way to perform masculinity in the sense that it is a way to show to girls and other boys that they are fit. In other words, boys do not consider the naked male chest or six-pack to be arousing for girls, but it is not the same when they speak about so-called 'dick pic'.

> When you want to excite a girl, I think that you have to be… direct [laugh]. I mean… I do not think that she can get excited by looking my chest… so… it is better to show her what is exciting for her… like… it [the penis]. [Boy, 16 years old]

In this case the interviewee has a specific vision of the female desire in connection to the male body. The male body, as stated by other interviewees, is not thought to arouse girls beyond its genitalia (Paasonen et al. 2019). Conversely, girls' bodies are eroticized even when not completely naked. The definition of 'naked' changes when applied to the female body, in contrast to perception of male nudity: 'We are semi naked… I mean with slips, not totally naked'.

> It is different if a guy posts a photo or if my friend [a girl] does it. First of all, my girl-friends do not post naked photos of themselves, I mean they do not post photos of themselves in bikinis on social networks. But, more than anything, what is important is the pose. The guys do it to show their muscles. If you see some photos of some girls… they are like a message… it is like saying, "I am looking for sex". [Girl, 18 years old]

The girl in the excerpt above uses the adjective 'naked' to describe a girl in bikini. Such extracts show that both boys and girls have internalized a dominant ideology about how (young) women look suggestive when striking a pose, whereas men are seen—and perceived—to be purely 'flexing muscles'. It seems then that a double standard emerges: posing is interpreted as being sexually suggestive (rather than exuding confidence, or being agentic, being sexual) for girls, while boys are 'off the hook', since they are not seen to pose for sexual reasons. As I have discussed elsewhere in relation to the teenage consumption of pornography (Scarcelli 2015), young people do not perceive a strong difference only between the male and female body, but also between male and female sexual desire. The defining factor is gender, a dimension that, in the words of interviewees, distinguishes between male sexuality—seen as more instinctive and connected to the necessity to 'see'—and female sexuality perceived as more reflexive, better suited to a romantic relationship and morally more acceptable (Kalish and Kimmel 2011; Sakaluk et al. 2014).

> Men are like this… they want to see boobs, asses and so on. They just need a photo to go crazy… it is because they go out of their head when they sext. They cannot understand that for us [girls] it is different. I like it more if someone writes interesting stuff to me. We need someone who can get inside our heads. [Girl, 18 years old]

> They [girls] come from another planet, definitely. They are able to resist more than us. In my opinion it is not like they do not have a sex drive, but, they can… control it. For us [boys] it is impossible, how can one control it! Then you do not jump on girls [laugh]. But sometimes you need to let off steam… sometimes alone [laugh]. [Boy, 18 years old]

The quotes above illustrate how teens have internalized hegemonic approaches to sexuality (Kimmel and Plante 2004): approaches that describe male desire as an implacable, natural, and fundamental expression of masculinity (Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009) and women as subjects who must control their sex drive unless they are in a stable relationship (Sakaluk et al. 2014).

Gender Performance in Sexting

As I have tried to show so far, the interviewees described the male sexual impulse as difficult to manage and characterized it as a 'natural' male characteristic. This is justification that the interviewees use to explain why they regard it as normal that a boy should ask a girl (more or less persistently) for naked or semi-naked content. In other words, the explanation seems to refer again, to the 'natural' drive that motivates masculine sexuality (Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009). As an interviewee said:

> It's obvious that they ask continuously for photos, or videos… they are men. They are like this, they need it. It's natural! [Girl, 17 years old]

The interviews reveal pervasive ideas that girls and boys have about relationships and about the roles that each gender performs within the context of a relationship or during flirting. Girls are frequently viewed as trophies, boys are seen as a sort of dispenser of sexual 'compliments' that they can bestow freely because, in interviewees' words, 'it is the essence of masculinity'.

> I like it when boys pay me compliments. You know it works like this. You do something to get noticed, making sure not to overdo it obviously, and they, if they fancy you, pay you a compliment. Then you can decide how much space to give them. [Girl, 18 years old]

> If a girl is pretty, you can tell them. Not in a vulgar way I mean. They like it. [Boy, 16 years old]

The hook 'paying attention but obviously not being excessive, making sure they don't overdo it, obviously' indicates a sort of unwritten rule in the game of seduction that frames the man as the one who has to take the first step, encouraged by a woman who can show, somehow, that she is available without looking as 'too easy'. In relation to sexting, this is translated into defined rules that frame female gender performance into a careful measurement of how much flesh to show when engaging with this practice. Girls are expected to strike a challenging equilibrium that allows them to maintain their good reputation while still appearing sexually attractive, which comes in stark contrast with stereotypical images of girls who do not want to have a sexual relationship (what

interviewees call 'nuns') and of those who are more 'licentious' (Lippman and Campbell 2014). To avoid any misinterpretation, I do not mean to deny girls' agency, their capability of choice or their desire. Rather, I want to underline the difficulties a girl faces in order to avoid being 'branded' by a patriarchal approach to sexuality with labels that remain connected to the idea of the vulnerable and innocent (white and heterosexual) girl (Karaian 2014).

This kind of discourse also involves who can initiate sexting. According to some interviewees, the request to start a mediated sexual interaction usually comes from boys. It happens, according to interviewees, because boys are more subject to sexual impulses, imputing, again, a notion of natural difference to boys' and girls' sexuality. Gender roles seem still settled in a cultural script where it is 'normal' for a boy to make a certain kind of request, though not for a girl. A sexting request by a girl immediately labels her as someone with a less acceptable sexual performance or even a 'slut'.

> If a girl sends me a naked photo without me asking, I'll be happy. It could happen… but you can understand that's a bit strange…. Or there is something behind it, a joke for example, or that girl is a… slut. [Boy, 16 years old]

> Girls don't do it [ask for sexting]. It would be strange if I asked a boy to sext me … He'd take me for a slut… [Girl, 16 years old]

These quotations show that a hegemonic gender script that ascribes a carefully regulated—and disciplined—sexuality to girls is used by both genders. Both boys and girls have internalized dominant perceptions of 'appropriate' femininity: the idea that female interest in sex ought to be concentrated within the border designated by romantic relationship.[1]

To Sext or Not to Sext: When the Couple Matters

During the interviews, participants explained what motivates them to sext. Their responses indicate diverse forms of gender performance in relation to sexting. For some girls, sexting is part of nurturing and helping to sustain an intimate relationship.[2] They ascribe sexual pleasure in sexting practices, which sometimes stand as a surrogate for sex:

> You do it [sexting] like you have sex. It is not the same thing, but sometimes you do it because you like it and you want it. Practically, [this is how] you keep the relationship alive. Sometimes my boyfriend wants it and texts me stuff [laughter]. And maybe we do it… maybe we cannot have sex because our parents are at home. [Girl, 17 years old]

So, according to some girls, pleasure sometimes fades into the background. Sexting becomes a practice that gives them a pleasure more connected to the idea of the relationship than to any physical aspect. This is connected to the notion of desire that I described in the paragraph above and to the idea that the couple is considered as the only territory in which girls are allowed to explore and use practices other than traditional sexual intercourse.[3]

Other girls we interviewed spoke about sexting as something they share with their boyfriend because *he* takes pleasure in it, while they much prefer physical intercourse. Interestingly, in some cases, it seems that the autoerotic element of sexting may not appeal to girls, unlike its effect on boys:

> Sometimes I've noticed that during [sexting] I was not so involved as my boyfriend. He told me that he climaxed. For me it was different. I mean… I liked it… but more because I knew that it was good for him, so it was good for me too… When we have sex, it is different. It is more pleasurable for me [laughter]. [Girl, 17 years old]

The idea of the 'relationship' in the case of the last quotation seems to be the base here.[4] We notice the same approach in another quotation, where a boy discusses a further element that is important in sexting: interaction.

> Sexting is something in the middle between looking at porn images and being with your girlfriend. I like to have sex with her and when I'm with her, physically, I do not watch porn… you see? I mean, there are photos [in sexting], you cannot touch your partner like pornography. But it is better than porn because you are interacting with another person. I mean… she is not an imaginary person, [she's real], someone you interact with. Then it is not the same as having my girlfriend in my bed. But I have desire and with it [sexting], the desire has been fed [laughter]. Besides, I prefer to look at my girlfriend over the smartphone and touch myself than do the same with someone who does not exist. [Boy, 17 years old]

Here sexting is compared to pornography but differentiated on the basis that you do it within someone you know and with whom you have a connection. In this quotation we can see how sexual agency and desire is ascribed to both genders, contrary to those who pontificate about the numbing and alienating effects of porn consumption. Mediated sex, using pornography or using sexting, in other words, is not something that substitutes physical intercourse, what this interviewee explains is proof of a more articulated use of these kinds of practices by youth.

The status of being a 'couple' is the point of reference also used to distinguish between good and risky sexting: within the context of a relationship, sexting is viewed as a welcomed practice. However, outside this context, especially when carried out with a stranger, it is construed as something bad (Hudson et al. 2014).

> I've never tried it [sexting] but it's something that people… people of my age I mean… do. It is not a problem in my mind… I mean… It *could* be a problem, but it depends on who you do it with. If you do it with an old man, it's a problem [laugh] […] seriously, at the moment I do not have a girlfriend, but if I had one, I think that it could be a good thing. You can write to her "I love you… I miss you… blah blah blah?" And so, why can't you say that you want her… physically I mean? Then… if you do this with everyone or with someone you do not know, you have problems. There is no sense [sexting] with people that you don't know. [Boy, 16 years old]

> With your boyfriend, it's allowed… with other people, no. Sometimes it happens that someone, I define them as maniacs, asks for my photo on Facebook Messenger or Instagram. You know… that's wrong… In general, with a stranger or with someone you do not know, well it's a problem. [Girl, 16 years old]

The interviewees seem to have internalized the idea that romantic love (Rose 1989, 1999) and the relationship in general is the only space where sexting is allowed. Causal sexual behaviour is frowned upon and sometimes labelled as perverse or abnormal. In this way the couple becomes the only place where having sex or sexting is allowed and can be permissibly connected to physical pleasure. It seems that sexting is sometimes considered more intimate than sex ('with a stranger or with someone you do not know, well it's a problem'). This could show, as the conclusion will summarize, that sexting is not a surrogate for sex but is a practice that engrafts itself in the broader range of sexual activity

connected to intercourse. What I mean is that the interviewees are probably speaking about intimacy. If there is a connection before sexting, it is permissible because there is a sort of anchorage to a previous sexual experience with that person, otherwise it is perceived as cold and lacking in significance.

The idea of the 'respectable woman' discussed earlier, and the concept of the couple as a territory which permits sexting, could also be useful for framing the words of other interviewees. Some male participants draw a line between intimate content shared by two partners within a relationship—and therefore out of bounds of the male gaze of peers—and sexting content offered by 'girls who are like that ….' and 'do it with everyone'.

> I don't think that just about anyone can look at my girlfriend's photos. She is mine! [Interviewer: do you keep photos of other girls on your smartphone?] Yes, but that's different. I had them before getting involved with my girlfriend [laughter]. These photos come from girls who are like that… they do it with everyone. My friends can look at these photos, but not my girlfriend's! [Boy, 17 years old]

The prescription of stereotypical masculinity—'she is mine', therefore not material for prying eyes emerges here, whereas girls of 'questionable' morals—girls who 'do it with everyone'—are legitimate prey for public consumption. It appears that some moralistic attitudes and conceptions of 'proper' femininity are already inscribed within young boys who penalize teenage girls seen to be 'too' sexually assertive—and therefore deemed worthy of defamation.

So, there is a reiteration of the stereotype of the 'good girl', entitled to privacy protection because she is in a relationship, as opposed to 'naughty girls' who do it with everyone, and therefore 'deserve' what's coming to them.

Sexting, Sounding Boards and Risks

According to the majority of interviewees, sexting is seen as a complementary sexual practice but not a substitute for sexual intercourse. This practice is not a surrogate for sex, but something that can add to a relationship on an erotic level.

> You have sex and you have sex through your smartphone, with photos, videos, and so on. Not one thing or the other. There is the same person on the other side, isn't there? Either you kiss her, or you can say to her that you want to do it… I think it is reasonable, isn't it? [Boy, 16 years old]

> Usually it's a way to stay together. It happens that you can't meet for a long time or it happens that you are chatting, and that the situation goes to… you know… [laughter]. [Girl, 16 years old]

Sometimes sexting becomes a sounding board for eroticism and flirting. But it is not only a means for pleasure, it is also a way to get to know one's partner, to be introduced to sexuality. In these cases, sexting becomes a step that precedes sexual intercourse. A sort of sounding board not only for eroticism and pleasure but also for the modality of interaction with the other. The dance of courtship and sex has been equipped with a sort of antechamber where some moves can be tested, a room where errors may be more easily managed.

> I remember doing it differently with my girlfriend when she was not my girlfriend yet. I mean, if we sext now, it' s different compared to that earlier time. It happened that we flirted for a short period, without having sex. It was a way to get to know each other better. What we liked, how we were, our… desires. Then after a while, we had sex. [Boy, 18 years old]

In some cases, this antechamber can be used as a substitute for sexual intercourse if you are not ready for it. Sexting therefore becomes a practice that can be used as a learning curve for sex.

> Me and the boyfriend I had some time ago sexted sometimes. We never had sex in the end. But it was like having [sex], but with more calm… I was not ready to have sex… maybe he wasn't either [laughter]. We loved each other, and we exchanged some photos. It was my first time. [Girl, 18 years old]

In contrast to the panic discourse, this interviewee portrays sexting as a sexual practice that does not substitute physical sexual intercourse but places itself side by side with other practices. Sometimes consensual sexting is a useful approach to sex with a new person, a step by step process that allows teens to develop knowledge that helps partners get to know each other and articulate what they want before they engage in

physical intercourse. As the conclusion will confirm, it is clear that if we perceive sexting as a loss of the innocence of youth we ignore the sexual agency of young people (Angelides 2013), as these quotations show, the discourse is more complicated and cannot be solved merely by teaching teens about making safe choices (Ringrose and Barajas 2011).

In line with other studies (Albury and Crawford 2012; Hasinoff and Shepherd 2014), it emerges that adolescents are conscious of the perceived risks of sexting and express relative clarity and consensus on the matter; most report that it is unacceptable for someone to forward an intimate sexual image that was intended to be private to a third party. The risks described seem to be different in relation to gender. For girls, if someone were to share their photo with a third person their reputation could be seriously damaged; for boys that represents a minor risk. For everybody, one of the biggest preoccupations is that a parent might receive that content.

> The risk exists. If someone sends your photo to others, you are… dead… You can't be seen around […] because everyone could treat you as a slut. You might have done it with a person that you loved and he, for revenge or some other reason, sends it to someone, and then you are screwed. You can't leave this problem behind you. Maybe by moving to another city. With boys, it's different… people might think that he is cool. [Girl, 17 years old]

As Lippman and Campbell (2014) emphasize, girls suffer more from defamation than boys and this is an important issue that needs to be addressed because, despite the postfeminist rhetoric about sexual freedom and agency, this is a problem that denies the sexual citizenship and freedom of girls. It is highly relevant that none of the boys I interviewed showed concern about the idea that someone else could share their intimate photo and, on contrary, that it was the most worrying risk for girls.

To cope with reputation management, boys and girls manipulate their images to make it difficult for other to make out who the protagonist of a certain content truly is (for example, they avoid putting their face in the photo; or they use specific platforms such as Telegram and Snapchat where content is automatically deleted after a preset time). 'This contradicts the image of youths as passive consumers and victims found in the deviance discourse spread via media' (Korkmazer et al. 2019, 58).

Conclusions

Digital media do not only produce benefits, they may lead to people harming one another: sharing sexual images without consent, for example, constitutes a serious violation of privacy that can also become a form of harassment and may traumatize those involved. However, in order to focus properly on issues such as the non-consensual distribution of private images, humiliation, and the violation of privacy, we need to recognize teen agency without condemning sexting per se. 'In most cases, teens and adults sext for simple and obvious reasons: because they enjoy it and because they trust the recipients of their images' (Hasinoff 2012, 4), and there is clearly a large proportion of teenagers who sext consensually. Criminalizing and labelling sexting as 'child pornography' in the public discourse, only further feeds the moral panic surrounding it.

The responses of adults, provided through media literacy, education, mass media, etc., is to tell young people how to behave online; reminding them, for example, that is important to preserve one's reputation. Such discourses, frequently in the name of teen (or child) protection, tend to produce moral panic. This moralistic approach to teenage sexuality is far from effective (Attwood and Smith 2011), and abstinence-only training has been shown to be equally counterproductive (Fine and McClelland 2006).

However, going through the daily life of teens in their own words allows us to consider sexting from a different perspective to that represented by moral panic approaches. As we have seen, the practice is more complex than popular media or adults in general tend to present it. Sexting is a practice strictly connected to bodies and gender representation, desire, gender roles, cultural and subcultural scripts, the definition of 'good' and 'bad' sexuality, interaction, digital culture, and more. In other words, sexting is a more complex inter-social practice than popular anxieties and panic makes it out to be. It is, therefore, a practice which deserves analysis able to eschew the idea that there is a strong cause-effect relationship between media use and everyday life, where media represent the cause of deviant behaviour or negative social change.

Observing sexting without adopting the myopic view of moral panic is crucial to better understanding teenage sexual cultures and deconstructing, for example, the idea of sexualization (Tsaliki 2016a) and the notion that young people are, by definition, sexually freer than the past generation (De Ridder 2017). What the interviews showed is that

the interviewees relied on traditional moral values to frame sexting as acceptable if carried out in a romantic relationship.

By focusing on discourses about the authentic self, online identity and reputation management, adults, and society in general, have introduced a regime of control (De Ridder 2017) that has a fundamental failing: it ignores the sexual agency of teens (Angelides 2013) and the issues of sexuality and ethics in digital media (Hasinoff 2017). Eschewing moral panic and discourses which are quick to label sexual behaviour as deviant, and recognizing sexual agency, as well as sexuality and ethics in digital media, could help young people obtain (both formally and personally) the intimate citizenship (Plummer 2003) that they need to live in contemporary society. This might help them to explore their sexualities in a word where 'social media logic could, at moments, fit rather uneasily with the messy and contradictory ways intimate social lives are lived (Plummer, 2001)' (De Ridder 2017). This also means we must start to engage with the digital media lives of teens, beginning from their experiences, behaviour, and understanding of these practices. From this perspective we might better understand how society may approach digital media that, as this paper has stressed, are intimately connected to the sexuality and sexual lives of young people and adults more effectively and less censoriously.

Notes

1. According Barbagli et al. (2010) there is strong differentiation in Italy between the sexual behaviour of men and women with a crystallization of the double standard. Female sexuality is already seen as relegated to relationships and romantic love. Male sexuality is seen as more suited to sexual experimentation outside of affective bounds. The idea of a 'respectable woman' is also strong amongst young people (18–23 y.o.). One third of young adults say that if a woman displays an open interest in sex, she endangers her reputation.
2. This is especially true if we consider that young teenagers in Italy live with their parents and it is difficult for them to find places where they can be alone.
3. 'Traditional sexual intercourse' is here understood as the sexual behaviour between two people that constitutes touching, penetrating, stimulating, etc. without the mediation of a smartphone.
4. The word 'relationship' is here used to mean two teens who hang out together or are in a couple. In other words, not an occasional sexual intercourse.

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PART IV

Anxious Parenting: Parental Concerns about Children's Media Uses

CHAPTER 14

Is It Me, or Is It You? Exploring Contemporary Parental Worries in Norway

Elisabeth Staksrud and Kjartan Ólafsson

Introduction

Worry can be defined and seen as something arising from cognitive processes of anxiety, that serve to maintaining high levels of vigilance towards personal danger (Mathews 1990). When worry becomes overwhelming it can result in anxiety, public outcries and even panic and calls for action. This can happen even if the indentified potential danger might not represent an objective risk or contain a likelihood of harm. Furthermore, substantial worry among individuals (such as parents), can result in group level processes, where the group reinforces and self-replicates the worry between its members.

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Within the social sciences, such as media studies, this is a recognised phenomenon. Moral and in particular *media* panics have been of interest to researchers. Originally the term, as (likely) coined by Marshall McLuhan, linked directly to a concern over new media technology:

> Our Western values, built on the written word, have already been considerably affected by the electric media of telephone, radio, and TV. Perhaps that is the reason why many highly literate people in our time find it difficult to examine this question without getting into a moral panic. (McLuhan 1964, 85)

While the term "moral panic" in empirical studies has been used broadly on different types of public outcry, such as day-care abuse (De Young 2004), AIDS (Weeks 2006), and obese children (Stephenson and Banet-Weiser 2007), one most often finds these panics linked to (mass) media, either as a forceful instigator of the panic, as a player fuelling the panic, and/or as cause of the panic itself. Often it includes a strong *worry* for the welfare and development of children and youth.

A special form of moral panic is the *media panic*, a panic over how media in general and new media in particular, can threaten the established moral way of life. Interestingly, these panics are more often than not instigated by (traditional) already established and not so new media. As defined by Drotner (1999, 596):

> In some cases, debate of a new medium brings about - indeed changes into - heated, emotional reactions: in that case we have to do with what may be defined as a media panic. It may be considered a specification of the wider concept of moral panic, and it has some basic characteristics: the media is both instigator and purveyor of the discussion; the discussion is highly emotionally charged and morally polarised (the medium is either "good" or "bad") with the negative pole being the most visible in most cases; the discussion is an adult discussion that primarily focuses on children and young people; the proponents often have professional stakes in the subject under discussion as teachers, librarians, cultural critics or academic scholars; the discussion, like a classic narrative, has three phases: a beginning often catapulted by a single case, a peak involving some kind of public or professional intervention, and an end (or fading-out phase) denoting a seeming resolution to the perceived problems in question.

Because of its swift narrative and visibility, moral panics can be found and documented, yet the true and pure (in theoretical terms) panics are

notoriously challenging for researchers to find and study. A moral panic is by nature volatile, it erupts suddenly, and then fades away (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2006). Thus, they are typically studied retrospectively, often addressing historical concerns rather than contemporary ones. However, we argue, that understanding the types and levels of media-related worry among the public in general, and parents in particular, might aid an understanding of probable topics of future media panics and discourses of anxiety.

Research Questions

While the process of worry and its function has been extensively researched in psychology (see for instance Freeston et al. 1994; Koning et al. 2013; Mathews 1990; Meyer et al. 1990), we are in this paper not linking it to wider psychological issues of anxiety and feelings of control. Instead, our aim is to explore how various worries are distributed among parents, and if there are particular demographics and characteristics that are associated with these worries. This is done by an original analysis of empirical data from a representative sample of Norwegian parents and their children (9 year olds), collected in 2018. Our goal is to give insights into the potential for wider societal concerns and subsequent media panics and media regulations and restrictions. Our approach rests on the understanding that when you worry, you can be anxious and troubled about both actual, potential, and even very unlikely situations and problems. The welfare of their children today and in the future is something of concern for most parents. Thus, parents worry. And some parents worry a lot. In this paper we investigate what parent's today worry about *a lot*, asking the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1. What, if anything, do todays parents worry about *a lot*?
RQ2. What is the number one media-related worry among parents?

Previous research on adolescent drinking has shown how the level of parental worries is linked to how parents estimate the risk if their child engaging in risk behaviour, as well as their belief in whether or not they will be able to influence their child's risk behaviour (Koning et al. 2013, 1079). In other words, both parent- and child-related factors could potentially explain why worry occurs.

However, little is known about which factors influence or predict technology- and media-related worry in parents. Is it primarily caused by

individual characteristics of the parents who worry, pointing to perhaps a more generalised worry? It is therefore interesting to also ask:

RQ3. Is great parental worry linked to parents' characteristics?

Finally, it is possible that parental worry is something that is linked perhaps not to a potential perceived threat, but more directly to the actual media use of the child? In other words that it is more the characteristics and experiences of the child, rather than the characteristics associated with the parent, that drives the worry.

Here we hypothesise that both the age and the gender of the child might be a factor influencing parental worry, predicting that parents with younger children will be more worried than parents with older children. Also, to which degree the child uses the Internet might be a factor. For instance, most children use a mobile phone, not only for peer-to-peer communication, but also for Internet activities. Previous analyses from the same dataset has shown how most Norwegian children use the Internet every day, and how the mobile phone is by far the number one device for daily use of the Internet among 9–17-year-old Norwegian children (Staksrud and Ólafsson 2019). 85% of all (and 98% of 15–17 year olds) access the Internet via the mobile phone every day, compared to 46% using any type of computer,[1] and 48% using the TV (see Table 14.1).

The mobile phone allows a more private and personal media use than other devices, something that might represent less control and overview

Table 14.1 Daily use of different units to access the Internet, by gender and age in percentage

	Mobile phone	*Stationary computer or portable PC*	*Tablet*	*TV*	*Game console*	*A toy connected to the Internet*	*Something you wear (wearable technology)*	*Other equipment*
Boys	82	51	32	52	45	3	12	15
Girls	89	42	31	43	6	0	9	4
9–10 years	61	17	49	57	35	6	10	11
11–12 years	80	26	38	51	37	1	6	18
13–14 years	92	46	34	44	27	1	10	8
15–17 years	98	75	17	43	18	1	15	7
All	85	46	32	48	28	2	11	10

Source Authors

for the child's Internet engagement for the parent. We also hypothesise that if a child has had previous negative experiences online, and the parents know of this experience, they might be more worried than if the child has not reported negative experiences to the parent. Finally, we therefore ask:

RQ4. Is great parental worry linked to child-related characteristics?

The Cultural Context of Our Case

Norwegian parents represent a particularly interesting case to investigate worry, as the national media and children culture holds some paradoxical qualities.

On the one hand, media in general, and media access and content in particular, have been tenaciously regulated "in the interest of children". Norway is, as an illustrating example, one of the few countries in the world where advertising targeted at children under the age of 12 is illegal ("Act relating to the control of marketing and contract terms and conditions, etc.," 2009, Chapter 4). Special provisions have been made throughout history in order to ensure continued control over children's interaction with traditional media, typically fuelled by public concern. Some of these could be labelled as media panics.

Media services and technologies, including content, are seen as *cultural* and *moral* tools, rather than for instance strictly technical distribution services. One example of this is how movie theatres in Norway, from 1913 under strict legislation became managed by local municipalities. As a result, all privately owned cinemas disappeared within 15 years. This was understood as an important tool for attaining political goals related to cultural politics, making it a unique and unparalleled system internationally (Asbjørnsen and Solum 1999). Some of the key rationale behind the localised public control over cinemas was the question of quality and diversity, ensuring the distribution of non-commercial films *with higher moral standards* than Hollywood movies were assumed to have (Asbjørnsen and Solum 1999, 281). Thus, legal provisions were put in place to give local municipalities the authority to ensure that cinemas showed the right type of balanced, preferably character-building, content, and that children would not be allowed to attend inappropriate screenings. In addition, the state would, from 1913, pre-censor all films and provide age restrictions

to be followed as stipulated by law (Bruus Pedersen Bruus 1976; Det Kongelige Kulturdepartement 2009–2010; Kulturdepartementet 2015; "Lov om film og videogram" 1987; Solum 2013).

Similarly, the Norwegian Broadcasting Service (NRK), is fully state owned and was for decades the only television and radio broadcaster allowed to broadcast within Norway. Licences to a commercial national TV channel were granted as late as in the 1990s, followed by the first nationwide commercial radio channel in 1993. And, in Norway, the first country outside of the US to connect to the Internet (ARPAnet, in 1973) (Hannemyr 2005, 29), colour television was not officially accepted as a permanent solution until 2002. Between 1972 and 2002, colours on TV programmes formally existed on a trial basis only. The forceful reluctance by the Norwegian parliament to accept the broadcasting of colours was originally due to a public fear dating back to the 1960s, of how life-like moving pictures might influence children. As summed up in Parliament (somewhat ironically) by the later-to-become head of the Norwegian Broadcasting Company, Einar Førde: "Sin has come to earth, but we do not want it in colour!" Colours were perceived as problematic, having a more seductive allure as opposed to a black-and-white outlook on the world (Staksrud 2013; Wiig 2008). Colours also represented what was in puritan Norway considered an unnecessary luxury. As a result, Norway became the very last country in Europe broadcasting in colour.

Consequently, as a Norwegian parent prior to the1960s (or even 1970s), you could rely on the welfare state to address and solve potential problems relating to children, media and harm. If your child wanted to go to the cinema, you could rest assured that your child's age right to attend would be verified by the user. Age classification was absolute and no kind of parental intervention could circumvent it. Radio and TV were offered by the state-owned national broadcasting company (NRK), financed by a license fee rather than commercials. Parents could rely on the NRK to offer age-appropriate, educational content 30 minutes a day, ending by 18:30 in order to comply with the culturally negotiated appropriate bedtime for children.

On the other hand, historically, children's status in Norway is one that affords *independence* and *participatory rights*. Norway was the first country in the world, in 1981, to legally implement a national ombudsman for children. Children's participatory rights are generally very

strong and ensured by law, in line with the strong standing of freedom of expression and information. Compared to other countries, Norway is habitually ranked as one of the top three countries in the world when it comes to freedoms of information, expression, and of the press, and is ranked no. 1 on the world press freedom index (Reporters Without Borders 2019). As for the children themselves, starting in the '70s, they became some of the most wired-up, techno-savvy, and independent children in the world (Hasebrink et al. 2011; Livingstone et al. 2011; Staksrud and Ólafsson 2019). Today, digital skills are defined as key competences in schools, on par with writing and reading (Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 2003–2004), and most children have personal devices connecting them to other individuals, groups and the wider world, outside of the parental or adult gaze. Norwegian children are raised with a strong focus on cultivating independence, and an understanding of children's individual rights as autonomous and different from their parents. As a result, children's rights are embedded within Norwegian society, legal frameworks, in schools and in children themselves.

The strength of the cultivation of individual independence can be illustrated through the results of the World Value Survey (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; World Values Survey 2005–2009). Looking at independence as a value for child-rearing, one observes how there are very few countries in the world where a majority of the population sees it as an important value (see Fig. 14.1), but those who do include Norway, and the other Nordic countries. For instance, comparing the percentage of the general population in European countries that consider it to be especially important that a child learns *independence* at home,[2] the Nordic countries all score highly on the independence scale (NO 85% of the population, SE 65, IS 81, DK 79 and FI 51%).[3] Interestingly there are similarly few who think that cultivating *obedience* in children is an important child-rearing value (NO 21. SE 16, IS 13, DK 14, and FI 20%) (World Values Survey 2005–2009).

In sum, Norwegian parents are in a position of wanting and having techno-savvy, highly wired up independent children, while having to face a new media situation where media use and access is more personalised, individual and not regulated by the welfare state as in previous years. In this situation of less control, we ask what parents today are worried about.

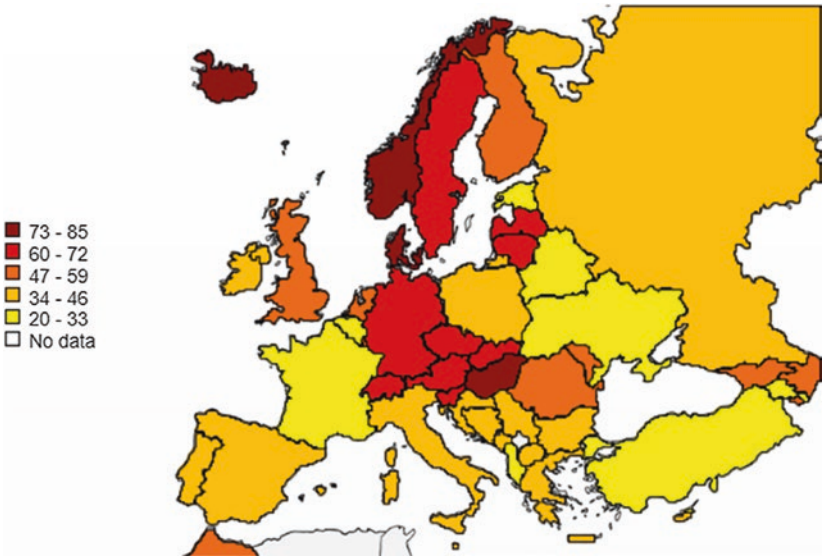


Fig. 14.1 Percentage of people that consider it to be especially important that a child learns independence at home (figure generated from WVS wave 2008, Europe)

Data and Methods

The data was collected between June and October 2018, from a representative sample of 1001 children between 9 and 17 years old, who had used the Internet at least once in the past three months, and one of their parents. The data collection was part of the European EU Kids Online 2018 study. In Norway, the data collection was financed by the Ministry of Justice and Reform through a special government grant. During the whole process of data collection, the parties adhered to established standards of ethics (The Norwegian National Committees for Research Ethics 2016) as well as relevant legal provisions on the handling of personal information. All the respondent recruitment was done using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), and all the parents received written information about the survey via E-mail.

The sampling frame was stratified by the economic statistics and number of 9–17 year olds in municipalities. In addition, the nationwide distribution of parents' sex and education was taken into consideration during field work.

The data was collected by Ipsos, and interviewers from the company visited the recruited respondents at home, while the children and the parents filled out the survey using tablets. Both children and parents were promised full anonymity, and were not in the same room when data collection occurred. Parents could not read the answers the children had given, and all interviewers were instructed to not look at the answers given by the children in the survey. For more detailed information about the recruitment, sampling and weights, please refer to the project's technical report (Ipsos 2019).

Measures

Dependent Variable

While the focus of this study is on a subset of measures relating to parent worries over Internet use, to put Internet-related worries into perspective the parents were also asked about if they worried about things not directly related to Internet use. The question was phrased in this way: "Thinking about your child, which of these things, if any, do you worry about a lot", and the parent was then asked to say yes or no to a total of 26 items. The risks chosen were a combination of *traditional risks* associated with children and youth (such as traffic accidents, health risks, and the parent worrying about not having sufficient money to care for their child), *risks often associated with youth and deviant behaviour* (such as drinking alcohol, having sex, engage in criminal activities) and *Internet related risks* (such as digital bullying, exposure to pornography and using media technology too much). By providing the respondents with a rather extensive list of potential worries we were able to have the parents assess their worry in relation to other types of worries. And, importantly, by asking the same group of people about the same types of risk we can see what risks, if any, are of great concern to the majority of the population, and what risks are a great concern for the few. Such knowledge can aid our understanding of if, and in which groups of parents, moral and media panics may erupt.

For all of the items the parents were also given the option of saying "don't know" or "prefer not to say" but these options were chosen by only a fraction of the respondents indicating that overall the parents did not find it problematic to answer the questions.

It should be noted that the questionnaire used was in Norwegian, using the word "bekymret". While we in this paper refer to this as "worry", the Norwegian word *bekymret* entomologically translates and incorporates not only the English word "worry", but also "concerned" and "anxious", and to some extent also "apprehensive" and "uneasy".

Independent Variables

In order to answer research questions RQ3 and RQ4, two sets of variables were created to measure parent and child characteristics, respectively.

Parent-related variables (RQ3) included gender (49% female) and age (mean 45.4 years, SD 5.7 years, range 29–67). Parent's education (secondary education or less = 28%, lower tertiary = 40%, higher tertiary = 32%). Family income as estimated by the parent and coded into three categories (Low = 44%, Medium = 39%, High = 17%). Frequency of using the Internet in general (at least every week = 1%, daily or almost daily = 7%, several times each day = 65% combined as "less frequent use" = 73%, almost all the time = 27% and labelled as "more frequent use". Frequency of using smartphones to access the Internet (never = 1%, almost never = 1%, at least monthly = 2%, weekly = 1% daily or almost daily = 7%, combined as "infrequent use" = 12%, several times each day = 64%, almost all of the time = 24%). Attitudes towards time spent online as measured by the question "Internet takes up too much time" (strongly disagree = 11%, somewhat disagree = 12%, somewhat agree = 48%, strongly agree = 29%). Finally, parent confidence in using the Internet as measured by the question "I know lots of things about using the Internet" (not true for me = 4%, a bit true for me = 23%, fairly true for me = 38%, very true for me = 36%).

Child-related variables (RQ4) included gender (47% girls) and age (mean 13.2 years, SD 2.7 years, range 9–17). Frequency of smartphone use to access the Internet, the number one access point for Internet engagement by Norwegian children, was also looked at (never = 2%, almost never = 4%, at least monthly = 2%, weekly = 6% combined as "infrequent use" = 14%, daily or almost daily = 12%, several times each day = 46%, almost all of the time = 28%). The quality of communication

within the family as measured by the question "how easy or difficult is it for you to discuss things that bother or upset you with your parents" (very easy = 42%, rather easy = 43%, rather difficult = 11%, very difficult = 4%). Finally, the parent's answers to whether the child had experienced anything negative online in the past year (yes = 20%, no = 67%, don't know = 13%).

Methods

A logistic regression analysis was used to test the effects of child- and parent-related variables on the likelihood of parents saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much. For parent-related variables in the model, gender is coded as female = 1 and male = 0. The age of the parent is used as a continuous variable and centred on the median age of respondents = 45 years. For education the parents are split into two groups, those with three years education at a university level or more = 1 and those with less education = 0. Household income is dummy-coded with those in the most frequently selected middle category (annual yearly income of NOK 1—1.5 million before taxes) used as a reference category. Parents are split into two groups in terms of the overall frequency of using the Internet is with "more frequent users" = 1 (those saying that they use the Internet "all the time") and "less frequent users" = 0. Frequency of using smartphones to access the Internet is dummy-coded with the most frequent response category (several times each day) as the reference category. Attitudes towards time spent online were dummy-coded with those who strongly disagree that Internet takes up too much time selected as the reference category. Parent confidence in using the Internet was also dummy-coded with those who strongly disagree that they know lots about using the Internet selected as the reference category.

For child-related variables in the model gender of child is coded as girls = 1 and boys = 0. The age of child is used as a continuous variable and centred on the median age of child = 13 years. Frequency of using a smartphone to access the Internet is dummy-coded with the most frequent response category (several times each day) as the reference category. The question on how easy or difficult the children find it to talk to their parents about things which bother or upset them is dummy-coded with those who find it rather or very difficult to do so as the reference category. Child having had negative online experiences is coded as yes = 1 and no = 0.

Results

In response to our first research question, what (if anything) parents worry about a lot, Table 14.2 shows the percentage of parents saying that they worry a lot for each of the 26 items by age and by gender of the child that answered the child questionnaire. The table is sorted in descending order by the overall percentage of parent selecting each item. The number one item parents worry, answered by 61% of all parents, is their child receiving an injury on the roads. This is followed by parents saying that they worry a lot about their child experiencing something that makes them feel bad about themselves (57% of all and 68% of parents of younger girls). The most mentioned media-related worry (RQ2) is their child using the mobile phone too much. 56% of all parents say they worry about this *a lot*. Using a confidence level of $\alpha = 0.05$ the margin of error for the results is around $\pm 3\%$ leaving the top three worries in roughly the same category.

As stated in the introduction, little is known about which factors influence or predict media- and technology-related worry in parents. We therefore wanted to check if and how the number one media-related worry, in this case the worry of their child using the mobile phone too much, is related to parent characteristics, such as demographic, own use, general attitudes towards the Internet and confidence in one's own Internet skills and abilities.

Table 14.3 shows the percentage of parents who say that they worry *a lot* about their child using the mobile phone too much by how they respond to various parent-related variables. For each of the bivariate correlations a chi-square test is used to test for statistical significance. Looking separately at each of the parent-related variables in this way indicates that gender of parent, whether parents are frequent users of the Internet or not and their confidence in using the Internet does not seem to have any real influence on the likelihood of them saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much. Age of parents has some effect with younger parents appearing as more worried than the older parents. More educated parents also appear to be more worried than those with shorter formal education and parents with higher income are more worried than parents with lower income. Parents who are more frequent users of smartphones are more worried than those who use smartphones less often and parents who in general think that Internet takes up too much time are more likely to be worried about their child using the mobile phone too much.

Table 14.2 Parent worries by age and gender of child

% parents who say they worry a lot about the following…	*9–12 year olds*		*13–17 year olds*		
	Boys	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*All*
Your child receiving an injury on the roads	63	66	61	57	61
Your child experiencing something that makes him/her feel bad about themselves	59	68	46	58	57
Your child using the mobile phone too much	53	57	53	61	56
Your child using the Internet too much	56	52	49	53	52
A stranger contacting your child on the Internet	54	65	42	48	51
Your child playing computer games too much	76	36	69	21	51
Other children treating your child in a hurtful or nasty way	54	56	41	45	48
How your child is doing at school	45	37	45	36	41
Your child being contacted by a stranger for sexual purposes	45	59	23	40	40
Your child becoming a victim of crime	35	41	37	39	38
Your child being exposed to pornography	40	54	25	32	36
Your child's health	38	37	33	34	35
Your child being damaging their reputation either now or in the future	33	43	34	31	35
Your child revealing personal information online	36	42	33	30	34
Your child being exposed to hateful or racist messages or activities	35	49	27	31	34
Your child seeing inappropriate material on the Internet	44	47	29	21	34
Your child being asked to send sexual images of themselves to someone	35	50	18	35	33
Your child treating other children in a hurtful or nasty way	38	38	28	19	30
Your child becoming socially isolated because of their technology use	33	20	33	18	26
Your child being seeing content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves	26	25	17	18	21
Your child learning to hack or being drawn into cybercrime	23	12	14	6	14
Having enough money to care for your child	12	16	12	12	13
Your child getting into trouble with the police	13	8	16	10	12
Your child's sexual activities	8	10	10	13	10

(continued)

Table 14.2 (continued)

% parents who say they worry a lot about the following…	*9–12 year olds*		*13–17 year olds*		
	Boys	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*All*
Your child being recruited by extremist or fundamentalist groups	9	11	6	9	9
Your child drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs	7	4	12	7	8

Source Authors

Table 14.4 shows a binary logistic regression model where the effect of all parent-related factors on the likelihood of parents saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much are tested simultaneously. The overall model is statistically significant and accounts for somewhere around 5–7% of the overall variability in the dependent variable. The multivariate analysis confirms what could be seen in Table 14.2, namely that it *is parents' overall attitudes towards the Internet being too time consuming that most strongly predicts them being worried about using the mobile phone too much*. This might be seen as a rather predictable result but what is perhaps more interesting than the coefficients which turn out to be statistically significant are those who are *not*, such as gender.

We have hypothesised that parental worry can be linked to actual experiences or assessments. So, worrying about your child using the mobile phone too much could be linked to experience with and knowledge of the characteristics of your child and if they have had previous negative experiences with online engagements. We therefore also wanted to check what, if any, child-related characteristics were associated with parental worry (RQ4).

Table 14.5 shows the percentage of parents who say that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much by how they respond to various child-related variables. For each of the bivariate correlations a chi-square test is used to indicate statistical significance. Looking separately at each of the parent-related variables in this way indicates that neither the gender nor the age of the child seems to have any real influence on the likelihood of parents saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much. As is perhaps to

Table 14.3 Bivariate effects of parent-related variables

% who say they worry a lot by…	
Gender ($p=.893$)	
Male	56
Female	56
Age ($p=.001$)	
40 years and younger	68
41–50 years	54
51 years and older	51
Parent education ($p=.027$)	
Primary	42
Secondary	55
Lower tertiary	61
Higher tertiary	58
Household income ($p=.027$)	
Low	50
Medium	58
High	61
Frequency of using the Internet ($p=.673$)	
Do not say that they use the Internet 'all the time'	56
Say they use the Internet 'almost all the time'	57
Frequency of using a smartphone to go online ($p<.001$)	
Daily or less often	40
Several times each day	60
Almost all the time	54
The Internet is too time consuming ($p<.001$)	
Strongly disagree	49
Somewhat disagree	37
Somewhat agree	56
Strongly agree	68
I know lots of things about using the Internet ($p=.829$)	
Strongly disagree	53
Somewhat disagree	54
Somewhat agree	57
Strongly agree	56

Source Authors

be expected, the frequency of the child using a smartphone to access the Internet has a strong correlation with parent worries about their child using the mobile phone too much. As does the quality of communication within the family as seen from the side of the child. *So if children find it difficult to talk to their parents about things which bother or upset*

Table 14.4 Binary logistic regression model for the effect of parent-related factors on the likelihood of parents saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much

	Exp(B)	*Sig.*
Women vs men	1.01	0.96
Age of parent (centred on 45 years)	0.99	0.56
Parent with longer education vs shorter education	1.14	0.43
Lower income families vs middle income	0.85	0.32
Higher income families vs middle income	1.23	0.27
More frequent use of the Internet vs less frequent use	0.93	0.73
Somewhat disagree that the Internet is too time consuming vs strongly disagree	0.60	0.08
Somewhat agree that the Internet is too time consuming vs strongly disagree	1.44	0.13
Strongly agree that the Internet is too time consuming vs strongly disagree	2.17	0.00
Parent uses smartphone infrequently to access the Internet vs several times each day	0.58	0.03
Parent uses smartphone almost all of the time to access the Internet vs several times each day	0.76	0.18
Parent somewhat disagrees knowing lots about using the Internet vs strongly disagree	0.92	0.85
Parent somewhat agrees knowing lots about using the Internet vs strongly disagree	0.87	0.76
Parent strongly agrees knowing lots about using the Internet vs strongly disagree	0.79	0.59
Constant	1.27	0.64
χ^2	47.69	
df	14	
p	<0.001	
−2 Log likelihood	1179	
Cox & Snell R^2	0.05	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.07	

Source Authors

them, the parents are much more likely to say they are worried about their child using the mobile phone too much. Finally, if parents say that their child has had negative online experiences then they are more likely to worry about their child using the mobile phone too much.

Table 14.6 shows a binary logistic regression model where the effect of all child-related factors on the likelihood of parents saying that they

Table 14.5 Bivariate effects of child-related variables

% who say they worry a lot by…	
Gender of child ($p = .036$)	
Boys	53
Girls	60
Age of child ($p = .428$)	
9–10 year olds	51
11–12 year olds	59
13–14 year olds	59
15–17 year olds	56
Frequency of child using smartphones ($p < .001$)	
Weekly or less	33
Daily	55
Several times each day	58
All the time	65
How easy or difficult to talk to parents about things which bother or upset you ($p < .001$)	
Very easy	49
Rather easy	58
Rather or very difficult	74
Child has had negative online experiences in past year ($p < .001$)	
No	51
Yes	69

Source Authors

worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much are tested simultaneously. The overall model is statistically significant and accounts for somewhere around 11–14% of the overall variability in the dependent variable. The multivariate analysis shows that overall the child-related variables correlate more strongly with parent worries over smartphone use than the adult-related variables did. It also confirms the effect observed in Table 14.4 of the quality of parent–child interaction. Thus, if a child says that he or she finds it very easy to talk to their parents about things that bother or upset them then the parents are 62% less likely to say that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much.

As was to be expected, there is a clear correlation between actual behaviour of the child in terms of frequency of using a mobile phone to access the Internet and parents worrying about their child using the mobile phone too much. The logistic regression model also reveals an

Table 14.6 Binary logistic regression model for the effect of child-related factors on the likelihood of parents saying that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much

	Exp(B)	*Sig.*
Girls vs boys	1.03	0.83
Age of child (centred on 13 years)	0.96	0.34
Child uses smartphone infrequently to access the Internet vs several times each day	0.20	0.00
Child uses smartphone at least daily to access the Internet vs several times each day	0.56	0.03
Child uses smartphone almost all of the time to access the Internet vs several times each day	1.39	0.11
Child finds it very easy to talk to their parents about things which bother or upset them vs not easy	0.38	0.00
Child finds it rather easy to talk to their parents about things which bother or upset them vs not easy	0.55	0.02
Child has had negative online experiences vs not	1.67	0.01
Infrequent smartphone use by age	0.96	0.73
Daily smartphone use by age	0.70	0.01
Use of smartphones all of the time by age	1.12	0.16
Constant	2.82	0.00
χ^2	96.23	
df	11	
p	<0.001	
−2 Log likelihood	1076	
Cox & Snell R^2	0.11	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.14	

Source Author

interaction effect between the age of the child and the extent to which frequency of using a mobile phone to access the Internet has an impact on parental worries. This indicates that parents adjust their ideas about how their children should use digital media as the child grows older. This interaction effect between the age of the child and the extent to which frequency of using a mobile phone to access the Internet is demonstrated in Fig. 14.1 which shows the predicted probability of parents saying that that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much as the age of the child varies from 9 to 17 years and by how frequently the child uses a mobile phone to access the Internet. The predictions are set for girls who find it rather easy to talk to their parents about things

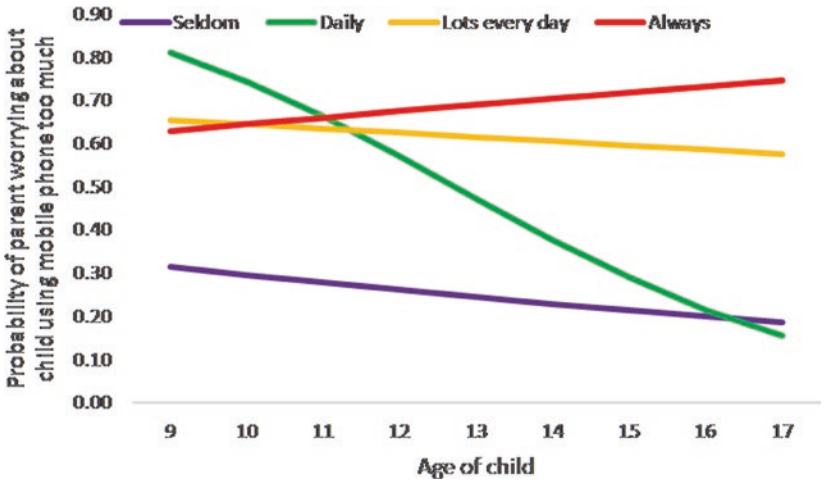


Fig. 14.2 Predicted probability of parents saying that that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much by age of child and how frequently the child uses a mobile phone to access the Internet (*Source* Authors)

which bother or upset them and who have not had negative online experiences in the past year (Fig. 14.2).

For younger children, only parents of children who say that they use the Internet infrequently (less than daily) are not particularly likely to say that they worry a lot about their child using the mobile phone too much. As the children grow older the parents seem to gradually accept that using mobile phones daily to access the Internet, but parents of children who use a mobile phone more frequently (lots every day or all the time) are still very likely to say that they worry a lot.

Conclusion

Our study has shown how Norwegian parents worry a lot, and using the mobile phone "too much", is one of their greatest concerns when thinking about their child. While it is a concern regularly touted in the media and among parents, it does not carry with it an unequivocal understanding of what the *potential harm* is. It also seems, as this study has demonstrated, that both parent and child characteristics matter. Yet, our analysis shows that in sum, the characteristics and experiences of the child as

perceived by the parent, correlate more strongly with parent worries over smartphone use than the adult-related variables did.

As was to be expected we found a clear correlation between time spent on the mobile phone to access the Internet by the child, and parents worrying about their child using the mobile phone too much. We also see how parents adjust their ideas about how their children should use digital media as the child grows older.

A limitation of this study is that when assessing worry among parents, they were given a list of pre-defined topics and concerns. Thus, it is possible that there are other types of risks that were not listed in our survey that are even higher than being hurt in traffic (a great worry for 61% of Norwegian parents) and using the mobile phone too much (56%). More research, including open questions and qualitative interviews, would deepen the understanding of this issue further. While we acknowledge that there could be concerns related to physical consequences on e.g. muscles and the skeleton of the extensive mobile user, the concept of "too much" mobile phone use is a risk primarily linked to more abstract concepts of *time*. In order to understand the worries and potential anxieties that are present among parent, and that might have the potential for erupting into future media panics, future research should explore the underlying causes of risk perceptions in the public in general, and in parents in particular.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from our study of current concerns and worries among parents is that family atmosphere matters, in particular the quality of parent–child interaction. As our study has shown, children who feel that it is easy to talk with their parents about what they experience online, have parents who feel substantially less worried about mobile phone use. Thus, the general advice often given by media scholars, including the EU Kids Online research network, to not focus on time as number of minutes or hours, but rather *how* that time is spent, on what and with whom finds support in our findings.

Notes

1. We of course acknowledge that technically speaking, a mobile phone is also a computer, but that is in this context not relevant.
2. Map generated on the average results in each country from the 2008 world value survey wave via http://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu.

3. Countries where more than 75% of the population mention independence as an important value to teach children include Norway (90%), Slovenia (83.2%), Indonesia (82%), Hungary (81.4%), Taiwan (80.3%), Japan (80%), Ethiopia (79.2%), Malaysia (78.7%), Switzerland (77.7%), Germany (77.6%) and Sweden (77.4%). In Finland 69.3% of the population mentioned independence as a very important value (data from Iceland and Denmark were not available in this wave, nor the following [2010–2014]). Interestingly, none of the countries in the English-speaking included in the same wave put high emphasis on independence (AU 63.6%, UK 58.7%, CA 58.1%, USA 53.8%, and NZ 53.2%).

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CHAPTER 15

Parental Anxieties and Double Standards in Their Discussion of Young People's Use of Social Media: Perspectives from a Qualitative Project in Sao Paulo, Brazil

Monica Barbovschi, Tatiana Jereissati, and Javiera F. M. Macaya

Introduction: Moral and Media Panics Around Sexuality and Children

Moral panics are fueled further by media coverage, as both construct a social problem to a certain degree, while also contributing to the rise of public concerns over said problem (Krinsky 2013). Adding to the development of moral panic theory, the concept of "folk devil" (Cohen 2002) depicted the social categories that become the culprits of social evils in the eyes of the public. The out of proportion aspect of the moral panic (Hall et al. 1978, 16) was intrinsically linked to the mass media and their

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role in amplifying the process of deviance (Cohen 2002, 8). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009, 37–43) discuss five indicators in moral panic formation process: concern/anxiety over a definite menace; hostility towards an identifiable source of menace; substantial consensus/agreement over the existence of a threat and its defining characteristics; disproportionality in terms both of fear mobilised and of actions taken and volatility, as a sudden explosion of concern about a new threat from individuals perceived as moral deviants: "*As the name implies, a moral panic involves some uproar along a moral boundary, a fear of change or invasion by some sort of known yet mysterious evil, and a collective response to this perceived transgression*" (Smith and Cole 2013, 209).

Technological innovation that gives rise to anxieties, moral panics and other forms of moralising stances (Hunt 2013, 60) has marked the shift from one pattern that began with a traditional focus on sin or immorality to a more "modern" pattern of risks and anxieties, which has been characterised by "the precautionary principle" and "the culture of precaution", which require taking steps against potential risks (Hunt 2013, 62–64). The moral panic around sexuality is fertile ground for "arousing intimate questions about personal identity, and touching on crucial social boundaries" (Weeks 1985, 44), mobilising all sorts of conflicts and tensions, whose origins lie in class, gender, racial location, intergenerational conflict, moral acceptability and medical definitions (Weeks 1985, 44). In particular, the moral panic over childhood sexuality is one of a number of contemporary panics (Buckingham et al. 2009) that has fuelled "a generalised social anxiety" (Krinsky 2013, 83) and includes the idea that progressive sexualisation of children and young people exists and is harmful (Tsaliki 2015).

Kristen Drotner (1992)—alongside other scholars—used the term "media panic" to describe the phenomenon of alarmist discourses over the negative effects of media technologies especially on children and youth. Molloy (2013, 190) contends that in order to feel secure, communities "*require* a consistent supply of threats" (emphasis in original), an "us" versus "them", with young people often portrayed as the dangerous Other, who need to be kept in check and controlled. Paradoxically, as Molloy notes (2013), the same discourse of danger both marginalises and criminalises youth and constructs them "at risk" and in need of protection from media/social media. As Buckingham contends, young people are often perceived as "too immature or simply too feeble-minded to resist the negative influence of the media" (Buckingham 1993, 4). Interestingly, the discourse is not gender-neutral,

with girls being regarded as generally more susceptible to harm and more easily falling prey to ill-intended people or morally questionable content.

Moral Panics About Young People's Use of Social Media and Sexual Content

New media has been adopted by young people for purposes of communication and connection to peers, as well as a means for self-expression, including of one's gender and sexuality. However, the past decade has seen a new brand of panic emerging, the "social networking moral panic" (Smith and Cole 2013, 208), which holds three intertwined strands of moral anxiety, a child sex crime panic, an Internet sex crime panic and a larger panic over the effect of computer technology and Internet on young people (Smith and Cole 2013, 209). However, these panics do not consider young people's agency, which has come to be recognised in the context of the growing popularity of social media as something both positive (for example in terms of personal self-expression online), and negative (as in the case of online peer bullying or sexualised cyberbullying, for example when publicising without consent a nude picture, usually of a girl, which was initially sent as a private message).

In Cohen's theorisation of moral panics, "folk devils", be they child molesters, sleazy pornographers, or Internet predators (deYoung 2013), have a central role as stereotypical characters marginalised as "the Other" (Bauman 2001), reified as objects rather than subjects (deYoung 2013, 142). In the case of risk-averse discourses concerning children, the figure which most aptly embodies the "stranger danger" (Livingstone and Bober 2003) is the paedophile, which, according to Burn and Willett (2004), is construed from both folkloric types of the urban myth or legend variety, as well as from rationalistic discourses. However, in the case of moral panic over young people's sexuality, the stereotypical characters often become easy-to-blame victims, unable to defend themselves (Rubin 1994, 25), such as girls being shamed for having shared nude photos of themselves, which are further spread online among peers.

All risk-averse discourses constructed around childhood and youth and their relationship with media are built on either "youth at risk" or "youth as a source of risk" stereotypical portrayals.

Youth at Risk and as a Source of Risk

Youth and youth culture represent a borderline, marginal identity, transitioning between childhood and adulthood, both at risk and as a source of risk (Krinsky 2013, 229). In the same vein, Buckingham (2000, 125–126) reflects on adults' contradictory views about children, one stemming from the Romantic notion of the child as innocent and vulnerable, the other—the Dionysian view (Tisdall 2015, 97)—depicting the child as the bearer of the original sin, with drives towards violence, sexuality and anti-social behaviour, which need to be kept constantly under control. The 'lost childhood' trope resides in "adults' idealisations of childhood based around children's 'pricelessness', innocence and vulnerability" (Tisdall 2015, 93). This "preciousness of childhood" (Tisdall 2015, 96) is linked to an Apollonian view of children as inherently innocent, in need of protection and nurturance (a view often associated with Rousseau's writings, cf. Jenks 1996). Buckingham (2011) further discusses protective views over children's exposure to technology and commercialisation within the context of consumer culture.

The first view, riding on the idea of children as innocent and in need of protection (Krinsky 2013, 228) constructs the child as "passive and unknowingly dependent" (Jenks 1996). However, as Krinsky notes (citing Kerry H. Robinson 2008, 115–116), there are some inherent contradictions which stem from the hegemonic exile of childhood and children outside the domain of sexuality, which remains the mark of physiological maturity at the borderline between adulthood and childhood. Construing children as sexually immature, thus pure, has been one of the most powerful discourses about children since the nineteenth century (for a brief overview of anxieties about young people's relationship to media and popular culture, see Tsaliki 2015). Tsaliki (2015) argues that this type of risk-averse discourses, which conflate all things sexual into something potentially harmful (e.g. child pornography but also sex education, young people's encounters with sexual content or the "sexualised" pop culture) is also obscuring the importance of media in constructing identities and enabling youth expression (Attwood 2011; McNair 2002).

The perception of the savage child, has been a fertile ground for restricting and regulating young people's time and expression online. The idea of "unstructured leisure" time, responsible for juvenile deviance (Tsaliki 2015) is present also in the risk-averse discourses about young

people's use of social media. Furthermore, this view is instrumental in the attempts towards regulating women and girls' sexual expression, including the nowadays slut-shaming tendencies on social media which reflects a rather generalised sentiment that girls should feel ashamed of their sexual availability, behaviour or history (Gong and Hoffman 2012). Slut-shaming builds on the idea of sexual virtue, conformance to normative sexual behaviours, and supports the cultural suppression of female sexuality, which has precedents throughout history (Webb 2015). In addition to slut-shaming, victim-blaming stems from the same negative views of women/girls being at fault for their own victimisation (Fairbairn 2016). In the case of revenge porn (which has been linked to young people's sexting practices), the focus has been too often on the conduct of girls, blamed for their expression and exposure, instead of on the perpetrators of non-consensual abuse. In this regard, the case of a young Brazilian girl committing suicide after videos of her engaging in sexual acts circulated the Internet is exemplary, as she states in her final words how she has failed to be "the perfect daughter" (Berger 2013).

The child-at-risk discourse thrives on both types of representations, that of the innocent and that of the savage child and has been always corroborated with moral positioning and panic (Cohen 1972). In relation to children and sexuality, two types of risk-averse discourses have emerged from these representations: the child at risk of sexual predators and the sexualised child.

Social Media and Its Dangers: The Child at Risk and the Sexualised Child

One type of discourses reinforces moral panics around young people's sexuality by stressing how media and, more recently, social media, have been playing a crucial role in promoting and reproducing unhealthy beauty norms and standards (Fardouly et al. 2015), often unrealistic. The idea of the "sexual child" which needs to be treated with extreme caution and placed under professional scrutiny and monitoring (Egan and Hawkes 2010), which emerged in the nineteenth century, has been instrumentalised in discourses about regulating young people's use of media and social media. This type of monolithic discourse decries the way in which the media give female beauty standards disproportionate attention (Fallon 1990; Malkin et al. 1999), thus contributing to the objectification of female

bodies. It further points to a gender power asymmetry assumed when it comes to how girls' and women's bodies are portrayed in media and social media, under the heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey 1975). Female bodies are something to be looked at by men (Walkerdine 1991), as girls are under the contradictory pressure to appear both sexy, but not too slutty (Ringrose and Renold 2012), while boys are rewarded for bodily displays of tough masculinity (Manago 2013). However, this position has been more recently enriched in light of digital technologies potential to challenge norms and stereotypes online and contribute to more diverse youth identity exploration and expressions, taking into account young people's agency. For example, there is research that challenge both the ubiquity of media messages that reproduce stereotypical standards, and the notion that boys are immune. Contrary to popular perceptions, research comparing boys and girls in terms of body image dissatisfaction, found that boys perceive appearance-related pressure, criticism and teasing at levels that are similar or higher than girls (Ricciardelli 2012) and that boys too are subjected to negative comments regarding masculine displays (or lack thereof).

In the context of young people's practice of *sexting*, some findings provide evidence that sexually active boys are admired, while sexually active girls are denigrated as "sluts",[1] resulting in the risk of girls being unable to openly talk about their sexual activities and practices; boys on the other hand, are at risk of being excluded by peers if they do not brag about their sexual experiences. In this vein, the "postfeminist moral panic" (Ringrose and Renold 2012) purported by mass media has dramatised extreme incidences of youth sexual images "gone wrong" and further stigmatised youth sexual behaviour online. However, this type of academic discourse largely neglects girls' agency in constructing themselves as sexual selves. There is a point to be made about the crucial role of media education and porn literacy education in mediating the relationship between exposure to pornography and views of women as sex objects in both adolescent boys and girls (Vandenbosch and van Oosten 2017). There is evidence that the context of viewing stereotypical depictions influences greatly how these are understood, as does the increasing existence of more diverse representations and counter-stereotypical, alternative narratives (Attwood et al. 2013).

The EIGE report on gender equality and young people's use of digital technologies (EIGE 2019) shows that, while many girls have internalised stereotypical beauty standards and norms, others are in fact challenging

rigid beauty ideals and counterpose non-stereotypical, body-affirmative expressions via online platforms. The report also shows that, while the "politics of respectability" and appropriateness are still largely restricting girls' expression online, some become aware of the rigid standards they are pressured into (EIGE 2019).

The report built on the experience of European experts and young people's own accounts of engagement with media to reflect on both the effects-laden discourse on early/hyper-sexualisation of girls and women (expressed in girls feeling pressured to look and portray themselves in a sexual way through provocative poses, inappropriate attire and excessive body/skin) and a more nuanced discourse which puts sexual subjectivities at the centre of personal agency of young people constructing themselves as (sexual) agents (Gill 2003, 2008).

Revisiting the Media and Moral Panics Around Youth and Sexuality Among Brazilian Parents: Findings from a Qualitative Study in Sao Paulo

Following this overview of moral and media panics over young people's use of social media, and especially over engagement with sexual content, sexualisation, predators and sexting, we would like to analyse and discuss how various anxieties and moral panics are reproduced in the way Brazilian parents talk about their children's use of social media. We argue that a lack of appropriate knowledge about young people's use of the Internet and social media, coupled with low digital skills and lack of effective parental mediation are a fertile ground for the proliferation of moral and media panics which further reproduce stereotypes and infringe on young people's agency. For the remainder of the chapter, we illustrate various fears and connect them with the panic discourses highlighted in the previous sections.

Parental concerns over the sexuality of young people found a renewed mode of manifestation in the increased autonomy facilitated by mobile communication, which allowed for greater unsupervised use of communication devices, unlike desktop computers (Mascheroni and Ólafsson 2014). Further concerns about social media rose in the context of the culture of oversharing, the changing nature of privacy, and the danger that people known to young users might pose (Smith and Cole 2013, 217). In Brazil, in 2014, 22% of Internet users were aged between 10

and 17, which corresponds to 20.7 million Brazilians—figures that point to the relevance of this group on the Internet (CGI.br 2015). Conversely, only 50% of parents or legal guardians were Internet users, with significant differences among socioeconomic classes. Three years later, in 2017, 77% of young Brazilian Internet users had parents or legal guardians who were also Internet users (54% in rural areas; 80% in urban areas. Class AB 93%; Class DE 54%) (CGI.br 2017).

Among parents of Internet users in Brazil aged 9–17 (CGI.br 2015), many express concerns about the possibility of their child being contacted by strangers online (41%), being exposed to inappropriate content online (32%), and being treated in a hurtful or nasty way by other children (23% of parents), values that are much higher than those reported by their European counterparts (Barbosa et al. 2013). Other concerns expressed by parents about their children were: being a crime victim (38%), alcohol abuse/use of drugs (35%), academic development (35%), daughter/son's sex life (26%—with higher proportions for girls) and legal problems/committing a crime (20%).

Nonetheless, these concerns are neither balanced by any knowledge of what their children actually experience as harmful online, nor are they being accompanied by digital and critical skills necessary for a real understanding and appropriate supportive responses (around half of Brazilian parents engage in any type of mediation of their children's use of digital technologies). Finally, although Brazilian parents report high level of concern about their child's use of the Internet, when asked if they think their child actually faced a bothersome situation online in the past year, 11% say yes (higher proportions for parents of girls). Additionally, 68% say that there is no chance or little chance that their son/daughter will experience any situation like this in the following 6 months. Furthermore, 38% of parents of Internet users aged 9–17 say they have no or little ability to help their child if they encounter a bothersome experience online (CGI.br 2015).

At times parents expressed contradictory views about their children, an attitude which can be explained through the mechanism of social representations being challenged. The distinction between the core and peripheral elements of a social representation that Abric (1994) introduced is useful in observing how parents try to negotiate conflicting images about their children. In the case of powerful constructions, such as those about children and childhood, resistant transformation might display the dynamics of a slow change and reshaping. For example, at the

core of parents' perceptions about the "child", one might find the idea of innocence or vulnerability, which can be hard to shake and change. The peripheral elements are the ones which may be subjected to change and contestation, for example the child's degree of agency and autonomy, brought by the recent uptake of social media as the favourite venue of communication and expression for young people. Another conflicting image is that of the "sexualised child", in particular the "sexualised girl", which comes at odds with the innocence trope many parents hold dear.

Given the disparities in Internet use and digital competencies between young people and their parents, as well as the gap between parental concerns and actual knowledge of what their children are facing online, we are interested in seeing how parents express concerns about their children's online use, and how moral/media panics are being reproduced in their discourse and finally, how these concerns are reproducing gender stereotypes. The contribution of this chapter resides in illuminating a symbolic battlefield that parental discourses create, which combines both moral panics and media panics over young people's sexual lives and their experiences of sexualised violence online.

Methodological Note

For the qualitative analysis in this chapter, we draw upon data on the use of ICT by young children through a gender perspective (2016–2018) collected by the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br) in Sao Paulo, Brazil via 12 in-depth semi-structured individual interviews (conducted in the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo) with parents of both genders (mothers, fathers of young people) from three age groups (11–12, 13–14, 15–17), whose children were users of the Internet, social media and mobile phones, from different socioeconomic backgrounds (classes AB and C).[2] The recruitment and the fieldwork were conducted by Ibope Inteligência, a Brazilian research company, in September 2016; each interview lasted between 50 and 90 minutes.

Previous research has shown that in countries marked by gender differences, mothers' strategies for mediating boys' and girls' Internet use differ in several aspects, reflecting the broader context of changing socialisation practices, gender norms and the generation gap in using digital technologies (Talves and Kalmus 2015). Therefore, to ensure a better understanding of gender differences in adult discourses and

anxieties around young people's use of social media, we had interviews with mothers of girls, mothers of boys, and fathers of girls, fathers of boys, respectively, as well as mothers and fathers of both boys and girls. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed using thematic analysis procedures (Feredey and Muir-Cochrane 2006), employing inductive and deductive strategies, relying on both categories from literature, such as "moral concern", "concern about media/Internet", the "innocent child", "destroyed childhood", and allowing for new analytical categories to emerge from the material. The extracted material was marked with the following identifiers: the respondent's gender, i.e. mother/father, the gender of the respondent's child, i.e. boy/girl, the age group of the daughter/son and their socioeconomic background. For anonymity purposes, we created an identification code with letters from A to E.

Parental Concerns About Technology, Internet and Social Media—the Internet as "Evil" and "Bad"

Some of the views expressed by Brazilian parents reflect technophobic or sceptical attitudes regarding the usefulness of technology and social media for the lives of their children: "I'll tell you, 70% [of children's Internet use] is nothing. (…) Nothing, saying nonsense to friends, posting photos. (…) You ask her if she is aware of the reach that her posts have. Ah, they are, yes they are. These people are smart, there are things they do, a lot more than what I do with this [mobile phone], I try not to spend too much of my time posting things, I think that's very futile. But it is of this futility that they live; if they do not do that, they are not living, are not part of the tribe, right? I too did not have Facebook two or three years ago, but I had to sign up, otherwise I would be excluded" **[Father E, girl, 15-17 y.o., Class AB1]**. The view about the Internet as a futile activity and a waste of time is further amplified by concerns related to social media destroying the innocence of children by exposing them to deviance and criminality and by forcing upon them an early sexualization: "In relation to crime, what they post a lot today about crime, about women and men's sexuality, I think this shouldn't be on the Internet, on social networks, if there were a way they could exclude this, I think 100% of parents would like it because what has been attracting youngsters is the Internet. Today, with the increase in social networks, many

youngsters have been doing things that back in my time would not take place. (…) Today young people learn about sexuality very early because of the Internet, not all of them, because it depends on their parents too, but about these things, crime, drugs, nowadays access is easier. But there are good things too in relation to studying. Today, from what we see, young people are more attracted by the wrong things than by the right ones" **[Father A, boy, 15-17 y.o, Class C2]**.

A similar view is expressed by a mother who thinks the Internet is accelerating the natural developmental stages of young people, making them adopt "grown-up behaviours" (Gunter 2014, 13): "(…) nowadays the Internet […] you can access whatever you want, you have all the information, so I think the Internet is helpful, but also has ended, destroyed adolescence, like. (…) Destroying, people are living a phase that is not theirs, 12 year-old girls want to live like 18–20 year-old women. (…) Anticipating things, right? So they get pregnant faster, pregnant 12-year-old girls, start using drugs, it is a lot" **[Mother C, girl, 13-14 y.o, Class C2]**. At times the same parents express contradictory views, when affirming online opportunities for knowledge and information: "Ah, yes they are, [the social networks], they are important [for children], yes. Ah, because she is no longer… she learns to have a little more malice, right? To know the world, because nowadays you are getting to know the world through the Internet. And she does not leave the house, [my daughter] is at school, at her grandfather's house, here at home, so she's not much of a 'I'm going to my friend's house' person, or 'I'm going to stay at such-and-suchs house', she doesn't often leave the house, so she also matures with the Internet, learns a lot, so it's important" **[Mother C, girl, 13-14 y.o., Class C2]**.

However, one of the common views that parents hold is that the Internet does not offer anything good: "You have to be careful about everything on the Internet because it has everything that is bad. (…) The Internet is always all bad" **[Father C, girl, 13-14 y.o., Class C2]**. Other parents expressed concerns about the same types of risks, access to sexual content to early or inappropriate, violence, rape, pedophilia, drugs, the easy access to social media being the culprit in most cases, for young people's exposure to various threats: "A movie on Netflix, movies that talk about sex, drugs, alcohol, fights, mistreatment, things that are not healthy for a 12 year-old child to know or see" **[Mother F, girl, 11-12 y.o., Class AB1]**. These worries expressed by parents reflect some of the characteristics of a moral/media panic listed above, namely

concern/anxiety over a threat—in this case "the internet" as a source of evil, hostility towards an identifiable source of menace, substantial consensus/agreement over the existence of a threat and its defining characteristics, disproportionality in terms both of fear mobilised—in these cases, the generalisations such as "the internet is all bad" can be considered a disproportionate/erroneous perception. Also, the techno-phobic determinism in the parents' accounts, as if "the internet" were an entity endowed with volition and thus made responsible for corrupting children is another characteristic of a media panic, where technology is to blame for a social problem.

The Innocent and Gullible Child

Many parents have internalised the dominant tropes about the innocent and gullible child, the child at risk for falling prey to people with ill intentions online. The theme of the "innocent child" reappeared throughout many parental accounts and is linked to one of the most powerful characters present in the risk-averse discourses, the sexual predator/paedophile: "Talking to strangers, who don't know each other, they arrange a meeting, [they] think that they are talking to one person and they are talking to another…" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., Class C2]** or "I think that there still are children who are still very innocent, I think they do not assimilate the evil of the Internet, what she plays with on the mobile phone, what they do with her videos … Because of young age, they think that the Internet only does her good" **[Father F, girl, 11-12 y.o., Class AB1]**.

Here we can see that parents reproduce some of the most common misconceptions about sexual predators being mostly strangers, people from the Internet unknown to children in real life: "It already happened (…) that I showed her on the Internet, girls who got involved, like, signed in, accepted a friendship, started talking on the Internet, and then went and arranged a meeting, went there and was raped, and was killed (…)" **[Mother C, girl, 13-14 y.o., Class C2]**, or "Yes, several, for example, kidnapping, girls who date through social network and who don't know the boy and when they meet, […], if you don't know how to use the Internet in a conscious way it also brings bad influences, especially in this phase of 13, 14, 15 years of age… Until they are 15 years old I think they do not have this consciousness" **[Mother E, girl, 15-17 y.o., Class AB1]**. These excerpts further show a lack of awareness about

other relevant factors in the case of online sexual grooming of children, such as a history of problems and abuse in family or peer groups, or unstable social and psychological backgrounds, which have an important role for the context in which young people engage with media (Craven et al. 2006).

Concerns about young people's sexuality were one of the salient themes throughout the parents' accounts, including concerns related to grooming and pedophilia which does not exclude boys: "I fear more these things that happen all the time, pedophilia, this lot of absurd things, guys arrange meetings and then take people away and so on, without mentioning rape and everything else that is happening, so I prefer to avoid it [having him adding unknown people]" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., Class C2]**. Throughout the interviews, parents reproduce the discourse about children as incompetent, unable to discern between right or wrong, practically inable to assess the accurateness of online information as they lack critical thinking which comes with maturity. Some expressed views about all children being at risk and vulnerable, while others emphasised girls being more victimised.

The Fragile Girl Victim

Although parents express concerns for both boys and girls, many believe that girls are more at risk than boys, showing they have internalised a powerful sexist discourse about the fragile girl victim, where girls are seen as gullible, fragile and more exposed to the risk of having their image damaged, ruined by their actions online, or by falling prey to ill-intended individuals: "I think it is worse for girls, because I think women are more vulnerable to some things, for example, women are always the victims of something…" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., C2]**. Some parents believe that girls expose themselves because they are more sentimental, sensitive and crave for attention, exposing another trope of boys not having feelings or being less easily hurt by other people: "[Girls do it more] I think because there is a matter of their feelings, boys I think they do not feel much, being sentimental…and girls are more sentimental" **[Mother A, boy, 11-12 y.o., Class C2]**. "For the girl there are more risks, but everything is equal. (…) Because I think girls are more open- minded. (…) I do not know, sometimes a person comments something, girls fall for it faster. (…) I don't know. Women are different, sometimes a person says something, girls pick it up faster,

fall for it faster in a conversation. (…) There is a difference between a man and a woman. Women are more fragile than men. (…) Women are more fragile in everything. (…) I don't know, women have a softer heart, that is why they fall faster for men's talk, or of another person, I do not know" **[Father C, girl, 13-14 y.o., Class C2]**. Another parent stressed the perceive differences between boys and girls: "Because girls, I think, I don't know, I can't tell you if girls are more foolish than boys, I don't know, I believe, I've seen several cases with girls (…). He is a boy, she is the girl, I think the difference between the sexes is difference of, how can I tell you? I don't know how to tell you, I know the girl is the fragile sex, I think she is more given, is more vulnerable, believes in love, girls live, many girls live in fairy tales, men are smarter" **[Mother C, girl, 13-14 y.o., Class C2]**.

In these interviews, we recognised some of the stereotypical images of femininity, that of the soft, sentimental, more easily hurt (than their male counterparts) girls and women. Furthermore, the "fragile gullible girl" trope is (most probably unconsciously) utilised by adults to reconcile the image of "the innocent child" with that of the "sexualised too early" child/girl: they are scared of how young adolescent girls express themselves online, but it must be because they "don't know what they are doing".

However, one father (of girls) shifts the blame towards the boys whom he thinks as only interested in sexual content and violence: "I think there's a lot of, like, sex advertising, (…) and there's this thing in the village now, that everybody, I don't know the kids, they all want to try it, I think that's everything on the Internet. (…) [it] Stimulates it a little. There is a lot of advertisement for lots of pornography on the Internet, and one has to be very careful about that. There are lots of people that only connect [to the Internet] because of pedophilia, so we always see what they do and who they talk to "(…) Look, I think that boys access a lot of sexual content, or violent games, because kids nowadays only care about that" **[Father F, girl, 11-12 y.o., Class AB1]**. Here, the father expresses some of the worries reproduced by academic discourses which links adolescents' exposure to sexualised female characters (in video games) to increased acceptance of rape myths and tolerance for sexual violence (Driesmans et al. 2014). However, other research contradicts such simple-effects paradigm (e.g. Fisher and Grenier 1994) which construes boys/men as inevitable perpetrators (Fairbairn 2016).

The Sexualised Girl

Under the parental scrutinous eye, girls are seen as posing too early in a sexual manner either for obtaining validation or for seducing boys: "[The daughter] already takes photos wearing short shirts, mini skirts. (…) I say 'wow! How did you post a photo like that?' (…) [She] says 'I don't know, my friends also do the same', we are always controlling this, I say 'no, my daughter, this is bad, wearing shorts like that and posting a picture like that for everyone to see ' (…) Then some friends comment 'what a hottie, this and that…' (…) You know how things are, these adolescent girls, if they have big breasts they already pull down [their shirt] a little and post it [the photo]. There's no other way … If they have nice legs, if they change their hair, if they have their eyebrows done, they'll post everything" **[Father F, girl, 11-12 y.o., Class AB1]**. The father expresses a preconceived, stereotypical view of what appropriate femininity entails, according to which young adolescent girls should not reveal too much flesh or too much about themselves. In this, he follows long-established constructions of femininity, which do not make room for a sexual self for teenage girls, as they are doing "too much, too soon".

At times, parents pass judgement and disapprove of girls exposing themselves too early in a sexual manner online, other times they try to convince their daughters why such behaviour is inappropriate "… but [my daughter] makes me be harsher with her [than with her brother], but due to her actions, I don't know if it's okay to try to offend her to see if she wakes up, I try various ways - offending, talking nicely, kindly to see which way will make her understand" **[Mother A, boy, 11-12 y.o., Class C2]**. This is a mother which has deeply internalised a long-established code of conduct for women, a code that dictates which girl/woman is "good", i.e. moral, and which has "fallen". Girls' agency is infringed upon by the slut-shaming discourse which reflects a rather generalised sentiment that girls should feel ashamed of their sexual availability, conduct or history (Gong and Hoffman 2012). It is part of a wider prohibitive attitude towards girls and women's agency over their own bodies and sexuality, often coupled with an over-simplification of gender-sensitive risks (e.g. sexting, cyber-violence) and coercive messages.

While girls are disapproved for exposing themselves, are not adhering to "proper" feminine behaviour, young boys are pressured into

projecting images of hyper-masculinity, which composes an emotionless, aggressive and fearless masculinity (Holloway 2015), which has been shown to be damaging for the psychological health of young boys and men: "The boys more in the sense of showing that he is fearless, that he is a stud, and girls more in the sense of showing that she has grown up, she shows herself more sexually, right? Shows her body, takes more sensual photos. Boys do not care about this sense of sexy photos, even because boys mature and develop after girls, so they don't even have the body build to show on the Internet. But girls (…), today 12-year-old girls have the body of a 20, 18 year-old. They expose themselves much more in the pictures, show their body more … Got it?" **[Mother E, girl, 15-17 y.o., Class AB1]**, or "Boys are more difficult, but there are, there are some exceptions of boys showing themselves, showing their body, showing their figure, showing muscles, but it is much less than girls and does not show as much as girls, girls sensualise more" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., Class C2]**. Throughout the interviews, parents seem to recognise there is much more pressure on boys to appear as sexy on social media and are also protected by their later physical development which occurs later than that of girls'.

The Evil, Competitive Girl

Another stereotype constructed in parental discourse was the "mature, competitive girl", where girls are seen as growing up faster than boys and entering a world of adult competition earlier than boys, while jostling for position with other girls: "[women suffer more with offences on the Internet] Due to the fact that women suddenly grow up faster, to understand things, and also to put their finger on someone's would, right? (…) If you notice in schools, usually bullying happens to whom? A girl with another girl. (…) So why, because of competition, because they grow up and become adults, recognise the world faster…" **[Father A, 15-17 y.o., Class C2]**. This view plays on another stereotypical depiction of women and femininity, that of the "evil" girl/woman, always at each other's throats in a fierce competition with one another, manipulative and vindictive. Here, we no longer have the innocent, gullible child, unaware of the consequences of its actions, but the deliberate vile actions of someone who intentionally wants to hurt others.

The girls competing for the attention of boys is part of the same oppressive mainstream moral panics around sexuality which embed

oppressive attitudes around gender and sexuality: "Wanting to be better than the other friend, wanting to show what is not, for more status, more 'likes', to be in the media, that girl is cool, so many 'likes', to stand out more in the network. (…) I think so [online and offline experiences are different for boys and girls], in that sense yes, because boys do not care that much, from what I see, even though I do not have a son, but from what I see when I access my social network, I notice that girls show themselves more in social network than boys" **[Mother E, girl, 15-17 y.o, Class AB1]**. The female intra-sexual competition and slut-discourse are interlinked (Webb 2015). In another publication (Barbovschi et al. 2017), based on the interviews and focus groups with young people in Sao Paulo, girls talked about being in competition with one another, while, at the same time, trying to not appear as "one of those girls" or "too slutty". At the very least, young women participated in this phenomenon because it conferred social benefits upon them; however, this reveals that slut-shaming is pervasive and diffused across the gender divide.

Victim-Blaming

In various public and academic settings, sexting has been demonised and linked to revenge porn because of the potential of consent being violated. Nonetheless, more nuanced research has denounced the moral panic around sexting as infringing on girls' sexual agency (e.g. prohibitive discourses and anti-sexting campaigns) which obscures perpetrators of cybersexual assault and leads to misguided and prohibitive policies against sexting and biased cyber education initiatives, rather than to actions against non-consensual dissemination of nudes and other kinds of cybersexual abuse (Hasinoff 2013, 2015). In our interviews with Brazilian parents, many show to have internalised the position in which victims are being blamed for the risks they face online, in particular young girls for posing in sensual videos online, which might attract ill-intended adults: "So, I would highlight, I think there is a lot of, what shows a lot is a girl that, teenage girls posting lots of funk videos, so too many videos like that, way too sexy right? Anyone can get there, that's why there is pedophilia too right? (…) It sure ends up attracting, an older person, sending messages or 'likes', talking to a teenager, because there are a lot of teenagers who post videos there, who … For God's sake…" **[Father F, girl, 11-12 y.o., Class AB1]**. "I think

that [exposing oneself on the Internet] is more common with girls. I think [it's because] girls are more exposed on the Internet than boys. Girls expose themselves more. [as they expose themselves more] they draw more attention [so it happens more with them]" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., Class C2]**. Other parents make a case by emphasising that the blame is never passed onto boys, denouncing the double-standard for boys and girls around sexual expression (Ringrose 2011; Ringrose et al. 2013): "…if women do something wrong she is bad and man is always the stallion and the repercussion for her is worse, for the image she ends up getting and the man does not, even if she is the victim she ends up getting a bad image" **[Mother D, boy, 15-17 y.o., C2]**.

However, based on our qualitative data, many parents by large tend to reproduce moral discourses of victim-blaming in the cases of sexual assault (Salter 2013, 312) instead of condemning the cultural sexism that endorses gender violence. Women and girls are thought to shame themselves back into a position of self-regulation and limitation on their behaviour so as not to "deserve" any kind of abuse (Fagan 2012). As a result, these discourses reconstruct girls as sexual subjects to be controlled and their sexuality as something to be surveilled and regulated (Salter 2013).

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter aimed to illustrate parental concerns over young Brazilian's use of social media and Internet and to distinguish several intersections between moral and media panics over Internet and technology, and how they connect to more generalized anxieties over the behaviour and expression of young people. We used the concepts of moral and media panics in order to make sense of the discourses and emotions Brazilian parents transmit when talking about their children's use of social media and its potential risks.

New media has been widely embraced by young people for purposes of communication and connection to peers, as well as for gender and self-expression. However, not everybody is celebrating this newly found freedom, as is the case with Brazilian parents. First, the interviews with parents transmit a general feeling of anxiety over the Internet and social media which they see as "all bad" and a source of all evils, thus reproducing techno-deterministic and pessimistic views about the role of digital technologies. Second, parents talk about

different strands of moral anxiety (Smith and Cole 2013, 208), such as the Internet child sex crime panic (reflected in anxieties over sexual predators online), and a larger panic over the effect of computer technology and Internet on young people (Smith and Cole 2013, 209), which both do not consider young people's agency. The anxiety over young people falling prey to ill-intended adults is connected to the myth of the innocent child (Buckingham 2000) and was expressed for both boys and girls (although largely about girls), whereas the other—the anxiety over the effects of the Internet on children can be connected to the Dionysian view (Tisdall 2015, 97)—depicting the child with drives towards violence, sexuality and anti-social behaviour, and in need to be kept constantly under control (and was expressed mostly in connection to girls). At times, the two views reflects contradictions and cognitive inconsistency, e.g. either mature or gullible, either pure and in need of protection or savage and sexualised too early. Parents voiced their concern about young people's "grown-up behaviours", identifying them as a problem (Gunter 2014, 13). This points towards an idealised view of children as "innocent", as opposed to the sexualised "grown-up behaviour" they see young people display on social media.

These "grown-up behaviours" Brazilian parents referred to were about young girls posing in sexual manners on social media or engaging in sexting. Often sexting has been linked to revenge porn because of the potential of consent being violated, which in turn has led to widespread public and policy concern. Nonetheless, the moral panic around sexting has been denounced as infringing on girls' sexual agency while obscuring the perpetrators of cybersexual assault and leading to biased and prohibitive policies and actions (Hasinoff 2013, 2015). The slut-shaming discourses around practices of sexting and self-expression online, which reflect the idea that girls should feel ashamed of their sexual availability, behaviour or history (Gong and Hoffman 2012) can be linked to the powerful constructions about the immoral, "fallen" women/girls (as opposed to the "good" and "moral" women/girls, but also to the Dionysian view (Tisdall 2015, 97) of the child as the bearer of the original sin, with impulses towards sexuality. Often discourses around sexual victimisation of girls online are similar to other types of sexual violence and include victim-blaming and toxic masculinity, i.e. blaming girls/women for their own victimisation, while viewing boys/men as inevitable perpetrators (Fairbairn 2016). More often than not, parents reproduced

the mainstream victim-blaming discourses, although some noticed the injustice of placing the entirety of the blame solely on girls.

Furthermore, parental discourses reflect some of the trends related to social media's role in creating assemblages of female and masculine bodily representations. As per Livingstone and Mason (2015), girls are faced with the challenge of having to express hyper-feminine sexualised roles, rising from internalising stereotypical, body-objectified self-concepts promoted by media, while keeping the image of "proper" feminine behaviour. On the opposite, very young boys are pressured into projecting images of emotionless, aggressive and toxic masculinity (Holloway 2015) in their gendered expressions on social media (in the words of Brazilian parents, they often pose as "studs", "fearless", "showing muscles" and "boys access a lot of sexual content, or violent, or violent games").

These quotes reflect also that parents attribute little or no agency to their children, such as no agency when young people become victims or, especially in the case of girls, victim-blaming for putting themselves at risk by posing in a sensual manner online. Both mothers and fathers, irrespective of the child's gender expressed stereotypical views about the "early sexualised" girls, "over-sexualisation", and about girls being more "fragile" and "sentimental" than boys, making them more at-risk. At times, their discourses became contradictory, as in the case of the "evil girl" trope, engaging in intra-sexual competition with other girls, over the attention of boys (Webb 2015).

The moral panic over childhood sexuality is one of a number of contemporary panics (Buckingham et al. 2009) that has created a generalised social anxiety and includes the idea that progressive sexualisation of children and young people exists and is damaging (Tsaliki 2015). In connection to young people's expressions online, parents tend to reproduce both discourses about over-sexualisation (the mature girl) and the child at risk (the gullible, innocent child), at times in a conflicting way, but without taking into account young people's agency. These conflicting views can be mitigated by the distinction between the core and peripheral elements of a social representation that Abric (1994) introduced, for example in the case of discourses about the "gullible" girls who engage in "slutty" behaviour (peripheral element), not because they are inherently "bad" (core element), but because they do not know what they are doing (i.e. are "Innocence/innocent", another core element).

Although there is research that challenge both the ubiquity of media messages that reproduce stereotypical standards, and the notion that

boys are immune to those messages, and that social media can contribute to more diverse youth identity exploration and expressions, what parental views reflect was largely restrictive and paternalistic attitudes which further perpetuate gender inequalities. However, these results point towards the need for programmes for digital literacy and media education among adults, as well as solutions to address systemic gender discrimination and violence against girls and women. As the EIGE report states in the case of discourses in Europe around sexuality and young people (2019), there is a need for various stakeholders (and not just individuals, adults/parents) to be trained in the "normalisation" discourse which accepts that young people have sexual agency. Girls in particular should be supported to be more assertive and confident in expressing their own sexual needs and desires, while learning that they need neither to conform to stereotypical pressures and standards, nor to take the blame for others' abusive behaviour towards them. In relation to "sexting" in particular, educational programmes should be careful not to engage to victim-blaming of those who have sent sexually explicit messages or images, but instead discuss issues related to abuse and coercion versus consent, and shift the focus on those who perpetrate the abuse.

Notes

1. *Slut-Shaming* is a form of cyberbullying where girls bullied on social media through degradation or humiliation for their sexuality (Bailey and Steeves 2015).
2. The criteria adopted were the Brazilian Classification Criteria that classify households according consumer goods (avoiding the non-responses related to income). For more information on the Brazilian Economic Classification Criteria, see www.abep.org/Servicos/Download.aspx?id=11.

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CHAPTER 16

"*Be Careful with Whom You Speak to on the Internet*"—Framing Anxiety in Parental Mediation, Through Children's Perspectives in Portugal

Teresa Sofia Pereira Dias de Castro and Cristina Ponte

Introduction

Late modernity is perceived as the age of insecurity and human-made uncertainties that span across many aspects of modern life, including adults and children's lives, as it contributes to instil in adults fear for children's well-being, pressuring them to put children under surveillance (Kehily 2010). Also, the distinction adult–child is blurring and representations of childhood are changing as children become more active, participative, and more difficult to manage (Prout 2005). In the particular case of the embeddedness of always-connected devices in children's everyday lives, new family dynamics of conflict, control and negotiation emerge (Cardoso et al. 2008). Indeed, influenced by moral and media panics

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about children and digital media (Buckingham 2009) and research shaped within developmental theories and a welfarist scope, adults tend to adopt one of two contradictory positions regarding children: they are either "*afraid for or afraid of*" children (boyd and Hargittai 2013, 245), as a response to theories around "risk and its management [as these] are now central to how we, in the West, construct childhood" (Brownlie 2001, 519). In line with this, children's digital consumption and participation in the online sphere became a double-edged sword that activates policing interventions, social expectations and concerns.

Since not much *parental mediation* research is informed by children's views (Haddon 2015) and their right to be listened to in matters that concern them, the overall contribution of this chapter is to offer a snapshot on how they perceive and reflect parental mediation deriving from their own accounts. In specific terms, it aims to draw attention to the fact that children have their own expectations, they are agentic in their digital consumption and their response to parental mediation; and to show that parents and children's perceptions are influenced by social panics disseminated through the media resulting in a tense mismatch of expectations.

This chapter builds on qualitative data collected for a Ph.D. study during 2013/4, using participatory-based approaches with school-aged children (mainly) from low and medium socioeconomic status, a group underrepresented in the literature (Livingstone and Bulger 2013). Drawing from their everyday lived experiences, children expressed their perspectives about the complexities enclosed in digital media consumption, parental mediation and digital participation (Castro 2015). The focus of this chapter is to look at data collected on children's views about parental mediation and answer to the following questions: *how are discourses of anxiety moulding parents' perceptions about digital media consumption, from a children's point of view?* And *how are children responding to more intrusive parental mediation approaches?*

Framing Anxiety: Children, Parenting and Digital Technologies

Although children are not central in the highly influential social analyses made by Beck (1992) or Giddens (1990), their theoretical dialogues about *risk society* offer rich frameworks to make sense of the climate of

fear and paranoia that seems to permeate contemporary experiences of parenting and childhood.

To understand parents and parenting nowadays, it is also important to introduce and explain the concept of "culture of fear", which was introduced by Furedi (1997) to explain the "widespread sense of anxiety with regards to the future, a mistrust of others, and an increased sense of danger and risk" (Franklin and Cromby 2009, 1). More than a reaction to risk brought by the context of late modernity and risk society, this became a cultural representation and an interpretation of life in the beginning of the twenty-first century, much encouraged by the media and fiction (Furedi 1997). Fear became a response to how individuals view the world and humanity. Furedi's discussion of fear and panics about environment and technology reveals that a very similar structure exists in human relations, and, ultimately, how such a structure triggers anxiety, risk aversion (Gill 2007), paranoia and controlling behaviours that bring tension to family relationships. Human relationships became a "prolific source of anxiety" (Bauman 2006, 69) explored in media, political and public discourses for its attractiveness.

These social constructions of risk, as Bond (2014) explains, became central in not only understanding childhood in western societies, but also in identifying parenting styles in late modernity. This pessimistic attitude, imbued by risk and fear discourses, affects the relation between adults and children, encouraging the construction of more social problems as it reveals a lack of trust in community (individuals, institutions, governments); it favours the path for suspicion, vulnerability and individualisation; increases and legitimises adult supervision and policing strategies, instilling in them the illusion of control (Piper et al. 2006; Stokes 2009; Wong 2010). This is what, ultimately, Furedi (2001) labelled as "*paranoid parenting*"—a western obsessive preoccupation with child safety, a lifestyle that affects children, parents and other adults involved in the care of children (Parker 2004). Fifteen years later, Lim (2016) in light of more recent technological innovations, discusses how the always-on services shape consumption habits in a pervasive fashion and how this gives rise to a demanding and obsessing "timeless time" parenting watchfulness.

In a social atmosphere marked by uncertainty, from a parent's perspective, risk seems to lurk everywhere (Franklin and Cromby 2009). This means that once healthy, creative and fun activities in the outdoors became threatened by a plethora of risks, like for instance, sun exposure

(Furedi 1997), stranger danger (Pain 2006) and paedophilia (Franklin and Cromby 2009) to name a few. Bottom line, these (and other) fears are evicting children (again) from public life sphere (boyd and Hargittai 2013; Pain 2006), while inhibiting them from experiencing the world outside and building social, emotional and resilience skills. In many situations, to allow children to take risks is regarded as a sign of neglectful and irresponsible parenthood or even child abuse (Gill 2007; Sutterby 2009; Sutton 2008).

Nowadays, parenting is further challenged by the ubiquity of handheld, always-connected devices in children's lives. As a plethora of digital artefacts increasingly mould children's core activities and interactions, risks may occur within a click away. With regards to children's digital practices, three aspects seem to intersect and complicate such matters further. Firstly, as children grow up, they become digitally more autonomous and their digital interests change very quickly. Secondly, as the handheld and always-connected devices become pervasive in children's lives, managing their digital interactions to meet social and developmental expectations, becomes increasingly difficult for families (Duerager and Livingstone 2014). Thirdly, trends of more private (Haddon 2013), fluid and "on the move" styles of consumption put taken-for-granted rules to test, in particular for those parents who remain attached to a traditional media-based landscape.

Thus, parenting became an exhausting full-time job filled with new and "transcendent" (Lim 2016) (impossible to meet) expectations, driving children and parents apart. Parents are expected to chaperone children from home to school, and then from school to their after-school activities or back home, where they are locked away and safeguarded. In line with this, some have hypothesised that as children have been discouraged from taking risks and evicted from public sphere, they have turned to the Internet to "reclaim a public space where they can gather with friends, hang out, and have fun" (boyd and Hargittai 2013, 245).

Furthermore, the national context matters to understand the data discussed here: What is the Portuguese parents' approach to the digital activities of their pre-adolescent children? And what are their main concerns? The EU Kids Online reports show (Duerager and Livingstone 2014; O'Neill 2014; Vandoninck et al. 2013) that Portuguese parents are in the group[1] whose mediation approaches are based on restriction. Despite having positive results, this is the less effective approach in terms of protection (Helsper et al. 2013; O'Neill 2014). As experts point out: it "close[s] off avenues for beneficial cognitive and psychosocial

development that are available to young people in the online social world" (Tynes 2007, 576) and "might lead to higher levels of harm when risk is encountered" (Helsper et al. 2013, 5).

Restriction-based approaches also reproduce a romantic construction of childhood (James and Jenks 1996; James 2010)—the vulnerable and innocent non-agentic child in need of protection that legitimates parents policing and surveillance interventions—resonating with Foucault's concept of governmentality (1979) based on panoptic relations of power where parents exercise their power over children.

Regarding parents' fears and anxieties related to children's digital activities, boyd and Hargittai (2013) identify three main types of risks that tend to dominate the public discourse: being contacted by strangers; bullying and harassment; and exposure to problematic content (e.g. pornography and violence). Corroborating this, Ponte and Simões (2009) from the EU Kids Online—Portugal, corroborate that two of these tend to dominate Portuguese parents' worries and supervision decisions: contact and content.

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

As previously mentioned, this text builds from children's perspectives on parental mediation. The fieldwork involved (41) children, mostly aged 10–12 years[2] old, from low and medium socioeconomic status. This particular age range corresponds to the pre-adolescence stage (also called *tweens*), when they have more cultural autonomy (see Pasquier 2008), and possess their own personal device for personal and interactive purposes. Moreover, tweens, as they are dubbed by the marketing industry, are a special target for entertainment, technology and clothing industries. These are years of school transition, corresponding to changes in their lives and social relationships; also the management of some pocket money allows them some margin of choice over what they consume, from food to leisure. Marketing experts have also identified that at this age, insistence and argumentation influence the families' media decisions and the purchases of goods, including, in particular, technology (Clark 2014; Cook 2004).

Reality is a social construction made by human actors to make sense of the surrounding world. Thus, to collect children's views, participatory strategies were privileged to generate in-depth narrative data. The use of dialogical, flexible, reflexive techniques enabled to support children's

participation in research and the power balance between researcher and children (e.g. games, drawing and role-playing games, focus groups, group and individual interviews and participant observation). The talks express their perspectives on several issues: everyday matters, digital habits, parental mediation and interactions supported by communication technologies.

The ethical framework that guided this investigation endorsed the consequentialist model elaborated from the feminist ethic of care (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) and "ethical symmetry" (Christensen and Prout 2002), and was sustained by three documents, including the code of ethical conduct of the University of Minho and ethical guidelines supporting research with children, namely Barnado's (Tyler et al. 2006) and Save the Children (Laws and Mann 2004).

Despite having the right to be heard in matters that concern them and being the centre of this research, gaining access to children implied going through the approval of key gatekeepers. Parents and institutions were informed of the research goals, strategies and ethical guidelines through a written proposal, an informed consent and face-to-face meetings. To seek equilibrium between protection and participation, children's consent was also sought and they were invited to partake in a session where the researcher gave further details about the study explaining to them that they were also able to withdraw from the study at any point. To protect children's rights to privacy and confidentiality, personal information was concealed and identities were replaced by a pseudonym (see Castro 2015, 2017).

To organise the data collected we used two methods compatible with constructivist tradition (Guba and Lincoln 1998): thematic (Braun and Clarke 2006) and narrative analysis (Riessman 2008). To answer the research questions, we looked for evidence on children's talks that could give us a deeper understanding on *how discourses based in a culture of anxiety are shaping parents' digital mediation?* And *how are pre-adolescents responding to parents' approaches when they see these as intrusive?* The selected data was organised in three themes: parents' digital anxieties, media moulds parents' perceptions and children's response to parental mediation.

Discussing Results

Listening to the pre-adolescents' accounts provided insightful information about different mediation styles in the families, from their viewpoint. This chapter focuses on the parental interventions that inflicted tension in the parent–child interactions. As the narratives portray, some of these parental interventions reveal both the influence of risk narrative conveyed by the media and children's agentic role in the process, in which they creatively engage to protect their *digital autonomy*.

Parents' Digital Anxieties

Stranger danger and children being contacted and molested online by strangers is a risk widely promulgated in the media (Livingstone et al. 2015) that fuels parents' concerns about to whom children talk in their online interactions. Alice (aged 10), shares how her dad grounded her, when he found out she accepted a friend request from a stranger on Facebook:

> Someone sent me a friendship request. And I accepted it, but I didn't know this person and then, one day, when I was on Facebook, the person kept sending me several messages. I didn't answer, but my dad saw it and said: 'Alice I'm going to ground you. You shouldn't have accepted friend requests from people you don't know.' (Alice, aged 10)

In Alice's case, at least in the short term, her father's intervention may prove to be effective—Alice complied and told that since then, she did not accept friend requests from strangers. If such approach confirms Livingstone and Helsper's (2008) argument that restricting may keep children safer`, it may also cost the opportunity to turn the episode into a pedagogical opportunity for parent and child. Taking advantage of the father being aware and in control of what was happening, he could turn this into an opportunity to mentor Alice helping her to deal with these situations. He could scaffold her through the process of building trust and acquire social competencies to assess whether a stranger may always represent a risk (or not). Considering that many times in our lives we depend on the goodwill of strangers, grounding Alice only reinforced the focus on the risk and suspicion on humanity and the outside world.

Having a Social Networking Profile or playing online games (such as Fortnite, Roblox, StarDoll, Habbo Hotel), in fact, opens venues for strangers (despite their age, gender or intentions) to get in touch with children (and vice versa), as reported by these pre-adolescents (see Castro 2015).

More access and use entails more contact with risky situations. To deal with the inevitable problems that may arise from digital consumption, parents have a twofold reaction: some parents decide for the forbidding approach, while others opt instead to negotiate with their children. For instance, they allow the child to have a profile in a social network if they comprise to validate with them or older siblings before accepting a friendship request. Despite not having the minimum age to have a social network profile, this is the strategy applied by Marina's (aged 12) parents. Marina's parents are not savvy in technological issues, so they confide in their older son to mentor and supervise Marina's digital activities, as she explains: "I promised my brother I wouldn't accept strangers' requests". Nevertheless, and proving children's agency to respond and circumvent parental restrictions, for example Teresa (aged 11) lied and with the help of her cousin created a profile without her parents' awareness.

Media Moulds Parents' Perceptions

From children's own account, they were open to share that despite knowing the risks, they often accepted requests from people they do not know, overlooking their online protection, not only on social network sites, but also in gaming platforms. In these ages, social capital is also measured by the number of followers and "friends" one has on social networking platforms. Thus, this justifies accepting requests from strangers without much consideration, a decision they do not consider risky, as long as they do not engage in talking with them.

Diana (aged 12): I accept requests from strangers, but I don't… [Interrupted]
Francisco (aged 12): [Finishes Diana's sentence] But she never chats with them.

When children were requested to reflect on their parents' mediation styles, proving their critical and agentic perception of parents

interventions, two girls were aware of the link between parental supervision and regulation and *media coverage*, confirming the power media have in the construction of moral panics in late modernity (Anderson 2006)—as shown in the two following excerpts.

> When my parents watch such news [about online risks], they tell me to be careful with whom I speak to on the internet. (Joana, aged 10)

Following Joana sharing her point of view on how she perceives that media influences and produces effects on her parents' mediation, Lara reinforces by adding that:

> My mother every single day bothers me with all the internet dangers [with a theatrical suffering voice]. To make things worse, she reads about Facebook [incidents] on the computer. (Lara, aged 10)

With children's help and their comments, it was possible to produce a list with parents' main concerns based on the advices they give to the children. The list is organised according to the criterion of frequency: being contacted by strangers, finding pornography online, watching violence, getting viruses, gaming addiction and social networking addiction. This finding is supported in literature by Ponte et al. (2008) and the EU Kids Online report (Livingstone et al. 2012), wherein Portuguese parents were identified as being overly worried—twice as much compared to other European parents—about two kinds of risks: contact with strangers and encountering sexual content.

However, if parents' main concerns about children's digital activity seem to remain more stable over the years, children's concerns are more up-to-date, sophisticated. In their own words, they worry about: being cyberbullied, strangers accessing their personal information, being tracked by localisation software, someone guessing their password, being victims of webcam hacking, being contacted by strangers, finding pornography, being abducted (when meeting online contacts), identity theft, online impersonation and being blackmailed over a personal picture. These examples prove how children's concerns are more wide-ranging and complex, mirroring technological advances and the embeddedness of digital culture in their daily lives and interactions. Nevertheless, we cannot be sure if some of these (e.g. pornography, contacted by strangers) may mirror what children assimilate and reproduce from parents' worries and warnings.

Children's Response to Parental Mediation

As internet creates more opportunities for children to participate in an unsupervised manner, through the use of applications and social networks that parents do not understand, parents tend to feel more uncomfortable feeling their supervision threatened and disempowered as gatekeepers. Listening to children, it seems parents have developed a paradoxical relationship with these new services and platforms, through which some seem to take advantage of its architecture to supervise and control the child's digital footsteps. The following account is a very interesting example that illustrates the kinds of tensions that may arise when parents' monitoring style encourages children to take matters in their own hands to protect their digital privacy and participation. Eva shares her critical understanding of her mother's behaviour and describes how she manages to resist and balance the power differential arising from the mother–child relationship:

> I'm friends' with them [my parents]. But I sometimes don't post things because of them. And you know why? Take for instance this situation: Rosa sends me a friend request and I accept it. She becomes my Facebook friend, right? My mother sees that 'Eva and Rosa are now friends'. And then my mother asks me: 'Do you know that person?' And I reply: 'Yes, mother'. Then she says: 'But I don't.' Look, she's really annoying. My mother wants to know everything. We are more relaxed without parents snooping. (Eva, aged 12)

Her response to motherly surveillance resonates western *individualization*, claimed by Beck (1992), *reflexivity* as discussed by Giddens (1990), and the need to *stay in control* of the situation as argued by boyd (2014). The combination of these three aspects is significant to understand how Eva examines her everyday practices, and how she reflects her own decision and the strategy she uses to avoid conflicts resulting from the panoptical structure of Facebook; how she scrutinises what to post online, encouraged by the certainty of her mother snooping in; and how she counterattacks her mother's regulation, denoting the lack of trust (in this case, bidirectional), a corollary of late modern society, as a result of how she expects her mother to behave.

Besides Eva, other children in the study reported to have an active role in the way they perceive, experience and respond to parents' mediation practices. More or less creative reactance strategies to mitigate this

power differential and to circumvent parents' controlling schemes were reported by the children. One girl declared deleting the internet browser history in her mobile phone (Maria, 10). Some shared they use codes in their text messages when talking about school crushes and gossip (Teresa, 11; Clara, 10); using passwords to avoid parents entering their smartphones and avoid parents from snooping in (Ariel, 10; Alice, 10; Teresa, 11; Clara, 10; Paula, 10; Rogério, 12; Mel, 11); and deleting compromising text messages (Vanda, 10; Ariel, 10; Alice, 12; Esmeralda, 10; Helena, 10).

Despite parents' choice for a more overt or covert approach, empirical findings demonstrate that children are knowledgeable of *when* and *how* their parents are checking on them. Thus, when parents' efforts to protect children go through restricting their offspring's online freedom, participation and self-expression rights, children actively engage in countermeasures to escape such control.

For the generation born in the new millennium, the value of these always-connected devices goes beyond its use or utility: they reinforce *tribal feelings and feelings* of *belonging* (Maffesoli 1996). Thus, as the lack of trust undermines the relationship between parents and children, children may be impelled to migrate between digital spaces (e.g. Instagram, Whatsapp, Snapchat, Tik Tok, YouTube). Like (digital) nomads, they switch between platforms and apps to escape adult supervision and the self-contained world shaped by parental concerns in order to construct their own (digital) biographies, as Maria's account proves:

> *Maria (aged 10)*: My father created a Facebook profile. And now he sees the things we – me and my sister - do.
> *Gabriela (aged 10)*: (laughs). If that would happen with me, I wouldn't accept my father's friend request.
> *Paula (aged 12)*: Me neither.
> *Maria*: I don't do anything interesting there. I only play games there.

The picture that emerges from Maria's account is far from simplistic and reveals intricate strategising. Maria manages several accounts: one for her parent to supervise and other account(s) she uses for playing and interacting with other people. Her final statement is challenging, "I don't do anything interesting there. I only play games there". The use of the adverb "*there*" is of major importance in her account, as it may suggest that like Eva (in the previous example), she actively and reflexively

manages her online *self* so she can avoid friction with her dad; and she reflexively manages strategically her digital footprint to make it "more opaque to parental scrutiny" (Garcia-Montes et al. 2006, 69), while she enjoys her digital freedom in a more independent and hidden manner elsewhere.

Notwithstanding their *getting around* parents' restricting and monitoring strategies, most children reacted positively to parental concern about how they use digital technologies: "*I think they should worry if someone bothers us*" (Bárbara, aged 11). And to some degree, children are willing to accept parents *tightening the net of control* (James and James 2001), as long as they do not feel their autonomy constrained. For children, the barrier of their privacy is the mobile phone, a (personal) device that represents emotional investment and attachment (Serrano-Puche 2015). In their own words they expressed they do not approve when parents "*snoop my mobile phone*" (Tiago, aged 12); "*snoop my photos or my text messages*" (Bárbara, aged 11).

Moreover, some children also regard parental advice as "*too demanding*" (Alice, aged 10) and "*pointless*" (Helena, aged 10), which may suggest that some think of their parents as naïves and not in touch with the online world in which children navigate, as Haddon (2015) also concludes. Below follows an example of how a general piece of advice coming from parents may lose credibility when the child has already significant digital skills.

> *Researcher*: And why is that you don't need that kind of advice?
> *Helena (aged 10)*: Because I know they can steal my identity, thus… [pause].
> *Alice (aged 10)*: Yes [agreeing with Helena].
> *Helena*: Thus, I will not trust anyone.
> *Alice*: I won't either.

For example, Rita (aged 10) justifies the use of a picture of Pucca (a fandom character) in her Gmail account profile to avoid someone "stealing" a picture of herself. Although children may not be totally aware of the consequences that, for example, *identity theft* may comprise—indeed they were not (see Castro 2015)—they are aware of risks in general terms.

Their lack of knowledge may be a reflex that parents and teachers, the adults who are in charge of their well-being, also lack literacy to offer a sense of perspective. And there is a handful of reasons why this might happen—lack of time is one of the main reasons reported by parents, despite the media landscape (Pereira 1999; Ponte et al. 2017). Parents tend to claim authority based on the argument "because I say so" (Castro 2015) or use devices as a bargaining chip (Ponte et al. 2017). Children, on the other hand, to avoid getting grounded or their devices taken away, tend to hide things from parents. This attitude reveals a lack of trust on parents and a mismatch of expectations that has an impact on mediation, protection and in the parent–child relationship. The examples depicted previously not only undermine parental credibility, but also shake the bond of trust between parent and child, like the next dialogue exemplifies:

Lara (aged 10): Because we may encounter things that upset us, but we don't trust our parents… we fear that our parents do something. Either way, they can find out.
Gabriela (aged 10): They don't have anything to do with what I'm doing online. If they want to know, they should ask, and I'll tell them.
Joana (aged 10): As long as they are not annoying.

It is not the purpose of this study to inflame the debate about risks or to alarm parents. On the contrary, despite not being representative, the data presented here provides useful information to stimulate the need to build constructive approaches towards problems; to stimulate transparent and positive conversations about what means to make wise decisions online and a responsible use of digital media.

Feeding parents' fears and anxieties, ultimately, may be limiting children from exploring digital opportunities in more depth: it might affect children's decisions, social development, human bonds (Bauman 2006) and might also encourage children to sharpen their strategies to outsmart adults, while also promoting a negative imagery of the internet and the perception of the world as a dangerous place (Best and Bogle 2014). Moreover, it is important to support the positive response of children to their parents' involvement, as the digital and online landscape becomes just another layer (but increasingly complex) of everyday life.

Final Remarks

Based on evidence that "indicates the probability but not the certainty of harm" (Staksrud et al. 2013, 41), research appears to have suffered a turning point, beginning to explore a different approach to risk—one that seems to smooth some digital panics asserting that risk does not necessarily means harm and accepting the possibility of children exploring risky opportunities in order to build coping strategies and resilience.

The chapter builds on Portuguese pre-adolescent children perspectives on how they perceive and react to parents' intervention concerning their digital activity when it brings tension to the parent–child relationship. Regarding on *how discourses of anxiety are moulding parents' perceptions and mediation of their children's digital media consumption*, the accounts analysed here confirm that media play a role by conveying risk-based messages that influence and impact upon the way parents form risk perceptions and react with policing schemes to children's digital activities. Since we were not able to hear the parents on these issues, we cannot for certain assert that restricting or policing are the only approaches used by those parents or if they adapt their strategies accordingly to the situations that may arise.

About *how children are responding to more intrusive parental mediation approaches*, despite the good news—that children uphold that parents should concern about what they do online, they also made it clear that parents should respect their digital rights to privacy and participation. Overall, children's accounts (i) problematise power and control as aspects of paramount significance that trouble the parent–child relationship; (ii) show that parental restrictive and monitoring strategies reflect an over-protective approach that underestimates children's digitals competencies and resilience; (iii) demonstrate that adults are hardly in charge of controlling children's digital activity when reactance strategies are activated.

Parents' responses to potential digital threats are built from already outdated concerns that no longer fit children's own anxieties or the increasing changing technological landscape in which they are growing. Thus, while parents are concerned with protecting children from potential harms, children's narratives depict their concern in protecting themselves from adult control and surveillance, which, ultimately, results in more (complex) problems: it puts children's online protection at risk and it drives both generational groups apart, as a result of a mismatch

of needs and expectations between children and adults. Children's arguments not only inform us on their perspectives, but it also instigate us to support that parental mediation should pursue more positive approaches to children's digital consumption.

Both groups would benefit from learning from each other. Adults can learn from children about technological dexterity and children can benefit from adults' wisdom to avoid and overcome social problems they may face online, and take more advantage of their online participation.

Finally, the findings reinforce the need to continually update research so we can keep track of technological developments and appropriations to offer families updated information to mentor their children's media consumption, helping them "scaffold learning and maximise opportunities of digital media access" (Mascheroni et al. 2016, 277).

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Notes

1. Alongside with Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom.
2. From the 41 children enrolled in the study, 35 had 10–12 years old, two were 13, other two were nine, one was 15 and another one was six years old.

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CHAPTER 17

Conclusions: Why Is 'Childhood at Risk' so Appealing After All? The Construction of the 'Iconic' Child in the Context of Neoliberal Self-Governance

Liza Tsaliki and Despina Chronaki

Contributing to a Growing Body of Work on Discourses of Anxiety

This concluding chapter aims at both summing up the ways in which the authors of this book contributed to the overall discussion about moral anxieties surrounding childhood in different social and political contexts and across different countries, but also provide a broader contextualization when thinking about childhood in relation to moral panics. Our attempt has been to build upon already established cultural accounts on the topic (e.g. Buckingham and Jensen 2012; Clapton et al. 2013; Krinsky 2008; Hier 2011) in order to reiterate the need to address the

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diverse span of discourses of anxiety about childhood from a perspective that draws primarily upon technologies of children's regulation and self-regulation. Contributing further to an understanding of how the conception of 'risk', 'risk averse culture' and 'risk society' inform discourses about childhood and guides towards socially acceptable, self-governed and regulated lifestyles of both parents and children, this book wishes to add to the already well-cited body of literature on the topic, focusing the cross-national and cross-cultural nature of moral panics.

Clapton and Barker (in this volume) are investigating the political nature of the 'child at risk' via critical evaluations of the system of social work in Britain and of the political debates provoked by the 'video nasties'. In fact, they show very succinctly that in some cases, especially when the debates turn out to be of ideological or structural nature, children themselves are largely missing from debates of which they are central figures. In such cases, overarching assumptions about the status of childhood, defined as what adulthood is not, i.e. innocent, incompetent, in need of guidance and regulation, are indented in discourses seeking to reiterate self-regulation practices of the neoliberal individual, regardless of whether this is about the parent or their offspring.

A similar case emerged on October 20, 2019, during the first screenings of *Joker* in Greek cinemas. Following a phone call made by civil servants from the Ministry of Culture and Sports to the police, the police raided one of the theaters screening the movie in order to force underaged spectators and their parents out. Titles such as '*Police raid Joker screenings in Athens, turfing out 19 children*' (Crowcroft 2019), or '*Police remove minors from screenings of Joker*' (ekathimerini.com 2019) appeared in the press and in news sites, and a heated political discussion erupted across the social media. The incident took place almost four months after the conservative party (New Democracy) came to power in Greece, succeeding a four-year Left (SYRIZA) administration. Such a reaction by the official state revived political discourses about the 1960s military junta in Greece (1967–1973), a period of extreme censorship and policing of freedom of speech and fundamental human rights; it also brought back memories of the enforcement of Law 445/1937 banning underaged people's consumption of movies, a law voted during the Metaxas' junta (1936–1941). Therefore, overnight, the key point was no longer about whether or not underage youth should have been granted entry to watch *Joker*, and what the law stipulated—nor about how young people are being perceived in Greece. Instead, this quickly came across as a political issue, and one about censorship and infringement of free speech and freedom of expression.

In this context, *Joker* was used by the SYRIZA opposition in Greece to make a political point about a potential revival of the police-state, after the Conservatives taking over. Although the argument was legitimate—in that such an activity indeed violated individual rights of freedom of choice and expression—, it was nonetheless presented as a major violation of democratic principles, with a social and political backlash. Invoking militaristic discourses about the 1960s junta in Greece and political discourses about human rights and national identity, the incident was framed as a threat to democracy in the country, following the change in administration, leaving the real issue—how young people are constructed as 'in need of protection'—unscathed. As noted in Buckingham and Jensen (2012), when it comes to a media panic, examining who, when and why makes a case might prove much more effective than merely applying a media/moral panics taxonomy or an ideological critique. In asking such questions, one can address a particular case through a cultural-historical lens, including all sorts of interests and social circumstances that contextualize the event at hand.[1]

Within such a cultural-historical perspective, contributions in this book focus on three main themes, usually reflected in discourses of anxiety about childhood:

- the politics of children's protection,
- childhood sexuality and
- the fear of media effects.

In summarizing the works of this volume along these lines, we show that we approached discourses of anxiety about children and youth in a way that not only reflects previous and current research, but also contributes to a critical reading of concepts like 'harm' and 'risk', especially in the context of children's media use. By including research from cultures that do not regularly appear in scholarship regarding this topic, as for example case studies from francophone Canada, Brazil or Mexico, we shed light both on how social anxieties that surround childhood share common ground, but also how distinct social conditions impact upon the construction of these anxieties at the cultural level. By remaining within a social constructionist analytical perspective, this volume wishes to contribute to the international body of research with studies that have both analytical and theoretical underpinnings and implications for future research.

The Politics of Children's Protection

Martin Barker and Gary Clapton have discussed social and cultural concerns about childhood via an analytical perspective of political and policy-oriented discourses. Barker (Chapter 2) revisits the 1980s 'video nasties' campaign and the critique of the ways in which their demonization within the political debate, also embraced by media (mostly sensationalist press), led to an emergence of discourses of anxiety over the child and the family, and the values instilled in both of them. In an attempt to enshrine family values in content classification billing in the UK (Barker in this volume, p. 52), government and aligned Christian groups work towards further intensification of regulation and self-regulation within the family context. In effect, Barker highlights the strategic alliance between politics and religious groups, i.e. between politicians and Christian groups, opting for effective ways to have a say in the public sphere by regulating childhood and the institution of the family.

In reading childhood through different conceptualizations of risk and panic (Cohen 1972/2002; Critcher 2003; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994), Barker manages indeed to shed light on how a notion of 'childhood-at-risk' is conveniently employed in political or politically oriented strategies towards broader causes. In this case, such strategies aimed at contextualizing a nation's social and cultural development in ethical terms. In Barker's discussion, an important point emerges: the child or childhood is not always the real problem or cause for concern. In fact, it is usually the idea of childhood that is being employed in shaping public policies; but also, in reinventing aspects of cultural identity, which is reiterated through the author's argument that negotiations of moral panics are context-specific and cannot be necessarily approached by means of a general theory.

In his chapter, Clapton argues that the social work system in the UK has in several 'signal events' led to a strategic shift from underestimating children's agency to overestimating it (Chapter 4). In effect, such hard shifting from one position to the other, the argument goes, often leads to a fueling of moral panics. Different cases, which Clapton approaches critically, signify what in other works of his has been described as a 'readiness to panic-and a readiness to intervene' (Clapton et al. 2013, 205). And not least, to 'a "better safe than sorry" culture', where not just social services and other related institutions, but the society as a whole, begs constantly for childhood regulation and self-regulation.

In critically discussing political initiatives and social work system figures, Clapton argues about the inefficacy of adopting either a 'parent-to-blame' or a 'children-exaggerate' approach, in that the actual problem with this ever-going 'child protection' question is that parents are seen as the problem. In seeing parents as the core issue in child protection, policies allow further state or other intervention in how family works, which inevitably institutionalizes and instrumentalizes childhood and turns children into constant objects of expert and state investigation and regulation. To be clear though, such an argument is not merely a biopolitical one; rather it reiterates, in the same way since the eighteenth century, that children and parents are constantly expected to act in certain ways when it comes to children's upbringing (see Rose 1999).

Still from the perspective of state intervention, nevertheless addressing femininity, health and girls' bodies as sites of achievements, Clark (Chapter 6) discusses the ways in which children embody and negotiate the healthy body as a project and a form of citizenship. By conducting interviews with teen girls in the UK, she approaches analytically the complexity and contradictory process of self-making, when it comes to girls seeking to achieve 'successful girlhood' (ibid., p. 119). In effect, age and gender dynamics define the ways in which girls construct their bodies as projects within 'the competitive heteronormative economy of school' (ibid., p. 119). Within a western cultural context, leisure is often associated with incompetent children and thus falls within an understanding of how leisure activities should be regulated, in order to turn into creative and educational practices (Tsaliki 2016). Therefore, it is not coincidental that physical activity is rarely embodied in terms of fun or relaxation, but, rather, in terms of health, academic competence and physical attraction. Set in a post-feminist analytical context and discussed through a (self-) governmentality perspective, Clark's discussion prioritizes girls' bodily concerns that turn into body projects monitored within peer culture and the schooling system.

Childhood Sexuality

Concerns over the female teenage body and the fear of the effects of hypersexualization on girlhood and childhood sexuality, is the topic of other contributions falling within the broader context of sexuality. Mercier (Chapter 3) is interested in discourses deriving from the Press,

public figures (like actors, authors or celebrities) and 'experts' claiming academic or experiential knowledge of childhood and the 'problems' relating to it. She focuses on how girls' sexuality appears in public space through processes of 'problematization', an analytical concept employed by Foucault (1986/2012) in his work on sexuality. Thereafter, as in other cultural scholars' work, sexuality turns into a problematic situation once it moves from private to public (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Chronaki 2013). She provides empirical evidence that surveillance and regulating practices appear as the solution to the hypersexualization of girls (and online pornography as its major component). Her work, reiterates further how well-established assumptions about the child-at-risk and about fallen girlhood are in western culture, and francophone Canada more particularly.

From a different perspective, Holloway et al. (Chapter 5) work critically with understandings of parenting and child regulation. Their analysis brings effectively upfront how children's bodies are exhaustively monitored and medically/scientifically defined as part of proper upbringing. The discussion develops around how baby health-monitoring technology marketization contributes to a discursive construction of parents within a binary of responsible vs irresponsible parent, including market, science and experience-laden parenting. Neoliberal discourses about childhood and parenting are inherently discourses about self-governance and most significantly about the public performance of effective self-governance. The notion of parental responsibility towards children and children's responsibility towards parents and the family, are in fact responsibilities towards society, projected in public space and in this sense, the Aristotelian notion of 'good citizen' (applying 'a diet of the self' in one's life), contextualizes governing and self-governing practices of this sort (Foucault 1986/2012).

Thus, citizenship being an inherently public performance, makes good parenting—as an element of how conscious of and concerned about their offspring's proper upbringing parents are—, a matter of public performance, too (Geinger et al. 2014). In the process, being a good parent implies experience, knowledge and responsibility, which is exactly what Holloway et al. point out in their analysis. They provide an account of the discursive components of parenting as represented within the marketization techniques of baby monitoring technology. In effect, what emerges from the discussion is public concern about the parent's self, as a requirement for good parenting. In the process, the role of

gender, (i.e. the mother is still assumed to be the key figure in children's upbringing, Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Knaak 2010), remains undisturbed, as does the extent of scrutinization of the child's body (Zornado 2001).

Sexualization and online risks for young people is the main topic in Barbovschi, Jereissati and Macaya's discussion (Chapter 15). Through a study situated in Brazil, the authors provide a reading of how sexualization is contextualized in parental discourse about girls' use of social media in the Latin American context. Their gender-specific approach lies on the grounds that concerns about childhood sexuality are mostly about gender and class (Weeks 1985), therefore girls are centrally situated within such concerns and debates. The neoliberal context in which we understand gender performativity, and femininity in particular, still denies girls their sexual agency to a certain extent (Gill and Scharff 2011). This is coupled with neoliberal practices of regulation and self-regulation of childhood overall, creating a conceptual space from which Barbovschi and Jereissati examine their case study. The case study at hand is interesting for providing an analytical view not only of how parents construct children's and girls' sexuality, but, more importantly, of the ways in which such discourses of anxiety are established in their patterns of upbringing. In effect, the either/or perceptions of childhood and sexuality instil into children and parents (self-) governing practices on a constant basis.

Apparently, it is not by luck that almost half of the contributions in this volume discuss the topic of moral panics and discourses of anxiety in relation to childhood sexuality. Both concepts (childhood and sexuality) have always been convenient platforms of regulation and self-regulation, given that childhood reflects and encapsulates broader social concerns—predominantly concerns about the future of society (see for example the critical approaches of Buckingham 2000; Krinsky 2013; Tisdall 2015; Tsaliki 2016). The body of the child as a site where discourses about 'healthy' vs 'unhealthy', 'safe' vs 'unsafe', 'risky' and 'toxic' sexuality apply is the focus of McKee et al.'s (Chapter 10), Green et al.'s (Chapter 11) and Scarcelli's (Chapter 13) chapters.

The sexual child and the child body as a site of institutional, state-led regulation is the topic addressed by McKee et al. in their discussion of the notion of risk in sex education. As the authors themselves note, 'in Australian, British and American sex education, "risk" is a key term' (McKee et al. in this volume). Although the nature, content and aims

of sex education are context-specific and vary across countries with a well-established sex education protocol (e.g. Anglophone, Scandinavian or German-speaking countries), the very essence of sex education, even the term itself, implies a need to 'teach' something specific about sex. As noted elsewhere, the discursivity of sex is defined in terms of a problem, i.e. sexuality comes to the public sphere only to be discussed or treated as something problematic (Chronaki 2014; Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Foucault 1986/2012).

Sex education, therefore, as an inherently public and institutionalized platform upon which sex is negotiated, is discussed by McKee et al. through the perception of sex as something potentially risky. In proposing a new tool to measure the fun aspect of young people's sexual life, McKee et al. argue that such an approach might broaden the conceptual scope of risk in relation to sex, and allow young people to develop less censorious and medicalized ways of thinking and talking about it, as well as when negotiating their sexual lives and identities.

In the milieu of discourses about sexualization, sex education and sexual content effects lie young people's sexting practices, as another ill-defined and highly demonized form of self-expression. Sexting is a social practice also understood as a malpractice and often described as such in the context of sex education. Scarcelli (Chapter 13) employs cultural and post-feminist approaches to investigate Italian youth's sexting practices that acknowledge children's agency to negotiate sexuality in public space in multiple, context-specific ways. He provides empirical evidence of the ways in which technology is embedded in young people's lives and embraces sexuality in manners that do not exclude intimacy, romance, gender performance, negotiation of the public self or even fun. In effect, he aptly shows that sexting, as an inherently social practice firmly embedded in young people's cultural practices, becomes a platform which both researchers and adults overall need to embrace, before they can address sexuality-related issues more effectively.

On a similar topic, Green et al. (Chapter 11) discuss children's experiences with sexual content online and the ineffectiveness of the 'risk' approach often employed in exploring such encounters. Studies attempting to identify risks and potential harms that children's online experiences might entail, appear with the broad diffusion of online media use and primarily the internet in the late 90s. In effect, a still growing body of mass communication research, mostly represented by the work of EU Kids Online, a pan European network of researchers studying children's

online use, signalled the establishment of the 'communication risk' paradigm (Chronaki 2014). In distancing itself from the causality rationale of the effects approach, this body of research understands children's experiences within the binary context of risks and opportunities online. Not surprisingly, sexual content is classified as a risk and a potentially harmful experience (Buckingham and Chronaki 2014).

Green et al.'s discussion of the topic derives from the activity of EU Kids Online network, and thus sexual content is discussed by the children of the sample in negative terms. It nevertheless underscores the cultural context of risk and the need for this to be taken into account in research of this sort. Not least, the authors stress the need for researchers to see children's own understanding of being bothered, of risk and harm in the context of these responses' social and cultural production.

The notion of 'risk' does not only concern children's experiences with sexually oriented information, but also relates to the representation of the sexual child via discourses of abuse. In fact, when it comes to childhood, sexuality can very easily be perceived in a context of abuse, especially when adults are involved. In addition, the figure of the perpetrator, as a middle-aged, socially or mentally disabled, sleazy man, fits conveniently the conceptualization of the threat to the romantic perception of the child figure (see accounts like Wilson and Silverman 2002 or Burn and Willett 2004). In Lamont's discussion, Chapter 12, the interest is in how concerns about childhood sexual abuse appear in exaggerated cultural representations. Given that social and cultural negotiations of issues like abuse are discursively constructed through the less traumatic nature of humour, Lamont approaches the topic through the satirical text of the 2005 British comedy 'Nathan Barley'.

The author concludes that the exaggerating nature of satire and parody creates a space to approach

> interpersonal harm, cultural capital, objectifying clichés or personal prejudices of the "deserving" victim, whilst also addressing the viewers' own culpability in the very "trauma industry" in which they critique. (Lamont in this volume, 335)

In effect, what aptly emerges from Lamont's discussion and sits firmly alongside the conceptualization of the social work system in the UK offered by Clapton (in this volume), is that public discourse focuses almost exclusively on the child, as a victim, as struggling to survive in

the context of a malfunctioning family and is therefore in need of protection. Needless to say that such anxieties usually concern families or people with particular gender, race or class characteristics, all of which also apply to children.

The Fear of Media Effects

Academic and public discussions about children and media, inevitably engage with or address the never-ending issue of media effects. Fear of what the media does to people, underlie most anxieties about childhood, and not least are of essence when one discusses the media as an inherent part of 'risk society' (Beck 1992) or the 'culture of fear' (Furedi 2001). Thus, even paradigms like the communication risk model, which classifies children's experiences online as either risky and potentially harmful or safe and beneficial (e.g. Livingstone et al. 2011), the growing discussion about children's rights in the digital era (e.g. Livingstone and Bulger 2014), or parental mediation of children's online practices (e.g. Kirwil 2009), all talk about the risk of some sort of effect, thereby working on policy-oriented guidelines towards children's resilience online. The very fact of resilience, of the condition within which the child needs to learn how to protect themselves from the assumed corruptive power of the media, underscores the extent of public and academic acknowledgement the effects discourse has.

Staksrud and Ólafsson (Chapter 14) explore the 'worry' factor in parents' perceptions of children's online experiences. As noted elsewhere, it is the very fact that online media are firmly embedded in children's cultural worlds and everyday routines, that often drive both parental and adult worries more broadly (Prout 2005). On top of the unregulated child, sit concerns about the nature of online media and technology, at least as heavily influential—at most, as 'perverse' (Chronaki 2014). When it comes to parental mediation of children's media use, different sorts of constructions of gender, age and agency come into play. In fact, parental concerns seem to increase when it comes to girls, younger children and academically less competent ones (Livingstone et al. 2011). This is an observation upon which Staksrud and Ólafsson attempt to provide further evidence with data from Norway. Thus, as noted elsewhere, issues of gender, age and class appear through their cultural significance in discourses about media effects (Buckingham 2000) which are expected to be the case with parents as well.

Within the all-inclusive 'effects' term, come concerns about online excessive use, and about the cognitive, behavioural or attitudinal impact of online media. In this perspective, Staksrud and Ólafsson's results empirically support that the effects discourse as well as cultural and social classifications of children (gender, age, etc.) inform parental worries in Norway. Such empirical evidence further supports the argument that as long as childhood is understood in terms of risk, harm and effects, it keeps informing a highly regulatory framework of children's needs, rights and responsibilities concerning the use of online media.

It is along such lines that Dias de Castro and Ponte (Chapter 16) discuss children's perceptions of parental mediation in Portugal. The concept of parental mediation is a term introduced to conceptualize how parents regulate children's online use (Livingstone and Helsper 2008). Although it appears as a much broader and inclusive concept than regulation itself, including online skills acquisition, parent–child sharing practices and not least, children's rights in a digital context, its actual efficiency for children still remains unclear given the lack of children's voices on the topic (Haddon 2015). We would further argue in this respect, however, that talking about parental mediation by default excludes children themselves and limits their agency when talking about their online experiences.

In critiquing the censorious context of parental mediation, whereby mediation discourses are inherently about risk, harm and how to avoid it, Dias de Castro and Ponte discuss empirically how such anxiety regarding technology is well embedded in children's own constructions as well as in parents'. They work with Furedi's (2001) 'culture of fear' concept, assuming that different technologies and structures within the western wider social context trigger anxiety and 'controlling behaviours that bring tension to family relationships' (Dias de Castro and Ponte in this volume, 395). In effect, they draw upon another concept applied by Furedi (2001), that of 'paranoid parenting', to discuss how both children and parents engage with strict regulatory and self-regulatory practices when it comes to children's online use. This condition limits participation in public space further (boyd and Hargittai 2013), also neglecting and strictly regulating agentic practices with technology.

In most of the contributions in this volume underlies an assumption made elsewhere by Tisdall (2015, 35) that 'children will be empowered, rather empower themselves'. In Trultzsch-Wijnen and Supa's discussion (Chapter 6), social constructionist and new cultural history approaches

are applied to elaborate on the complexity and reductive nature of children's relationship with the media. Working within this perspective and within an analytical framework proposed by Buckingham and Jensen (2012) to explore media panics over childhood, the authors seek to provide an overview of the rationale behind packing claims about childhood in a certain spatial and time cultural context (German-speaking countries). In this process, they work with the dominant oppositional binaries within which childhood and online media are understood, namely child vs adult and risk vs opportunity. These binaries offered them contextual space to conceptualize media panics over childhood in German-speaking countries and work critically with concepts like 'media education' and 'children's media practices'.

The still ongoing concerns that Pokémon (and recently Pokémon GO) has raised in the public sphere because of its popularity, is the topic critically addressed by Patrickson in Chapter 8. Pokémon has been also constructed in terms of its potential negative effects on users, whether these might be psychological or physical, concerns that are heightened to a greater extent because of its interactive gaming nature. Its interactive nature and extreme popularity received huge media interest and, as a result, researchers' interest like Buckingham, who addressed the extent of the participatory agency it offers (2011, 2003 with Sefton-Green), or Tobin (2004) who mostly focused on the commercial aspects of the Pokémon phenomenon.

Patrickson explores the ways in which 'viral media processes challenge previous models for understanding moral panics' (209) and also investigates issues of datafication and the social anxieties the datafication process invokes in the case of Pokémon GO. In effect, she manages to offer an overview of the complexities of Pokémon GO not just in terms of how it is represented in media texts, but also in terms of the gaming activity itself. Moreover, she addresses the ways in which players' dealing with and becoming aware of such complexities contribute to players' overall game literacy and competence. Patrickson approaches Hiroki Azuma's (2009) argument, one that seems to neglect the social and discursive nature of the gaming experience, arguing that 'media datafication and participatory culture creates database animals' (Patrickson in this volume, 237), critically. And she shows that there is a great deal of identity-work taking place during the gaming activity, including a wealth of social experiences within the community and urban space, as well as a wide range of discursive constructions of the gaming experience.

Finally, Inzunza-Acedo (Chapter 9) offers a classic reception study exploring children's constructions of crime and insecurity in Mexico, via interviews with 45 children 6–13 years old in the city of Monterrey, Mexico. Her interviewing strategy also included participants' production of drawings as another way of narrating/illustrating their understanding of insecurity in the city or of how a criminal looks like. Employing a theoretical discussion of moral panics through the critical perspective of new cultural history (Buckingham and Jensen 2012), Inzunza-Acedo approaches analytically the components of crime as social and discursive constructions. Consequently, she manages to show that, instead of merely arguing that media discourses about crime influence children's perceptions and constructions, we need to approach them as agentic negotiators of what happens in the city; and as significant contributors to how the social context (including aspects like risk and insecurity) is understood and dealt with.

Contributors of this volume offered works that contextualize social and cultural concerns about childhood within the different approaches to moral panics. Some of them provided alternative approaches to classic moral panics models, while others used them analytically. All contributions, nevertheless, position towards not just a need to acknowledge children's agency in talking and participating in the public debate about childhood or balance the ways we negotiate with the state of childhood as something fragile and constantly at risk. They also point at the need to shift towards a more balanced approach to the condition of childhood and acknowledge why children are constantly the primary focus of moral panics in cultural-historical terms. Such an approach might allow a shift in policymaking, media education and children's social development more broadly in ways that will not feed forms of hysteric parenting, suffocating state regulation and panicking moral constructions of childhood.

Note

1. In talking about interests we do not merely mean media ownership interests; as the Joker example shows, we talk about political interests (right/left wing populism) as well, but also about other groups' interests (e.g. Christian groups) or related stakeholders who would benefit from establishing such a 'panicky' notion around media and childhood (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 428).

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