Reporting on young people, sexuality, and social media: a discourse theoretical analysis

# Details

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

183 news articles published in Northern Belgium between 1 January 2009 and 31 December
2016 that fell under the themes ‘youth and sexuality,’ ‘sexual crimes,’ ‘sexting and nude photos’ and ‘youth and social media

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Journalists

# Abstract

The amount of public interest in and media panic over youth,
sexuality, and social media has grown in recent years. In this
paper, we explore the discursive practices that are disciplining the
digital intimacies of young people through print media discourses.
Therefore, we use a Foucauldian feminist approach and conduct a
discourse theoretical analysis of 183 news articles published in
Northern Belgium between 1 January 2009 and 31 December
2016. Our findings show that the discourse in newspapers
reporting on youth, sexuality, and social media consists of three
recurring discursive practices. First, there is the problematization
of social media. Second, this problematization is legitimized by
the use of authoritative voices, such as those of academics or
other experts. Third, this results in a gendered categorization
where young girls are extensively included in the debate and
young boys and their digital experiences are most often excluded.
This gendered discourse not only perpetuates sexual double
standards throughout society but also implicitly disciplines young
people to adhere to hetero-patriarchal ideals of femininity and
masculinity.

# Outcome

The findings reveal three recurring discursive practices that are disciplining the (sexual) bodies of young people.
First, there is problematization. "Social media platforms are portrayed as unsafe and highly sexualized digital environments. This goes along with a victimization discourse where young people are presented as ‘naïve’ victims without any agency, highlighting the potential risks and overlooking the opportunities social media can have offer to youth culture.
Second, there is the legitimization given by authoritative voices. Problematization is enforced by the use of experts who offer explanations for the ‘incomprehensible’ behavior of young people.
The third discursive practice is categorization, mostly across gender. Young girls were highly represented and included in the dominant discourse, in contrast to the category
of young boys. This discourse evokes the impression that boys do not have to deal with online safety issues as much as girls do. When they are represented in news, boys more often appear as ‘sexually aggressive predators’ instead of ‘naïve victims.’ It does not only facilitate the circulation of sexual double standards in society, but it also perpetuates hetero-patriarchal ideals of femininity and masculinity, such as the innocent girl and the assertive boy dyad." (Korkmazer et al., 2020, pp. 333-334)