“Be Careful with Whom You Speak to on the Internet”—Framing Anxiety in Parental Mediation, Through Children’s Perspectives in Portugal

# Details

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## Sample

The fieldwork involved 41 Portuguese children, aged between 6 and 15 years old (8 boys
and 33 girls), mostly 10-12 years old, from low and medium socioeconomic status, distributed among four groups in two cities of the North of Portugal: Braga (3 groups) and Oporto (1 group).

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

"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 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 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 views (Haddon 2015) and their right to be listened to in matters thet concern them, the overall contribution of this chapter is to offer a span shot on how they perecive 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 parent mediation approaches?" (Castro, T. Ponte, C., 2020: 373-374).

# Outcome

"Based on evidence that 'indicates the probability but not the certain 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 explering risky opportunities in order to build coping strategies and resilience" (Castro, T. Ponte, C., 2020: 386).

"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 strategics 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" (ibidem).

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" (ibidem: 386-87).

"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)" (ibidem: 387).