Popular culture and moral panics about ‘children at risk’: revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate

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qualitative research conducted in Athens with young schoolgirls aged 10–12 years

# Abstract

In an attempt to resist moral panics over children’s media consumption, and especially
girls’ consumption of hyper-sexualised popular media, this paper aims to offer a more
positive account of popular culture and young children’s, especially girls’, engagement
with it. By adopting a historical approach to modern childhood and the moral panics
associated with it, I argue that the consumption of entertainment media and popular
culture is a leisure activity which, rather than facilitating or reinforcing female
subordination and youth vulnerability, can be seen as a possible source of knowledge
about sexuality, about the self and the social world. I draw on findings from qualitative
research conducted in Athens with young schoolgirls aged 10–12 years about their
favourite popular icons in order to examine the variety of their engagements with,
readings and practices of popular culture. Their discursive accounts reveal the intricate
ways in which pre-teenage girls make sense of fandom and stardom, discuss taste,
fashion and body aesthetics, and construct notions of attractiveness and ethical selfhood.

# Outcome

"respondents showed diverse practices and subject positions,ruled by the notion of self-governance" (Tsaliki, 2015, p.507)
"Young pre-adolescents (or ‘tweens’) exhibit a variety of diverse readings, engagements and practices of popular culture – contrary to prevailing moral panics about viral sexualisation"(Tsaliki, 2015, p.511)