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ENGLISH EDITION

YOUNG PEOPLE,
MEDIA AND HEALTH

RISKS AND RIGHTS

EDITORS: CECILIA VON FEILITZEN
& JOHANNA STENERSEN

The International Clearinghouse on
CHILDREN, YOUTH & MEDIA
at NORDICOM, University of Gothenburg

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media

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In 1997, the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), University of Gothenburg, Sweden, began establishment of the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media. The overall point of departure for the Clearinghouse's efforts with respect to children, youth and media is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of the Clearinghouse is to increase awareness and knowledge about children, youth and media, thereby providing a basis for relevant policy-making, contributing to a constructive public debate, and enhancing children's and young people's media literacy and media competence. Moreover, it is hoped that the Clearinghouse's work will stimulate further research on children, youth and media.

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media informs various groups of users – researchers, policy-makers, media professionals, voluntary organisations, teachers, students and interested individuals – about

- research on children, young people and media, with special attention to media violence,
- research and practices regarding media education and children's/young people's participation in the media, and
- measures, activities and research concerning children's and young people's media environment.

Fundamental to the work of the Clearinghouse is the creation of a global *network*. The Clearinghouse publishes a *yearbook* and *reports*. Several *bibliographies* and a worldwide *register of organisations* concerned with children and media have been compiled. This and other information is available on the Clearinghouse's *web site*:

www.nordicom.gu.se/clearinghouse

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THE CLEARINGHOUSE IS LOCATED AT NORDICOM

Nordicom is an organ of co-operation between the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The overriding goal and purpose is to make the media and communication efforts undertaken in the Nordic countries known, both throughout and far beyond our part of the world.

Nordicom uses a variety of channels – newsletters, journals, books, databases – to reach researchers, students, decisionmakers, media practitioners, journalists, teachers and interested members of the general public.

Nordicom works to establish and strengthen links between the Nordic research community and colleagues in all parts of the world, both by means of unilateral flows and by linking individual researchers, research groups and institutions.

Nordicom also documents media trends in the Nordic countries. The joint Nordic information addresses users in Europe and further afield. The production of comparative media statistics forms the core of this service.

Nordicom is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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Foreword and Introduction

Young People, Media and Health

Risks and Rights

Cecilia von Feilitzen and Johanna Stenersen

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization, WHO, 1946)

This anthology is the 2014 Yearbook from The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media at Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. The book focuses on children and young people in relation to media and health issues. Such issues represent central debates in contemporary society and pose major challenges for researchers and practitioners in a number of fields. The various contributions in the book – for which we would like to express our wholehearted thanks to all the authors – provide different perspectives on the ways in which media and health are interrelated.

Several contributions deal with possible *risks* to the health and well-being of children and young people in relation to *their use of media* – as viewers, listeners, readers and being on the internet – including research on how media can influence young people's physical and mental health. What are the potential benefits and disadvantages associated with certain media behaviours? The contributions present empirical findings and highlight different societal, political and research areas as answers to this question.

Other contributions in the book treat young people's health and well-being in relation to their *rights* to access information, express their views and participate in the media (cf. Articles 12, 13 and 17 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Media can, thus, also become *powerful tools for participation and inclusion* in groups and society, a perspective covered by other articles in the book. In which ways does, for example, a gender or equality perspective regarding young people and media improve our understanding of society? These articles discuss the importance of media when it comes to

processes of social change, not only in the form of public health campaigns but also as other creative forms of education and entertainment.

The anthology is interdisciplinary and aspires to present research with both empirical richness and theoretical depth. Although this book only covers a sample of the broad range of media and health issues, we hope it will contribute to a better understanding of different aspects of health connected to children's and young people's media use and participation in the media – and therefore to increased media and information literacy, as well. It is also our hope that this book will stimulate urgent debate, policy and further research on children/young people, media and health.

The world's population is currently around 7 billion (7,162 billion in 2013). By 2050, it is expected to be 9 billion (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, 2011, 2012a, 2013). More than 40 per cent of the world's population consists of people 24 years old or younger. A hopeful fact is that, on average in the world, mortality among children under five years of age is decreasing. At the same time, the median age of the world population is rising somewhat, the percentage of young people in the population is starting to decline and these changes are accompanied by a decrease in the fertility rate (UNFPA, 2012b). However, these demographic indicators differ quite a lot between countries and regions.

It is possible that, historically speaking, interest in children's rights and perspectives has never been keener – an important milestone being 193 countries' ratifying or acceding to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nevertheless, issues that concern children and young people still tend to be downplayed in politics, the economy, social life and culture, not least with regard to the distribution of resources. Similarly, young people are heavily underrepresented in decision-making organs and processes. Such circumstances are seldom covered in the media.

A central aspect when discussing media and health in relation to children and young people is that of equality. It is important to bear in mind that we live in a world where, on the one hand, scientific progress and economic wealth are growing but, on the other hand, a large number of people still live in extreme poverty and the gap between the richest and the poorest is getting wider. Current globalisation processes – in the form of increasing media communication, technology, commerce, social networking, and human beings' mobility as refugees, migrants, tourists/travellers, etc. – contribute both to decreasing distances in time and space *and* to risks of increasing the material divides between groups of people. At the same time, increasing globalisation is changing the face of media, as practice, structure and power factor.

Another serious concern is that heterogeneity in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, social class and poverty within the young population is quite often not taken into account. There are significant differences in these preconditions

and possibilities for children and adolescents both between and within countries. Such differences make it relevant to talk about opposing or contradictory problems related to health and media, such as obesity vs. undernourishment, or excessive media use as opposed to lack of access to media and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Media – press, film, radio, television, computer games, the internet, etc. – have, as a concept, become more complex to grasp due to the media's 'omnipresence' in everyday life (Deuze, 2011), as well as to technological convergence accelerated by digitisation (see, e.g., Jenkins, 2006). Notably, mobile technology and 'smart' media are blurring previous distinctions and understandings of media equipment and media use which have both become more individualised. According to Deuze (2011) the 'unconscious' use of media is also growing in media-saturated societies. The implications of all this are not fully understood. And young people are among the primary consumers and users of screen media in particular and they also contribute heavily to user-generated content in many different media forms on the internet.

These and other circumstances speak to the growing importance of media, information and communication literacy, not least among young people. Socio-political engagement is increasingly technology-driven and media become vital tools when engaging with society. The democratic potentials provided by new communication technologies to further include young in political and societal matters are still to be explored (Christensen, 2011).

However, access to media and ICTs is not evenly distributed across the world. While children and young people in the so-called developed world grow up in a media dense environment – where in some countries it is quite common for toddlers to have TV sets in their bedrooms (Rideout & Hamel, 2006) and for 2 and 3 year olds to have started using the internet (Findahl, 2012) – other children and young people are deprived of all or almost all kinds of media. Internet usage is increasing quite slowly worldwide. According to statistics from 2013 (International Telecommunication Union, 2013, 2014), 39 per cent of the world population were estimated to use the internet.¹ In the 'developed world' 77 per cent were internet users, compared to 31 per cent in the 'developing world'. In developing economies, there may be hindrances such as lack of electricity, poor or unreliable network coverage, heavy expenses using the net, or long distance to an internet access point. In many regions, for example, in rural areas of sub-Saharan countries, radio remains the most significant medium. Simultaneously, there are approximately 6.8 billion mobile cellular phone subscriptions in the world. Mobile-cellular penetration rates stand at 96 per cent globally, 128 per cent in developed countries and 89 per cent developing countries (International Telecommunication Union, 2013).

Parallel to the rapid but uneven media development, there is an increasing focus in many societies on issues related to health, well-being and lifestyle, where

media also play a major role. This rising interest may be partially explained by a growing international concern for sustainability issues. But there are other factors as well. Economic and socio-cultural dynamics play a role and macro-processes, such as individualisation in increasingly consumer-orientated societies, contribute to changing interests in health, body, beauty and other identity issues. Health and lifestyle subjects account for a substantial part of the total media content and have become a lucrative trend for a number of business sectors, including food, drinks, sports, fashion, housing, travel, make-up and medicine.

In the past decade, the concept of 'global health' has emerged in both national and international debates as an increasingly important but equally often disputed discourse. The difference between 'global health' and 'international health' can, in part, be found in underlying assumptions about the world, where 'global health' suggests an understanding of health matters that are globally interconnected (politically, economically, through pandemics, crossing national borders, affecting large populations, etc.). The dispute often revolves around two quite dominant frameworks for global health. On the one hand, there is a social justice framework and, on the other, there are economic development principles (Escobar, 1995). The former considers health as a global public good and puts emphasis on its connection to human rights. The latter focuses on good health as a key vehicle for overall economic progress and development, regardless of the inequalities these might produce. Today, it is widely recognised that health is vital for democratic, sustainable development.

It was one of the characteristics of modernity to take health out of the confines of religion and charity and make it a key element of action of the state and the rights of citizenship. The process, initially within the context of the constitution of the nation state, today needs to go global as a key dimension of global justice. Global health needs to move out of the charity mode of bilateral aid and philanthropy into the realm of rights, citizenship, and a global contract (Kickbusch, 2004: 230).

An essential incentive in this regard is the UN Millennium Development Goals from 2000, of which certain goals directly focus on *combating* poverty and hunger, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases, while other goals focus on *promoting* primary education, gender equality and maternal health among others. While large sums of money are spent on research and treatment of health in international development, increasingly, money is also spent tackling the underlying problems or issues related to certain health conditions or diseases (Obregón & Waisboard, 2012).

Taking a broad look at what can be defined as 'global health issues' reveals matters that can affect members of all societies. However, deprived and vulnerable groups are more at risk than others and there is a bias in power and influence of

advantage in favour of elite groups and richer countries. Media globalisation, as with most forms of the present globalisation processes, covers different parts of the globe asymmetrically (in some places, not at all) and is dependent on existing power relations (von Feilitzen, 2002). Poverty is inseparable from any analysis of both equity and health (Lister, 2010). In the 1970s, development economist Amartya Sen (1979) challenged the world community to see beyond such static fixations of poverty as the World Bank's definition of an income of USD 1.25 a day (nowadays supplemented with USD 2 a day, see e.g. The World Bank, 2014) as well as subsequent talk of being 'above' or 'below' the 'poverty line'.

Health is an undisputable part of people's lives and society and not a single product of physics, social structures or lifestyle and consumption. There is a need for all of these perspectives when tackling complex health phenomena. Health is related to ways of living, conduct, ideals and morals as well as to determinable factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class and poverty. In the face of global challenges, it is necessary to look intensely at how risks and opportunities affect the well-being of children and young people, and also to acknowledge central socio-political, economic and cultural determinants in the young population. The WHO definition of health at the very beginning of this introduction speaks of the fact that there is a call for holistic – not only medical-physical but also social and culture-centred – approaches to children, young people, media and health; approaches that consider and reflect upon the various 'economies' and 'geographies' that all children and young people (as well as adults) are entangled in.

There are a growing number of reports of non-communicable (non-infectious) and lifestyle related diseases worldwide. As an example, in recent years there has been much focus on complications caused by obesity, such as diabetes, sleep problems, and heart disease. The prevalence of obesity has nearly doubled between 1980 and 2008. Once associated with high-income countries, obesity is now also prevalent in low- and middle-income countries. Excess weight and obesity are linked to more deaths worldwide than being underweight (WHO, 2013).

The rapidly expanding media market, an increasing commercialisation of the media and a higher concentration of media ownership and power all point to the importance of taking a closer look at media and health among children and young people. In the following parts of this introduction, we briefly present the contributions to this book.

Media use and health risks

The first article, *The Relationship between Offline and Online Risks*, draws on the findings of the EU Kids Online project and network, which examined the risks and experience of harm among children who use the internet in 25 European

countries. (In 2014, 33 countries participate in the network.) Authors *Leslie Haddon* and *Sonia Livingstone* focus on two specific risks: children's exposure to pornography and their experiences of bullying. How common are these activities among 9-16 year olds on and off the internet, respectively? Are an online activity and its comparable offline activity connected and, if so, how? Similarly, are there differences – is online bullying experienced as more harmful than 'real-life' bullying by its victims and/or is online pornography somehow more upsetting to children than offline pornography? In addition, how do other factors impact, e.g., the child's psychological profile, age and gender?

In the second article, *Socially Disadvantaged Children, Media and Health*, authors *Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink* and *Jasmin Kulterer* present findings of a longitudinal study in Austria on the role media play for children in socially disadvantaged families. These children use media intensively and in various forms to cope with the everyday challenges of life. Media become crucial elements in the children's process of socialisation as other agents often fail to assume their responsibilities. The article discusses the relationship between the children's media use and mental and physical health problems in a multidimensional way to illustrate and explain this complex interplay. The study also combines scientific concern with social concern aiming at improving the integration and participation of socially disadvantaged families.

One of the most focused on areas in media research for almost a century is media violence. Many studies and reviews have found that film and TV violence have negative consequences for some children under some circumstances. The United Nations study on Violence against Children (2006) sought more knowledge of the interaction between media violence and other risk factors. The article *Mediated Violence and Related Risk Factors. Examples and Reflections* by *Cecilia von Feilitzen* puts forward some recent research findings that illustrate such knowledge, i.e., cumulative patterns of risk factors. The use of media violence not only in one kind of medium but across several different media, including web sites showing serious violence, is one such example. The relationship between use of media violence, delinquent peers and a lack of parental mediation is another example.

Ibrahim Saleh also looks at media violence in a broader context, the family environment, the peer groups and the social and economic conditions in which children grow up. Examples in his article, *Stealing Children's Innocence in Egypt. Media Literacy, Human Rights and Roads of Violence*, include: corporal punishment of children, domestic violence, and different socialisation processes regarding approaches to violence, as well as media's role in these processes. The backdrop is the Egyptian revolution in the spring of 2011 and the deteriorating societal situation after that. The author also presents an instance of newspaper coverage of children and violence during this revolution.

The media's role in the sexualisation of young people has received enormous attention in recent years in the form of several major reports from more developed and industrialised countries, says *Jeanne Prinsloo*. Her article, *Sexualisation and Children's Relationship with the Media*, provides an overview and discusses two different positions taken in relation to media and the sexualisation of girls, specifically structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. The article seeks to develop greater clarity about the issue and to suggest more nuanced and holistic kinds of research. The author also underlines the need for studies from southern countries with their particularly complex contexts and where modern discourses on sexuality and sexualisation interact with traditional, and often tabooed, ones.

The next two articles are written by paediatricians who have researched young people and media. One article, by *The American Academy of Pediatrics* with *Victor C. Strasburger* as the lead author, summarises international research on *Children, Adolescents, Obesity, and the Media*. The article shows that screen media contribute to the development of excess weight and obesity. Less physical activity because of media use, the advertising of junk food and late-night screen use which interferes with sleep are all, with high probability, contributing factors in this process. The article includes a policy statement for the U.S. public from the Academy's Council on Communications and Media.

In the second medical article, *Markus Dworak* and *Alfred Wiater* provide more detail on the subject of the *Impact of Excessive Media Exposure on Sleep and Memory in Children and Adolescents*. Research shows that excessive media use has negative effects on children's and adolescents' sleep behaviour and general health. It also suggests that sleep problems are connected to impaired learning and memory. This, in turn, has several long-term behavioural consequences.

Excessive media use is dealt with from a different angle in the following article. More and more often, screen media, like television and the internet, used on multiple platforms, such as computers and hand-held devices, dominate the lives of children. In her article, *Too many Screens, Too Much Stuff. How Media, Marketing and Commercialization Are Harming Children's Health*, *Susan Linn* underlines how commercialism and marketing linked to screen media in particular are escalating and increasingly emanating from huge corporate conglomerates for the sake of profit. This kind of extensive marketing not only contributes to obesity but also to discontent with body image, eating disorders, sexualisation, depression and the erosion of necessary creative play among children.

Research on how food marketing is related to the development of excess weight and obesity among children is dealt with from a different perspective in the article, *Food Marketing and Child Health* by *Moniek Buijzen*, *Esther Rozendaal* and *Simone de Droog*. The authors discuss the fact that today's marketing – and food marketing in particular – focuses mainly on transferring affect and emotions.

One example of such a marketing technique is the use of brand characters, i.e., popular child idols and cartoon characters that are linked to brands and products. Another example is the 'advergame', in which the brand or logo forms an integral part of the game. The authors put forward recent research findings from the Netherlands showing how these marketing techniques can also be used to stimulate healthy eating behaviour.

The right to participation – communication for health and social change

While media and media use contribute to certain health problems, as indicated by the exemplifying articles above, media are also essential for children's and adolescents' right to participation and can be a positive tool in the process of change. *Rafael Obregón* and *Angela Rojas Martínez* discuss the concept of communication for social change (CFSC) and its role in advancing participatory health communication approaches for children and adolescents. Their article, *Communication and Health of Children and Adolescents in Latin America: Toward a Child and Adolescent-centered Approach*, also illustrates the role of CFSC principles using two case studies from Colombia. These studies actively involved children and adolescents and illustrate the types of opportunities that participatory and gender sensitive communication approaches can bring to rights-based, long-term health improvements and development, and how they can contribute to more equitable societies.

The next article, *Body Politics and the Mediated Body. Young Women in Nicaragua Talk about Sexual and Reproductive Rights*, deals with how young women between the ages of 13-19 in Nicaragua learn about and perceive issues related to sexual and reproductive health. Using an intersectional research approach, it becomes clear that these issues overlap with a range of socio-political and cultural factors. The author, *Johanna Stenersen*, focuses on the role(s) that media can play in sexual health education and understanding, and why media are relevant for the multitude of issues related to sexual health, such as gender (in)equality, norms and values. A local radio show produced by young women illustrates the importance of community based and participatory communication initiatives for giving a voice on sensitive issues to discriminated and oppressed groups.

Arvind Singhal describes and analyses a long-running radio initiative in Nepal in his article, *Youth, Media, and Respectful Conversations about Health: Lessons Learned from an Exemplary Project in Nepal*. The radio series is based on locally-produced content which has created a safe media environment within which young audience members have been able to engage in open and honest conversations (partly directly, partly in listeners' clubs) about their bodies, sexu-

ality, health, interpersonal relationships, everyday problems, education, careers and citizenship. There are also magazines, social media on the internet and a television programme connected to the radio series. The project, *Saathi Sanga Manka Kura* (Chatting with My Best Friend), views communication processes as an integral part of social change, questioning existing social realities and opening up communicative spaces to broach new possibilities.

Susan Goldstein's article, *Children as Agents for Social Change. Soul Buddyz and Soul Buddyz Club*, presents a long-standing edutainment vehicle for 8-12/14 year old children in South Africa with the aim of promoting the rights and potential of all children. The vehicle comprises a television series, radio programmes in nine languages, print material and clubs where children interact with peers and learn about their health and rights in a spirit of fun and adventure. There is also a docudrama, *Buddyz on the Move*, recounting the progress of the clubs. The programmes and material are produced from the children's point of view and have dealt with health related issues like bullying, gun safety, sexuality, HIV, sexual abuse, caring for the environment, nutrition and alcohol free schools. The *Soul Buddyz/Soul Buddyz Club/Buddyz on the Move* model constitutes unique examples of media, children's agency and social activism that have contributed to significant change in many children's lives in South Africa.

Violence against children (VAC), in the form of physical violence, mental violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, neglect and so on, a common phenomenon in many countries in the world, is, as mentioned, considered by the United Nations in its study on Violence against Children (2006). In the article *Talking about Violence with Children. A Case Study of Children's Participation in the Communication Plan on Stopping Violence Against Children (VAC) in China* the author, Bu Wei, writes about how migrant children 9 to 12 years of age in a Chinese village participated in a workshop to develop a communication plan for stopping VAC. The workshop was divided into four components: 1) Our rights; 2) Violence in our lives; 3) Children making changes; and 4) The communication plan. The author concludes that a number of lessons were learnt, of which one is that 'effective communication is not a top-down process. Successful advocacy should be a creative work rooted in children's needs coming from below, which is also a means of empowering children'.

Statistical indicators on children in the world

In the statistical section of the book, we present a selection of indicators valid for children and adolescents, based on *The State of the World's Children 2012* by UNICEF, and on World Health Organization publications and statistics 2012-2013. The data consist of averages for regions in the world and for the world in total. The statistical indicators are presented in the following groups:

- demographic indicators, e.g., the number of children and adolescents in the world and life expectancy in different world regions
- economic indicators, e.g., gross national income, poverty, and child labour
- education and media, such as access to mobile phones, the internet and use of information media
- health indicators, e.g., the development of the under-5 mortality rate in 40 years, the number of children suffering from pneumonia, being underweight, malaria, HIV, child maltreatment, obesity and excess weight

The figures point to enormous differences between children and young people in rich and poor countries – or ‘industrialised’, ‘developed’ and ‘least developed’ countries as they are named in the tables. The evidence of these immense economic, health and information/digital inequalities among children and young people in the world underlines the cold fact that there is a long way to go before human and children’s rights are realised.

Note

1. An internet user is defined as a person who used the internet in the last three months from any location (computer, mobile phone, tablet, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV, etc.) (International Telecommunication Union, 2014).

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Media Use and Health Risks

The Relationship between Offline and Online Risks

Leslie Haddon and Sonia Livingstone

As the internet has become ever more a part of many people's lives, including children's, many interrelated issues arise about the relationship between online and offline experiences. For the researchers, policy makers, teachers and parents concerned with the question of risk online, this relationship is of particular interest. What is the overall place of the internet in our lives? To what extent have practices changed so that we do online what we used to do offline? Or, do we now do new things online because the internet somehow enables them? Indeed, is the scope of what we can achieve newly enhanced or, conversely, reduced – either for those online or, as much discussed in debates over the digital divide, for those not online (Van Dijk, 2006)? Questions of digital in- or exclusion also apply to children (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), but more public and policy attention has focused on the nature of their activities once they are online, along with questions of how this may change the nature of parenting, education or social life. But we must also inquire into continuities, for however much they may appear the 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001; although see Helsper's & Eynon's 2010 critique), children still live in more or less familiar world of home, school and community, albeit that this is increasingly mediated by online communication of various forms.

Our present focus on the relation between offline and online experiences is pertinent to understanding the contemporary nature of childhood and the wider society. We do not mean to compare children's lives before and since the advent of mass internet, though that too is important. Rather, we examine the relation between offline and online spheres of activity, taking two specific risks as our case studies. These, selected because of their importance in the *EU Kids Online* study on which we draw, concern children's exposure to pornography and their experiences of bullying. To understand online versions of these risks, we must

inquire into the distinctiveness of virtual spaces – how different are online experiences from comparable offline experiences? For example, is online bullying more problematic than physical bullying to its victims because the bully can reach a victim 24/7, or because the act of bullying is visible to a wide audience? And, is online pornography somehow more problematic than offline because of the sheer volume online or because the nature of that sexual material is different, more extreme, compared with what can normally be accessed by a child offline?

Both academic and popular discussions are fascinated by such questions at present, it seems. Let us explore the nuances of this with a further example. Is there something about the nature of social networking sites themselves that invites children to divulge more about themselves, to a wider range of people (e.g., far more SNS ‘friends’ than the offline ‘friends’ we might have), thereby raising concerns about the misuse of that information, the privacy children are giving up or, indeed, the potential for grooming? This example is useful for reminding us that, despite the affordances of the technology, children are still social actors making decisions about how to use the technology; thus it may be less the technology that shapes present practices than children’s uses of the technology, these uses possibly reflecting their prior need or desire for greater social networking opportunities. In the *EU Kids Online* survey, 50 per cent of 9-16 year old internet users said it was a bit or very true that ‘I find it easier to be myself on the internet than when I am with people face-to face’ and 45 per cent said that they talk about different things on the internet than when speaking to people face-to-face. This suggests that for many children internet communication is special, perhaps giving them a means to deal with the immediacy or embarrassment of face-to-face communication, and thus we can understand why so many of them disclose more about themselves online than they would offline. Moreover, emerging social conventions distinctive to the online environment (sometimes discussed in terms of ‘peer pressure’ or, more positively, in terms of ‘digital citizenship’) remind us that social considerations, not just technological options, have a bearing upon what children do online. For even when operating in a technological environment, children remain social actors, acting within a wider social context. In relation to both positive and negative online experiences, then, it is important to ask for the internet – as for preceding media – what do children bring to this encounter, and how do they interpret and react to media, what do they find fascinating or problematic?

Relating offline and online experiences

Let us stand back from the particular discussions of risk in order to appreciate broader debates about the relationship between the offline and online worlds. Following the social shaping of technology approach (MacKenzie & Wacman,

1999; Hutchby, 2001), our focus is not intended as a simple question about the 'impact' of technology. Rather we mean to inquire into how the online environment has been shaped so as to afford possibilities that are either continuous with or distinctive from the offline environment. Let us contrast these two strong positions to make clear the analytic possibilities. When reviewing findings from the first generation of internet studies, Woolgar (2002: 14-19) argued for continuities across offline and online. Somewhat provocatively, he proposed five (then) empirically-supported 'rules' for understanding developments in what he called, with a deliberate question mark, the 'virtual society?', all of which counter the popular assumption that the online and offline are quite distinct. Thus he observed: (1) the importance of contextualization, namely that 'the uptake and use of the new technologies depend crucially on local social context'; (2) the assumption of inequality, that 'the fears and risks associated with new technologies are unevenly socially distributed'; (3) the consistent empirical evidence against displacement of the real, in other words that 'virtual technologies supplement rather than substitute for real activities'; (4) the counter-intuitive observation that 'the more virtual the more real', since the growth of online activities/spaces has unexpectedly intensified, remediated or stimulated innovation in offline activities/spaces; and (5) contra claims about the death of distance, that efforts to transcend the local and promote the global depend on specific local practices and identities – therefore, 'the more global the more local'.

Contrast this with the argument that, by virtue of its being a network that mediates representations and communication in particular ways that differ from face to face communication, the internet affords both new opportunities and, our interest here, new risks to children. For example, boyd (2008) claims that online communication is distinctively characterized by (1) persistence – being recorded (even permanent), thus permitting asynchronous communication with far long-term consequences than typically apply to face-to-face communication; (2) scalability – the considerable potential for visibility, rescaling simple interactions to constitute networked publics; (3) replicability – enabling multiple versions with no distinction between the original and the copy (and, further, easy and seamless editing to manipulate content); (4) searchability – permitting the easy construction of new, extended or niche relationships (including ready contact among 'strangers'). She adds that the dynamics of communication and social networking online are driven by three dynamics, adding to the preceding points thus: (5) invisible audiences – a radical uncertainty regarding who is attending to the communication (and, one might add, who is speaking) being built into the architecture of online spaces (exacerbated by conditions of anonymity); (6) collapsed contexts – for the absence of boundaries impedes the maintenance of distinct social contexts; (7) and public/private blurring – this follows from the lack of boundaries and, when scaled up, has distinctive consequences.

As computer-mediated-communication scholars have argued, such features disembed communication from its traditional anchoring in the face-to-face situation of physical co-location, re-embedding it in more flexible, more peer-oriented relations of sociability, thereby transforming the possibilities of communication for better or for worse. Distinctively, offline conduct is socially regulated by norms of behaviour and sanctions for their transgression. While online behaviour hardly goes ungoverned by social convention, the conventions are more flexible and less enforced in the absence of clear social cues, while the blurred boundaries no longer contain private interactions, enabling greater risk and risk-taking. And all this on a scale (in terms of physical and cultural distance, number of people and sheer amount of communication) that far exceeds the traditional limits, and established protective factors, of children's lives. On the other hand, other scholars (Slater, 2002; Orgad, 2007) sound a warning at the doom-laden implications of such claims, arguing that children (and people in general) still live in the 'real' world, commuting between the internet and face-to-face communication seamlessly, seeing friends on Facebook but also at school, chatting to siblings while doing homework online, as aware of their parents' rules and values when they are online as when they are sitting at the dinner table. And to be sure, although children seem to be in touch with ever more people ('friends') and to be online for hours at a time, on reflection they still like to play football, go out with friends, and watch television with the family much as they ever did.

The degree and type of continuity between offline and online experiences is, in short, a fraught question for researchers, policy makers and the public. Arguably, identifying continuity helps to counter some of the moral panics associated with media, questioning how much online behaviour is really 'new'. For example, in the *EU Kids Online* survey most children (87%) who communicate online turn out to be communication online with people they already know face-to-face. Meanwhile, American writers on children's experiences point to the way they 'hang out' online, similar to the way a previous generation used to 'hang out' in physical locations such as the shopping mall or street corner (Livingstone, 2009). On the other hand, familiar practices do seem altered by being played out in new electronic spaces, leading some to examine how the nature of online world can reshape what occurs offline – for example, amplifying the social dramas that teenagers often experience (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Research questions and methods

This chapter draws on the findings of the *EU Kids Online* network, which examined the risks faced by children when using the internet in 25 European countries (see www.eukidsonline.net). The survey was funded by the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme. Interviews were conducted during

Spring/Summer 2010 in children's own homes among a random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 who use the internet, plus one of their parents. A series of sensitive, risk-related questions were asked of the child in a private, self-completion part of the interview, so that neither the interviewer nor any parent (if present) could oversee how the child answered. Specifically, the risks asked about in the survey were pornography, cyberbullying, sexting (sending and receiving sexual messages or images) and meeting people offline who the child had first met on the internet. The interviews included questions about how offline experiences compare with online ones (e.g., bullying versus cyberbullying), whether the child experienced these as negative (or not) and, if negative, how children tried to cope with the experience. Examples of contextual data collected to help understand responses to risk included socio-demographic variables, psychological profiles of the children, the range of technologies they access and how they use them, and parental strategies to mediate their child's online experiences.

The network has also proposed some hypotheses, two of which are relevant for this article. The *risk migration hypothesis* recognises that some children encounter a range of risks in their everyday lives, whether because they are disadvantaged or because they are risk taker, and thus risks encountered offline are now extended online. The *vulnerability hypothesis* recognises that, while not all those who encounter risk online find it at all harmful, for those who are in some ways vulnerable offline (e.g., for psychological, social or other reasons), the more likely online risk will result in harm.

How can these kinds of questions be asked of children in a survey? Although the term 'bullying' has a distinct and familiar meaning in some countries, this is not universal, making the term difficult to translate. So, the term 'bully' was not used in the children's questionnaire. Instead, it was defined thus: 'Sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone and this can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include: teasing someone in a way this person does not like; hitting, kicking or pushing someone around; leaving someone out of things.' Similarly, for both ethical reasons and because of the uncertainties of translation, the term 'pornography' was also not used in the interview with children. Instead, questions about seeing sexual images were introduced as follows: '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.' The children were then asked 'Have you seen anything of this kind in the past 12 months?', together with some questions about where they had seen such images in general before moving on to questions about the images seen online. Then, for children who had been bullied, or had seen sexual images online, we also asked about harm: again, the specific word 'harm' was

not presented to children; rather we asked children if a specific experience had bothered them, defining 'bothered' thus: 'for example, [something that] made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it.'

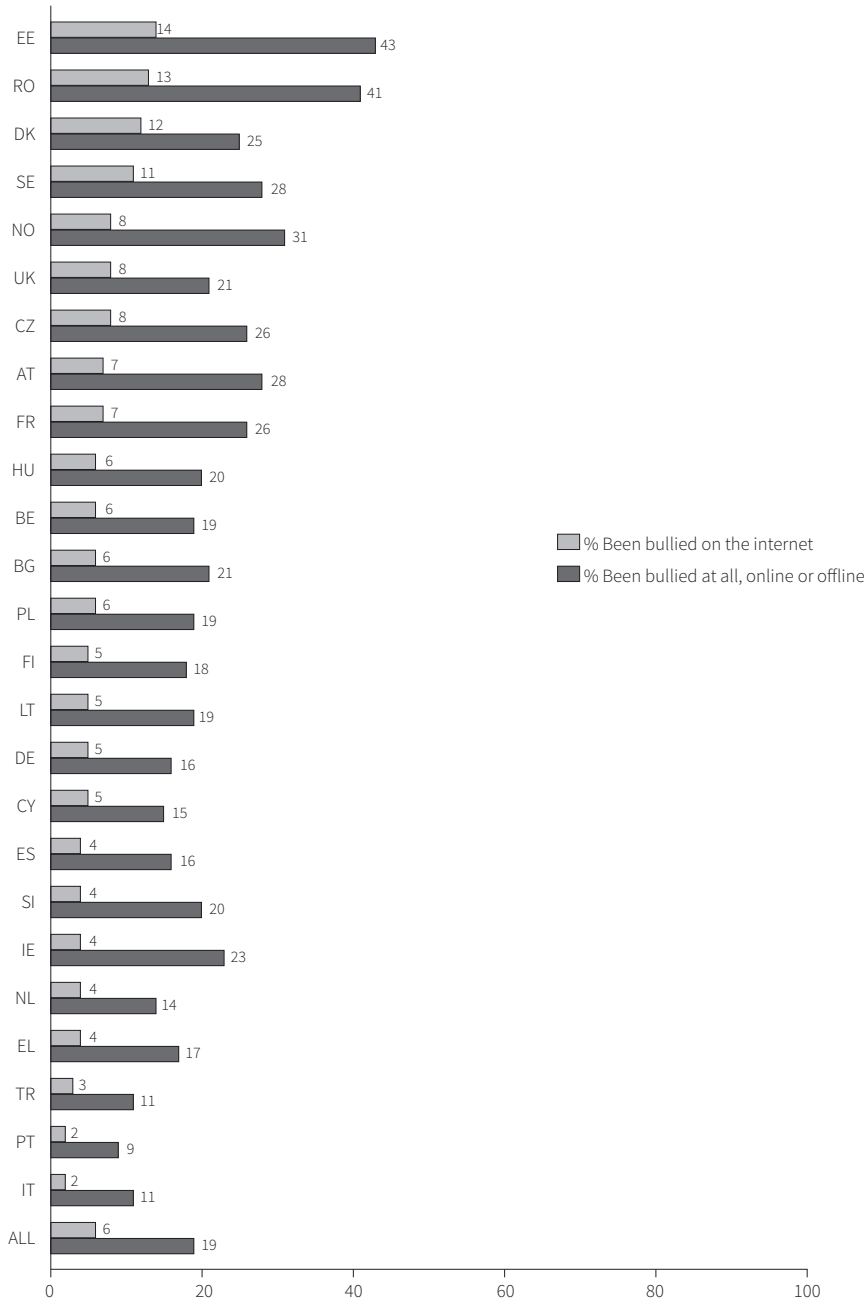
In what follows, we ask whether and to what extent children's online experience or bullying and encountering sexual images now exceed their offline equivalents. Note that since we asked about online and offline behaviour, if children admit to offline experiences of sexual images and bullying there seems little reason to believe that they would then conceal the equivalent online experiences. Our ability to address the issue of the distinctiveness of the internet is limited insofar as the *EU Kids Online* survey concentrated its data collection on children's online more than offline experiences. However, data on the background of those who said they were 'bothered' or 'upset' by the online experiences can be used to demonstrate how and which social factors make a difference. Finally, we examine the degree of continuity between offline and online experiences by asking how much offline bullying and seeing sexual images carries over into the online world, and by asking whether offline experiences have a bearing upon how the online equivalents are evaluated.

Offline and online risks compared

As Figure 1 shows, the most common form of bullying is still in person, face-to-face: 13 per cent say that someone has acted in a hurtful or nasty way towards them in person face-to-face in the past 12 months compared with 6 per cent who say that this happened on the internet and 3 per cent who say that this happened by mobile phone calls or messages. This is the case in all countries, although the nature of bullying may differ by country. Clearly, the virtual world has not eclipsed the physical one on this respect, although future trends are hard to predict. It would also appear that bullying online appears more common in countries where bullying in general is more common (rather than, say, in countries where the internet is more established). This suggests that online bullying represents a new form of a long-established childhood problem rather than, simply, the consequence of a new technology.

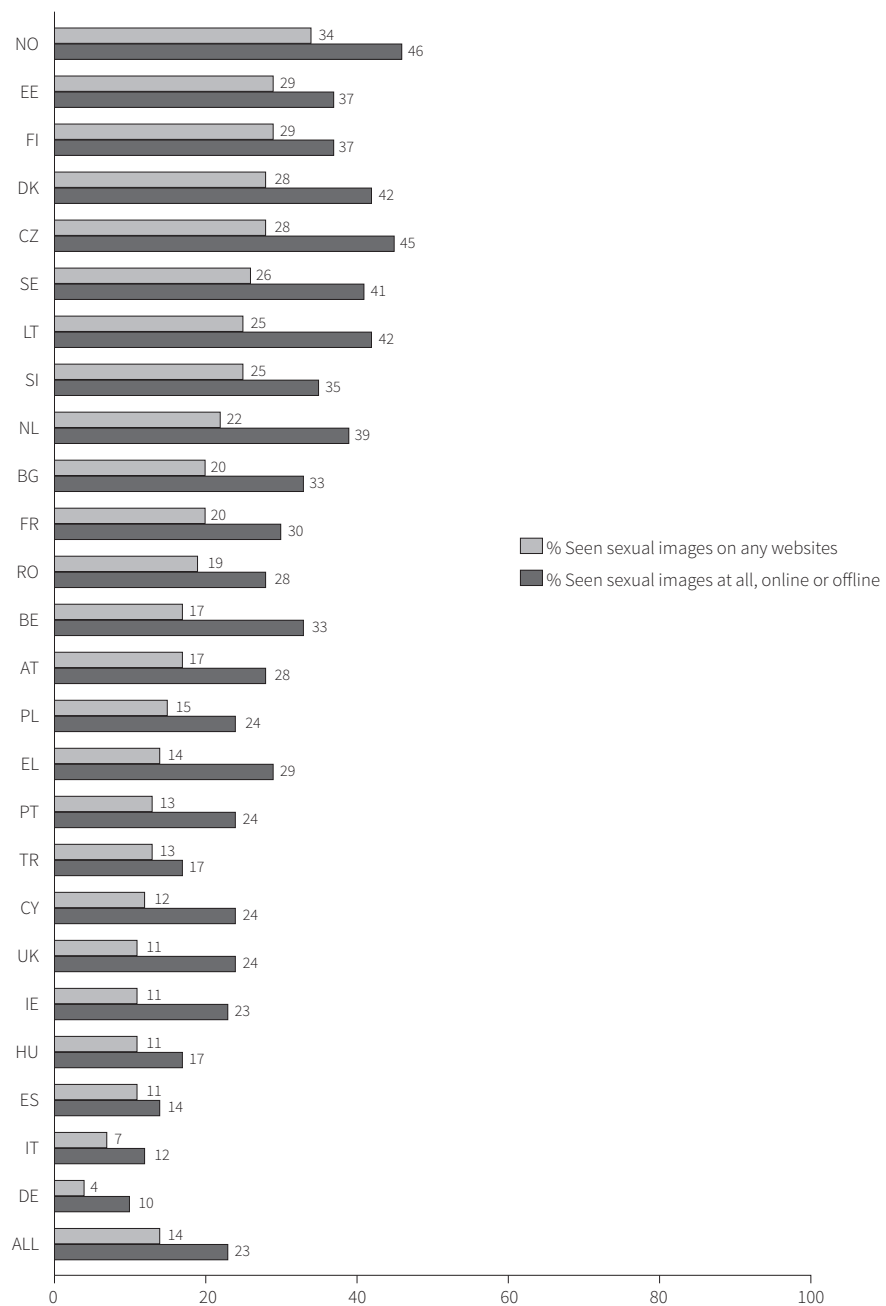
As regards sexual images (Figure 2), 14 per cent of 9-16 year old internet users overall have seen these on the internet in the past 12 months, followed by 12 per cent on television, films or video, 7 per cent in magazines and books, and 3 per cent on mobile phones. Hence while the internet is now the main source of encounters with sexual images, offline forms still remain important. Overall, in countries where more children have seen sexual images in general (especially, on television, film or video/DVD), they are also more likely to have encountered it online. However, the country comparisons reveal some variation in that, in some countries, the internet represents a proportionately less important source

Figure 1. Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months, % of children, by country



Note: AT = Austria, BE = Belgium, BG = Bulgaria, CY = Cyprus, CZ = Czech Republic, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, EE = Estonia, EL = Greece, ES = Spain, FI = Finland, FR = France, HU = Hungary, IE = Ireland, IT = Italy, LT = Lithuania, NL = Netherlands, NO = Norway, PL = Poland, PT = Portugal, RO = Romania, SE = Sweden, SI = Slovenia, TR = Turkey, UK = United Kingdom

Figure 2. Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months, % of children, by country



Note: AT = Austria, BE = Belgium, BG = Bulgaria, CY = Cyprus, CZ = Czech Republic, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, EE = Estonia, EL = Greece, ES = Spain, FI = Finland, FR = France, HU = Hungary, IE = Ireland, IT = Italy, LT = Lithuania, NL = Netherlands, NO = Norway, PL = Poland, PT = Portugal, RO = Romania, SE = Sweden, SI = Slovenia, TR = Turkey, UK = United Kingdom

of exposure to pornography (e.g., Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Greece and the U.K.), implying that if children do see sexual images in these countries it is often on other media. By comparison, in some other countries it seems that the internet has become as or more common than any other source of pornography (e.g., Estonia, Finland, Turkey, Spain).

Offline factors shape online risk and harm

When moving beyond descriptive statistics to logistic regressions, the strongest predictor of both online bullying and seeing sexual images online is the equivalent experience offline (Laurinavičius et al., 2012). In fact, the offline risk is a much larger influence than socio-demographic and psychological factors. Being bullied offline increases the odds of being bullied online by a factor of 10. Seeing sexual materials offline increases the odds of seeing sexual content online by a factor of 15. Other offline risks (e.g., drinking alcohol, missing school or getting into trouble with the police) also predict our two selected online risks (see Ságvári & Galács, 2012). Thus the *EU Kids Online* findings confirm the risk migration hypothesis.

However, further analysis of the *EU Kids Online* data shows the relationship emerging between online and offline bullying to be complex, indicating a vicious circle in which the more of one is associated with more of the other – for both bullies and for victims (Lampert & Donoso, 2012; Goerzig, 2011). In other words, the domains of offline and online do not mark separate spheres but, rather, experiences of bullying intersect both. Over half (55%) of online victims said they have also been bullied face-to-face¹ – and, also, over half (56%) of online bullies said they had also bullied people face-to-face. As with bullying, exposure to pornography also crosses the online/offline boundary. Over half (59%) of those viewing online sexual images had seen them offline.

As *EU Kids Online* has both argued and demonstrated, risk does not necessarily result in harm (Livingstone, 2009). By entering a set of social and psychological factors into logistical regressions to predict harm, the findings reveal a common picture across the risks of being bullied online and seeing sexual image online, despite their differences as experiences. For example, as predicted by the vulnerability hypothesis, girls and children who report more psychological difficulties are more likely to say they are bothered by each² (Laurinavičius et al., 2012; see also Lampert & Donoso, 2012; Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). On the other hand, there are also differences: those with lower levels of sensation seeking are more upset by online bullying, but this was not a factor in reactions to online sexual images.

Interestingly, for both being bullied online and seeing sexual images online, experiencing the offline risk seems to result in children being less bothered by the online equivalent. This may be explained by habituation: i.e., those children

who are bullied offline may become less sensitive to being bullied online; those children who have seen sexual images elsewhere may be less affected by seeing similar images online (Laurinavičius et al., 2012). Or, to interpret this relationship more positively, we may be witnessing children's building of resilience through experience (Masten & Powell, 2003); given the focus of the present article, the interesting point here is that offline experiences may support online resilience (just as offline vulnerabilities can render a child vulnerable online also).

Socio-demographic and psychological variables also have a bearing upon the types of coping response employed by those who have been bothered or upset by online risk (Vandoninck et al., 2012). For example, having been bullied online or having been upset by sexual images online, children with higher self-efficacy appear more willing to take a proactive approach and try to fix the problem (rather than, say, simply stopping using the internet). Deleting messages and blocking senders of upsetting messages is also a more common response the more children are active online. In the case of online bullying, low sensation seekers and children with no peer problems prefer a communicative response, such as talking to other about the problem with others. Meanwhile, when faced with upsetting sexual images, a communicative approach is preferred by girls, younger children and those with higher self-efficacy. So, in relation to coping with risk as well as in relation to its incidence, offline factors can make a difference.

Conclusions

The findings reported in this article reveal that, in the age of mass internet use, offline bullying remains consistently more prevalent across countries than its online counterpart, although for exposure to sexual images country differences are notable, this remaining to be better understood by future research. Several noteworthy conclusions regarding the relationship between offline and online risk emerge from *EU Kids Online* findings examined here. First, risks do appear to have migrated online, and at both the individual and the country level there is a strong connection between offline and online risks, as reflected in the figures showing just how much the former experience predicts the latter.

But, in keeping with Woolgar's analysis, the 'virtual' has not displaced the 'real': children still are bullied face-to-face, whether verbally or physically, and they are exposed to pornography through a range of media including but far from limited to the internet. What determines the balance of offline and online is clearly complex, depending on the interrelations between children's cultural contexts, on the specific risks involved (of which bullying and pornography are but two), and on the nature of the online environment in different countries (which, in turn, depends on the market, technological infrastructure, national regulation, etc; Lobe & Ólafsson, 2012).

Lastly, there can also be a transfer from offline to online especially: As seen in the data above, if a child learns resilience offline, this may benefit them online; but if they are vulnerable offline, this may also be exacerbated online. Moreover, the online does not merely extend or replicate the offline, for we have seen that it has its own distinct affordances – in some ways more intimate yet also more anonymous, permitting delayed reactions and invisible consequences of one's actions yet in key ways beyond one's control too, with confusing interfaces and unanticipated content or opaque communications resulting in unpredictable or difficult to manage experiences. In the emerging interplay between the online and offline, the communication that occurs in both domains may often be intensified, for better or for worse. Whether in the future, children's use practices, or the design of the online environment, can be modified so as to break any vicious circles that occur, remains to be seen.

Notes

1. But only 24% of those who are bullied face-to-face are then bullied online – so for most victims of physical bullying, the experience does not migrate to the internet. The equivalent figure for seeing sexual images is (also) 59%.
2. In the case of bullying, we made the assumption that this is a negative experience, so the finding here relates to who was more bothered, in terms of intensity.

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Socially Disadvantaged Children, Media and Health

Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink and Jasmin Kulterer

Socially disadvantaged families are challenged to cope with many problems in their daily life as their *lebenswelt* conditions – resulting from restricted financial resources, unemployment and poor education, lack of time and leisure opportunities – are very demanding. Research makes clear that children in these families are at risk in two ways. On the one hand, they suffer from the effects of their parents' socio-structural problems; on the other hand, they use media very intensively meaning their socialisation can be characterised as media socialisation. Recent studies show that these children have to cope with a disproportionate number of health problems, so they suffer a lot in this respect, too. Against this backdrop, interesting questions to be answered are how these factors interplay and what this presumed interrelationship between socio-economic factors and the use of specific media and health problems looks like.

Our article has a twofold aim: Firstly, it provides findings of a longitudinal study in Austria on the role media play in socially disadvantaged families with special respect to children between five and ten years of age. This is a very crucial phase during which children undergo the transition from *kindergarten* to school and experience processes of dissolution from their parents while, at the same time, teachers, friends and peers gain importance as agents of socialisation. Secondly, the article discusses the relationship between the children's media use and health problems – not from a narrow perspective that draws a unidirectional correlation between health problems and media use, but in a multidimensional way that tries to illustrate and explain this complex interplay.

Socio-economic disadvantage, children and health – an outline of the problems

Generally speaking, children in Europe today partake of the growing wealth and higher social security that most societies are able to provide. Most children have access to educational facilities and the offerings of the leisure industries; nevertheless, children's ability to participate in this is highly unequally distributed (Kränzl-Nagl & Mierendorff, 2007: 13). According to Eurostat (2010), 17 per cent of the population in the 27 member states of the European Union (EU) – even after taking social transfers into account – were at risk of poverty in 2008 and suffered from various forms of social exclusion (from health services, the information society, etc.). One child in five lived in a family that could not afford adequate heating, meals and regular or “luxury” goods. In 20 of the member states, the child-at-risk-of-poverty rate was 20 per cent higher than that of the total population. Additionally, in 2009, 6 per cent of the EU population suffered from severe housing deprivation (overcrowding, pollution) with families with dependent children being particularly affected (see Eurostat, 2011). These data paint a bleak picture and illustrate how children are affected by the socio-economic status (SES) of their parents or extended families. Although these rates are higher for the Eastern member states, the conditions for children in the EU, as a whole, are still often not ideal.

The fact that such conditions (can) have negative effects on various aspects of children's physical and psychological development has been the focus of many studies. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds have less access to additional health services, healthy nutrition and tutoring (Burkam et al., 2004; Heindl, 2007). Furthermore, extracurricular activities like music and sports are beyond their reach. Similarly, due to generally poor(er) living conditions and a restricted social network, they are more likely to suffer from poor health, weight problems, early contact with alcohol and drugs, poor grades, lower education and poorly paid jobs – a vicious circle that many are not able to escape from (Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008; Richter & Hurrelmann, 2007). The strained situation of affected parents often leads to them passing on negative feelings to their children (mostly subconsciously), to an increased use of physical punishment and an inconsiderate use of and discourse about media. In many cases, media, and especially television, are often one (and the only) cheap way of spending one's leisure time, and is used as a means of keeping children occupied or even as a substitute nanny (Davis-Kean, 1999; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993; McLoyd, 1998; Warren, 2005). This media use, its reasons and consequences are also crucial points in relation to children's physical and psychological health and for finding ways to tackle problems resulting from excessive use of media.

Inconsistent parenting styles present another problem that many parents from less privileged contexts have to deal with. They have certain ideas about ideal

forms of parenting. However, they are not able to put them into practice as they lack the expertise to realise them and are overburdened with other problems (see Grundmann, 2000: 97; Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008; Warren, 2003, 2005). Thus, children often lack their parents as proper socialisation agents and positive influences in their development, something that is particularly critical the younger the children are. Much of this was clearly demonstrated in our longitudinal study on the media use of socially disadvantaged children.

Researching media socialisation in the light of social disadvantages

Considering what has been said so far, how can one tackle such a complex issue as the interplay of socio-economic, individual and external factors, children's use of media and the consequences of all this on their (mental and physical) health? We used a multi-methodological design, following the model of triangulation, to reconstruct social transformation processes which shape the terms and conditions of children's socialisation in their families. Furthermore, the design took into account the dynamics of children's development both in the context of their individual *lebenswelt* and the wider social framework of their families (schools, *kindergarten*, etc.). The whole space of socialisation was taken into account as neither children nor their parents are influenced by media in a unidirectional way. Therefore, a theoretically and methodologically coherent and interdisciplinary research was essential.

Our main starting point was Bourdieu's work, which provides a theoretical framework for the interaction between structure and action (for the following, see Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008). Bourdieu (1977) explains how, in the social field in which social action takes place, certain aims are followed, particular patterns of action are socially "accepted" (Weiss, 2000: 47) and certain patterns of orientation and perspectives can be built (Hasebrink & Paus-Hasebrink, 2007). Patterns of action and orientation are culturally rooted and refer to people's societal status. Transformed into everyday opportunities and competences, they not only influence individual actions and processes of social and personal identity development, but also interact with people's own subjective sense-making of societal conditions.

Looking at the means of sense-making, at the ensemble of practices used to cope with everyday life, this conceptual approach does not allow the question to be tackled from either a subjective or an objective perspective. Instead, the question is dealt with from the perspective of "practical meaning" or "praxeology" (see Weiss, 2000; Willis, 1977). In doing so, the focus shifts to the individual context of life but, at the same time, the focus goes beyond subjective representations and takes into account social milieus, or spheres, that are – actually or symbolically – at the individual's disposal. In their practical actions, all individuals, by means of their economic and symbolic capital, try to seize the opportunities of

their respective social spheres. This wealth of capital is distributed highly unequally, as the different social positions of young people clearly demonstrate. This has to do with the different opportunities available to develop one's identity and to acquire the capabilities to act. Thus, the following three areas can be conceptually integrated:

- Options for actions (societal, structural conditions, the media system)
- Drafts/outlines of actions (subjective perceptions of societal conditions)
- Expertise for actions (concrete manifestations of these drafts of actions which help to cope with everyday life).

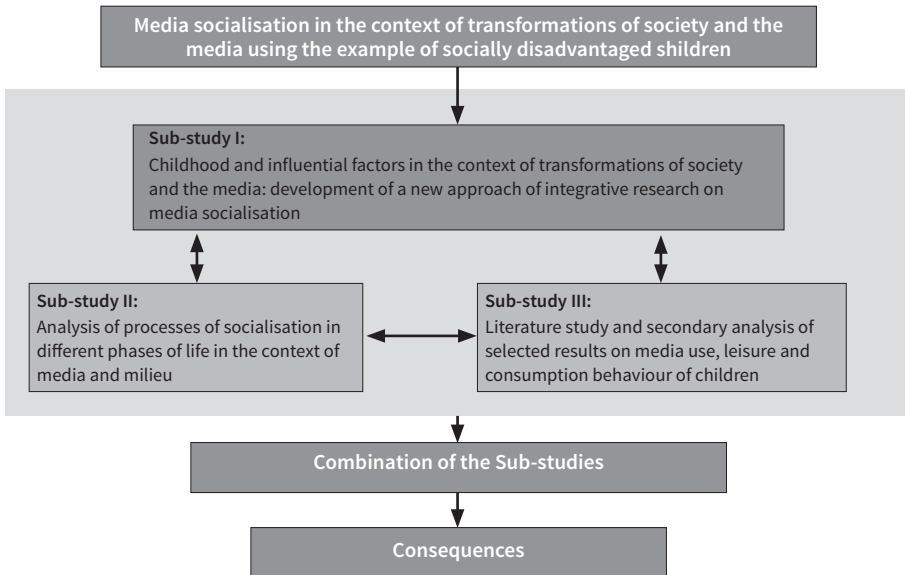
The second area is that of developmental tasks. When growing up, children are faced with specific developmental tasks. Approaches from developmental psychology (Havighurst, 1972) indicate that children use media in accordance with their identity. In order to cope with the developmental tasks and experiences they encounter in their daily life, children seek to acquire expertise (*ibid.*) and use media in relation to their age, gender and social background.

The qualitative longitudinal study at hand (Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008) is divided into four waves of data collection. The first took place in 2005 (children aged four to six years), the second in 2007, the third in 2010 and the last wave was on-going in 2012. Data was gathered first from 20 families, two families later dropped out.¹ Guided interviews were done with at least one legal guardian and one child from each family. The interviews were combined with observations of everyday situations and a short standardised questionnaire for the parent(s) concerning income, formal education, etc.

The data were analysed in two steps: firstly, a focused analysis according to previously defined categories was carried out for the parents' and children's interviews using software for qualitative data analysis (MaxQDA). Secondly, a contextual analysis of the individual subjects was done, comparing their answers from the guided interviews, treating them as individual case studies. Additionally, empirical data from other studies on aspects of childhood, media use, leisure and socialisation were collected according to their relevance for the study. Lastly, these independent components were combined in order to gain results and to derive possible consequences for different stakeholders (see Figure 1).

Selected results

The health factor, although not at the centre of this research, proved to be an important issue. Here, health means not only physical health but also, and especially, the mental health conditions of the children which, in many cases, were critical. The problems the children experienced ranged from psychoso-

Figure 1. Design of the study (Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008: 15)

matic problems to bedwetting, forms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and overweight to learning disabilities – often reactions to previous traumatic experiences (divorce, violence, etc.).²

This is not to say that the critical SES of the families is the factor that causes all of these problems. Nonetheless, the families' less beneficial circumstances have effects in other ways. As the parents are overburdened with their own worries and (financial) problems, they lack the ability to focus on their children's needs. Their lack of money prevents them from providing their children with special help when they suffer from certain illnesses and learning disabilities. Fewer alternatives for playing and spending time outside are available. Social isolation stemming, e.g., from the parents' fear of letting their children play with children from ethnic minorities (living in the same low priced neighbourhoods), and the parents' own small networks lead to an absence of other agents of support. These circumstances can cause many of the above-mentioned health problems or increase the severity of already existing ones. As the parents are often not able (or do not want) to grasp the severity of their children's problems, problematic behaviour is met with incomprehension and increasing aggression. The problems become more and more critical and the children are left on their own to cope with them.

Sometimes the children's only place of refuge is the media and the alternative realities that they present. The children's media use is generally marked by long

periods of consumption which happen mostly unsupervised and unreflected on – a result of their parents' own lack of media competence. The problems remain unresolved and often intensify over time. These things can change if family circumstances improve (new partner, job, housing), but changes, and especially a worsening of the conditions, can have further devastating effects, all depending on the family constellation and each child's individual personality.

Our study shows different forms of interplay between aspects on the micro, meso and macro levels. We will use two case studies to further illustrate what changes on one of these levels can trigger and what influence the SES can have on children's development, health and their use of media. The cases of Olivia Fein and Erich Grubert³ serve as examples of at least two different forms of interplay. Firstly, there is the negative interplay between a changing social network, unmanageable developmental tasks and the inability of the family to stabilise a child. This leads to psychological uncertainty and a specific form of media use as a forum for para-social interaction with the protagonists. The second example shows how improved social conditions can lead to improved health conditions and (positive) changes in the child's media consumption.

Case study I: Olivia Fein – loss of social network, unmanageable developmental tasks and para-social interaction with media

In 2005, Olivia's mother was a single parent on maternity leave living in a small subsidised flat. She had to support her two children on €1,000 per month and was dependent on social welfare aid. Between 2005 and 2007, Olivia's mother met a new partner – a carpenter – and the family moved from the city into his house in the countryside. Nothing gave the impression that the family was experiencing financial problems although the new partner was not properly employed and Olivia's mother only worked half-time in the local carpentry. Olivia (aged 7 at that time) did not take this change very well. With one blow, she lost all her friends and contact persons apart from her mother and brother and she often expressed fears of being alone and of dying. Soon after moving, Olivia began to suffer from epilepsy, displayed aggressive behaviour and started fantasising about being able to speak Croatian – reactions to the stress caused by moving and leaving her old life behind. In both data collection waves Olivia did not have much contact with her biological father who showed little interest in his child – something that Olivia always struggled with. Thus, she was seeking attention and diversion from her grandparents and friends. As mentioned, however, through moving to a new home, she lost these crucial contacts, became more and more aggressive and was not able to make any new friends.

Media always played an important role in Olivia's life. However, in the beginning, her mother would sometimes take her to the playground or to the lake. Two years later, this was no longer the case. Olivia especially used television

from the time she came home from school until bedtime, time during which she was mostly alone with her brother while her mother was working, spending time with her new partner or using the television intensively herself (after moving, Mrs Fein's use of media also grew rapidly because of a lack of social contacts and the remote location of the town). For Olivia, the media and the characters in her favourite TV series became her substitute friends and family. She began to immerse herself in their worlds. The girl favoured topics that mirrored the tasks she was currently struggling with herself (developing a gender identity, dealing with problems at school, being accepted, finding friends, etc.) and she mainly watched movies like *Pocahontas*, *Arielle* as well as *telenovelas* that also her mother liked.

In 2010, the situation looked very different again. In 2008, Olivia had threatened to throw herself down the stairs at school if her schoolmates did not let her play with them. As pointed out earlier, she became hard to handle and socialise with because of her excessive attempts to get attention from peers and her aggressive behaviour which started soon after moving. As a consequence, the school principal initiated an investigation by the youth welfare office and Olivia, after strong intervention from her grandmother who did not trust her daughter to raise Olivia properly, was admitted to a special assisted living facility.

Currently, Olivia is only allowed to spend every second weekend with her family; the rest of the time she has to stay in this facility with other children and attend school from there. She sees a therapist regularly; her daily routine and use of media is strictly monitored. The facility and its youth counsellors have become the most important socialisation agents in her life and offer her the stability and regularity that her family was not able to provide. Interestingly, Olivia has developed sexually very prematurely. There have been many instances in the facility when she has supposedly masturbated in front of others. As was the case in 2007, female role models are still important when choosing the media she wants to use. Currently, *Hannah Montana* is her favourite TV character and she owns plenty of merchandise connected to the series. The famous girl who has two identities, two separate and very different lives, success, friends and attention, who is still a schoolgirl but already a star, appeals to Olivia as she experiences similar forms of being torn. Her fascination with *Hannah Montana* and the actress, Miley Cyrus, marks Olivia's coping strategies with media. Besides television, the internet, Facebook and YouTube have also started to interest her – platforms that she mainly uses to find information about her TV heroine. Olivia mentioned seeing a video once, showing Miley Cyrus, performing a sex act which bothered Olivia a lot. Here, Miley Cyrus (it is unclear if in reality or in her imagination) embodies Olivia's main issues: sexuality and unmanageable premature development.

In Olivia's tragic case, one can see how dramatic changes and the loss of the social network can have negative effects on a child and result in psycho-somatic

illnesses. Olivia's family was not able to react to her problems adequately and media became her substitutes for other social contacts. Against the backdrop of a demanding everyday life, her mother could not help her child because of a lack of competence and time, as she had to earn money. Beyond that, her mother was suddenly immersed in her new relationship and did not spare enough time for her children (and her new partner did not/could not fill the gap either), and Olivia developed behavioural and health problems.

Case study II: Erich Grubert – improved SES and growing up: new developmental tasks, new media preferences

Erich's case acts as a counterweight to Olivia's. When Erich and his mother were first interviewed in 2005 (then he was 6 years old), they were living in a subsidised flat in an urban area with a high proportion of immigrant inhabitants. The furniture was old, used and shabby, as was the whole flat. As a single parent, Erich's mother earned less than €1,000 per month which made it hard to afford suitable housing and support the family adequately. Erich, who attended *kindergarten* at that time, was mainly unsatisfied because he did not own many media devices. Outside of *kindergarten*, he did not have many friends as his mother did not approve of the other (immigrant) children in the neighbourhood. Consequently, Erich did not get much exercise or spend much time outdoors; instead, he sat in front of the television, was overweight and strongly focused on his mother. Television was the most important medium for him. He particularly enjoyed Japanese animation series and owned a lot of the associated merchandise. Erich also showed symptoms of ADHD and needed to take medication.

In 2007, the family situation looked very different. Erich's mother had a new partner and the newly formed family moved to a bigger apartment on the outskirts of town, a change that Erich and his mother found very satisfying. Erich's mother was now working 30 instead of 15 hours a week and the additional income of her new partner meant a much higher income for the whole family. The bigger apartment afforded opportunities for privacy and a better quality of life. Erich enjoyed having his own room and many new media devices. His mother no longer had any objections to letting Erich play outside, his weight problems decreased (also because of gym lessons) and his social circle grew wider, also due to starting school. Generally, he appeared to be more balanced and his problems with ADHD began to disappear.

Although he suddenly possessed more media devices, they did not play much of a central role in his daily routine anymore. He still watched television in the evening and had a liking for TV related merchandise; he used the computer regularly but also listened to CDs and read comics. However, the level of intensity was different. His preferences, especially regarding television, began to change and he became interested in information programmes with a focus

on technology and science – this was also a result of growing older and new developmental tasks that he had to face. In contrast to the first panel wave, in the second and third waves, Erich was consuming media mostly on his own in his room as his mother had less time to spare for common media use because of her extended working hours and her new relationship. Interestingly, his mother generally objected to his watching television on his own because of his problems with ADHD and the negative consequences that she thought Japanese *anime* especially would have on his psyche. In this respect, she was not able to live up to her own ideals of parental mediation. Today, Erich's problems with ADHD are nearly gone.

In 2005, as he lacked a male reference person, Erich constantly looked for male role models and orientation in Japanese *anime*. By 2010, Erich had become a good pupil with grades good enough to allow him to attend a secondary school for higher education – a choice that would have fitted his creative character and his interest in the natural sciences and music. However, he joined an American football team and, despite his interests and good grades, decided to attend a technical high school, in spite of the fact that neither of these really fit his personality. Behind these decisions is Erich's step-father who participates in all forms of traditionally very masculine activities (car racing, football, computing) and who often makes assumptions about what is good for Erich based on his own experiences (e.g., being interested in technology and using his hands for work rather than sitting in school and studying theoretical subjects), even though he and Erich have two fundamentally different personalities. For Erich, it is, thus, very difficult to identify with this form of masculinity and it remains to be seen how this will affect his further development. Television is still the medium he uses most, but the Wii video game console, the internet and his new mobile phone have also increased in importance.

Erich and his family are an example of how an improved SES can have an impact on various aspects of a child's life by improving the child's health, level of achievement and intensity of media use.

Conclusion

Social disadvantage has many different faces – family circumstances differ greatly and depend on many factors, therefore, one should be careful to avoid generalisations. With regard to the parents' subjective perceptions of their demanding socio-structural conditions and, concerning their children, with regard to the special developmental tasks they face, both the children and their parents in our study display different forms of coping with these challenging conditions. Among these forms of coping, media play a central role as illustrated by the selected case studies. Nevertheless, there are also some common denominators,

especially when we look at the children's media use and their health in the light of a low SES. Our study tries to shed light on the particularly strained situation of children in socially disadvantaged families but, at the same time, tries to avoid generalisations and stigmatisation. The study shows that the circumstances in which the children grow up have a severe impact on their development, their health and their socialisation. This can be characterised as a highly media-orientated socialisation. Their parents' grave situations and the vicious circle that they and their children are at risk of being drawn into are reflected in the children's behaviour and actions – the burden of a low SES is passed on to them and manifests itself in different ways ranging from aggressive behaviour to mental and physical illnesses.

The basic understanding underlying our study is that it follows what Norbert Elias (1987) refers to as "involved social science" which ideally combines a social concern with a scientific concern and aims at improving the integration and participation of socially disadvantaged families. Therefore, our study calls for an approach which includes all of the involved stakeholders working together to reach solutions. Regarding the healthcare system, it seems mandatory that a paradigm shift must take place, from investing money in treating the symptoms, to investing in eliminating their cause. Youth welfare and healthcare are, in this case, two overlapping systems that have to cooperate in order to cater to the special needs of children at risk (see Keupp, 2009). With regard to the media, our study showed that children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds use media intensively and in various forms to cope with the everyday challenges of life. Media become crucial elements in their process of socialisation as other agents often fail to assume their responsibility.

Notes

1. According to Hradil (1999), two dimensions of social inequality can be identified – the objective dimension (income, education, employment, gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) and the subjective dimension (integration, prestige, power, etc.). As the basis for the selection criteria, only the objective dimension was used. The following factors were selected as most relevant for the study: (1) poverty, low income, unemployment, (2) low level of formal education (parents), one-child-families, large families, migrant families, (3) bad housing conditions, few possibilities for shaping one's leisure time (see Paus-Hasebrink, 2011; Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008). An effort was made to recruit enough families to cover these factors; not all factors applied to all families at the same time.
2. In our sample, there are a number of children who are affected similarly. Two children suffer from asthma (one because of mildew in the apartment); two show symptoms of ADHD; two are/have been bedwetters (one because of the parents' divorce, the other because of a lack of affection); others (n=2) are lagging in their development and had to attend an additional kindergarten/pre-school year. Some also showed more than one of these problems.
3. Names have been rendered anonymous.

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Mediated Violence and Related Risk Factors

Examples and Reflections

Cecilia von Feilitzen

Violence is a major and growing public health problem across the world, the World Health Assembly declared in 1996 (WHA49.25). Violence in different forms affects many people in all demographic groups in all countries. Children are one of the most affected groups. Although children have suffered violence, often hidden and under-reported, perpetrated by adults throughout history, this violence has been made more visible in recent decades. Extreme forms of violence against children have received the most attention, but many children are also routinely exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence in their everyday lives.

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 says that 'States Parties shall [...] protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse [...]'. And the central message of the UN Secretary-General's study on Violence against Children (VAC) from 2006 is that 'no violence against children is justifiable, and all violence against children is preventable' (p.3).

The VAC study used an 'ecological' model¹ to help understand the complex multi-level and multi-faceted nature of violence. The study says that no single factor explains why some individuals behave violently toward others or why violence is more prevalent in some communities than in others, '[...] [I]t is a combination of factors, acting at different levels, which influence the likelihood that violence will occur, recur, or cease' (p.12). The model focuses on four groups of factors in interplay: the personal history and characteristics of the victim or perpetrator; her/his family and other relationships; the immediate social context or community; and the characteristics of the larger society. The model also takes into account the setting, such as the home, school, institutions and workplaces.

Being exposed to several kinds of violence means a cumulative risk, whereby trauma symptoms increase with each additional risk factor (Surgeon General 2001, Turner et al. 2012). In a U.S. study with a national representative sample of 2 to 17 year olds, children with four or more types of victimisation (about one fifth of all children) were at particularly high risk of persisting 'poly-victimisation'. Examples of studied factors related to heightened risk of poly-victimisation were violent or maltreating families and family problems such as alcohol abuse, imprisonment, unemployment and family disruption. The authors underline that studies focusing on single forms of victimisation are therefore likely to underestimate the full burden of victimisation that children experience and to incorrectly specify the risk profiles of victims (Turner, Finkelhor & Omrod 2007a, 2007b).

Media violence

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the important function performed by the media, that the child shall have access to information and material aimed at the promotion of his or her well-being and health and that s/he shall be protected from information and material injurious to his or her well-being (from Article 17). The previously mentioned VAC study also differentiates the different roles of media and information and communication technologies (ICTs). On the one hand, the study sees the constructive role of media in campaigns or reporting for raising awareness about different kinds of violence against children. And here the media, while respecting rights of children to privacy, should give children and young people a prominent role as spokespersons on their own behalf.

On the other hand, the study states that a growing exposure to images of violence and male domination of women and girls due to globalised media and new ICTs can affect opinions, norms and behaviour and is therefore a risk factor in the community. Media violence, not least in popular culture, increases the likelihood of aggressive and fearful behaviour in situations of stress or perceived danger and may give children unrealistic ideas about violence in real life. In addition, solicitation, harassment and bullying are found online.² The study asks for more knowledge of the interaction of media imagery with other risk factors, such as the interplay of media violence with individuals' backgrounds, e.g., if these are violent, and with individuals' predispositions to aggressive behaviour. Nor, according to the study (p.314), is much known about violent media imagery's interaction with viewers/media users who have mental health problems or who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Research on media violence

What then does research on media violence show? Violent representations in the media have been studied to a great extent, and researched in film and television for nearly a century. There are also many reviews of these research findings. This article is not such a review. It aims instead to give, in the light of the questions from the VAC study, a few research examples about the relationships between media violence and other risk factors.

Some research has analysed violent media *content* in films, TV programmes, newspapers, video/computer games and, to a lesser degree, on the internet. The kinds of media violence most often referred to have been depictions of visible, manifest, physical violence, and the threat of such violence, intended to kill, hurt or inflict physical suffering on the victim(s), e.g., fights, shootings, murders, etc.

Other research on media content has focused on values or myths, power or dominance relationships, and different kinds of structural, latent or mental violence in the culture.

Further research has focused on the reasons for media violence that are to be found in society, culture or the media's ownership structure, policies, economy and technology.

However, the great majority of studies on media violence have concerned its possible harmful or injurious *influences* on the media user, above all on children and young people.

It is essential to bear in mind that this research has mostly been performed in richer countries and continents, such as North America, Europe (mostly Northern and Western Europe), Australia and New Zealand, Japan and other well-to-do countries in Asia. The knowledge we have about the influences of media violence originates thus from relatively few countries with specific media situations – and research findings cannot be automatically generalised across borders. Consequently, in most countries there is a great need for research into children and media in the changing local and global media landscape. Such research should be carried out both on the countries' own social and cultural terms and through international comparative investigations.

Film and television

Regarding the influence of violent portrayals in film and on television, the main question – both in the public debate and in research – has been if such violence, not least in fiction and drama, leads to destructive *aggression* (aggressive feelings, perceptions, norms, behaviours) among young (or adult) audiences. In sum, these studies have shown that film and TV violence do contribute to aggression within some individuals under some conditions. Thus, a causal relation has been established – but the fact that media violence is not the only or

strongest risk factor for aggression among the viewers has also been established. Looking conversely at studies focusing on risk factors for youth violence, it has been found that, e.g., substance use and weak social ties are stronger risk factors than media violence in this respect (Surgeon General 2001).

Besides aggression, much research has shown that media violence can lead to *imitation* among viewers. Another influence, studied in relation to fiction and news/factual content, is *fear* within the viewer. There are also studies, although fewer in number, which indicate that media violence can result in *erroneous notions of violence in society* (which, in turn, can also lead to fear) and *habituation* to media violence (e.g. von Feilitzen 2009).

Different kinds of film and TV violence

It is important to stress that different kinds of media violence pose different degrees of risk of harmful influence. For instance, a review of previous studies (Wilson et al. 1997) showed that those depictions of violence in film and television that with greater probability contribute to *aggression* include:

- an attractive perpetrator (with whom the viewer may identify)
- violence that stands out as justified (that is, the viewer finds it in order when, for instance, the hero commits violence to settle accounts with the villain)
- use of conventional weapons
- extensive/graphic violence
- violence that stands out as realistic
- violence that is glorified, rewarded or not punished
- violence in which seriously painful or harmful consequences are not shown
- violence portrayed in a humorous way.

On the other hand, those depictions of violence that with greater probability contribute to *fear* include:

- an attractive victim (with whom the viewer may identify)
- unjustified violence
- extensive/graphic violence
- violence that stands out as realistic
- violence that is glorified, rewarded or not punished.

Not many studies have focused on habituation to or possible desensitisation through media violence. But the kinds of media violence which contribute to habituation mentioned in the review are extensive/graphic violence and violence portrayed in a humorous way.

Since the reviewed research had mainly treated the different kinds of media violence in isolation, there is a need to know how they work in combination. What the researchers did in their subsequent extensive content analyses was to study composite patterns of media violence in TV programmes (ibid).

The child's personality and relationships

As mentioned, the influence of film and TV violence is not the same for all individuals. Early on in media research, the findings – not least those on aggression – have been related to, among other things, the child's age, gender and personality, and to the family climate, the parents' upbringing and their socio-cultural background. Many studies show that the risk of media violence contributing to aggression increases if the child already has aggressive predispositions which, in turn, are often connected to aggression or conflicts within the family (e.g. Huesmann & Eron 1986).

Some studies also point to a reciprocal relationship between viewing film and TV violence and aggression, that is, a circle or spiral effect. This implies *both* that children and young people who are already aggressive, are attracted by media violence *and* that viewing media violence reinforces their aggression.

At the same time, research supports the notion that most children, especially when having good relationships with their parents, peers, etc., not living in a violent environment or society, having secure social conditions, liking school, and not being frustrated or aggressive for some other reason, will most likely not become more aggressive through exposure to media violence. These children and young people also get impressions from film and TV violence, but there are few other concurrent risk factors in their environment and, at the same time, there are several protective factors. Among other things, their parents may engage in and discuss media use with the child, something which has been shown to counteract harmful media influences.

Video/computer games

Naturally, research on video/computer games is much more recent and less extensive than research on film and television. Neither is it possible to simply generalise findings on the influences of film and TV violence to those of violent digital games, as the content, format and narratives of the games often deviate from those of film and television. Game playing also has more features of in-

teractivity and play and perhaps implies another kind of identification, not least when playing from a first-person perspective.

Although there is research indicating a probable causal link between playing violent digital games and subsequent aggression among players, there are also contradictory findings. On the whole, there is disagreement within the research community as to how to interpret the findings, and several scholars maintain that there is not sufficient evidence on which to base any safe conclusions.

Mediated violence on the internet

The multitude of traditional and new media forms on the internet allow internet users to take on many different roles – to receive, consume, interact, participate, create, produce, send content, etc. Furthermore, especially (inter)personally or socially mediated communication on the internet can turn into face-to-face communication in real life, which means that the internet is related to all main forms of communication.

Although the internet is mostly experienced as positive and useful by children and young people (e.g. Livingstone et al. 2011), they may intentionally find, or non-intentionally come across, unpleasant or frightening content – not least extreme violence, violent pornography, child pornography, racism, hatred, etc. Additional risks of the internet are connected with communication and contact that often address specific others – e.g. bullying, threats, harassment, violations of privacy and personal integrity, economic crimes, undesired meetings offline, etc. We may talk of *mediated* violence rather than media violence (von Feilitzen 2009).

Research on children and contents and contacts on the internet has partly taken a different direction to that of research on film, TV and video game violence – for example, by asking young people if they have become upset or experienced harm by something online. However, such inquiry methods do not reveal influences that might be harmful even though the user does not experience them so.

In the European research project, EU Kids Online, with more than 25,000 internet-using 9 to 16 year olds in 25 countries in 2010, 55 per cent answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?’ and the majority of these children expressed their concerns in their own words (Livingstone et al. 2013). Most of these comments were related to *content* on the internet, not least pornography and violent content. The authors stress that ‘violence receives less public attention than sexual material but many children are concerned about violent, aggressive or gory online content. They reveal shock and disgust on seeing cruelty, killings, abuse of animals and even the news’ (p.1).

Many comments were also related to *conduct* and *contact* online, e.g. bullying on the internet. The number of such comments increases when children get older (ibid.).

The EU Kids Online project is based on an 'ecological' model (cf. the VAC study) in order to take into consideration not only risks and harm on the internet but also various kinds of risks and protective factors offline (a risk and resilience approach). Analyses show, for instance, that those children who encounter risks in their daily lives offline (e.g. being bullied) are more likely to encounter the same types of risks online. Similarly, regarding different types of internet users among the children, the 'risky explorers' group, for example, is a boy-dominated group whose internet behaviour correlates positively with, among other things, sensation-seeking and psychological difficulties, while their parents are the least restrictive regarding their children's internet use (Hasebrink 2012, Livingstone, Hasebrink & Görzig 2012).

Similarly, other research increasingly points to relationships between risky online behaviour, a troubled home and/or personal life, etc., and risky offline behaviour. For example, a U.S. research review from 2008 states that those experiencing difficulties such as physical and sexual abuse offline and those with other psycho-social problems are most at risk online (The Berkman Center 2008, p.20). Those identified as 'high risk' (i.e., experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse or parental conflict offline) were twice as likely to receive online solicitations. A variety of psycho-social factors (such as alcohol and drug use, sexual aggression and poor bonds with caregivers) were correlated with online victimisation (p.39). Furthermore, children and adolescents who engaged in deliberate acts of self-harm were more likely to be contending with other psycho-social issues, have a history of physical or mental abuse as well as a high degree of parent-child conflict, and were more likely to engage in other risky online behaviours (p.33).

In line with the U.S. review above, a Swedish investigation among 15-year-olds in 2006 (Shannon 2007) showed that youths who said they had been the object of sexual contact initiated by adults on the internet generally tended to be more risk-taking (e.g., they drank alcohol to intoxication and tested drugs). Problems within the family and in school, having been bullied in real life, or being involved in theft and violent crimes were also significantly more common within this group than among other youths.

Mediatisation and cross-media studies

The spread, digitisation and convergence of many media, including the internet and mobile phones, mean that media and media use have permeated culture, politics and everyday life in new ways in many communities – although not in all societies in the world and not among all inhabitants.³ Briefly, we can say

that relationships between individuals, groups, institutions, organisations and societies are more and more facilitated and partly shaped by the media. This mediatization⁴ intertwines practices offline and online which, in certain respects, makes it difficult to distinguish, e.g. influences of a specific medium. Perhaps it is therefore more fruitful to study content independent of medium?

Some recent U.S. studies have focused on the use of violence across several media, and a number of these studies have also included other risk factors for or protective factors against aggressive behaviour among the users. This research mostly deals with correlations and can suggest which risk factors are more important than others but it does not have a basic cause-effect design. A few examples follow.

One study (Gentile & Bushman 2012) focused on the cumulative pattern of risk factors for aggressive behaviours among elementary schoolchildren (mean age 9.7 years). Use of media violence across television, movies and video games was regarded as one potential risk factor. Examples of other potential risk factors studied were past aggression, having been bullied or physically victimised and the tendency to attribute hostility to others. A potential protective factor studied was parental involvement in the child's media use.

The study, surveying children twice with six months apart, demonstrated that exposure to media violence is associated with an increased risk of later aggression, that parental monitoring of media use can decrease the risk, and that the greatest risk occurs when multiple risk factors are present. The best single predictor of future aggression among these children was past aggression, followed by violent media exposure, followed by having been a victim of aggression. Furthermore, multiple risk factors were not simply additive; in some cases they were multiplicative.

Another investigation (Boxer et al. 2009) combined content on television, in films/movies and video/computer games in order to examine the role of violent media preferences in an analysis of the cumulative risk of violent/aggressive behaviour. Seven other commonly acknowledged risk factors for such behaviour were included. A sample of teenagers in high school was compared with a sample of delinquents (detained in juvenile justice facilities) of corresponding age.

A total risk composite, including media violence as well as other risks of violent/aggressive behaviour, predicted significantly more statistical variance in the outcome scores than each risk alone. The media violence risk factor had a significant additional effect over other risks. These findings were valid for both the general sample and the delinquents, although stronger for the delinquents.

The aim of an *online* study (Ybarra et al. 2008) of 1,588 10 to 15 year olds (thus, internet users) was to examine the association between seriously violent behaviour and watching depictions of physical violence across television, computer/video games, music and specified kinds of web sites on the internet. The

web sites were, among others: hate sites; sites showing pictures of dead people, people dying or 'snuff' sites; sites showing satanic rituals; and sites, including news-related ones, showing pictures of war, death or 'terrorism'. Although online surveys often do not allow sufficient control of the population, sample and non-responses to produce statistically representative results, the resulting patterns of risk factors among the respondents are of interest as they indicate a syndrome where aggression/violent behaviour is associated with the use of mediated violence across different media where not least violent representations on the internet seem to be of particular concern.

Five per cent of these youths reported engaging in seriously violent behaviour in the previous twelve months, which included shooting or stabbing someone, aggravated assault, robbery and sexual assault. Exposure to violence in the media was associated with significantly elevated odds of concurrently reporting seriously violent behaviour. Although many of the youths had not heard of the types of violent web sites asked about, 38 per cent reported exposure to such violence online. The odds of reporting own seriously violent behaviour increased 50 per cent⁵ with each increase in the number of different types of violent web site exposure the youths reported. The violent web sites had a stronger correlation with own seriously violent behaviour than violence on television and in games. Compared with otherwise similar youths, those who indicated that many, most, or all of the web sites they visited depicted real people engaged in violent behaviour, were significantly more likely to report seriously violent behaviour of their own. After controlling for a range of underlying differences in youth characteristics, it was also found that the respondents' alcohol use, propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, delinquent peers, lack of parental monitoring and exposure to violence in the community were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of concurrently reporting seriously violent behaviour.

Concluding words

In the light of the UN Secretary-General's study on Violence against Children (VAC) mentioned initially, we can say, in sum, that there are previous and an expanding body of recent research that meets the study's requests for more knowledge about the interaction of violent media imagery with other risk factors. The research also shows that considering (and controlling for) several risk factors does not level out or diminish the risk of mediated violence leading to aggression but, instead, increases it.

Certainly, more research in this direction is needed, including studies that allow drawing causal inferences. Moreover, few studies have hitherto combined the different kinds of influences that mediated violence can give rise to. Besides

aggression, there are, as mentioned, imitation, fear, erroneous conceptions of real violence (which, in turn, can lead to fear) and habituation to media violence. Repeated fear that is not treated but hidden away inside will, sooner or later, manifest itself in some way, for instance, as uncertainty, anxiety, depression – or aggression. It is also likely that among a minority of individuals, it is precisely the combination of erroneous conceptions of real violence (leading to fear of encountering violence oneself and to experiencing threats in one's surroundings) and ideas about how one can commit violence – phenomena that media violence has contributed to – that can pave the way for destructive aggression in crisis situations.

There is also a need to combine studies of influences with studies that try to understand children's, youths' (and adults') own ideas, feelings and motivations to use mediated violence, especially in relation to their life situations. Such research builds on the fact that different individuals generally experience excitement, violence, horror and power – and other media content – very differently, need it to different extents (or not at all⁶) and give it different meanings depending on their life context.

For some people, mediated violence means *excitement*. Research also shows that sensation-seekers (persons willing to engage in risky activities without concern for the consequences) often are more attracted by media violence than other young people (Slater et al. 2003).

The signs and symbols of popular culture are also important constituents of children's and young people's everyday practice and learning processes – in play and identity work, developing lifestyles, group belonging and social action. Similarly, mediated violence can sometimes and in different ways play a role in *identity seeking* and *the feeling of group belonging* (e.g. Roe 1983, Bjørnstad & Ellingsen 2002).

Moreover, for some, the use of mediated violence is a more or less conscious attempt to *work through and understand* their feelings of anxiety, oppression, frustration or aggression, and circumstances that have contributed to an aggressive environment, such as family, peers or armed conflicts (e.g. Merlo Flores 2000).

Still other research indicates that some seek out particular violent genres and view these repeatedly, since their life situations imply the desire to *learn special actions* in order to master a possibly violent situation in the future (Bjørnebekk 1998, Uddén 1998).

As research shows that some children and young people are more at risk than others, there is a strong need for studies on mediated violence that are both in-depth and holistic. As shown by the examples in this article, most studies have focused on concurrent risk and protective factors at the levels of personal history and characteristics of the victim or perpetrator, as well as her/his family and other relationships. Since few studies have taken the immediate social

context/community or the characteristics of the larger society into account, it is also essential to find potential risk factors for violence at these levels, such as structuring power relations that lead to inequality and discrimination.

Notes

1. From Krug et al. (2002) and based on, among others, Bronfenbrenner (1977)
2. In a later report (UN 2013) the new ICTs are said to be an emerging concern – progress must accelerate in ensuring children's online protection from violence, such as harmful information, abuse, bullying, harassment and exploitation (p.16).
3. In 2013, 39% of the world population were estimated to be internet users. This figure is only slightly higher among young people. Simultaneously, there were 6 to 7 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions (International Telecommunication Union 2013).
4. For a review of different definitions of this concept, as well as of the related 'mediation', see Kaun (2011)
5. Odds ratio: 1.50; 95% confidence interval: 1.13-1.98
6. See, e.g. Tarasov 2000

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Stealing Children's Innocence in Egypt

Media Literacy, Human Rights and Roads of Violence

Ibrahim Saleh

Children should not be victims nor witnesses of violence and their rights should be respected under all circumstances. (UNICEF representative in Egypt, Duamelle, 2013)¹

Young children are exposed to many forms of media messages that form an important part of their lives. In general, media education/literacy has been seen as a way to protect children from the 'big bad media world' whose 'tentacles' are wrapping around their minds. (Tawfik, 2004)²

On a daily basis, Egyptian children endure all sorts of violence in the media and in other respects inside and outside their homes, especially within the current fluid political situation in Egypt. Children are witnessing the trauma of such clashes, especially that many young children have been seen at demonstrations and there have been disturbing reports of some groups deliberately bringing in vulnerable children. Some reports suggest that certain political organizations are offered money in exchange for sending street children into a demonstration area.

Violence against children is a socially and politically complex issue that is closely linked to poverty, unemployment, drugs, inadequate or abusive parenting practices and real-life adult models of violent problem-solving behaviour. Official figures are not to be found; however, according to the latest estimates (2013) from the Centre for Egyptian Social and Criminal Research, 36 percent of the street children suffer from sexual abuse, violence and other coercive practices including prostitution.³

This article aims to address the links between different kinds of violence in society and the media, and discuss how the consequences of both factual and fictional media violence may be reinforced by other social and economic factors. It is thus pertinent to take into consideration two interrelated challenges: how

children's rights are (or are not) being protected in Egypt, and the role media literacy can play in order to respond to this societal crisis.

The article considers, as well, the reciprocal relationship between media coverage of violence against children and the actual crisis that is threatening the Egyptian society with a new pattern of increasing violence and abuse.

Setting the scene

Living in Egypt makes it disturbingly commonplace to experience running street battles between children and police, battles, which have an ugly social characteristic of being 'normal' or 'usual'. The police routinely arrest and detain children because they consider the children 'vulnerable to delinquency' or 'vulnerable to danger', although they have not committed any criminal offence; they are simply arrested for begging or being homeless. While detained for days or weeks, the children are often subjected to police beatings, sexual abuse and violence in unsanitary and dangerous conditions – often with adult criminal detainees who abuse them – denied adequate food, water, bedding and medical care (Human Watch Report, 2003).

Since the turmoil started, the police justify arrests by claiming that the street children were paid to support the revolutionaries during 2011 by inciting violence in the streets. The Egyptian Association for the Assistance of Juveniles and Human Rights has confirmed this. Mahmoud al-Badawy, the association's head, explained that the state-owned television channel Al-Oula (First Channel) aired a report stating that street children were paid \$20 a day to throw stones (Marroushi, 2011).

The role of media comes into question, and the polarized debates on media coverage and coverage of torture and sexual assault cases against children make the whole credibility of the rule of law, media literacy and children's rights questionable. The media credibility is doubtful and becomes a case of walking on water. What are media educators and practitioners supposed to do: Should we cover children's violence incidents? What is the public right to know?

The main hypothesis here is that 'the key to calming the Egyptian public is to find a permanent solution for the torture apparatus of children and more ethical ways to cover such incidents without silencing the media or hiding 'the ugly truth from the fragile public. Pushing the people to know is the only way out of this mess' (Allam, 2013).⁴

This makes the lack of public knowledge one of the main obstacles when dealing with violence against children. Violence in the media is even less publicly discussed, though extensive research has been carried out on the influences of media violence on children. However, such research has mostly been done in other countries (von Feilitzen, 1998) and is largely lacking in Egypt.

A main assumption here concerns the role of the media as a socialization catalyst of violence, which correlates the depiction of violence in media on the one hand, and the collapse of the healthy development of children on the other. But the main hurdle in this context is the societal denial of the problem and the lack of interest in analysing and offering problem-solving strategies (Lippincott, 2013), especially with the current bleakness of economic recession and the lack of political freedom. According to Global Peace Index (GPI, 2013), Egypt's score has drastically deteriorated in recent years (from 49 in 2010, 73 in 2011 to 113 in 2013 in the global rankings. Egypt now ranks 10 in Mena, the region of Middle East and North Africa).

In this setting, although they represent 40 percent of the population, children are neither a national priority nor regarded as social and cultural capital. Moreover, over 20 percent of the whole population lives on the national poverty line, and another 20 percent below this poverty line (United Nations Population Fund, 2009). More than 2 million young people have never attended school (6% of females and 3% of males aged 10 to 29 years) (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2012).

Even school violence has become a growing problem in Egypt. Violent behavior against school children is primarily expressed as physical or verbal aggression. In a cross-sectional study that assessed a total of 500 elementary school children from mixed schools (private and public, 250 from each in North Cairo Educational Zone) the prevalence of different forms of physical violence was 72 percent in the private school and 76 percent in the public school (Ez-Zelara et al., 2007).

Of course, corporal punishment is banned by ministerial decree (Naqvi, 2011), but the reality presents a very dim and sad story of violence occurring in Egyptian schools. Such rash of teacher-on-student violence has blighted Egypt's schools since the former Minister of Education Ahmed Zaki Badr 'told the Shura Council that preventing school teachers from beating students as a form of punishment would leave teachers vulnerable to attack'. (Selim, 2010)⁵

Moushira Khattab, former secretary-general of the Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in Egypt and vice-chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, describes the prevailing Egyptian culture as a violent one (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2005). Khattab added that when an emergency phone hotline was installed as part of an effort to tackle violence against children, it received more than 25,000 phone calls in twenty-four days.

It [violence in and against children] is linked to the breakdown of the family, to some extent. When the large family breaks up, communities break up, the rural-urban continuum picks up, and the need for money makes it impossible for so many mouths to be fed, so you have the beginnings of a nuclear family. [...] the society creates its own imbalances, which then create these conditions where children become the victims.⁶

This makes the need to state the problem of violence – which is the result of cultural hypocrisy and society's double standards, discrepancies between laws and their implementations and religion – more acute. This corruption means that Egyptian society itself – excluding the media – is not safe for children to live in.

Having said this, there is an urgent need to look deeper into the matter, by analysing the possible correlations between violent media content or visuals, contextual factors in the environment, and patterns in children's physical and relational aggression over time.

Media literacy, human rights and roads of violence in Egypt

In this section, the author argues that the diagnosis of the current violence against children in Egypt and the media literacy challenges make the situation like walking on deep water. While acknowledging the importance of individual and family factors, the author proposes that such factors are significantly affected by the mores of the media coverage, as well as the socio-economic conditions which reflect those mores in the Egyptian society. This is especially the case with the current political challenges, which highlight the tradition with an extreme focus on patriarchy (Ghaly, 2000).

It is not that both domestic and international legal frameworks attempt to adapt to the growing fear of the effects of mediated violence, especially against children. However, more attention should be directed towards the mid- and high-level educational measures, based on the transmission of strong moral guidelines, critical thinking skills and media literacy to enable future generations to evaluate media content and understand its dangers. If such conceptual idea would be implemented, it will lead to a more informed selection of media content by the audience (Scharrer, 2006). In a bottom-up manner, individuals will counteract the influence of media violence at a societal scale. The mediated violence, justified or not, will be put in perspective and its effect substantially diminished.

The modern 'active audience' theories have provided a conceptual context to this view of media use/effects, as explained by Baran and Davis (2012) – a view that sees the audience as 'actively and consciously working to understand media content'.⁷ Such perception multiplied by the intended polysemy of content perfectly justifies the need for media literacy education.

Although the media content has many different meanings, audiences must be given adequate tools to make sense of this content and control its influence. Undoubtedly, the dilemma also depends partly on the allocated amounts of time and exposure to media violence (Osborn, 2009). Violent content and narratives in media representations play a major role in socialization, and contribute to the naturalization of violence.

It is, thus, imperative that we consider the risk of adhering to the 'early window' principle when teaching media literacy. As proposed by Baran and Davis, this is the idea that 'media have become a primary means by which most of us experience or learn about many aspects of the world around us',⁸ implicitly meaning that media representations are faithful portrayals of reality. In fact, one of the important elements of media literacy is to actively work to discern reality from fiction in order to reduce the potential for identification and reproduction.

In this context, media literacy education should be understood and strategized as more than just a shield against harmful, external content. In today's hi-tech reality, media is no longer the elite's luxury tool and bullhorn. It should be seen as a pleasurable tool of empowerment that needs to be taught, in order to consume and produce content responsibly. As expressed by Renee Hobbs, this mindset values the youth as competent decision-makers and inventive media creators.⁹ Educating the youth in this manner can avoid the stigmatization of children as helpless victims – which they do not readily accept – and instruct them in a more constructive and productive fashion to build a comprehensive understanding of the field.

The learning process also orients children to cope with difficult situations of abandonment and abuse, for example in relation to the fact that 30 per cent of newlywed couples in Egypt experience violence in the first year of marriage (Abou el Maati & CAPMAS 2008).

The mediated experience of violence has a double-edged impact. According to Groebel (1999), many children live in problematic emotional states and identify with fictive media heroes for escapism from their bleak reality. This supports the hypothesis that aggressive behaviours are generated by troubled family environment and peer groups, in particular in harsh social and economic conditions (Groebel & Hinde, 1991), while media consumption is only a catalyst in the process.

Today's media landscape is not similar to that of the 1970s and 1980s, something which puts more stress on both parents and teachers to take equal responsibilities in media education. Fighting the social phenomenon of violence against children in Egypt does not end with denial or enforcement. Instead, adults need to acquire the methodological tools to help the younger ones with their pursuit of sharp critical thinking and analytical skills needed in content decryption and creation. As expressed by the American Academy of Pediatrics in a 2009 publication about media violence, 'there has been little time to assess the effects' of modern interactive media such as video games or the internet, but 'early studies [...] indicate that effects of child-initiated virtual violence may be even more profound than those of passive media, such as television'.¹⁰

A condition of any reform is engagement and scope enlargement in the process of media literacy among parents, schools, and communities to educate

children to be media literate as a means of protecting them against deleterious health effects of media exposure.

However, some questions remain unresolved, such as possible alternatives for fighting the negative effects of violence in the media. The dilemma lies in the difficulty of journalism to self-regulate and professionalize, since it is almost impossible to rely on expected social responsibility of a heavily profit-driven industry to opt for the moral option which, more often than not, tends to be less profitable. And if there are positive outcomes of these attempts, it may take many years before they ever become common practice.

This is the volatile situation of violence against children and media literacy in Egypt. When attempting to educate individual media users, one has to understand that it is a long-term goal. It promises to yield high returns only if we could create a future of responsible media professionals who will practice in a world where they will no longer be permitted to senselessly use violence as is now the case, albeit having the intellectual honesty to accept family violence as a part of human nature and society, as well as the entertaining nature of mediated violence. In teaching media literacy, it is also important to underline the fact that media can play a positive role in the lives of Egyptians.

Context: Violence in the media family and society

As mentioned, children are exposed to violence in many domains in their everyday life. In this section, the author will provide examples of research, which illustrate some of the most pertinent issues and studies relating to socialization of violence in Egypt. First the legal framework is presented.

Corporal punishment in Egypt – the legal framework

'Darkness' laws connecting repression, intimidation and illegalities (Allen, 2012) emphasize governmental strategies that infringe on the law (sanctioned illegalities). Corporal punishment is unlawful as a sentence for a crime. It is not a permitted sentence for children between 7 and 15 years of age under the *Children's Act (Article 101) Law No. 396 (1956)* that was repealed by *Law No. 152 (2002) (Article 42)*. Children aged 15 to 18 years receive reduced penal sentences, and these do not include corporal punishment.

Article 40 of the Code of Criminal Procedure advocates the preservation of the human dignity (physical or mental) of detainees, though the legality of corporal punishment in social welfare institutions, in which children below 16 years convicted of crime may be detained, has not been ascertained.

Efforts to introduce into law the full prohibition of the corporal punishment of children are still unsuccessful. The Egyptian constitution includes article 74 of the *Child Law, which confirms parents' and carers' 'right to discipline'*, and legal

provisions against violence and abuse are not interpreted as prohibiting corporal punishment. *Act No. 126 (2008)* amended the *Children's Act (1996)* to strengthen the legal protection of children's rights, including protection from harm. Also, *Article 1* of the *Amending Act* explicitly emphasizes that the state guarantees as a minimum requirement the same rights as provided in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other relevant international instruments applicable in Egypt.

The provisions against violence and abuse in the *Children's Act*, the *Criminal Code (1937)* and the *Constitution (1971)* are not interpreted as prohibiting all corporal punishment of children (Newberber, 2000). The presence of a *ministerial directive (17 November 1998)* and the *National Council for Childhood and Motherhood* which prohibits corporal punishment (Kamel et al., 2011) have not yet led to any changes.

Violence and socialization

In a study investigating various definitions of violence, who (and not) affected by it, and how seriously, findings suggested that discourses on violence assume the blame frame where the 'doer' is responsible. This creates a polarization of 'we' and 'them', which might end up with militarist solutions against the enemy (Korall, 2002).

In another study that analysed the impact of the amount and type of TV violence that young children are exposed to at a very young age on a daily basis, the findings held adults responsible for helping children deal with the violence they saw and heard about by becoming more engaged in conversations with the children to assist them in understanding the negative or harmful images (Erwin & Morton, 2008).

A study that examined the correlation between violent media content and general aggression considered the case of 820 youths, comprised of 390 juvenile delinquents and 430 high school students. Findings confirmed that media exposure to violence is associated with involvement in violent behaviour, but that many other risk factors for such behaviour are also involved (Boxer et al., 2009).

In a study that analysed the relationship between exposure to media violence and its influence on a sample of adolescents, findings indicated that the negative impact of exposure to media violence is more powerful on adolescents who already have disruptive behaviour disorder diagnoses, or who have a history of aggressive-disruptive behaviour, than on adolescents with no psychiatric diagnosis (Kronenberg et al., 2005).

In another study, which tracked the long-term impact of exposure to violence on television and its implications for aggression, the results strongly indicated the significance of prefrontal cortical structures, which provide important mediational links in the relationship between exposure to violent media and increased aggression (Carnagey, Anderson & Bartholow, 2007).

Still another example is a study that analysed how different factors of television narratives influence people's judgments of how violent those narratives are. Findings indicated that the participants' judgments were more strongly associated with perceptions of the graphicness of the violent acts and the harm to victims, than with other factors such as the number of violent acts or the seriousness of those acts (Riddle et al., 2006).

A final example is a study, which sought to explain the impact on children of exposure to domestic violence. The results indicated that both moderate and severe violence occur frequently between family members, and that children who are exposed to this violence are more likely to be abused and neglected. However, the levels of influence and impact also depend on the children's risk and vulnerability, as well as the structure of their environments (Osofsky, 2003).

Domestic violence

Another group of studies concern domestic and gender-based violence. It is far to assume that the violence children experience in their home environment, and how this type of violence is reflected in society will affect children's views on and attitudes towards violence.

One study analysed 'Honour killing' in Egypt based on a sample of 20 daily newspapers and weekly magazines over a period of one year (Khafagy, 2005). The findings indicated that the majority of perpetrators of violence were male (76%): husbands (42%), fathers (10%) and brothers (10%). The types of violence were murder (76%), attempted murder (5%), battering (18%) and kidnapping (2.5%). And the causes of violence were honour crimes (42%), leaving the house without the husband's permission (7.5%), and wives asking for a divorce (3%).

In a study exploring the intensity of domestic violence in Egypt, findings suggested strong determinants of domestic violence against women which included the women's religious affiliation, age group, place of residence, duration of marriage and experiencing the death of a child (Ulbrich & Huber, 1981). However, social taboos such as female genital cutting varied between regions, classes and income levels.

Another study (El-Zanaty & Way, 2004) examined the family organization in Egypt, the treatment of married women and societal attitudes towards divorce and physical abuse of wives. The results indicated that women's dependency on marriage to retain custody of their children discourages them from divorce and increases their acceptance of abuse.

A study by Yount (2005) highlighted women's dependence and social isolation and suggested that physical abuse is substantially higher among women who are economically dependent on marriage and who lack access to social support, regardless of the level of household wealth.

In a study of how the Egyptian press frames issues of female sexuality (Abu Amara, Ambrosetti & Condon, 2009), the findings indicated that the newspaper *Al-Sha'ab* (The People) was sceptical about public deliberation of the issue, since it might contribute to destruction of the family institution and encouragement of adultery and apostasy. However, this debate has gained some attention in the élite foreign press, such as *Al-Abram Hebdo* and *Al-Abram Weekly*.

Another study assessed the treatment of female detainees by both the police and the State Security Intelligence (Sottas, 2001). The results indicated that Egypt suffers from serious cases of violations of the human rights of women involving sexual abuse, or threat of such abuse, with the aim of acquiring intimate or sensitive information relating to husbands or other family members.

Depiction of children in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm*

While international research on the influences of media violence is extensive, far fewer studies have dealt with the representation of children in connection with violence in the media. A valid recent example is the coverage of children and children's rights in media in South Africa and Zambia (Radu & Bird, 2013). While there have been general improvements in how children are represented in the news in Africa since 2003, when Media Monitoring Africa started these analyses, an unsatisfactory state of affairs still remains, according to the report. Two to three (2 to 3) percent of the news stories still clearly violated the rights of the children. And children's voices were heard in only five to seven (5 to 7) percent of the stories.

In this section of the article, the author presents an analysis of the depiction of children related to their rights and to violence in the daily edition of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (The Egyptian Today) from January to July 2011 (the Egyptian revolution took place from January 25th to June 30th the same year). The method used was quantitative content analysis. However, since the analysis only used a purposive non-probability sample, the findings cannot be generalized, such as when looking into all kinds of articles, news spots and visuals related to children's rights and violence.

The analysis revealed that only nine (9) articles dealt with children's rights and violence over the seven-month period. This highlights a serious issue of under-reporting. The limited number of articles were scattered over the period of 210 days with some concentration in July (3 articles) (see Table 1).

The coverage took the form of one of three nodes. Firstly, violence drives the storyline; crime, murder and fist fighting were used to launch media plots where the victim is never safe and danger is always just around the corner. Secondly, children and violence were usually covered without a link to justice and the law. Thirdly, most of the coverage was in spot news or detached episodes,

Table 1. **The media coverage of issues related to media violence and children’s rights in *Al-Masry al-Youm***

Date	Title of the article	Name of journalist	Gender of journalist	Main theme
02/02/2011	Children of the protests	Valentina Cattane	Female	Violent environment
04/03/2011	Children’s corner: Helping children through trauma	Nevine El Shabrawy	Female	Children’s fears and anxiety
13/04/2011	Beating children in the name of discipline	Hazem Zohny	Male	Violence in schools
16/04/2011	‘Arna’s Children’: The life and work of Juliano Mer-Khamis	Helen Stuhr-Rommereim	Female	Theatre for trauma therapy
26/05/2011	Teacher detained pending investigation	Adel Durra	Male	School violence
28/06/2011	Social initiatives: Alashanek Ya Balady’s fight against child pneumonia	Heba Helmy	Female	Child mortality
14/07/2011	Child labour in Egypt estimated at over 1.5 million	Amira Saleh	Female	Child abuse
16/07/2011	Domestic violence	Hoda Nassef	Female	Child abuse as a response to domestic violence
23/07/2011	Children’s corner: A mini-city is an innovative edutainment experience	Heba Helmy	Female	“Respite” for kids

with no analysis of the danger or the reasons behind the violence disrupting the fabric of society.

Furthermore, the characters and voices were caricature-like in nature so no one could call about them, and many of them had no families. Hardly any individuals were referred to using their full names; only their nicknames were used. However, this might be justified by ethical considerations based on the requests of individuals.

Of the nine articles, female journalists had written seven and male journalists two. This finding could be interpreted on a number of grounds, such as the awareness and advocacy of females to important issues. However, it might also simply be explained by the absence of journalistic specialization in Egypt.

Positive frames of the stories (4 articles) were almost equal to negative framing (5 articles). It seems that violence as a serious human rights issue is not yet given a priority. And there were no media literacy policies or directions towards awareness and education mentioned in any of the articles.

Table 2. **Themes of covering the violence against children**

Theme	
Children’s rights	1
Child abuse	3
Violence	3
Hostile environment	2

In Table 2, findings indicate that there are four main themes in the articles having addressed the issue of violence. One article presents it as a 'child rights' issue. However, the traditional approach of presenting 'child abuse' and 'violence', respectively, dominates and exists in three articles each. Lastly, two articles focused on the nature of the hostile setting. Though the sample cannot be generalized across different times and other newspapers or media in general, it still reflects a delinquency in addressing a social bomb in Egypt. Besides, only in one of the cases the coverage addressed the problem in a holistic manner, while in all other cases violence and children was dealt with as a separate accident. The holistic exception appeared on the 16th of July and followed a thematic frame analysis that directly tackled domestic violence.

As a point for discussion, it seems that the media texts as well as their accompanying visuals reflect a strong sense of a violent society that demeans and displaces positive social values. The main narrative was a 'negotiating narrative' in an inequitable society where the poor are depicted as criminals, young females are framed as visible minorities, and victims are portrayed in a 'black frame'. Such a lack of fair presentation and representation can only encourage a more subordinate culture that is willing to let the authorities' great power to enforce the status quo.

Concluding words

Egypt is caught in a vicious cycle of violence against children. The children continue to be frequently subjected to various types of assault and abuse. But the paradox lies in the pseudo-culture that continues to brag about its religious and conservative structure, while keeping silent and even being disinterested in child maltreatment, peer victimization and children's exposure to violence in the family, school, community and media.

The adverse effects of media reporting are still impeded by many social and cultural issues, are seldom recorded statistically and, even if reported, are usually only recorded in terms of broader family incidences. Moreover, with the lack of more child rights protection, media texts and visuals will continue to recreate and disseminate violent themes and radicalism in a positively packaged culturally mediated context.

The usual fascination among children with media violence does not mean that destructive behavior is innate. However, it explains the strong influence of media on children, an influence which certainly undermines the children's innocence and imagination. But one should not overstate the interlock between media violence and children, because it is much more complex and includes many factors. Additionally, it is very difficult to measure imitation by children ('copycats' and the like), without considering the quantity of exposure, both in

terms of duration and the range of expressions that can be seen as constituting 'acts of violence'.

Egypt's biggest challenge is how to reduce and mitigate the effects of these social ills, where its roads are full of violence and the colour of blood has stained everyone as a result of stealing the innocence of Egyptian children.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need to improve public awareness and knowledge, and to contribute to more engaging media through the collaboration of media educators, journalists and parents. Ultimately, the law alone cannot cure the epidemic of violence. The urgent need for better media and information literacy should not be limited to violence itself and what victims can expect and demand from the legal process. The inherent violence and gender inequalities in the Egyptian culture should also be challenged. It is through the people – the social capital – that things can actually change, by orientating towards alleviating the problem, which, directly or indirectly, impacts the lives of each and everyone.

This article has emphasized that there are areas where public awareness and media literacy education could benefit the Egyptian child. Such literacy is capable of dispelling myths, correcting stereotypes, and uncovering the economic essence of the media. On a micro level, media education will help children connect school material with the outside world. School work will no longer be out of touch with children's immediate surroundings, since these surroundings are increasingly media oriented. This may secure a more peaceful future for our children inside and outside their homes. Media literacy and education is an essential tool for protecting children.

Notes

1. Philippe Duamelle is here expressing his concern about Egyptian children being subjected to violence and detention in the latest bouts of national unrest. See UNICEF (2013). "UNICEF condemns violence against Egyptian children", *Al-Ahram Online*, Feb. 17, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/65011/Egypt/Politics-/UNICEF-condemns-violence-against-Egyptian-children.aspx>
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Sexualisation and Children's Relationship with the Media

Jeanne Prinsloo

The sexualisation of young people in and through the media has emerged as a topic that causes great consternation and even moral outrage in many quarters. Sexualisation tends to be defined both in terms of process and outcomes. As process, it is argued to occur when...

- a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
- a person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
- sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person (APA 2007:1).

As outcome it is understood as 'the imposition of adult sexuality on to children and young people before they are capable of dealing with it mentally, emotionally and physically' (Papadopoulos 2010).

The extent of the concern about the media's role in the sexualisation of young people is evident in the enormous attention it has received in recent years in the form of several major reports on the topic, notably from more developed and industrialised countries including Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA, both by governments and psychological associations.¹ It additionally receives frequent attention in the popular media and scholarly literature. While the responses are similar in asserting their concern for the well-being of children, significantly very different assumptions – as in all spheres of sexual politics and positions – inform these responses and their recommendations. Arguably the

most vociferous position around child sexualisation is one of moral outrage that insists on the media's effects as directly harmful.

To discuss sexualisation of (girl) children in the media, this article first addresses childhood as socially constructed before providing an overview of two different positions taken in relation to the media and sexualisation of girls, specifically structuralist and poststructuralist approaches. It seeks to develop greater clarity about the issue by identifying the concerns, making explicit the dilemmas we encounter and suggesting kinds of research that might develop richer understandings about children's sexualisation and media consumption.

Children, girl children and Sophie's choices

Within a poststructural frame, childhood is recognized as socially constructed and it regards the social and cultural forms it takes as historically and culturally contingent rather than essential or natural. Any construction of childhood assumes a particular form that then structures 'the possible field of action' of others (Foucault 1982:221). The particular structuring of the possible field of action for children is evident in how it is defined and how childhood is achieved through various practices both representational (as in the media) and actual lived practices.

The most prevalent view of childhood is expressed in the recurring lament about the 'sexualisation' of childhood through media representations and consumer products, and the consequent loss of childhood. In this view childhood is considered a time of innocence and is placed in binary opposition to adulthood, its concerns and responsibilities. Childhood was not always understood in this way or in all places but is a modern concept and the social and biological category that it assumes emerged in late eighteenth century Europe only (Kincaid 1998). If children were thought of as small-scale adults who entered into their given social status at birth prior to this, this gave way to the belief of the specialness of childhood, a construction that was articulated in Rousseau's (1762/1979) influential exploration of childhood in his book, *Emile*. He argues that the child (Emile) should be protected from premature exposure to the corruptions of society (inclusive of sex and violence) to have a chance of developing naturally. The child is seen as uncorrupted.

Alongside the idea of the child as innocent and different from the adult is another set of binary oppositions. The innocent or ideal child is simultaneously constructed as the child of promise in opposition to the child at risk or as risk. As Duhn argues, the 'ideal child is governed through its Other, the child as/at risk who marks the boundaries of ideal childhood' (Duhn 2006:ii). When children transgress the boundaries through particular behaviours associated with the adult world, childhood 'as a sunny and carefree paradise' becomes 'overshadowed by the fear of childhood as dark and foreboding territory' (Duhn 2006:50). The

child at risk is also potentially the dangerous child who might contaminate the purity that should be childhood and so endanger the ideal child.

However, if in the eponymous *Emile*, Rousseau devoted time to the education of this supposedly generic and special child, there is another aspect of his work that is central to this article. Less often acknowledged is the attention he gave in this work to the generic girl child, one Sophie, whom he proposes as the ideal companion for the boy child Emile, so inserting sex and gender into this apparently neutral space of childhood. In contrast to educating Emile to become an active citizen, Sophie's possible field of action is different. Rousseau proposed that she should be guided by women's nature, a docile servility which disbars her from participation in the political sphere of life. He is unambiguous about Sophie's role in relation to the generic Emile. Hers is essentially an adult role for she is to be trained to complement the development of boys and men.

To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of women for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young (Rousseau in Donald 1992:10).

What is striking about Rousseau's ideas is that the girl child is to be groomed to be an adult and not a child, and not merely an adult but an adult woman. This prescription might be easy to reject as inconsistent with practices in the twenty-first century but it is important not to dismiss it out of hand. Certainly the discourse of childhood as a golden era persists today and just as certainly childhood continues to be gendered. This gendering is clear in the retail world from any visit to a toy or clothing retailer. Cooking sets, baby dolls, and the *Barbie* and *Bratz* type ones as well, are among the merchandise for girls. So too are lotions, make-up, mirrors, beauty sets, padded bras and thong knickers. Toys for boys, goodies for girls goes one marketing mantra! It is striking that these are all signifiers of adult femininities, both the roles Rousseau expressed explicitly as well as the unexpressed injunction of sexual desirability. Is it far-fetched to suggest that to be 'pleasing in his sight' can imply physical desirability – however that might be constructed in a particular era – in order 'to make his life happy'? It seems that then and now Sophie is required to groom herself as a mini-woman and moral outrage does not greet this injunction. What produces the discomfort is not when girls emulate smooth-skinned, blond-haired pale princesses, or mums or nurses, but a singular aspect of adulthood, namely sexuality and sexualisation.² While expressed often as a concern for children, this is a concern with hypersexualised girls. We might well ask what Sophie's choices really amount to.

This sense of children as being innocent but corruptible promotes a passive and mechanistic construction of the child, at the mercy then of the media representations s/he encounters – for it parallels a tradition in media studies referred

to as the effects tradition and it conflates media messages and media reception in a hypodermic fashion (Egan and Hawkes 2008a:297).

In contrast, more recently new childhood studies offer a theoretical perspective of 'children as active, agentic and competent, as opposed to the passive, innocent and immature child of developmental psychology' (Grieshaber 2010). It includes both humanist and poststructural strands of understanding. The humanist subject is considered as active and rational and acting independently of social determinants. The construction of the rational child has been critiqued as a cognitivist model that overlooks emotionality and sexuality (Walkerdine 1999:13). The poststructural child is seen as constituted through the social and cultural contexts s/he inhabits. However, s/he encounters a range of competing discourses and so is not merely determined by one powerful discourse with a singular script to be performed. S/he is an active and desiring agent that negotiates the representations, both the dominant and contesting discourses encountered, in relation to her lived worlds. This view acknowledges that a sexualised discourse might be rehearsed frequently in many spaces, but other discourses also jostle with it and they include the validation of purity and chastity, hard work, nurturance and even servility.

Different questions and different approaches to sexualisation

Until fairly recently, there was a scarcity of research on sexualisation of girls in the media although concerned scholars argued that the phenomenon was prevalent and should be of great concern (e.g., Walkerdine 1999). This has certainly changed in recent years as the reports identified in the introduction attest to and the extent of the attention given to girls, sexualisation and consumerism has been described in some quarters as a moral panic (Egan and Hawke 2008a). As in other debates relating to sexual politics, there is no consensus about the relationship between the media and sexualisation. Different positions or paradigms pose different questions that result in different kinds of research. The question, 'What do the media do to children?' assumes that children are sponge like and absorb the messages they are exposed to. The question, 'What do children do with the media?' introduces a different dimension. The assumption here is that children are also active agents.

Structuralist accounts of media sexualisation

The question 'What do the media do to children?' emerges from a structuralist paradigm and the research tends to assume that media structures and content determine the meaning attributed it by the audience. This approach tends to focus on the context of production and the content of media texts to explain an

existing phenomenon. It excludes attention to the audience as active consumers who might negotiate meanings.

Several of the recent comprehensive responses on the topic of the relationship between sexualisation of girl children and the media tend to be concerned with what media *do* to their audiences. This includes the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* by the American Psychological Association (APA 2007), two books informed by scholarly work but written to be widely accessible, namely *The Lolita Effect* (Durham 2008) and *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (Levine and Kilbourne 2008) emanating from the USA; *Corporate Paedophilia* and *Letting Children be Children* (Rush and La Nauze 2006 a, b) from Australia; and the *Sexualisation of Young People* (Papadopoulos 2010) in the United Kingdom. These accounts distance themselves from conservative attitudes that disallow that children are indeed also sexual and they differentiate between sexuality and sexualisation or the production of the 'baby-faced nymphet' (Durham, 2008:24). Rather than discussing all these works, I seek to identify particular elements that recur.

The Lolita Effect (Durham 2008) addresses the sexualisation of young girls in relation not only to representations but to the contemporary media environment with its wide range of media products, marketing and associated merchandise, as do many of the works cited above. The author identifies five 'myths' at play in contemporary American society (and implicitly as broadly as the spread of American cultural products) to achieve the Lolita effect with its imperative to get and keep your man. First, 'if you've got it, flaunt it' (2008:63) is an injunction to be 'hot' and requires stylish clothing and presentation to attract boys' sexual interest. Second, to be hot requires the 'anatomy of a sex goddess', slender, long-legged, busty, wasp-waisted, long haired and frequently white. Three, 'pretty babes' relates to the Lolita effect whereby little girls are seen as sexually appealing and advertisements are identified as spaces where very young girls are often sexualised where sexiness is linked to youth, and the younger the sexier. Myth four proposes that 'violence is sexy' as evident in slasher movies, video games, music videos, wrestling programs, etc. The fifth myth proposes that girls should do what boys like as articulated in the advice columns of teen magazines about pleasing boys to get their attention, keeping their boy, but without a sexual voice themselves. Paradoxically, girls are exhorted to be themselves (the girl power rehearsed in *Bratz* type products), but this self must be complicit with this ideal *Barbie* femininity and traditional heterosexuality.

Levine and Kilbourne's intervention is cast in the same mould but incorporates both sexes who they argue are 'routinely exposed to images of sexual behaviour devoid of emotions, attachment or consequences' and so come to link sex with violence. 'And they learn to associate physical appearance and buying the right products not only with being sexy but also with being successful as a person'

(2008:2). Sexual images are considered dangerous by Rush and La Nauze (2006a) for effecting age-inappropriate interest in shopping and imitating sexy pop stars which in effect grooms young children for paedophiles.

Similar concerns informed the APA task force investigation into the sexualisation of girlhood in U.S. culture in response to public concern about both media representations and consumer products, including lacy thongs, t-shirts with suggestive slogans and salacious toys. While the authors differentiate between 'healthy sexuality' and sexualisation and describe the sexualisation of girls as a complex social phenomenon, the media are understood to deliver messages that teach girls that women are sexual objects. Advertising is again singled out. Its sexualisation of women extends to young girls depicted as sexual objects, (un)dressed in sexually provocative clothing, and posed in submissive sexually exploitative ways. Their concern relates to the well-being of girls and negative outcomes from exposure to sexualising media representations for girls as more likely to experience 'dissatisfaction, depression and low self esteem' (2007:35), and a sense of shame. They propose that girls' sexual development might be affected by exposure to models of sexual passivity.

Similarly, the impact of media sexualisation is considered damaging in a British report for its deleterious effects on body image and consequently on mental health, and the increasing phenomena of eating disorders (Papadopoulos 2010). It argues that the ubiquity of sexualisation is so ingrained in society as to render the harm of commercial sexual exploitation invisible. Elsewhere the implications of this sexualisation relate to early sexual activity, the possibility of sexually transmitted disease and teenage pregnancy.

These detailed and wide ranging reports make recommendations to address the situation: They approve of degrees of regulation and argue for media literacy or media education (Durham 2008), and national campaigns to address aspects of the phenomenon, e.g., violence in intimate teen relationships (Papadopoulos 2010). The educational initiatives assumedly work at a rational or cognitive level whereby knowledge is seen as a deterrent against sexualised behaviour as a consequence of recognising the potential risks of such behaviour.

Critiques of structural approaches – enter poststructuralism

Writing a few decades ago, Walkerdine argued that feminism had rarely addressed the issue of the girl child except in terms of socialization processes and sex-role stereotypes that assume a passive subject. In this way she provides a critique of structuralist accounts of the relationship between the girl child and the media. She describes and dismisses them as cognitivist and rationalist for it assumes that, if the girl had 'the veil of distortion lifted from her eyes' (Walkerdine 1990:89), she would wish to act differently.

While Walkerdine's was pretty much a lone voice at the time, the poststructuralist critiques of such accounts have increased alongside the proliferation of reports and publications. Unfortunately they are largely confined to scholarly publications and so feed into popular debates less frequently. These critiques are informed by understandings within the fields of Cultural Studies and new childhood studies. They explicitly do not dismiss the concerns described above but propose a more nuanced understanding consistent with the question, 'What do children do with the media?'. They are informed by a different understanding of media, power and identity. Powerful discourses are articulated in the media and work to rule in and rule out what counts as normal or the truth and so validate certain ways of being and acting, rather than merely oppressing or determining their subjects. In fact, the continuance of any discourse is dependent on getting buy in from willing and consequently desiring (human) subjects (Hall 1997). Desire then is produced through discourse. Importantly, while the media present girls with narratives of what counts as desirable, there is no single narrative or discourse. Importantly also, media discourses do not exist in isolation from other cultural practices.

The structuralist accounts are critiqued on several grounds, including the conceptualisation of sexualisation and the passive child, the evasion of gender power relations, the presumed homogeneity of childhood, and the assumptions made about media effects on inadequate empirical grounds.

Conceptualisations of sexuality

While structuralist accounts are careful to discriminate between healthy sexuality and sexualisation, there is no discussion of what constitutes healthy sexuality in the first place. What would count as age-appropriate sexual representations or behaviours is never clear and some taken-for-granted status seems to hold sway. In this way the need for explication is evaded; girlhood sexuality becomes conflated with sexualisation and 'sexuality outside of corporate exploitative messages is rendered impossible' (Egan and Hawkes 2008b:314). In spite of their claims to the contrary, sexuality is rendered inappropriate and an asexual but gendered child is presumed consistent with the idea of the innocent and ideal child.

Alongside the effective erasure of sexuality from girlhood is a sense that sexualised performance renders the girl as corrupted, the dangerous or as/at risk child. There is no sense that sexual performance can be an occasional experiment or a playful trying on of an identity which is valorised for adult women so frequently, one not premised on female purity. Rather structural accounts tend to assume that once sexuality is awakened it becomes unstoppable, 'a hydraulic force' (Egan and Hawkes 2008b:317). They disapprove then of girls' sexual agency and resistance to the narrative of innocence. If girls are viewed

as asexual, sexual images are attributed with the power to effect premature and inappropriate sexual actions. This concern emerges from an assumption of the girl child as passive, as vulnerable and at risk and is in line with the effects tradition in Media Studies – a kind of ‘monkey see, monkey do’ force that operates in isolation from other cultural practices.

Evasion of gender power relations

This focus on sexualisation arguably sidesteps the broader issue of the gendering of childhood in line with the dominant patriarchal gender order. The hegemonic gender has been described as normalising dominant masculinities and the kinds of emphasised femininities that complement such masculinities (Connell 1987). Importantly, it validates various femininities that include both nurturing and sexually desirability. Yet, what is at issue in terms of children is the penetration of the sexual into the domain of childhood. The resulting moral outrage – about sexualisation alone – is expressed as not being in the best interests of children. While phrased as a concern with ‘childhood’, it homogenises childhood and disavows its gendering. The anxiety about hypersexual performances in childhood should read as about hyper-sexy girls or ‘Lolitas’. The near total exclusion of boys from these debates treats femininities as though separate from masculinities and points to the need to extend the debates to incorporate boys and the construction of masculinities that sexualized representations presume (Walkerdine 1997; Enck-Wanzer and Murray 2011). Even greater silence (and anxiety) greets the heteronormativity that underpins the gender order.

Childhood is not homogenous

The plurality of cultural contexts locally and globally ensures the heterogeneity of childhood. Walkerdine has interrogated the centrality of cultural practices in relation to young girls and how desire is inscribed in these practices. While media texts propose subject positions for the audience she insists that they do not exist merely in the texts, but relate to the broader cultural tensions – to ‘existing social and psychic struggle’ (Walkerdine 1990:89). In her focus on the class transformation of young working class girls to middle class, she considers a repetitive theme in film of their social mobility through the patronage of an older man while ‘carefully avoiding any sexual reference’ (Walkerdine 1997:140), as well as how beauty pageants and stardom on TV serve as sexualised spaces for these girls to transform themselves through sexy attire and performance. The crucial point is that popular texts play a central role in constructing desire, here in relation to working class girls who engage in talent and beauty contests as moments of fantasy, escape and transformation. Popular cultural forms para-

doxically might enable an escape from class constraints, but these alternative fantasies and desires are argued not to be merely benign. They present an escape that enacts a further subjectification, this time as sexualised girls.³ Other lines of cultural and identity formation include race and geography, for example, and are increasingly researched.⁴

Inadequate empirical grounds

An important critique of the structuralist accounts relates to the scarcity of empirical evidence both about the sexualised texts and products in the first instance as well as how children interact with them (a point acknowledged even by authors of *Corporate Paedophilia*, Rush and La Nauze 2006a). The assumption that sexualised images form the wallpaper of children's lives is not informed by empirical evidence that demonstrates their pervasiveness in different spaces. In one study Buckingham et al. (2010) investigated the pervasiveness of sexualised consumer products available for children in Scottish retail stores. Their results suggest that while sexualised commodities were on offer in their sample, they were fairly infrequent and the argument that children's lives are effectively saturated with sexualised products is rendered inaccurate in this instance.

As part of my own research relating to sexualisation of girls, a textual analysis was undertaken into programmes screened in South Africa that both target girls and are frequently criticised for sexualised representations (Prinsloo 2012). While they are USA productions, they have broad circulation across the globe. An examination of the narrative of the main and sub-plots of *Bratz* and *Winx* revealed that, in spite of the unrelenting bad press they receive, these texts present complex narratives with active female protagonists and positive friendship relationships that validate 'girl power'. At the same time the subplots present scenarios where sexualised ways of being include hyper-sexualised bodily design, dress and performance. It became evident that these are more complex media products than is generally assumed, inscribing more than a single sexualised discourse although the script of the seductress is regularly rehearsed. However, the degree to which it matters cannot be assumed and what becomes a necessary adjunct to this or similar research is to investigate how young girls, and boys too, negotiate these representations in relation to their lived worlds using ethnographic methods.

The complexity of girls' engagement with sexual representations introduces an argument against conceptualising sexualized representations as having exclusively negative consequences and being automatically and necessarily dangerous (Lerum and Dworkin 2009). Buckingham's and Bragg's (2004) investigation into the responses to representations of love, sex and relationships in the media by children aged 9-17 proposes that their respondents valued the informational roles

of the media in relation to sex and relationships. They found it less embarrassing to find out about sexual matters in this way and saw popular media text such as soaps or teen mags as more in tune with their needs. At the same time they were capable of making complex judgments about the relationships between reality and media representations. This is an argument then that children learn about sexual matters from the media in complex ways rather than the direct way the effects approach suggests and is implicit in the notion of sexualisation, and that these ways will be informed by both their cultural capital and cultural contexts.

That the research cited tends to emerge from industrialised Anglophone countries points to the need for studies from southern countries with their particular complex contexts and where modern discourses interact with the traditional, as well as from those spaces where diasporic communities negotiate their identities in complex ways. If I can refer to South Africa briefly; there are considerable taboos against intergenerational discussions of sexuality, particularly in traditional spaces which are highly gendered and where women's sexual agency is constrained. Popular media do, in these circumstances, present contesting discourses of sexuality to those endorsed as traditional. Strelitz (2001) has described how a young Xhosa man brought up in a traditional and rural family context negotiated American soap operas to consider more satisfying ways to conduct his personal relationships, and in ways that his traditional and Western values could co-exist. At the same time very conservative sexual discourses are frequently inscribed in local productions where culture is validated as though necessarily desirable. Explicit sexual images tend to then be rejected out of hand as 'not our culture', while oppressive gender narratives tend to be rehearsed (see Boshoff and Prinsloo 2008).

Recognising the importance of understanding how young people are negotiating the media requires a reframing of the debates around sexualisation in line with the notion of children not as passive but as engaged in structuring their own lives and negotiating their own identities in complex and seemingly at times contradictory ways. There is a need to recognise both the positive and negative possibilities of sexual representation in the media.

Concluding thoughts

Ultimately though, we are left with a dilemma. We study the media precisely because what it represents does matter and the existence of sexualised media is not rendered immaterial simply because children and young people engage with it in different and complex ways. Activity should not be conflated with agency. Children's encounters with the media are constrained by the social and cultural institutions and the sets of representations they encounter. They are indeed active but they act under conditions not of their making (Buckingham 2008) and

they have to find their way through the myriad of potentially inconsistent and at times contesting messages and narratives. The calls for media education need to be heeded, but they should not seek to inoculate them against harmful images. Rather, educational initiatives can valuably help young people to develop understandings about the media and thus their abilities to critically consider the media they encounter, to play with alternative scenarios, to view society critically. This can lead to their questioning not merely sexualisation or gender, but the broader context, 'the consumerist and capitalist trends that promote sexualised images of childhood' (Thompson 2010:398).

If the structuralist accounts call for campaigns and media education, the post-structural critiques call for more research in order to better inform campaigns and media education. This research would not be premised on sexuality as merely negative or dangerous to girls, nor confined to girls alone. The reframing of research needs to recognise childhood as heterogeneous and to address a variety of cultural variables such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc. (Gill 2009). Hughes describes the research as needing to produce 'small narratives' which engage with the voices of children in particular locations while they are engaging with media; that examines the characters they encounter in these texts and how they engage with them; and then considers how to introduce diversity of characters or discourses for children to encounter. There is also a call for holistic research that investigates the production context, the texts produced, and their mediation by children (Buckingham 2008). Such engagements would 'shed light on the pleasures, problems and politics of "sexualizing" materials' (Egan and Hawkes 2008a:300), and go beyond expressions of anxiety and outrage.

Notes

1. They include, among others, a Commonwealth of Australian Senate Enquiry (2008), the American Psychological Association Report (APA, 2007), and the Bailey Review (2011) in the United Kingdom.
2. If the focus here included boyhood, the issue of violence would be relevant.
3. The talent contest fantasy does not present the same escape route for middle class girls who are differently positioned.
4. See Drotner and Livingstone (2008) for accounts from several southern countries.

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Policy Statement

Children, Adolescents, Obesity, and the Media

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Abstract

Obesity has become a worldwide public health problem. Considerable research has shown that the media contribute to the development of child and adolescent obesity, although the exact mechanism remains unclear. Screen time may displace more active pursuits, advertising of junk food and fast food increases children's requests for those particular foods and products, snacking increases while watching TV or movies, and late-night screen time may interfere with getting adequate amounts of sleep, which is a known risk factor for obesity. Sufficient evidence exists to warrant a ban on junk-food or fast-food advertising in children's TV programming. Pediatricians need to ask 2 questions about media use at every well-child or well-adolescent visit: (1) How much screen time is being spent per day? and (2) Is there a TV set or Internet connection in the child's bedroom?

Introduction

Obesity represents a clear and present danger to the health of children and adolescents. Its prevalence among American youth has doubled in the past 3 decades,¹ and there are now more overweight and obese adults in the United States than adults of normal weight.² However, obesity is also a worldwide problem; rates are increasing in nearly every country.^{3,4} It is increasingly clear that the media, particularly TV, play an important role in the etiology of obesity.⁵ As a result, many countries are now establishing new regulations for advertising to children on TV, and many government health agencies are now issuing recommendations for parents regarding the amount of time children spend watching TV.⁶ Unfortunately, there are currently no data relating other media to obesity.

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Media and obesity

There are a number of ways that watching TV could be contributing to obesity: (1) increased sedentary activity and displacement of more physical pursuits; (2) unhealthy eating practices learned from both the programming and the advertisements for unhealthy foods; (3) increased snacking behavior while viewing; and (4) interference with normal sleep patterns. However, most researchers now agree that the evidence linking excessive TV-viewing and obesity is persuasive.⁷⁻⁹ There have been dozens of longitudinal and correlational studies documenting a connection.⁹ An increasing number of these studies hold ethnicity and socioeconomic status – known to be key factors in obesity – constant and still reveal that TV-viewing is a significant contributor to obesity.^{7,10} Results of the longitudinal studies are particularly convincing. For example, a remarkable 30-year study in the United Kingdom found that a higher mean of daily hours of TV viewed on weekends predicted a higher BMI at the age of 30. For each additional hour of TV watched on weekends at age 5, the risk of adult obesity increased by 7%.¹¹ A group of researchers in Dunedin, New Zealand, followed 1000 subjects from birth to 26 years of age and found that average weeknight TV-viewing between the ages of 5 and 15 years was strongly predictive of adult BMI.¹² In a study of 8000 Scottish children, viewing more than 8 hours of TV per week at age 3 was associated with an increased risk of obesity at age 7.¹³ Also, in 8000 Japanese children, more TV-viewing at age 3 resulted in a higher risk of being overweight at age 6.¹⁴ Numerous American studies have had similar findings.¹⁵⁻²³

The presence of a TV set in a child's bedroom seems to exacerbate the impact of TV-viewing on children's weight status.²⁴⁻²⁸ A study of 2343 children aged 9 to 12 years revealed that having a bedroom TV set was a significant risk factor for obesity, independent of physical activity.²⁴ A cross-sectional study of 2761 parents with young children in New York found that 40% of the 1- to 5-year-olds had a bedroom TV, and those who did were more likely to be overweight or obese.²⁵ Teenagers with a bedroom TV spent more time watching TV, less time being physically active, ate fewer family meals, had greater consumption of sweetened beverages, and ate fewer vegetables than did teenagers without a bedroom TV.²⁶

Recent correlational studies have also found a strong association between time spent watching TV and blood glucose level control in young people with diabetes,²⁹ type 2 diabetes mellitus,³⁰ insulin resistance,³¹ metabolic syndrome,³² hypertension,^{33,34} and high cholesterol levels.³⁵⁻³⁷ Furthermore, when TV time is diminished, so are measures of adiposity.^{38,39}

Mechanisms

How might time spent with media result in obesity? Contrary to popular opinion, overweight and obesity probably result from small, incremental increases

in caloric intake (or increases in sedentary activities).⁴⁰ An excess intake of 50 kcal/day (eg, an extra pat of butter) produces a weight gain of 5 lb/year. Drinking a can of soda per day produces a weight gain of 15 lb/year.⁴¹ Nearly 40% of children's caloric intake now comes from solid fat and added sugars, and soda or fruit drinks provide nearly 10% of total calories.⁴² Because obesity is caused by an imbalance between energy intake and energy expenditure, screen time may contribute in several different ways.

Displacement of more active pursuits

Children spend more time with media than in any other activity except for sleeping – an average of more than 7 hours/day.⁴³ Many studies have found that physical activity decreases as screen time increases,^{44–46} but many other studies have not.^{47–49} Children and teenagers who use a lot of media may tend to be more sedentary in general,^{7,50} or researchers' measures of physical activity may be too imprecise.⁹ Nevertheless, increasing physical activity, decreasing media time, and improving nutritional practices have been shown to prevent the onset of obesity, if not decrease existing obesity as well.^{51–55} Some of the newer interactive video games may be useful in this way.^{56,57} For example, a study of preteens playing *Dance Revolution* and Nintendo's *Wii Sports* found that energy expenditure was equivalent to moderate-intensity walking.⁵⁸

Unhealthy eating habits and effects of advertising

Children and teenagers who watch more TV tend to consume more calories or eat higher-fat diets,^{59–64} drink more sodas,⁶⁵ and eat fewer fruits and vegetables.⁶⁶ Some researchers have argued that the viewing of TV while eating suppresses cues of satiety, which leads to overeating.⁶⁰ Others believe that viewers are primed to choose unhealthy foods as a consequence of viewing advertisements for foods high in fat, salt, and/or sugar and low in nutritional content ("junk food").⁶¹ On any given day, 30% of American youngsters are eating fast food and consuming an additional 187 kcal (equating 6 lb/year).^{67,68} Fast food is big business: Americans spend more than \$110 billion annually on it, which is more than that spent on higher education, computers, or cars.⁶⁹ A December 2010 study examined 3039 possible meal combinations at a dozen restaurant chains and found only 12 meals that met nutrition criteria for preschoolers. The same study found that 84% of parents had purchased fast food for their children in the previous week.⁷⁰ More than 80% of all advertisements in children's programming are for fast foods or snacks,^{71–73} and for every hour that children watch TV, they see an estimated 11 food advertisements.⁷⁴ Although exposure to food ads has decreased in the past few years for young children,⁷⁵ it has increased for adolescents.⁷⁵ In 2009, the fast-food industry alone spent \$4.2 billion on advertising in all media.⁷⁰ A

study of 50000 ads from 2003–2004 on 170 top-rated shows found that 98% of food ads seen by children aged 2 to 11 years and nearly 90% of food ads seen by teenagers are for products that are high in fat, sugar, and/or sodium and low in nutritional content (junk food).⁷⁶ A newer study of 1638 hours of TV and nearly 9000 food ads found that young people see an average of 12 to 21 food ads per day, for a total of 4400 to 7600 ads per year, yet they see fewer than 165 ads that promote fitness or good nutrition.⁷⁷ In 1 study, black children viewed 37% more ads than other youth.⁷⁸ New technology is enabling advertisers to reach young children and teenagers with a variety of online interactive techniques.^{79–82} A study of the top 5 brands in 8 different food and beverage categories found that all of them had Internet Web sites: 63% had advergames (games used to advertise the product), 50% had cartoon characters, and 58% had a designated children's area.⁷⁹ Half of the Web sites urged children to ask their parents to buy the products, yet only 17% contained any nutritional information.⁷⁹ Teenagers' cell phones can be targeted by fast-food companies that can offer teenagers a discount on fast food as they walk by a particular restaurant.⁸¹

Available research results clearly indicate that advertising is effective in getting younger children to request more high-fat/low-nutrition food (junk food) and to attempt to influence their parents.^{5,9,83–85} For example, a 2006 study of 827 third-grade children followed for 20 months found that total TV time and total screen media time predicted future requests for advertised foods and drinks.⁸⁶ Even brief exposures to TV food ads can influence children as young as preschool age in their food choices.⁸⁷ In 1 recent experiment, children consumed 45% more snacks when exposed to food advertising while watching cartoons than advertising for other products.⁶⁴ Similarly, children who played an online advergame that marketed healthy foods were more likely to eat healthy snacks than those who played an online advergame that advertised junk food.⁸² Perhaps the most convincing study about the impact of advertising involved 63 children who tasted 5 pairs of identical foods (eg, French fries) and beverages (eg, milk) from unbranded packaging versus branded packaging. The results of the experiment revealed that the children strongly preferred the branded food and drinks to the unbranded foods.⁸⁸

To illustrate the power of marketing, compare the commitment of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to spend \$100 million per year to try to decrease childhood obesity with the fact that the food industry spends more than that every month marketing primarily junk food and fast food to young people.^{84,89}

Food is also unhealthily portrayed in most TV programming and movies.^{9,84,90,91} A study of the 30 highest-rated programs among 2- to 5-year-olds found that an average child would see more than 500 food references per week, half of which were to empty-calorie or high-fat/sugar/salt foods (D. L. G. Borzekowski, EdD, "Watching What They Eat: A Content Analysis of Televised Food References Reaching Preschool Children," unpublished manuscript, 2001). In an analysis of

100 films from 1991 through 2000, fats and sweets were the most common foods depicted.⁹¹ Hollywood product placements are also being used to influence the food preferences and purchasing patterns of children and adolescents.^{92,93} In the 200 movies examined from 1996 to 2005, a total of 1180 brand placements were identified. Candy (26%) and salty snacks (21%) were the most prevalent food brands, sugar-sweetened beverages (76%) were the most prevalent beverage brands, and fast food composed two-thirds of the food retail establishment brand placements.⁹³

Effect of media on sleep habits

TV and other media are known to displace or disturb young people's sleep patterns.^{5,94,95} A longitudinal study of adolescents in New York found that viewing 3 or more hours/day of TV doubled the risk of difficulty falling asleep compared with adolescents who watch less than 1 hour/day.⁹⁶ There is also now evidence that later bedtimes and less sleep may be associated with a greater risk of obesity.⁹⁷⁻¹⁰¹ The mechanism may be that sleep loss leads to increased snacking and consumption of less healthy foods to maintain energy,^{102,103} that sleep deprivation leads to fatigue and therefore greater sedentary behavior,¹⁰⁴ or that children who do not get enough sleep have metabolic changes as well.¹⁰⁵

Stress may also play a role, although there are only a handful of studies that have studied this subject so far. For example, a Scottish study of nearly 1500 4- to 12-year-olds found that heavier TV use produced greater psychological stress in children and that this effect was independent of, but exacerbated by, decreases in exercise.¹⁰⁶

Conclusions

Media clearly play an important role in the current epidemic of childhood and adolescent obesity. The sheer number of advertisements that children and adolescents see for junk food and fast food have an effect. So, too, does the shift away from good nutritional practices that increased media screen time seems to create. Any success in dealing with the current epidemic will require a major change in society's recognition of media exposure as a major risk factor for obesity and in young people's media habits and the advertisements to which they are exposed.^{107,108}

Recommendations

1. Pediatricians should ask parents and patients 2 key questions about media use: (1) How much time per day does the child or teenager spend with screen media? and (2) Is there a TV set or unrestricted, unmonitored Internet connection

throughout the house, including in the child's bedroom?¹⁰⁹ This recommendation should be incorporated into every well-child visit, as outlined in *Bright Futures*.¹¹⁰

2. Pediatricians should encourage parents to discuss food advertising with their children as they monitor children's TV-viewing and teach their children about appropriate nutrition.^{111–113}

3. Pediatricians should continue to counsel parents to limit total noneducational screen time to no more than 2 hours/day, to avoid putting TV sets and Internet connections in children's bedrooms, to covie with their children, to limit nighttime screen media use to improve children's sleep, and to try strongly to avoid screen exposure for infants under the age of 2 years. In a recent study of 709 7- to 12-year-olds, children who did not adhere to the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines of less than 2 hours/day of screen time¹¹⁴ and 11000 to 13000 pedometer steps per day were 3 to 4 times more likely to be overweight.¹¹⁵ Conversely, preschool-aged children who ate dinner with their parents, got adequate sleep, and had limited screen-time hours had a 40% lower prevalence of obesity than those exposed to none of these routines.¹¹⁶

4. Pediatricians should work with community groups and schools to implement media education programs in child care centers, schools, and community-based programs such as the YMCA. Such programs that teach children how to understand and interpret advertisements may have the potential to immunize young people against harmful media effects.¹¹⁷ In addition, programs that educate parents about limiting media use in general have already been shown to be highly effective.^{8,38,39,118,119} ** Pediatricians should work with their state chapters, the AAP, parent and public health groups, and the White House¹²⁰ to do the following:

- Ask Congress, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission to implement a ban on junk-food advertising during programming that is viewed predominantly by young children.^{84,121,122} Currently, several European countries restrict food advertising aimed at young children.¹²³ Several food manufacturers have already indicated a willingness to implement such a ban voluntarily,^{124,125} but it remains to be seen whether they will follow through.^{126–128} For example, children's cereals remain considerably unhealthier than adult cereals; they contain 85% more sugar, 65% less fiber, and 60% more sodium.¹²⁹ One-quarter of all food and beverage advertising originates from companies that do not participate in the initiative, and two-thirds of all advertising by companies that do participate is still for food and beverages of low nutritional value.⁸⁵ In addition, the food and beverage industry remains steadfastly opposed to any regulation. For example, in 2007, 1 soft drink company spent more than \$1.7 million to lobby against marketing restrictions and school nutrition legislation.¹³⁰ Two recent studies showed that a ban on fast-food ads

would reduce the number of overweight children and adolescents in the United States by an estimated 14% to 18%.^{131,132} Just eliminating federal tax deductions for fast-food ads that target children would reduce childhood obesity by 5% to 7%.¹³¹ On the other hand, advertisements and public service announcements for health foods and healthy nutritional practices should be encouraged. One recent experiment showed that children exposed to attractive advertisements for healthy foods develop significantly more positive attitudes than children shown junk-food ads.¹³³

- Ask Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to prohibit interactive advertising involving junk food or fast food to children via digital TV, cell phones, and other media^{79–81,121} and to ban payments for product placement in movies. Restoring power to the Federal Trade Commission to more tightly regulate children's advertising could be another way of accomplishing this goal.^{84,134,135}
- Ask Congress to fund media research (eg, the Children Media Research and Advancement Act [CAMRA]). More research is specifically needed to determine (1) how heavy media use in children reflects or contributes to psychosocial elements of the child's life, such as stress in the home, (2) how new media technologies may be playing a role in exacerbating exposure to ads or encouraging more sedentary behavior, and (3) which of the above-mentioned mechanisms is most responsible for contributing to obesity and how such mechanisms can be ameliorated.^{83,134}
- Encourage the production of more counteradvertising and more prosocial video games^{136,137} and Web sites that encourage children to choose healthy foods.⁸²

5. Pediatricians should be aware that children with high levels of screen time have higher levels of childhood stress, which puts them at risk not only for obesity but also for a number of stress-associated morbidities (eg, mood disorders, substance abuse, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma).¹³⁸ Consequently, displacing screen time with more prosocial or resilience-building activities (eg, exercise, imaginative or social play) is an important approach to addressing a wide array of societal ills including obesity.¹³⁹

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** Erratum

An error occurred in the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement “Children, Adolescents, Obesity, and the Media” originally published online June 27, 2011 and published in the July 2011 issue of *Pediatrics* (2011;128:201–208; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2011-1066). On page 204, middle column, third line, a new Recommendation No. 5 should have begun at “Pediatricians should work with their state chapters, the AAP, parent and public health groups, and the White House¹²⁰ to do the following:” and included all four subsequent bulleted paragraphs. We regret the error.
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Impact of Excessive Media Exposure on Sleep and Memory in Children and Adolescents

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Media are among one of the most powerful forces in young people's lives today. Recent observations showed that the average media consumption in US children and adolescents is steadily increasing and accounts for over 7.5 hours a day, seven days a week, thus spending more time with media than in any other activity besides (maybe) sleeping (Rideout et al., 2010). Time spent on sedentary activities is inversely correlated with physical activity and therefore children and adolescents in modern society show largely sedentary behaviors (Strauss et al., 2001; Janz et al., 1992).

Within the last decade the impact of media on children's health and wellbeing is increasingly recognized and considered as a serious problem in modern society. Excessive television and videogame use has been associated with many psychiatric symptoms such as aggressive behavior, attention problems and hyperactivity (Johnson et al., 2002; Robinson, 2001; Singer et al., 1998; Christakis et al., 2004a, 2004 b; Bernard-Bonnin et al., 1991; Robinson et al., 2001). Further links have been suggested with certain somatic problems and obesity (Toyran et al., 2002, Robinson, 2001). Beside the negative effects of excessive media consumption on children's and adolescents' daily behaviors, increasing evidence has indicated that extensive media use tends to be associated with sleep problems among children, adolescents and adults (Owens et al., 1999; Gupta et al., 1994; Garrison et al., 2011). More than 30 years ago, no relationship between TV viewing and sleep length was found (Weissbluth et al., 1981), but sleep problems are increasingly common and according to parents in primary care settings around 21 percent of preschool-aged children are starting to have sleep problems (Archbold et al., 2002). Also, there is accumulating evidence, that the growing number of children and adolescent with sleep problems might be related to the increasing affinity to media exposure, since portable video

games and cell phones are frequently used and are often the last thing they touch before falling asleep.

Sleep is essential to children's development and health and the negative effects of excessive media consumption on sleep quantity and quality may raise significant concerns (Owens, 2004). Especially the central role of sleep in learning and memory processing, not only in adults but also in children and adolescents, was observed in many studies (Kopasz et al., 2010; Dworak et al., 2007). Therefore, negative effects of excessive media consumption on attention problems and memory might be, at least partially, related to impaired sleep quantity and/or quality.

This article reviews the relationship between excessive media exposure, sleep and memory processes in children and adolescence and provides practical recommendations for parents to prevent the negative effects of media consumption on health and sleep for their children as needed.

Media exposure and sleep behavior in children and adolescents

Clinical experience with adults and children with sleep problems strongly implicates television-viewing habits as a potentially significant influence on sleep behavior (Owens et al., 1999). Media exposure has been associated with sleeping difficulties, bedtime resistance, sleep-onset delay, sleep anxiety, night awakenings, and shortened sleep duration (Owens et al., 1999; Van den Bulck, 2004). Johnson and colleagues showed that watching television three or more hours per day during adolescence elevated risk for frequent sleep problems by early adulthood (Johnson et al., 2004).

The reasons for why media exposure affects sleep behavior seem to be multiple. First, especially late evening television viewing can contribute to heightened alertness and increased physiological arousal, which are associated with difficulty falling asleep (Owens et al., 1999; Higuchi et al., 2003; Kubota et al., 2002). Second, extended exposure to the bright light of a television screen may contribute to delayed or reduced melatonin secretion, adversely affecting the sleep-waking cycle (Higuchi et al., 2003, 2005; Kubota et al., 2002). Third, both news media and entertainment fiction may lead to short-term and enduring fright reactions. Even TV programs, movies and news made for children may trigger fear (Custers and van den Bulck, 2011), however, this media content is frequently consumed and may contribute to the development of sleep problems (Harrison and Cantor, 1999; Singer et al., 1998; Cantor, 1994). Also, physical inactivity, which seems to be associated with extensive television viewing, may contribute to increased restlessness and difficulty falling or staying asleep (Toyran et al., 2002; Dworak et al., 2007). Children and teenagers who use a lot of media may tend to be more sedentary in general.

Indeed, an inverse relationship between time spent using video games and daily physical activity has been observed. Positive effects of physical exercise on brain structures, functions, and memory processing were examined in recent studies and supported by cross-sectional observations that showed a positive association between physical activity and academic and accompanied improvements of concentration and classroom behavior (Cotman and Engesser-Cesar, 2002; Strong et al., 2005). Positive effects between physical activity and sleep have been observed in different studies (Driver and Taylor, 2000). In one of our previous studies, we examined the effects of physical exercise on children's sleep behavior. Physical exercise was clearly associated with increased sleep quality, reduced time to fall asleep and higher amounts of deep restorative non-rapid-eye-movement (NREM) sleep (Dworak et al., 2008).

Beside the reduced physical activity, excessive media use appears to be clearly associated with elements of a less healthy diet including lower fruit and vegetable consumption; higher consumption of energy-dense snacks, drinks, and fast foods; and higher total energy intake (Matheson et al., 2004; Pearson et al., 2011), therefore increasing the risk for overweight and obesity. Indeed, a 30-year study found that increased daily hours of TV consumption on weekends predicted a higher BMI at the age of 30. Each additional hour of TV watched on weekends at age 5, increased the risk of adult obesity by 7 percent (Skelton et al., 2009).

Various studies showed that children with a bedroom television consumed overall more media and were more likely to have a sleep problem (Garrison et al., 2011). This relationship was supported by different observations. In the US, 20 percent to 43 percent of preschool-aged children have a television in their bedroom, and in many families sleep problems are frequently reported (Garrison et al., 2011). The presence of a television in the bedroom of children and adolescents results in significant modifications of sleep-wake parameters. A bedroom television increases the opportunity to watch frightening or violent content, and adult-targeted television content has been associated with increased sleep problems in young children (Paavonen et al., 2006). Furthermore, bedroom televisions have been associated with delayed bedtimes, difficulty falling asleep, and less overall sleep, and thus seems to be the most powerful predictor of overall sleep disturbance and bedtime resistance (Van den Bulck 2004; Garrison et al., 2011).

Beside the negative effects of excessive media use on children's and adolescents' sleep behavior and general health, there is mounting evidence that media exposure can affect neurophysiologic functioning in different ways (Kopacz et al., 2010). Excessive media use was associated with impaired school performance, attention problems, and a higher risk for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Gupta et al., 1994; Christakis et al., 2004b). At least part of

those processes can be attributed to media's negative influence on children's and adolescents' sleep behavior. In the following section, we will discuss the relationship between sleep and central neurophysiologic processes important for learning and memory.

Sleep and memory in children and adolescents

It is widely known that the newborn brain continues to develop rapidly through the first years of life and that considerable plasticity, meaning the ability of the brain to reorganize neural pathways based on new experiences, exists during this time period (Barkovich et al., 1988; Yamada et al., 2000). In the last decades, extensive research has been accumulated demonstrating that sleep is essential for important processes of brain development, neuronal plasticity and memory consolidation in children and adolescents (Jan et al., 2010). Newly acquired memory traces are initially very unstable and require a process of strengthening, also called consolidation, to become resistant to interference and accessible for later retrieval. Sleep fosters different stages of memory processing, including encoding, consolidation, retrieval, or even further processing such as integration into existing memory networks (Stickgold et al., 2001), and only a single night of restricted sleep can affect cognitive functions, such as abstract thinking and verbal creativity in children (Radazzo et al., 1998).

Sleep seems to be particularly important during early brain development up to the age of two years when a child still spends more time asleep than awake. Even when starting school, sleep accounts for up to 50 percent of the 24-hour day. In addition, the circadian timing of sleep changes with the onset of puberty: sleep-onset is delayed, especially around the age of 14-16 years, i.e., at the mid- to late-pubertal stage. Often, total sleep duration in children and adolescents is also below general recommendations and despite cultural differences, many studies have shown that adolescents world-wide sleep significantly less than the recommended 9-10 hours (Carskadon, 1990). Beside sleep duration, also overall sleep-patterns change between younger and older ages. Compared to adulthood, childhood is characterized by longer sleep duration and higher amounts of deep and restorative NREM sleep and active (rapid-eye-movement) REM sleep which is characterized by a high-frequent brain activity as measured in the electroencephalogram (EEG) (Anders, 1994; Ohayon et al., 2004). Results from longitudinal EEG sleep studies suggest that sleep regulation undergoes a period of maturation during infancy and a lower frontal predominance of NREM slow wave activity has been observed in children and adolescents compared to adults, possibly reflecting the late maturation of the frontal cortex (Giedd, 2004).

Presumably, both REM and NREM sleep are involved in the consolidation process, in which NREM sleep is particularly favorable to explicit memory,

whereas REM sleep favors implicit memory processes (Gais et al., 2004; Diekelmann and Born, 2010). It has been proposed that during deep NREM sleep, the lower acetylcholine levels facilitate the transmission of information from the hippocampus back to the cortex. High acetylcholine levels during REM sleep would allow the neocortex to undergo a process of reanalysis and thereby develop new feed-forward representations for behavior (Hasselmo et al., 1999). An alternative hypothesis (synaptic homeostasis hypothesis of sleep) proposes that synapses strengthened during daytime wakefulness undergo a process of generalized down-scaling during sleep, specifically during EEG slow wave activity (SWA), refining the information/noise ratio in neural networks and restoring the brain's ability to acquire new information under conditions of limited energy and space (Tononi and Cirelli, 2006). Indeed, it has been shown recently, that during deep NREM sleep, when EEG SWA is high, the levels of the main energy molecule ATP (adenosine-triphosphate) increased significantly, suggesting that deep NREM sleep is important for providing the brain with sufficient energy supplies (Dworak et al., 2010).

Various studies have investigated the impact of sleep on learning and memory in children and adolescents and evidence is condensing that disrupted sleep negatively affects these processes. Steenari and colleagues showed that longer sleep latency and lower sleep efficiency were associated with poorer auditory and visual working memory, whereas shorter sleep duration was associated with lower working memory performance (Steenari et al., 2003). The authors concluded that sleep quality rather than sleep duration appeared to be strongly associated with working memory performance. Sadeh and colleagues examined the association between sleep and neurobehavioral functioning, including the encoding of declarative memory content in school-age children. "Good" and "Poor" sleepers were identified and the "Poor" sleepers showed more fragmented sleep and reduced sleep efficiency. Overall, good sleepers showed better results learning digits compared to the poor sleepers. Interestingly, this difference only showed up in a morning but not in the noon hours. The authors hypothesized that the findings are in line with theories of general cognitive performance emphasizing the contribution of both chronobiological and homeostatic factors on cognitive performance (Sadeh et al., 2002).

Only one single night of restricted sleep (4 hours) in 11-13 year old children resulted in significant effects on declarative memory (short-term recall of words) and other tasks of cognition and attention (Carskadon, 1990). Also one night of total sleep deprivation in young adolescents (12-15 years) resulted in a significant decline of correctly recalled words in the Williams Word Memory Test, a test that consists of 30 commonly used words, each of which are first read and then spelled and the subjects have 10 seconds to write each word. In a further study, Sadeh and colleagues (2002) examined the effects of prolonged modest sleep

restriction or extension in children. After two regular nights with normal sleep duration, children (9-12 year old) were asked to extend or restrict their sleep time by 1 hour for three consecutive nights. Children, who extended their sleep time, improved their memory task performance significantly compared to baseline and compared to the sleep-restriction group. Other studies compared the effects of nocturnal sleep versus daytime wakefulness on declarative memory consolidation and procedural memory consolidation in 6-8 year old children and adults (Backhaus et al., 2008; Wilhelm et al., 2008). Declarative memory performance was enhanced when sleep followed learning. Interestingly, in contrast to the hypothesis and to findings in adults, in children procedural performance was impaired after periods of nocturnal sleep in comparison to periods of daytime wakefulness. The authors concluded that the sleep-related consolidation process of distinct memory systems might depend on developmental stage. Together these and other studies provide evidence that sleep is critically involved in memory encoding and working memory in children and adolescents.

Effects of excessive media consumption on sleep-dependent memory performance

Sleep is essential for children's health and development and is involved in learning and memory processes. Despite the enormous progress in media research, there is still insufficient knowledge about the effects of singular excessive media exposure on sleep in children and adolescence. Most studies examined long-term effects of media exposure on sleep timing, whereas only a few studied the acute effects of television and computer exposure on children's and adolescence sleep quality and associated health problems.

In one of our previous studies (Dworak et al., 2007), we examined the effects of intense media use on sleep and cognitive performance in school-aged children. Eleven children were exposed to voluntary television use (TV-movie for 90 minutes) and video game consumption for 90 minutes or no media at all a few hours before their usual bedtime. Sleep behavior was measured in all participants in the following night by using polysomnographic measurements to determine sleep-architecture and sleep-continuity parameters. Furthermore, we used a visual and verbal memory test before media stimulation and on the following day after one night of sleep to determine visuospatial and verbal memory performance.

The results were revealing: playing an exciting video game resulted in prolonged sleep-onset latency, meaning that it took them longer to fall asleep, as well as more sleep in stage 2 sleep, which reflects a lighter and more interference-prone sleep stage. In contrast, the amount of deep NREM slow-wave sleep, known to be involved in memory processing, was significantly reduced.

Furthermore, playing the video game was also associated with a decline in verbal memory performance in the participating children. Television viewing reduced sleep efficiency but did not affect sleep patterns. Also, no effects on REM-sleep were observed throughout the study. In conclusion this study showed that playing a heart-pounding video game negatively affects children's sleep and verbal cognitive performance (Dworak et al., 2007). A poor sleep quality can result in mental health problems, impaired school performance, and somatic complaints. In some studies, sleep difficulties were significantly associated with both behavioral problems, such as school attendance problems, and higher levels of tiredness (Van den Bulck, 2004).

Previous studies showed different effects of television viewing and video game playing on several physiologic parameters (Wang et al., 2006). Unlike television viewing, which expends the same energy as sitting quietly, interactive video game consumption resulted in significant increases in various physiologic and metabolic variables in young children, including heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, energy expenditure, and ventilation, and thus a higher arousal state of the central nervous system (Wang et al., 2006). The magnitude of these changes was below standard physical exercise and national health recommendations and did not affect metabolic, cardiovascular, pulmonary, hemodynamic, and endocrine systems in the whole body and the brain as physical activity does (Cotman and Engesser-Cesar, 2002). A higher arousal state within the hours before sleeping might be a strong factor that influences subsequent sleep. Furthermore, different effects of television viewing and video game playing could influence emotional factors. Frölich and Lehmkuhl (2012) suggests that TV viewers are in a receptive state, whereas video game users are playing an interactive role. Children might identify themselves with the role they take within the game and aggressive or violent contents could be encoded.

The observation that playing a heart-pounding video game can impair verbal memory performance is in line with neuroscientific observations showing that strong emotional experiences, such as computer games and thrilling films, could influence learning processes negatively. Since recently acquired knowledge is very sensitive in the following consolidation period, emotional experiences within the hours after learning could strongly influence processes related to memory consolidation (Maquet et al., 2001; Stickgold et al., 2001; Dolan, 2002). Often, interactive video games are challenging, sometimes frustrating, exciting, and often surprising for children and adolescents, and during playing, individuals may experience a range of emotions accompanied by neurophysiological changes. Indeed, imaging studies using positron emission tomography (PET) scans showed a significant release of the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain during video game playing (Koepp et al., 1998). Both, dopamine and norepinephrine are known to be involved in learning,

emotion, and sensorimotor coordination and thus capable to influence memory processing decisively.

Exposure to adult media potentially has a stronger impact than media exposure time (Sharif and Sargent, 2006). Especially adult (violent/sexual) media content and associated individual excitement can affect sleep and learning in children (Brady and Matthews, 2006), but only 13 percent of children and adolescents have parental control with rules about the content of their consumed media (Rideout et al., 2010).

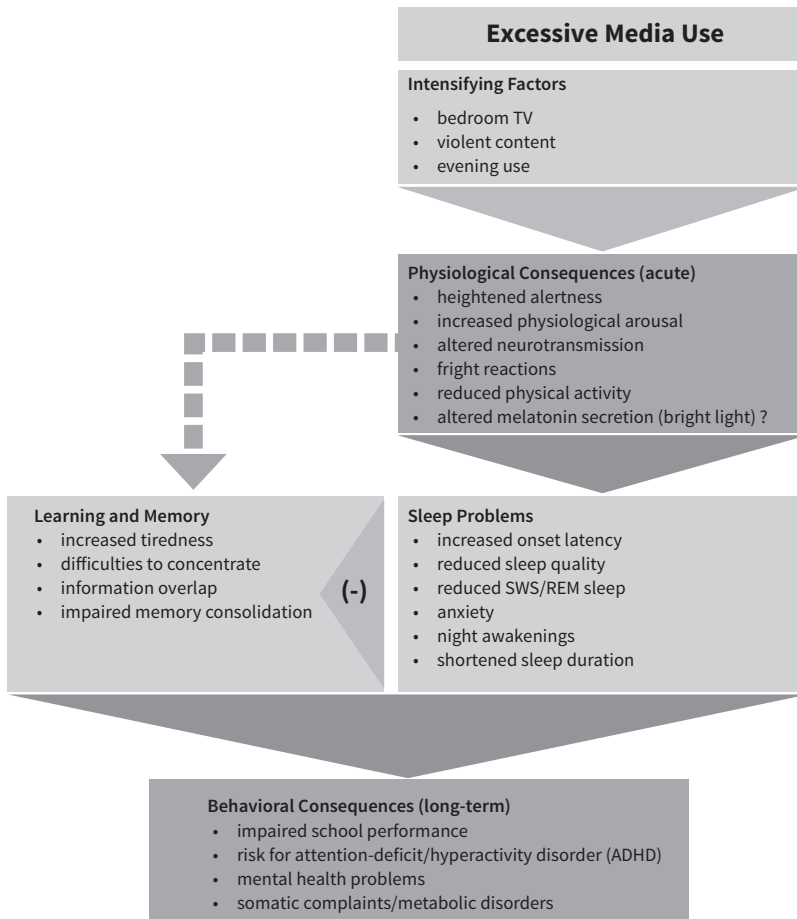
Movie, television, and video game use during the middle school years was uniformly associated with a negative impact on school performance, suggesting that there might be a negative relationship between excessive media use and school performance (Sharif and Sargent, 2006). Children with lowest grades spend more time playing video games and less time reading than those with the best grades (Rideout et al., 2010). Limiting young children's exposure to television as a medium during formative years of brain development may reduce children's subsequent risk for developing social and scholastic problems and possibly reduce the risk to develop ADHD as suggested by some studies (Christakis et al., 2004b; Sharif and Sargent, 2006).

Conclusion and recommendations

Media use is steadily increasing and captures a significant amount of children's and adolescents' waking time. Figure 1 shows the theoretical relationship between excessive media use, sleep problems, memory processing and behavioral consequences in children and adolescents. According to this model, excessive media use leads to several acute physiological consequences including heightened alertness, increased physiological arousal and reduced physical activity. All those factors can negatively influence sleep quality and sleep quantity resulting in an increased incidence of sleep problems, such as increased sleep onset latency, night awakenings and shortened sleep duration. Impaired sleep negatively affects learning and memory, which can also be impaired directly by diverse media related physiological consequences (dashed arrow). The long term-consequences of excessive media use and impaired sleep are multifarious and include attention-deficits, impaired school performance, mental health problems, somatic complaints and a higher risk for ADHD and obesity. Especially violent media content, excessive media use before bedtime and a TV in children's bedroom increase the risk for media related sleep problems.

Based on our own experience and evidence from the current scientific literature, we recommend that parents and teachers should be aware of their children's media use. Children's and adolescents' bedroom is no place for a TV. Parents and teachers should provide directions about total media use including

Figure 1. Theoretical relationship between excessive media use, sleep problems, memory processing and behavioral consequences in children and adolescents



the time spent with television and computer as well as the contents of TV and video games. Restriction of media time should be associated with alternative challenging activities. Insofar, physical activity and team sport can absolutely be recommended. Physical activity is an important component in the development of self-esteem in children. It has a preventive function concerning obesity and an improving influence on sleep quality.

Further research is needed to examine the long-term consequences of excessive media use in children and adolescents on overall health and behavior.

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Too Many Screens, Too Much Stuff

How Media, Marketing and Commercialization Are Harming Children's Health

Susan Linn

What's wrong with this picture? While billions are spent around the globe to eradicate and treat pediatric diseases, as much money or more is also spent inculcating and/or exacerbating health problems for children. No, I'm not describing institutionalized genocide or a terrorist's germ warfare plot. I'm talking about how, around the world, the unprecedented convergence of unfettered commercialism with ubiquitous, sophisticated screen media is harming kids.

It's not the goal of the multinational corporations that profit handsomely from deluging kids with marketing and saturating them with screens to promote ill health in children; their goal is to protect profits and shareholder interests by pushing product and building brand loyalty. But there is no getting around the fact that children are harmed when they have little societal protection from a commercialized, screen-saturated culture.

The links between child-targeted food marketing and childhood obesity have been made abundantly clear in recent years.¹ But marketing contributes to a host of other public health problems facing children today,² including discontent about body image³ and eating disorders,⁴ sexualization,⁵ youth violence,⁶ family stress,⁷ and the erosion of creative play⁸ – the foundation of learning, creativity, and the capacity to make meaning of life.⁹ And the underlying message of commercial marketing – that the things we buy will make us happy – is a major factor in the acquisition of materialistic values, which have been found to be linked to depression, psychosomatic illnesses and low self-esteem in children.¹⁰ A recent study of 12 wealthy countries shows that those allowing the most advertising to children score lowest on UNICEF rankings of child wellbeing.¹¹ Yet, even as evidence mounts documenting the harms of allowing marketers unfettered access to children, marketing to kids continues to escalate around the world.

Too much stuff sold on too many screens

It's true that children have been targets for marketing since the advent of carnival barkers, but the marketing experienced by kids today is vastly different from that experienced by previous generations. In the 21st century, marketing to children is big business. Marketers first identified children as a lucrative and virtually untapped market in the 1980s, and marketing to children has been escalating ever since. Marketers are spending more than ever targeting to kids. In 1983, corporations spent \$100 million annually in direct advertising to children in the United States alone.¹² Now it is estimated that they spend about \$17 billion.¹³ And the monetary value of immersing children in marketing has also increased. In 1992, James McNeal, often cited as the "father" of the modern child-market, stated that children influence \$137 billion in family spending.¹⁴ Today he estimates that they influence \$1.2 trillion.¹⁵

Television is still the primary venue for advertising to children, but Internet marketing through computers and hand-held devices like MP3 players is escalating, as is text-message marketing on cell phones. Nick.com, the website belonging to the internationally popular children's cable station, Nickelodeon, took in \$9.6 million between July, 2004 and July, 2005 – more advertising revenue than any other site.¹⁶ In fact, as digital technology becomes more sophisticated, TV and the Internet are merging to become a whole new interactive media and marketing experience for children. Although children see thousands of commercials each year on television alone, modern marketing methods extend well beyond the traditional 30 second-ad. The marketing industry is still creating TV commercials aimed at children, but companies are expanding their reach through a variety of other techniques.

Today, huge corporate conglomerates own television and radio stations, web businesses and film studios, and successfully insert screen time into the lives of an increasingly younger audience. For the first time in history, the most common activity for children around the world is watching television.¹⁷ In Vietnam, 91 percent of mothers report that their children watch television often, as do more than 80 percent of mothers in Argentina, Brazil, India, and Indonesia.¹⁸

In the United States, children spend more time in front of screens than in any other activity besides sleeping. Preschool children spend about 32 hours a week in front of screens.¹⁹ Including multitasking, children ages 8-18 spend an average of 4 ½ hours per day watching television, 1½ hours using computers, and more than an hour playing video games – more than 7 hours a day.²⁰

And children are using screens from infancy. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends discouraging screen time for children under the age of 2,²¹ yet 90 percent of parents in the United States say that their infants and toddlers regularly consume some sort of electronic media; 40 percent of 3-month-old babies in the United States regularly "watch" television and DVDs for an aver-

age of 45 minutes a day,²² and 19 percent of babies under the age of 1 have a TV set in their bedroom.²³

There's no evidence that screen time is beneficial to infants and toddlers, and some evidence that it might be harmful. Some screen time spent with quality content can potentially benefit older children,²⁴ but excessive screen time in and of itself can be harmful for older kids. For children under 3, screen time is negatively associated with cognitive development,²⁵ regular sleep patterns,²⁶ and language acquisition.²⁷ And the more babies and toddlers engage with screens, the less time they spend in creative play and interacting with parents – two activities known to be educational.²⁸ Studies also suggest that early screen use can be habit-forming; the more time children under 3 spend with screens, the harder time they have turning them off when they are older.²⁹ For older kids, time spent with screens is also associated with sleep disturbances,³⁰ as well as childhood obesity,³¹ problems with attention span,³² and academic performance and skills.³³

The proliferation of electronic media alone is problematic for kids, but the fact that much of children's programming serves as platforms for marketing is particularly worrying. The combination of ubiquitous screens and unfettered marketing blurs the line between commercialism and the rest of childhood. Toy, clothing and food companies were once content to associate their products with successful entertainment programs through licensing and advertising during commercial breaks; now, increasingly, they control the program creation process. And in 2010, the mega toy company Hasbro launched its own television station to promote its products and brands.³⁴

Children's entertainment today is routinely branded and released on multiple media platforms: the videogame reappears as a movie, a TV show, a cell phone app, and a book (or "talking" book), so that all of the content on various platforms essentially markets the brand. In addition, media companies lease beloved media characters as icons for food, toys, clothing, and accessories. Thanks to cell phones and the advent of wearable screen accessories, many kids are never more than a click away from their favorite media characters.³⁵ And brand licensing is incredibly lucrative. In 2010, the Disney Princess licensing alone brought in \$4 billion.³⁶ In the United States, it is difficult to find products for children that are unadorned by media characters and logos. About 97 percent of children under 6 in the United States own something – such as a doll, stuffed animal, action figure, bedding, or clothing – that features the image of a character from the media.³⁷

A good example is the franchise based on the *Toy Story* films, which has generated three movies, videogames for all the major systems, Toy Story versions of Etch-A-Sketch and Mr. Potato Head, and a vast bazaar of action figures, plush toys, costumes, hats, t-shirts, mugs, and dolls. For theme birthday parties, there are "Toy Story" cups, plates, napkins, tablecloths, balloons, stickers, tattoos,

cake decorations, and pre-packed party bags.³⁸ Children's play, reading, art and music are often primarily shaped by pre-created characters, plots, and themes. What were once tools for self-expression are now designed to remind children constantly of media programs and their products, teaching them to value that which can be bought over their own creations. But brand licensing does not just harm children's creative play. It is also culpable of harming children's health as one of the major techniques used to market unhealthy food to children.

Corporate profits versus children's health: The struggle over food marketing to children

Nowhere is the bizarre absurdity of allowing kids to be targets for marketing more evident than in the current struggles by the global public health community to curb junk food marketing to children. Such august bodies as the World Health Organization, the Institute of Medicine, and the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity all link child-targeted marketing to the Childhood Obesity Epidemic. Research shows that children's food preferences, brand preferences, food choices and consumption are influenced by marketing.³⁹ Just one 30-second commercial can influence the food preferences of children as young as 2.⁴⁰ Commercialism even trumps children's senses. Given the choice between two offerings of exactly the same food, significant numbers of children said that food wrapped in a McDonald's wrapper tasted better than food wrapped in a plain wrapper. Popular media characters such as Dora the Explorer also influence how children experience the taste of foods – particularly junk food.⁴¹

It is clear that marketing junk food affects children's eating habits, and, therefore, their overall health. Yet, food marketers continue to target children. In 2009, in the United States, fast food restaurants alone spent more than \$4.2 billion on marketing.⁴² Children actually see more marketing for fast food than they did a few years ago. Preschoolers today see 21 percent more fast food ads on TV than they saw in 2003, and somewhat older children see 34 percent more.⁴³

As it does for all sorts of products, child-targeted marketing for food comes in many guises. Even as food companies continue their onslaught of commercials and traditional ads, they seek to have children interact with brands through virtual worlds, games, competitions (including make-your-own-commercial contests), and the use of social networking sites to make online "friends" with spokes-characters for sugary cereals, like Kellogg's Frosted Flakes' Tony the Tiger.⁴⁴

Children are lured into fast food restaurants with promises of revolving toy promotions. In the U.S., more than 1.6 billion meals with toys were sold to children 12 and under in 2006.⁴⁵ Many, if not most, of the toys are licensed characters which are advertisements for children's media programs, such as Burger King's promotions featuring action figures like the Hulk, the Thing, and Spiderman.⁴⁶

A new trend in fast food toy promotions provides an excellent example of how advances in technology offer new, sophisticated vehicles for targeting children by promoting discontent. Burger King, in a November 2010 Kids Meal/Microsoft promotion, offered plush animal toys called “Kinnectimals” designed to be scanned into Kinnect, a new gizmo for the video game platform Microsoft Xbox 360, that allows what happens on the screen to be influenced by voice and body movements. Once scanned in, an image of the animal appears on the screen and will come when the child calls, and respond to commands like “jump” and “roll over.” With Kinnectimals, Burger King and Microsoft turned a toy giveaway into a child-targeted sales pitch to get children to nag parents for a \$150 add-on to an Xbox. And families that don’t own an Xbox 360 were being pressured to spend an additional \$300 for the gaming system. Adding to the allure of this promotion was that kids were urged to go online and enter codes found on food wrappers or containers for a chance to win a Kinnect.

The failure of self-regulation

Beginning around 1980, the burgeoning child-marketing industry in the United States got a boost from the government when the power of the two federal agencies in charge of protecting children from advertising and marketing was diminished. The Federal Trade Commission’s capacity to regulate marketing to children was severely crippled by Congress in response to attempts to prohibit advertising on television to children under 8 and prohibit junk food advertising to children under 12. Given the links between marketing and childhood obesity, the failure to adopt the latter regulation is particularly troubling. The escalation of childhood obesity in the United States began in the 1980s and mirrors the escalation of child-targeted marketing. In 1984, then President Ronald Reagan forced the Federal Communication Commission to deregulate children’s television and it became possible to create television programs for children for the sole purpose of selling a product. The next year, all ten of the best-selling toys were linked to media programs.⁴⁷ Today the U.S. regulates marketing to children less than most industrialized democracies.⁴⁸

Despite enormous pressure from the food industry, advocates in some countries have convinced governments to enacted laws, or enforce existing ones, to protect children from being targets for food marketing. In Britain, the BBC stopped using its beloved cartoon characters to market unhealthy food to children in 2004.⁴⁹ A few years later, in 2007, the country instituted regulations banning the advertising of food high in fat, sugar, and salt during television programs that have particular appeal to children younger than 16 years. Also restricted are the use of nutrition and health claims, promotional offers, and celebrities and licensed characters in advertisements for high fat, salt, and sugar foods targeted

at children under the age of 12.⁵⁰ And just recently in Brazil, McDonald's was fined \$1.7 million for using toys to promote fast food to children.⁵¹

Recognizing the harmful effects of all kinds of child-targeting marketing, other countries have instituted policies to address the problem. The Province of Quebec bans marketing to children under 13.⁵² Sweden and Norway ban television marketing to children under the age of 12.⁵³ Greece prohibits ads for toys on television between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.; ads for toy guns and tanks are not allowed at any time.⁵⁴ In the Flemish speaking areas of Belgium, no advertising is allowed within five minutes of a children's television program shown on a local station.⁵⁵ Advertising regulations proposed by the European Union would ban commercials suggesting that children's acceptance by peers is dependent on their use of a product.⁵⁶ Finland bans advertisements that are delivered by children or by familiar cartoon characters.⁵⁷ And the French government has prohibited all vending machines in middle and secondary schools⁵⁸ and banned television programming that targets children under 3.⁵⁹

In the United States, however, intense and well-funded industry lobbying continues to squelch much needed regulation. The support for the deregulation that began in 1980s and the recent Supreme Court decision affording corporate speech – including advertising – many of the same protections as personal speech, are huge hurdles for efforts to regulate, or even moderate, marketing to children. Lack of government support and the cynical disregard companies have for the wellbeing of children have played out especially in efforts to protect children from junk food marketing. In 2006, to stave off regulation, United States Food companies came up with much touted voluntary marketing guidelines.⁶⁰ Tailored to the product lists of each company, rather than a universal nutritional standard, these guidelines have failed miserably to affect junk food marketing to children. In the years monitored after the self-regulatory guidelines went into effect, children as young as 2 saw more ads for fast food marketing than ever.⁶¹ And junk food comprises three out of four foods advertised to kids on television.⁶²

In 2010, the U.S. government proposed its own set of voluntary guidelines based on universal nutritional standards for marketing food to children under the age of 18. The food, marketing, and media industries raised a ruckus, and spent huge amounts of money on lobbying. The Association of National Advertisers issued a report, since repudiated, suggesting that implementing the guidelines would cost 74,000 jobs.⁶³ A coalition of food conglomerates spent \$6.6 million on government lobbying just in the first three months of 2011.^{64, 65} In November, 2011, the government bowed to industry pressure and significantly weakened the proposed guidelines.⁶⁶

Conclusion

There's no question that government policies, or lack thereof, have contributed to the fact that we are raising children in the middle of a marketing maelstrom aimed directly at them. In recent months, public outcry about excessive corporate power in the United States and elsewhere has focused, justifiably, on the economy, housing, poverty, and distribution of wealth. But we should also be loudly protesting the harms caused when corporations have unfettered access to children.

As director of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, a small NGO in the United States fighting to limit commercial access to children, I know how easy it is to be discouraged by the wealth and power behind the commercialization of childhood. But I also know, as with any social injustice, change is only going to come when enough people are outraged enough to speak out. The glittering screen world of virtual magic, lovable cartoon characters, dastardly villains and glorious superheroes looks like so much fun it's hard to believe that it could be harmful. But when screens dominate the lives of children, and are dominated by corporate marketing designed to promote brands at the expense of children's health, there's no question that harm is being done.

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Food Marketing and Child Health

Moniek Buijzen, Esther Rozendaal and Simone M. de Droog

In most welfare states child-directed marketing for unhealthy products, such as alcohol, tobacco and energy-dense food products, has always been a serious cause for concern. In the past decade, the public and political debates especially center upon food marketing, which is often named as a cause for the dramatic rise of childhood overweight and obesity.

Approximately 20 to 30 per cent of children up to 19 years of age in Europe and the United States are overweight. If these trends continue on a linear basis, it is to be expected that in the present decade, 1 in 10 European children and 1 in 7 American children will be obese (Wang & Lobstein, 2006). Because overweight children have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart problems, and psychological problems, specialists foresee a generation of children who may not outlive their parents (Laing, 2002; Wakefield, 2004; Wang & Lobstein, 2006; World Health Organization, 2006).

Children's weight gain in recent years has been paralleled by an explosive growth of child-directed food advertising. The majority of these food advertisements are about high-calorie foods and soft drinks (Buijzen, Schuurman, & Bomhof, 2008; Hastings, et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2007). As a result, child-directed food advertising is often considered as one of the main causes of child obesity, which has led to a range of policy measures reducing children's exposure to advertising for unhealthy foods. In this article we review the evidence for the relation between food marketing and children's weight status. In addition, we discuss recent research findings showing that popular marketing techniques, such as *brand characters* and *advergames*, can also be used to stimulate healthy eating behavior.

The nature and role of food marketing

Advertisers use increasingly sophisticated strategies to market energy-dense food products to children. Although originally intended to inform a target group about a certain product, today's marketing – and food marketing in particular – focuses mainly on transferring affect and emotions. The persuasive power of emotion-based strategies lies in persuasive mechanisms such as *evaluative conditioning* (i.e., the brand is linked to emotionally-loaded stimuli such as popular media figures) and *affect-transfer* (i.e., the positive emotion evoked by the media experience is transferred to the brand). Non-traditional yet popular marketing techniques largely draw on these persuasion mechanisms (Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010).

A typical example of how emotion-based mechanisms are being applied nowadays is the use of *brand characters*, popular child idols and cartoon characters that are linked to brands and products (De Droog, Valkenburg, & Buijzen, 2011b). In the supermarket, television heroes such as Bob the Builder, SpongeBob SquarePants, and Dora the Explorer dominate the shelves with child-targeted cookies, desserts, pasta and soup. Child heroes are also used in the form of *premiums*, toys that are being offered with the purchase of a product. The toys that children can collect by purchasing McDonald's Happy Meal is considered as the most important explanation for the hamburger giant's success in the child consumer market (Schor, 2004).

Another example that has rapidly grown in popularity over the past years is the *advergame*, a custom-built online game in which the brand or logo forms an integral part of the game. Typically, advergames are free and are distributed via the web site of the brand (branded space), via the web site of another brand, or via game portals and other popular web sites. Game portals are platforms where children can play advergames of various companies. Examples can be found on candystand.com, advergames.com, and y8.com.

The impact of food marketing

Food marketing can have different types of effects, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects. Advertisers aim to increase familiarity with the brand name and, naturally, to increase product sales. Given children's relatively low monetary resources, advertisers often aim to stimulate children to ask their parents for the advertised products (Gunter, Oates, & Blades, 2005). These marketing efforts certainly have impact: Children who are often exposed to advertising, more often ask their parents for advertised products. This request behavior not only applies to toys and clothing, but also to the family menu. An observation study that we conducted in Dutch supermarkets showed that children who often watched commercial networks asked their parents more often for well-advertised

brands such as Haribo, Lay's and Danone (for more details on this study, see Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2008).

Given the high proportion of unhealthy and energy-dense food products in child-directed food marketing, preferences and purchase requests for advertised products can indeed have negative consequences for children's health. Many studies have shown that exposure to food advertising leads to less healthy dietary patterns among children (for a review, see Hastings et al., 2003). Most researchers also agree that exposure to advertising does increase the chance of overweight. It must be noted, however, that the observed relations are often relatively small, especially when compared to other influences such as parental dietary habits. Nonetheless, the international research evidence does support the notion that children who are exposed to higher amounts of advertising, more often develop unhealthy eating habits and on the long term have a higher risk of developing overweight and even obesity (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Hastings et al., 2003). At the Center for Research on Children, Adolescents, and the Media (CCAM), we conducted a household diary study that points in the same direction.

Food marketing and the family diet

To investigate the influence of food advertising on children's dietary habits within the household, we conducted a combined diary-survey study among Dutch parents. A total of 234 parents of children aged 4 to 12 years received a food diary in which they noted all the foods and drinks consumed by their children during four consecutive days. Parents also filled out a questionnaire tapping family communication patterns regarding advertising and consumer behavior, and their children's television viewing behavior. The television viewing data were linked to Nielsen data on food advertising broadcast on the various television networks in the month leading up to the study. Thus, we could calculate estimates of the number and nature of the commercials children had been exposed to.

The study yielded clear results regarding the role of food advertising in the family diet. Children who tended to watch television networks with relatively high amounts of energy-dense food advertising consumed more energy-dense products. Specifically, children who had been exposed to relatively high amounts of food advertising had a 25 per cent higher risk of having an unhealthy eating pattern. Importantly, children's exposure to food advertising was associated not only with their consumption of advertised brands (e.g., Lay's Chips rather than non-advertised store brands) but also with their consumption of the unhealthy advertised product categories (e.g., savory snacks rather than fruit) (Buijzen, Schuurman, & Bomhof, 2008).

The impact of specific marketing techniques

Specific marketing efforts, such as the above-mentioned brand characters and advergames, do reach their goals. Numerous international studies show that children prefer foods and beverages when the packaging depicts a popular cartoon character. The observation study that we conducted in Dutch supermarkets shows that children often refer to these characters when requesting products to their parents (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2008). And also brand characters, such as Ronald McDonald and Chuck E. Cheese, can develop a gigantic awareness and attraction among young children (Lapierre, Vaala, & Linebarger, 2011).

According to De Droog, Buijzen, and Valkenburg (2012), children develop friendships with these characters, a phenomenon that in the field of communication science is referred to as parasocial relationship formation (Hoffner, 2008). When people get to know a media character, they may gradually learn to see this character as a friend. Such parasocial relationships resemble real friendships in many ways; people can for example have deep emotions toward media characters. Media friendships already occur among children in early childhood (Hoffner, 2008). In fact, young children are particularly sensitive for the formation of social relationships with cartoon characters, for example by talking, laughing, and singing along with the characters on the screen (De Droog, Buijzen, & Valkenburg, 2012; Hoffner, 2008; Valkenburg, 2004).

In other words, after a period of media exposure, children believe they know the media character like a friend who is part of their own world (Hoffner, 2008). Not surprisingly, children often seek for ways to get closer to their media friends. One way to accomplish this is collecting products related to the media character, such as action figures and products depicting the character. That kind of merchandising is marketed in many forms and can vary from dolls and towels to lunch boxes and cookies. Not only do children get the character close to them, their positive feelings are being transferred from the character to the related products (Acuff & Reiher, 1997).

Not only brand characters, also advergames reach their intended persuasive effects. A master thesis project at the University of Amsterdam investigated the effects of an advergame for M&M's (candies) – where one of the M&M's characters has to eat as many M&Ms out of the sky as possible. The study showed that children who had played the game had more appetite for M&Ms than children who had played a neutral game, in spite of the high brand awareness of M&M's among all of the children (De Winter, 2010). Most likely, the advergame functioned through the affect-transfer mechanism mentioned above. The positive and excited emotions evoked during game play were unconsciously being transferred to the advertised product or brand in the game. In yet another study, for which an advergame for Lay's Chips was especially developed, we found that the more

children were involved in the game, the more they liked the advertised snacks (Van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2011).

Healthy food marketing

In the public as well as academic debates, the question is raised how parents, schools, policy makers, and others concerned with children's well-being can counter unhealthy marketing influences. Many countries have adopted self-regulatory advertising rules. For example, in the United States and several European countries advertisers are strongly advised not to use child idols and popular cartoon characters to promote food products in television commercials for children. Some countries – including Sweden, Norway, and the United Kingdom – have implemented explicit bans on child-directed food advertising (Children's Advertising Review Unit, 2006; Garde, 2008).

Aside from regulatory and restrictive policies, there is increasing attention for the question how established marketing techniques can be used to stimulate healthy behavior, a technique that has been labeled as *health marketing* (Lancaster, McIlwain, & Lancaster, 1983). In the supermarket, Dora and SpongeBob are depicted not only on cookies and snacks, but also increasingly often on fruit and vegetables. Apples, tomatoes, and cucumbers are presented in bite size pieces, wrapped in attractive packaging. In the following section, we discuss studies that have investigated the effectiveness of such health marketing techniques.

Health effects of popular media characters

At the CCAM research center, we investigate how brand characters can be used to increase the appeal of fruit and vegetables among preschoolers. We focus on preschoolers, because they represent the highest risk group in the context of increasing overweight. Moreover, during the preschool years food and taste preferences are determined. In a first study, we investigated whether brand characters could increase the appeal of fruit (De Droog, Valkenburg, & Buijzen, 2011b). We made attractive product packages containing either banana candy (Bananas) or pieces of banana (Real Bananas), and showed preschoolers the packages with or without various types of brand characters, including familiar (Dora and SpongeBob) and unfamiliar characters (a monkey). Then, we asked the preschoolers how much they liked the various snacks.

The results leave little doubt regarding the effectiveness of brand characters. When the package contained no character, the preschoolers liked the banana candy much better than the real banana pieces. Eighty-five percent of the preschoolers liked the candy a lot, while only 57 percent liked the real banana. However, when the packages did contain a cartoon character, the amount of preschoolers liking the real banana mounted up to 79 percent, almost as high

as the percentage of preschoolers liking the banana candy with a character. In other words, these results suggest that a character can make the difference between the appeal of candy and fruit disappear. Remarkably, the popular media characters Dora and SpongeBob were as successful in changing children's attitudes as was the unfamiliar monkey. An explanation for this unexpected result might be that conceptually, the monkey matched with the banana, and therefore evoked the same positive familiar feeling in preschoolers as a familiar media character.

A familiar product-character combination (such as banana & monkey, carrot & rabbit, caterpillar & apple) can evoke similar positive and familiar feelings as the above-described parasocial relationships. From a very early age, children are confronted with such combinations, via storytelling, reading- and picture books, movies, and television programs. As a consequence, the combination is easier to process, evoking a positive feeling of familiarity. Subsequently, these positive feelings are being transferred to the product. Thus, the congruence between the product and the character could have been an explanation for the monkey's success in the first study.

Effectiveness of unfamiliar characters

In a follow-up study, we tested the mechanisms and effects of such product-character congruence, this time investigating the appeal of a vegetable (De Droog, Buijzen, & Valkenburg, 2012). We presented preschoolers with a series of pictures, each of them depicting a carrot combined with various cartoon characters. We combined the carrot with familiar cartoon characters (Dora or her cousin Diego), a congruent unfamiliar character (a rabbit) or an unfamiliar non-congruent character (a rhino). As expected the rabbit was as effective as the familiar cartoon characters, and children liked the carrot with the rhino considerably less. Further analysis showed that the effect of congruence was explained by the feeling of familiarity that was evoked by the congruent product-character combination (De Droog et al., 2011a).

These findings are of great practical relevance, because designing a new character for a product can be less costly than using licensed media characters. Our studies show that to increase the effectiveness of a brand character, it is crucial to make sure that the character matches with the product, and to choose a combination that is familiar to children.

The next research step will be to investigate how we can reach children through various media channels, such as reading books, advergames, and digital tablet applications. Preliminary results on this topic are promising and show that various media and digital technologies can be used to stimulate a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating behavior as well as physical exercise. However, we are also detecting an emerging pattern that, especially for young children,

it is important how the health message is framed. For example, existing health marketing interventions often depict not only healthy, but also unhealthy food products, relying on a before-after or reward-punishment narrative format. To put it simply, in these narratives the character first becomes fat and unhappy by eating unhealthy candy and snacks before it discovers that it is better to eat healthy. In advergames, the character may get credits for eating fruit and vegetables, but gets negative credits for eating chocolate bars and hamburgers.

This mixed message strategy does not seem to be suitable for young children. In accordance with the affect-transfer mechanism, the more children like the narrative and its principle characters, the more they like the depicted products. Unfortunately, the positive feelings seem to transfer not only to the healthy, but also to the unhealthy products depicted: The preschoolers also like the candy, snacks, chocolate bars and hamburgers more. In other words, the affect transfer applies to all depicted food products, regardless of the critical message in the book or game narrative. As yet this finding is only a pattern and still needs systematic testing. Moreover, it should be investigated from which age onwards children are capable of processing more complex messages. Nonetheless, the pattern seems sufficiently strong and relevant to be taken seriously when designing effective health interventions for young children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, food marketing may have undesirable consequences for children's health, particularly because of the high proportion of energy-dense foods and beverages being marketed. Food marketing not only influences children's preferences for the advertised brands, but also for other brands within the same – unhealthy – product category. However, popular and successful marketing techniques, such as brand characters and advergames, can also be used to stimulate healthy behavior. When developing cartoon characters to stimulate fruit and vegetable consumption it is important to take into account that the character is either familiar among children, or represents a familiar combination with the product (banana-monkey, carrot-rabbit). Finally, when implementing media for young children, such as reading books and advergames, designers of affect-based health interventions should make sure to present a simple, straightforward, and unequivocal message and depict only the healthy foods or behaviors.

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The Right to Participation
– Communication for Health and Social Change

Communication and Health of Children and Adolescents in Latin America

Toward a Child and Adolescent-centered Approach

Rafael Obregón and Ángela Rojas Martínez

This article discusses the concept of communication for social change (CFSC) and its role in advancing participatory health communication approaches for children and adolescents in Latin America. It illustrates the role of CFSC principles through two brief case studies located in Colombia that have received increasing attention in the past few years (Rodriguez, 2008; Gonzalez & Rodriguez, 2008). We first provide some context about the health of children and adolescents in the region, followed by a brief discussion of key theoretical principles and tenets of communication for social change, and their application through the two case studies. Lastly, we put forth some challenges and recommendations that we believe social communicators must pay attention to in their efforts aimed at facilitating social change for the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents in the region. Throughout the article we bring forth gender-related issues as these are critical to the full realization of children's rights.

Health, children, and adolescents in Latin America

Multiple references are found in the academic literature about the conceptual and operational definition of health (Canguilhem, 2008; Salomon et al., 2003; San Martín & Pastor, 1988). For the purpose of this article, we define health as a dynamic individual and collective condition that results from the interaction of biological, social, cultural, economic and political factors, which can be transformed through human agency. The notion of health is no longer confined to bio-medical perspectives only but it is rather conceived and understood from multiple social, political, anthropological and communicative perspectives that recognize that active engagement of citizens and communities, from early age in life, is critical to better health conditions (Tufte, 2012).

In line with this perspective, over the past few decades not only has the health of adolescents gained increasing attention (Blum et al., 2012), particularly after significant improvements have been achieved in child survival and health conditions of children under 5 years of age, but it is also argued that children and adolescents must be seen as subjects and agents of change capable of being active participants of social processes that involve health and other development issues (Sawyer et. al., 2012; Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Some organizations (e.g. the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF), following the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, include adolescents in the classification of children (10-19 years). In this article, we refer to children and adolescents in recognition of the importance of developing interventions that engage both young children and adolescents as active participants, which has critical implications for their health and development in their youth and into adulthood (*The Lancet*, 2012).

The living conditions of children and adolescents across Latin American countries are highly heterogeneous. Population groups who live in optimal conditions regarding health care, nutrition, and development coexist with other groups who do not enjoy the same standards of living, thousands of which live in precarious conditions. It is undeniable that health conditions of children and adolescents, in general terms, have improved considerably in the past two decades, compared with the conditions they experienced for most of the second half of the 20th century. For instance, mortality rates of children under five years of age decreased in the Latin America and Caribbean region from 153 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 53 in 1990 and 19 by 2011, which puts the region on track to achieve the MDG (UN Millennium Development Goals) target of a two-thirds reduction by 2015 (UN, 2010; UNICEF, 2004, 2012).

By contrast, thousands of children and adolescents in Latin America, one of the most unequal regions of the world, still face critical challenges. For instance, the highest proportion (22%) of female adolescents worldwide who have had their first sexual relation before age 15 is found in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF, cited in United Nations 2011). These early sexual relations often take place in contexts that increase the health risks for both male and female adolescents, which in turn may contribute to increases in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early pregnancy, maternal mortality, early motherhood and fatherhood, and in many cases school desertion. Overall, UNICEF (2011) estimates that social disparities in the region affect more than half of children, while violence impacts nearly 6 million of them. Significant numbers of children and adolescents of indigenous and African descent are socially excluded, and children, especially girls, are more vulnerable in humanitarian and emergency situations. Chronic malnutrition currently affects nearly 16 percent of children in the region, which in turn negatively impacts their ability to thrive in school and in other social areas.

Likewise, reduction of existing gender inequities in the region is a great challenge. UNDP's (The United Nations Development Program) Gender Inequality Index (2011) shows that while Latin America and the Caribbean as a region ranks second (0.445), after Europe and Central Asia (0.311), if it were a country it would rank 94th or 95th. With regard to children and adolescents, a study conducted by UNICEF (2011) revealed that while significant gender-based differences are not found in the first five years of age of children with regards to health and education indicators, from age six the gap widens across several indicators in favor of male children. In addition to these figures it is necessary to take into account existing forms of gender-based violence or more subtle forms of gender-based discrimination.

Long-standing health issues and challenges remain widely visible, such as preventing maternal and child mortality, malnutrition, poor primary health care services, and violence with emerging problems such as obesity, diabetes, suicide, antisocial behavior, and use and abuse of drugs becoming increasingly important, all of which affect the lives and wellbeing of children and adolescents in the region. In addition, little is known in Latin America about the conditions of children and adolescents with regard to disability and mental health, conditions that are often linked to discrimination, stigma, exclusion, and greater vulnerability to various types of abuses. This two-fold situation – co-existence of long-standing health problems in developing countries and emerging health problems more commonly found in developed countries – calls for government and non-governmental organizations as well as academics and researchers to approach the health of children and adolescents from an integral and multidisciplinary perspective.

In a nutshell, significant work remains to be done in order to ensure that the improvements in the health and wellbeing of the majority of children and adolescents in the region, with particular attention to differences between countries and within countries and to minority and vulnerable groups, such as children with disability, are achieved and supported by existing evidence. Moreover, our contention is that health communication approaches need not to be prescriptive and vertical, but rather serve as catalysts for children's and adolescents' engagement and participation in ways that are holistic and allow for reflection and action.

Main challenges in child and adolescent health

In Brazil, decreases in infant mortality between 1998 and 2008 added up to over 26,000 children's lives saved – but in that same decade, 81,000 Brazilian adolescents, 15-19 years old, were murdered. Surely, we do not want to save children in their first decade of life only to lose them in the second. (Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF, 2011, p.iii)

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) contributed to international consensus on a global set of targets aimed at reducing poverty and improving a series of key indicators related to the health of children and adolescents, such as timely access to education and nutrition, and greater gender equity (United Nations, 2010). While the MDGs have contributed to improving the health and education of millions of children and adolescents, their overall health conditions still pose huge challenges to the national and local governments and to the international development community. Amongst the main health challenges that affect children and adolescents in Latin America, we highlight the following:

- adequate protection and safety, as it is estimated that between 6,000 and 14,000 children participate in some form of armed conflict in Latin America (Belfer & Rohde, 2005).
- it is estimated that every minute, four children are victims of abuse and sexual exploitation in Latin America, three of whom are girls (United Nations Radio, 2008).
- it is estimated that 20 to 40 percent of girls become mothers before they turn 20 years old (United Nations, 2009), which not only affects their well-being – present and future – but also puts their lives at risk.

Some of the challenges listed above primarily focus on health indicators; however, there exist other equally important issues that impact the quality of life of children and adolescents in the region. In particular, gender inequities and limited opportunities for participation in social processes and decision making that affect their health and wellbeing are critical to ensure that children and adolescents are active participants in the creation of enabling environments for their own wellbeing and realization of rights as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

These challenges demand an interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and global/local approach, but more importantly the conviction that it is necessary to transform those realities, and build on people's ability and empowerment to contribute to a more equitable world and to widespread wellbeing in society. The 2012 *Lancet* series on adolescents calls for holistic and life cycle perspectives that view children and adolescents as active agents of change whose health and wellbeing is determined by a host of social, cultural and environmental factors that transcend the traditional focus on risk factors and directed behavior change (The Lancet, 2012).

A gender perspective on the health of children and adolescents

A gender perspective on health issues means that health conditions and wellbeing are defined (from gestation and birth all the way through death) by norms,

standards, attitudes and beliefs that culture assigns to people because they are either male or female. Beyond the biological differences between sexes, which have implications for a series of health issues, there exist living conditions defined by cultural norms that promote or limit the wellbeing of people because they are a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. A gender perspective allows us approaching health and disease of children with a frame of reference that takes into account social inequities present in children's lives, defined by the social meaning of gender in each cultural context, as well as the gender relations that determine differences in the relative position of boys and girls (Vargas-Trujillo & Gambarra D'Errico, 2005).

Boys and girls in Latin America, as is the case with children in most societies around the world, are educated in different ways;¹ in the case of boys, for instance, they are pressured to take on physical risks, get involved in violent situations and avoid expressing their feelings. These conditions are linked to greater morbi-mortality in males as they are often more frequently involved in automobile accidents, death and lesions caused by violent circumstances, death in conflict situations, and higher rates of suicide when compared with women (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2011; Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal, 2011; Connell, 2002; Denton, Prus & Walters, 2004). More importantly, however, gender differences that convey a sense of superiority of males over females tend to place women and girls at a greater risk of being subjected to abuse or to any other form of violence.

While violence against girls and women is still widely tolerated and accepted in many societies, the occupational options of girls and women are limited or their physical image garners more attention than their intellectual abilities. These issues, which are frequently reinforced by media discourses and other media content, also are often linked to high rates of intra-family violence and sexual abuse against girls and women, fewer work and economic opportunities, and multiple adverse consequences both physical and emotional as a result of aesthetic standards imposed on them (Organización Panamericana de la Salud, 2010; Read & Gorman, 2010; American Psychological Association, 2007; Denton, Prus & Walters, 2004).

Gender studies in Latin America have several decades of tradition, especially by nongovernmental organizations, women's organizations, academic organizations and more recently state-run programs and projects. In the case of child and adolescent health there have been efforts to promote analysis, dissemination and implementation of protection policies about specific situations related to intra-family violence, sexual abuse, sexual discrimination, attention to sexual and reproductive health and the promotion of the psychosocial wellbeing of girls and women (Organización Panamericana de la Salud, 2011).

Some recent experiences in the region have promoted the participation of adolescent males in sexual and reproductive health, adolescent fatherhood and

prevention of family violence, and sexual discrimination and abuse (Organización Panamericana de la Salud, 2011; Obregón et al., 2011; El Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21, 2011; Puntos de Encuentro, 2008; Pulerwitz, Barker & Verma, 2012). However, health interventions driven by a gender perspective still are very recent and in some areas they are virtually non-existent. An example of this is that programs aimed at children younger than 10 years of age generally lack a gender perspective, a situation that limits the potential impact on those health determinants related to gender inequities, which are often formed and consolidated in the early years of children (Rojas Martínez & Vargas-Trujillo, 2010; Vargas-Trujillo, Rojas Martínez & Balanta, 2007). This clearly speaks to the importance of giving serious and urgent attention to actions that seek to influence practices and norms rooted in socio-cultural domains that determine many health conditions and wellbeing in the long run.

Along with gender inequities, another phenomenon that impacts significantly the quality of life of children and adolescents in the region is the limited opportunities they have of participating in the social processes that affect their health and wellbeing. Despite the fact that participation is perhaps the most clear manifestation with regards to being a member of a given community, most of the spaces for participation associated with health issues tend to exclude the voice of children and adolescents, do not provide adequate tools and resources to facilitate children's and adolescents' access to information and generation of children and adolescents-driven content, nor strategies aimed at developing the necessary competencies for fully exercising their right to participate. Communication for social change (CFSC) has emerged as one of the communication approaches that specifically focus on creating an adequate environment for people's participation. In the next section we briefly discuss CFSC's background, origins and key tenets, which are at the core of our analysis.²

Communication for social change (CFSC): Change through participation

Numerous theories as well as the cultural and personal experience of those who developed it have enriched CFSC. Two fundamental references, indispensable to understand the spirit of CFSC, are the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda.

To say that men are people and that as people they are free, and then to do nothing that concretely contributes to making this affirmation a reality becomes a farce (Freire, 1970, p.5).

Paulo Freire experienced poverty and hunger in his country, Brasil, which influenced his thinking. Two of his most widely read works, *Education as Praxis*

of Freedom (1967) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), are key conceptual references for CFSC. Freire proposes a liberating, critical and transformational pedagogy that goes beyond teaching and transmitting knowledge only and situates it in the social, economic and political context of the participants as a key condition for education to have a true sense and contribute to effectively transform the life conditions of the most vulnerable.

...Participatory Action Research is not simply a search for knowledge. It also entails the transformation of individual attitudes and values, in personality and culture that is part of a collaborative process. That may be the most profound sense of participatory action research as a historical project (Fals-Borda, 2008).

On the other hand, in Colombia, Orlando Fals-Borda created, along with liberation theology priest Camilo Torres Restrepo, the research approach known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). The violent and difficult political and social conditions that Fals-Borda experienced in his youth, as well as his dynamic academic and research activity, gave him the opportunity to understand the importance of building on the knowledge and ability to take action of communities as a way to address their own problems. PAR is an alternative method to traditional research methods that emphasize the “neutrality” and objectivity of research in which the social reality of communities is investigated without taking into account their real and equitable participation. On the contrary, PAR highlights the horizontal relationship between researcher and participants, the effective and joint participation of communities to transform their reality based on their needs, and the need to prioritize research that truly transforms and improves the lives of communities and individuals.

Both Fals-Borda and Freire coincide in the importance of education, the horizontality of communication, the active and conscious participation of all subjects in any communicative process, and more especially in the link between theory and practice as a prerequisite for social transformation. This background allows for a better understanding of the philosophy of programs for children and adolescents that build on the CFSC, which take distance from vertical communication approaches, and draw on socio-ecological perspectives to change that acknowledge the role and need to address the social determinants of health (Obregón, 2010).

These people-centered perspectives on social change in Latin America have co-existed with biomedical approaches that draw on theories and concepts from biomedical sciences and psychology, most of them developed in schools of psychology and public health in developed countries, which have been then applied to public health programs in Latin America. The majority of these programs draw on theories and models that look at the interplay of cognition, attitudes and behaviors. Some of the most widely used theories and models are

the health belief model (Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker, 1998), the risk reduction model (Catania, Kegeles & Coates, 1990), the stages of change model (Catania, Kegeles & Coates, 1990), and the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, Middlestadt & Hitchcock, 1994). These theories and models posit that change should focus on the individual, his/her cognitive processes, and his/her difficulties and barriers to move from knowledge to action, which is often operationalized through social marketing and/or communication strategies that are centered on persuasion, vertical communication and information transmission (e.g. information, education, communication, IEC).

Communication has played a key role in our understanding of and improvements in health conditions in Latin America which builds on the use of multiple strategies that recognize the importance of participatory and dialogical approaches. In the context of health communication, the literature shows that

...communication plays a vital role, whether in defining public agendas on health issues, providing better quality of health services, promoting healthy behaviors, or facilitating processes that may lead to citizens' exercise of their health rights (Obregón, 2010, p.1).

Not only has the theoretical scope of health communication, a sub-field of CFSC, grown worldwide and in Latin America, but its practice also shows that communication programs and interventions in Latin America have drawn on varied approaches ranging from organizational communication to social marketing to health advertising to health journalism, to media literacy in health (Secretaria de Salud, 2010; Mosquera, 2002, *The Communication Initiative*, 2002).

However, the limited success of behavioral change approaches, partially due to the implementation of programs that have paid little attention to contextual and socio-ecological determinants of health, and the renewed interest in human rights as an expression of the recognition of health rights and collective participation as key to ensure that people fully exercise their rights, have contributed to the growth and positioning of the CFSC in public health and development programs in Latin America and worldwide. In these programs children and adolescents are expected to express their views and participate actively, promote self-reflection and critical dialogue about their health, including gender-related issues, and contribute to the transformation and wellbeing of themselves and their communities (Schmid, Wilson & Taback, 2010).

Two communication experiences that take place in Colombia are now discussed in this article. These experiences actively involve children and adolescents, draw on the CFSC principles, and arguably illustrate the types of opportunities that participatory communication approaches that are gender sensitive can bring to rights-based, long-term health improvements and development, and how they can contribute to more equitable societies.

Health communication and children and adolescents: CFSC in action

While these experiences have not been originally designed as health communication interventions they illustrate how PAR-based communication processes can lead to agendas and approaches that reflect their own realities and priorities, including health-related issues. The first experience focuses on participation and empowerment of in-school children (8-12 years) in a small community in the southeastern region of Colombia, while the second one highlights work with in-school and out-of-school adolescents (12-18 years of age) in Comuna 13 (one of the most populous and violent areas of Medellín, Colombia). These experiences have in common that children and adolescents are the main actors of the process and the ones who reflect, speak, produce and lead the process of change.

Children's Audiovisual School Belén de los Andaquíes: There is no camera without a story to be told

The Children's Audiovisual School Belén de los Andaquíes (the School from now on) is located in the municipality of Belén de los Andaquíes, in the State of Caquetá. The School seeks to give visibility to children's voices by attempting to "tell stories of what we do in order to find out where we want to go in life", a statement shown on their Facebook page.³ Children 8 years and older imagine, write, draw, act, photograph, audiotape, animate and edit roughly two-minute stories in which they show and reflect upon their lived experiences. Members of the School define it as an attempt to facilitate collective creation of audiovisual products that include documentaries, photo and video workshops, animation, graphic design and film projections, amongst others. The School's mission is to strengthen the creative capacity of children who use school as a setting for the development of their personal life projects.

Belén de los Andaquíes is a municipality of a little over 10,000 inhabitants, where the agricultural activities of the population converge with various problems derived from the intersection of drug trafficking, poverty and violence. A teacher in the local school, Alirio González, founded the Association of Community Communication (Comunarte) in 1993 which led to the setup of Radio Andaquí, a popular community radio station. The School started operations in 2005 and it built on the previous experience of the community radio station and some moments of crisis in which, as Gonzalez reports,⁴ work seemed to have hit a ceiling and there was a felt need to seek new forms of expression.

The emergence of the digital revolution provided the necessary motivation and opportunity to bring together previous work and new technologies to re-energize the process. Digital technology allowed them a greater possibility of communication and content production and dissemination. The challenge was not so much about money, to purchase costly equipment, as it was about the

capacity to tell interesting stories. With the support of some communication researchers and scholars from Colombia (Universidad Autónoma de Occidente in Bucaramanga, and Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá), and the enthusiasm of children involved in the program, the School started its operations.

One day I took the radio station's computer to my house and one of the children came to ask whether I could teach him how to use the video camera (Alirio thought that they could produce a short film and edit it on the computer) and the next day all the children in the nearby houses came to ask whether they also could participate. The group started working on photos, videotaping, editing and music... we used very old computers and in a 2 mts by 2 mts room, it was a crowded space but everyone was very happy (Gonzalez, personal communication, 2011).

Over the years, the School has produced more than 100 two-minute documentaries and stories which feature a broad range of social, political and cultural issues. Nearly one third of the School's stories deal with health, especially sexual and reproductive health, conflict, nutrition, environment, rights and gender-related issues. In these stories, children of the School reflect and voice their views on these issues, interact and dialogue with family members, teachers, adults and local authorities, and present the viewpoints of other local actors. In one of the most widely known stories, for instance, a group of children portray the lives of adults as "raspachines", the practice of scratching the coca leaves. Gonzalez argues that these are stories that reflect the children's lived experiences and surroundings and that telling these stories help them reflect on those realities and see beyond them.

Another interesting example of how the School helps children to develop a sense of responsible citizenship and reflection of their own contexts, is the production of the *Telegordo*, a series of eight short documentaries funded by Colombia's Ministry of Culture. *Telegordo* takes its name from the nickname of its narrator – "the fat one". The stories of *Telegordo* deal with several issues of interest to children, from local values to cultural and ethnic identity and pride of being locals, to health and environmental issues. In addition, while children have control over the content, some self-regulation is agreed upon particularly with regards to the exclusion of situations that may be perceived to promote maltreatment of children, adults or animals, gender-based discrimination or based on disabilities, and intra-family violence (Gonzalez, Tamayo & Rueda, 2011).

Lastly, Gonzalez (2009) states that gender differences are noticed in the School as well. Girls tend to be more "political, more activists" than boys and girls tend to focus more often on issues of violence against women, intra-family violence, abuse, employment and rights and gender. Girls also seem to be more interested in telling stories while boys seem more interested in production is-

sues. According to Gonzalez several characteristics of the Audiovisual School of Belén de los Andaquíes reflect CFSC principles. These characteristics of the School include:

- *Local initiatives.* Sustainable projects must be born within local contexts. What does the community think of its development challenges? When projects are initiated by external agents there is typically good financing for the first year or two but then projects lose traction because there is no local ownership.
- *Collective legitimacy.* Projects are more sustainable when they are legitimate for the community. This legitimacy is not granted by the politician or the academic but by the local people, who feel the project is theirs and serves a purpose. *In the case of the School there are several examples:* photos of local events and traditions are taken by members of the School; when women or other groups want to develop community-based initiatives they gather in the School and some of these activities are broadcast by the community radio station; local mobilization for public health campaigns and vaccination campaigns, for instance, have been supported by the School. Thus, the community experiences that essence of the School is that it represents the collective interests of the community and not only the interests of a few individual.
- *Collective protagonism.* All work in the School is of a collective character, narratives are shared, and the production workshops are done collectively. Efforts are made to avoid individual protagonism in the stories. Even though individuality and autonomy are respected, protagonism is collective.
- *Search of common objectives.* Even in contexts of war and precariousness, it is important to think about what brings us together and what separates us. In Belén de los Andaquíes, for instance, the river is one of the most important resources, therefore regardless of whether a person is a paramilitary, guerrilla, priest or educator, all drink water from the river *and all know that they have to contribute in order to protect the river.* The problem of violence must be transcended and communication must promote and register care and love for the resources of the region. If no one does this then those stories will be lost (Gonzalez, 2009).

The pedagogical principles of the School capture the open nature of the participation process:

- Participants attend when they want to.
- Participants remain with the School as long as they want to.
- Participants engage voluntarily in projects of interest to them.

- Participants can generate income for them and the School if opportunities arise. (Gonzalez, personal communication, 2011; Gonzalez, 2009)

The School often challenges traditional education formats and at times enters in contradiction with them given the School's focus on discovery and development of life projects. Children view the School as part of their extended family, and as they grow and leave the School this becomes an important and constructive source of support. More importantly, the School serves as an open and safe communication space in which children reflect on various issues of interest to them, including health and gender from a rights-based perspective.

Corporación Pasolini in Medellín: Art and culture to disarm the minds

Corporación Pasolini⁵ in Medellín (CpeM)⁶ was founded in 2000 as a result of the interest of two audiovisual anthropology students: Germán Arango and Camilo Pérez, who discovered the possibility of linking film and anthropology as an alternative to understand the social dynamics of Medellín and in particular the social dynamics of violence. Pérez (2011)⁷ states that, at some point, “there developed a generalized belief that low-income adolescents and youth from Medellín were all criminals” and people who essentially did not engage in any type of productive work. To a large extent this was the result of media accounts that had little contact with the reality of adolescents and youth. This led Pérez and Arango to work on the project *Pasolini in Medellín: Notes for a visual ethnography about the urban periphery* which was the starting point for CPeM. CPeM explored the reality of children, adolescents and youth involved in or who live in conflict and violent areas in Medellín, through a series of film production workshops. Thus it started a collective and participatory process that has led to 15 video productions, and 300 photographs and essays that reflect the views of adolescents and youth on violence and conflict in Medellín. An example of their work is an audiovisual titled *5 to 13*, in which adolescents and youth, boys and girls, from one of the most violent areas of Medellín portray, with irony, the perception that the majority of the population has about them: violent human beings, tragic and disturbed lives, and how such perception does not necessarily reflect their own reality. In another production a group of young children creatively recreate, through cartoon-type animation, stories of sexual abuse that affect girls in their communities, opening a communication space that allows group and public discussion – in schools and community centers – of an issue often not talked about.

While the work of the filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini is a significant influence in the conceptual approach to this process, CPeM also draws on the work of a) the anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch (1917-2004), one of the founders of the Cinéma vérité, a documentary filmmaking technique that combines natural-

ist and stylized techniques, as well as the use of the camera by the subject, and thinking from Liberation Theology applied to filmmaking. The actual methodology of CPeM is highly ethnographic and seeks to establish rapport with participants, which demands ongoing interaction before engaging in production. Some of the key principles of the CPeM are listed here (Arango et al., 2008; Pérez, 2011):

- We don't teach, we learn from local participants.
- We turn what is familiar into novelty.
- We turn our realities into poetry.
- We de-learn our way of seeing and doing in the city in order to learn new forms.
- The transformative element is not the product but the process.
- Narrating and listening allows learning from others.

In addition to the participant-driven audiovisual productions, one of the main examples of the contribution of Pasolini to amplifying the voices of local actors and facilitating greater dialogue is that some of the project's participants have initiated their own processes. Some of them have set up initiatives of peaceful resistance which include Son Batá (an Afro-descendent musical group) in the Comuna 13, Comunicaciones Puerta Abiertas (Open Door Communications) in San Antonio de Prada (a communication collective), Carabantu (photography), Emisora Medellín Hip Hop (Hip Hop radio station), Colectivo Visión Urbana en el Barrio (neighborhood-based communication collective) and Popular Número 1 de Medellín (communication collective). These groups agree that CPeM gave them the opportunity to create a safe communication space in which they could come together and "encounter" each other, spaces that were not available in the past. Each of the participant groups has built their own identity and has started to organize themselves in an autonomous and creative way that creates new spaces for other groups.

The fact that some of the participants in the CPeM workshops have been killed, emphasizes the need to think about the audiovisual not only as aesthetics but also as a political act. Also, because many of the stories that emerge in the workshops are stories of violence, CPeM feels that it is necessary to allow children and adolescents to talk about violence in a safe space, not with the intention of reinforcing it but with the intention of reinterpreting it, critiquing it, and bringing a poetic perspective to it in order to promote strategies that may help leave the vicious circle that violent contexts impose upon these groups.

CPeM works with different age groups, including children, adolescents, youth and older adults. However, CPeM works primarily with adolescents (12-18 years of age), and its main thematic focus is the discourses and realities of local ado-

lescents and their communities in relation to violence, conflict, quality of life and wellbeing. CPeM currently has a team of 15 staff and works in four areas: Socio-cultural research; Training and Audiovisual Production; Support to Social Organizations; and Cultural Events.

In addition to these two experiences there are many others that have drawn on CFSC principles with the purpose of engaging children and adolescents in local development processes, open up spaces for their participation in the public sphere, and allow for an autonomous process in which they define the topics and issues that they want to focus on, which often include health and gender-related issues. One such example is the Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21, located in the municipality of Carmen de Bolívar, in the State of Bolívar in northwestern Colombia, a strategic area in the fight between Colombian military forces and guerrilla groups, that promotes community-based communication processes that include community media, non-formal education in development journalism, and a variety of creative school-based activities.⁸ This collective has been recognized as a leading CFSC experience in the country and it was awarded the national peace prize in 2006 for its role in creating safe spaces for local participation in conflict areas. In the midst of these processes, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality are regular issues in the collective's activities and communication products (Vega & Bayuelo, 2008).

Conclusions: A collective challenge

The purpose of this article was to discuss the role of communication for social change (CFSC) in health communication approaches illustrated through two case studies located in Colombia that also included a gender perspective as a key and complementary dimension to CFSC. Based on the discussions here above, we now put forth some empirical, thematic and methodological considerations.

- The experiences discussed above were not designed necessarily with the specific purpose of applying CFSC principles, but emerge from practice and the integration of multiple disciplines and streams of knowledge. However, as they have evolved over time they have clearly integrated CFSC principles that have facilitated the active participation of children and adolescents and their interaction with key community stakeholders and influentials.
- The role of theory building in these experiences becomes substantive by stimulating action, naming actual practice, and expanding our conceptual framework, which reflects participatory action research processes.
- The experiences described above are not based on themes pre-defined by their creators or founders about what may be of interest to participants, but on their capacity to create spaces for communication, interaction and

participation that allow for the autonomous expression about themes that are significant to them, including common objectives on health and development issues within their local contexts and groups. These experiences contribute in different ways to empowerment of children and adolescents, to the promotion of collective, territorial and individual identity, and eventually to citizens who may be better equipped to exercise their citizenship rights in the long run.

- The experiences discussed in this article utilize mass media channels not necessarily with the purpose of informing the public or disseminating information only but with the purpose of promoting a lively, quotidian and relevant communication space for children and adolescents in their own community that allows them to amplify their voices.
- These experiences illustrate how communication channels and practices come together in a way that reflects the role of communication not only as a tool (as it is often seen in prescriptive health communication interventions), but also as an integral dimension of people's lived experience. As many communication scholars have noted, communication is embedded in our cultural experience and therefore health communication strategies driven by CFSC principles must recognize such dimensions. The two experiences discussed in this article provide a good illustration of this approach.
- In these experiences there is a clear and close connection between action, aesthetics and politics, which coincides with Freire's and Fals-Borda's views. Children and adolescents communicate from their physical, psycho-social, economic, and political perspectives, dimensions that are often absent in prescriptive interventions aimed at children and adolescents, which in the health field often focus on addressing immediate risk factors and are dominated by vertical communication and persuasion.
- From a gender perspective these experiences do involve boys and girls and emphasize the importance of empowerment. However, gender perspectives still tend to reflect primarily issues related to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, and adolescent pregnancy. It is worth asking about the gender imaginaries that children and adolescents have, what impact those imaginaries may have on their health and wellbeing (not only in the area of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health), and how these communicative experiences may help them interpret and transform those imaginaries in order to build broader gender perspectives.

These experiences demand a profound commitment from their founders, members, and participants. Thus it is understandable that such experiences may not be all that common. However, it is those circumstances which can serve

as a catalyst for the creation of new spaces in which children and adolescents are able to express themselves openly and freely about issues relevant to their health and wellbeing, and engage in public debate and dialogue that ensures that their views and opinions can be heard. What do children and adolescents think about disability, mental health, natural disasters, obesity, quality of health services or resources needed to access to health services? All these themes are of great importance and relevant to them but their opinions are rarely taken into account. Likewise, it is urgent to ensure the participation of specific population groups that have been traditionally excluded, such as indigenous groups and people of African descent.

In order to achieve those objectives it is essential that decision makers decisively promote the creation and strengthening of local social communication networks, and coordination with global, national and regional networks with the purpose of facilitating not only the flow of accurate and reliable information about health services (which are often not available in rural and semi-urban areas), but especially effective coordination and participation mechanisms that ensure better health and wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Lastly, it is also critical to promote monitoring and evaluation mechanisms about existing health programs, that draw on or reflect CFSC principles with the purpose of assessing their impact in the short and long run, as well as the possibility of developing a more in-depth understanding of the program's most significant components. Such mechanisms should build, again, on participatory processes that allow for the identification of indicators that reflect children and adolescents perspectives and complement health outcomes indicators.

It is important to note, however, that these experiences are work in progress and demand a long-term perspective for change to take place. Partnerships with academics and researchers are critical to ensure that change and results that may be derived from these experiences are properly and rigorously documented and disseminated. This must be a key item on our agenda for the next few years, and will require the commitment and support of various stakeholders, government and donors who must be willing to invest in holistic interventions and strategies that do not necessarily yield short-term results.

We hope that this article will contribute to rendering greater attention to rights-based, holistic and open-ended communication experiences that address fundamental development, health and wellbeing issues related to children and adolescents with their active participation and engagement. In the long term this is a sound investment to ensure that children and adolescents embrace the notion of participation and engagement early on, and view them as key to ensuring accountability of governments and service providers.

Notes

1. An example of this is the type and intensity of physical punishment given to children and adolescents depending upon their sex. In Latin America, physical punishment may be more intense for boys, but much longer for girls who are often subjected to daily punishment (pushing, pinching, hair pulling, etc.) and for many more years than boys. In some cases these types of punishments on girls intensify during their adolescent years (Buitrago-Peña, Guevara-Jiménez, Cabrera-Cifuentes, 2009).
2. For more information on communication for social change, please read Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006.
3. For more information: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Escuela-Audiovisual-Infantil/129654637055616#!/pages/Escuela-Audiovisual-Infantil/129654637055616?sk=info> or: <http://escuelaaudiovisualinfantil.blogspot.com>
4. Interview via Skype with Alirio González, founder of the School, conducted by December 6th 2011 by Ángela Ma. Rojas-Martínez
5. The choice of the name Pasolini is the result of the organizations's founders', Germán Arango and Camilo Pérez, interest in the work of the Italian film producer Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), whose texts and films motivated them. In addition, Pasolini's interest for poetry, politics, the realities of youth and his willingness to express his opinions about controversial themes also influenced Arango's and Perez' decision to choose Pasolini as part of the name of the corporation.
6. For additional information about CPeM, go to: <http://www.pasolinimedellin.com/whatwedo.html>
7. Interview with Camilo Pérez, co-founder of Corporación Pasolini, held on November 23rd, 2011, in Athens (Ohio/US) by Ángela Ma. Rojas-Martínez.
8. For additional information about the Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21 go to: http://colectivolinea21.galeon.com/objeto_social.htm

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Body Politics and the Mediated Body

Young Women in Nicaragua Talk about Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Johanna Stenersen

CIUDAD JARDIN, MANAGUA. It's nearly 6.30 p.m. and, apart from the inevitable heat that the table fan is not able to fight, there is excitement in the air. In a small radio studio, five young women (between the ages of 16 and 22) are preparing to go on air. The women discuss the script, their turns and the music as well as welcoming their studio guest, while occasionally waving to friends and other people from the local area who are standing in the street in order to see the live show through the studio window. This evening, Meyling, 21 years old, is visiting the show. She lives in the neighborhood which is one of Managua's many poor *barrios*, and is the mother of two small children. Meyling is HIV-positive; she was infected by her first boyfriend at the age of 14. Tonight, she will share her life story with the radio listeners. It is a story that contains many 'typical' elements for young people in general – a love story, unprotected sex, a lack of sexual education and a lot of *machismo* – as well as those elements which apply to HIV-positive people in particular – discrimination, prejudice and stigma. She also talks of the importance of, and the many difficulties associated with, getting access to, not only health services and medical care, but to an overall healthy environment and nutritious food. The living conditions in the *barrio* affect her negatively since she is very susceptible to infections. However, Meyling has been lucky. She is in a treatment program and is cautiously optimistic about her future. Fortunately, none of her children is HIV-positive and now she wants to help other people by sharing her experiences and giving advice and hope. The pace of the show is quite fast, there is a lot to cover in only half an hour. There is music every five minutes and during the break the team members change positions in the tiny booth, desperately trying to cool their faces by fanning themselves with their manuscripts. After the interview with Meyling, listeners are encouraged

to call the show to ask questions and give their views. There are many calls, most of them sympathetic and supportive of Meyling. At 7 p.m. the jingle is played and the girls can soon join their friends outside, exhausted but happy.

This article uses an intersectional¹ approach to look at how young women (between the ages of 13-19) in Nicaragua learn about and perceive issues related to sexual and reproductive health. It specifically focuses on the role(s) that different media can play in sexual health education and understanding, and why the media is relevant for the multitude of issues, such as gender (in)equality, norms, values, power relations and representation which are related to sexual health. Empirically, the study draws on ethnographically collected material from field work in Nicaragua, Central America, between 2008 and 2010. It includes individual and focus group interviews, and participant observations from a variety of situations in the informants' 'ordinary life', as well as from organized events (workshops, radio studio recordings, demonstrations, etc.).

In this article, the quotes mainly derive from focus group interviews and informal conversations with young women during an educational workshop about citizenship and gender that was held by the Nicaraguan NGO, Grupo Venancia,² in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, in March 2011. The initial story derives from participant observation of a local radio show called *Mujeres Arriba*³ that was broadcast in Managua in April 2008. The radio show is referred to in some of the quotes below. It also illustrates the importance of community-based and participatory communication initiatives for giving a voice to discriminated and oppressed groups, enabling them to speak about sensitive issues.

Health and gender

Health is a complex concept. We must not only consider physical and psychological features of the individual, but also look at individuals in relation to groups of people and, subsequently, in relation to the wider society and the macro environment. The perception of health is changing towards a more holistic view of people's lives and public health. There is also a discursive shift from international to global health which points to an understanding of health issues that cross national and regional borders (Banta, 2001). Health has become trans-sectional and transnational, even global (Obregón & Waisboard, 2012). Parallel to this, there is a growing recognition of multi-sector approaches in order to tackle health challenges and, therefore, it is necessary to consider aspects that sometimes appear to be far beyond the scope of health.

In relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), a number of studies suggest that it is especially important to consider socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions, such as social equality, gender equality and different forms of oppression and violence (Bearinger et al., 2007; Contreras, 2010). The

growing world population has political aspects of global concern. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2012) points to the importance of applying a rights-based approach to family planning; family planning being considered a human right. According to UNFPA, an estimated 222 million women, of whom most live in poverty in developing countries, do not have access to modern contraceptives. Gender, class, ethnicity, etc. play a central role here and there is every reason to look at SRHR and population issues from an intersectional approach. Many times, decisions regarding the body do not belong to the individual, and the female body in particular has been, and in many societies still is, subject to subordination. Many times, cultural and social practices are specifically aimed at controlling women's sexuality and fertility. Needless to say, age is another factor which impacts on the influence individuals might have over their bodies.

Margaret Jolly (in Loos, 2008) offers a feminist explanation to this obsession with disciplining and controlling the female body. She argues that female bodies, because of their sexual and reproductive capacities, matter more in the creation of nation-state borders and that their bodies "are marked and remarked as they cross religious, ethnic, class and national borders in the process of marrying and [...] in the process of engaging in sexual relations because of its potential to produce children that encompassed these divides" (ibid. p. 40). So, the 'management' of sex and reproduction is entirely about the management of citizen privileges and property which has transformed into a dominant model of power exercise and gender order in society. Similarly, there are other forms of control and influence embedded in the societal structure. The state, for example, writes the laws that regulate access to, or denial of, abortion, and the state is often in control of the institutions that provide, or do not provide, sexual education. Another highly influential authority in Nicaragua (as in most Latin American countries) is the Catholic Church which exercises tremendous influence over people's minds, values and behavior, in addition to its more concrete political and economic power. As a result, body politics and identity politics collide and questions regarding women's sexuality and reproductive ability become even more morally and politically loaded.

In development cooperation, when it comes to both policy and practice, gender perspectives have been, if not lacking, at least lagging, and the representation of third world women has been stereotypical and uncritical. Karin Wilkins (1999, 2004) writes about how women in development programs have been systematically categorized through their bodies as either mothers or sexual objects. Traditionally, women have also been depicted as passive receivers, and interventions have targeted women's needs as primarily related to their reproductive function, focusing on maternity and child care. "An Orientalist approach to development incorporates patriarchal assumptions, which envision 'other' women in passive roles requiring 'our' assistance. 'Helping' women in these culturally

distant spaces focuses on women's sexuality, through development programmes focusing on attempts to control women's bodies" (Wilkins 2004:264). In that sense, the radio show, *Mujeres Arriba*, is a different and refreshing approach. Media and communication can make a difference and I shall now discuss the necessity to further problematize the role and use of health communication.

Communication and health

Communication plays an important role in many health issues. Traditionally, health communication, both in practice and as an academic discipline, has quite often been defined as a more or less public strategic communication process, aiming at conveying information or knowledge regarding health related issues to the general public or specific target groups (Morris, 2004). There is a wide variety in terms of strategies, tactics, topics and objectives, depending on the different conditions, priorities and perceptions in society. Health communication may be informative, instructive, or preventive, sometimes intended to alter risk consciousness, increase awareness, or aimed at radically changing an unsafe or destructive behavior (e.g. drinking and driving, smoking, etc.).

In health communication as an academic discipline, the approaches and theoretical frameworks are becoming more and more eclectic and interdisciplinary (Tufté, Obregón & Mosquera, 2004; Obregón & Waisboard, 2012). However, it is impossible to isolate communication processes, especially since they are part of, and contribute to, increasingly complex communication flows in society. The media are also central when it comes to shaping people's minds and can either reproduce or challenge existing perceptions of gender, bodies and normativity in society (Djerf-Pierre, 2007, 2011; van Zoonen, 2003; Carter & Steiner, 2004).

Parallel to the development towards a holistic view on health, there is a growing appreciation for and emphasis on participation and participatory communication approaches (Srampickal, 2006). It is now more widely recognized that people should be more engaged in social change processes and, above all, that they should be perceived as actively participating subjects, as opposed to being regarded as passive 'receivers' who are subject to change, but not agents in themselves (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Alternative media, especially community radio, such as *Mujeres Arriba*, have the potential to resist predominant cultural, religious and political hegemony, and also to open up spaces for self-representation that can challenge and/or complement mainstream media content (Downing, 2001; Husband, 2000).

Through my many encounters with young people during field work, it has become evident that sexual and reproductive health overlaps with a wide range of socio-political and cultural factors. My informants come from both rural and urban areas; they represent different social classes and possess distinct cultural

and socio-economic capital (cf. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and his understanding and use of cultural respectively economic capital, 1999). Different compositions of capital play important roles in the ways in which the informants perceive themselves and their bodies in relation to society. Two aspects stood out as particularly important during the focus group discussions: 1) access to, respectively the lack of, adequate information and education on issues related to sexual and reproductive health, and 2) the significance of both individual and collective identity creation and public action in relation to those issues. In these discussions, a couple of themes were recurrent. One theme revolved around issues of normativity and the factors that form and inform individual and collective knowledge of and decisions concerning the body. The other theme related to representation and how different media and different media practices open up spaces for participation and self-representation. In the following, I will show how these themes were discussed among the focus group participants. The intersectional approach points to central questions of inequality and power that need to be addressed in relation to media, health and young people.

Society, media and normativity

Perceptions of bodies and body conditions, as well as understandings of health and illness, reveal norms and normative frameworks in society. As I argued in the previous section, the media⁴ provide us with images and ideals and are quite influential in the formation of bodily perceptions and sexuality. The media also have a socializing function and play an important role in political and citizen socialization. In the following account, I refer to focus group discussions that dealt with the informants' ⁵ media experiences and usage.

At the beginning of each focus group discussion, each participant (6-8 young women) would introduce herself and give a brief account of her everyday life and her media usage. Depending on the informant's socio-economic situation, these accounts differed quite significantly. Some came from quite well-off middle class families with rather secure economies and access to a wide range of media including communication technology. Others lived in quite precarious conditions in remote villages with little or virtually no media access. The informants' educational backgrounds also differed a lot, which impacted on the way the informants both spoke of media and their usage 'profile'. Another factor was the degree of liberty with which the girls could choose what to read or watch or listen to. Some expressed that their media usage was subject to severe social control, sometimes out of necessity – due to their living conditions – and sometimes because they were being monitored by family or teachers or other persons with influence. However, almost all participants experienced that the boys and men in their families, and in general, had more liberty to choose and

also more independence in terms of mobility and life choices. That freedom also included media consumption.

They [the boys] have more to say, regardless of the situation. If they decide to do something, they just go ahead with it. And they can go where they please too. Even if they are punished, it doesn't affect them the same way. It's kind of normal for a boy to be a rebel whereas for us it, it will cause us greater trouble.

However, as the discussion continued, some of the young women pointed to the fact that boys were also being controlled and that gender expectations 'imprisoned' both sexes.

As the informants mapped out and reflected upon their respective media landscape and usage, a certain 'pattern' emerged. Almost everybody preferred local or regional media content, but when asked to be more specific, it proved that, in fact, most were referring to some understanding of Latin American media production, although they favored certain national media content, such as TV shows, radio programs, magazines, etc. During the discussion in one of the groups, a consensus was established among the participants, that they had more confidence in the big media outlets, regardless of their origin.

One simply cannot believe everything the media say, one has to be critical. I don't trust the media here very much, but I don't think that the really big media would tell lies to all Latinos. But media in general... I feel that they often want you to believe certain things, or maybe feel a certain way. So you see this and you think that maybe I should do like this or be like this. [...] But I think it's more important what my friends say and do.

In relation to issues connected to sexual and reproductive health and rights,⁶ it was the lack of content, rather than the content itself, which caused most discussion. For example, not everybody thought that sexual education and information regarding contraceptives should be taught in schools. Some of the young women thought that these issues belonged more in a private sphere, although quite a few of them could relate to an openness regarding these kinds of issues in their families. Not surprisingly, the more urban, educated and well-off informants said they experienced a more open atmosphere in their homes as well as in education and other activities. The notions of 'private life' and 'private space' emerged and caused an intense discussion in one of the focus groups. However, the patriarchic and Catholic framework remained the same. Several informants openly expressed that they completely lacked any kind of sexual education and that they experienced ambiguous feelings towards their own bodies.

They tell you that you are dirty when you have your period for example, and maybe that's why I really find it disgusting, I can't help it. Another thing is that you should not touch yourself down there... you see, I can't even name

it, even when I'm alone! My mother used to hit me if I ever did it when I was little, hit me on the hand and call me names.

There was general agreement that this kind of experience is quite common. Some aspects of the female body and its functions are not made visible and the socialization of body conduct is reinforced through the media. Media representations of women seemed to confirm these ideas to the girls and were sometimes used in order to instruct them on how to behave. One informant told the group about how her mother in particular would point out a certain character in a *telenovela* (soap opera) and say that she was the perfect role model. Similar examples from, for example, news media were used in order to frighten or intimidate the girls. The conclusion was that bad things happen to bad girls. These attitudes are inherent in social structures and practices, as well as in the media.

In Latin America, *machismo* is widely spread and understood as a framework for understanding gender and gender roles. It is also the basis for a gender dichotomy that has a significant impact on how young women and men relate to bodily and social practices, something which became quite apparent during the discussions. Most of the informants generally took for granted that representations in the media are produced in a certain way and largely reflected 'reality'. But quite a few participants became agitated when they realized to what extent female experiences and perspectives are subject to censorship and control. Some claimed that it was the same as lying and that it caused ignorance and could potentially hurt women. Felicity was one of these.

Well, yes, it's quite natural when you think about it. It just confirms that these topics are not something that we talk about, it doesn't exist! Everything should be beautiful and romantic! Then the girls don't know what happens to them! But if they get pregnant or ill, it's their fault and they have to live in shame.

But some of the informants shook their heads in disagreement. They did not feel that it was appropriate or even desirable to feature these themes in the media, especially not in fiction or entertainment. This hypocritical attitude towards female fertility is just one example of how women's bodies are simultaneously revered and rejected.

Nonetheless, somehow, everybody could see that the invisibility and non-representation of important aspects of the female experience in their family environment, education and mainstream media, affected their attitudes and behavior in different ways, and that they were most likely to repeat this themselves. Several informants had, despite their young age, experiences of mistreatment and sexual abuse, and quite a few already had one or more children. However, during the group discussions, questions on motherhood and teenage pregnancy were dealt with in a more indirect way. Maybe the group dynamics prevented the participants from becoming too personal in their accounts and opinions on these matters.

Some informants signaled that they wanted to talk about their experiences and that it was a relief to do so. During a break, an 18-year old woman told me that she had found herself pregnant at sixteen, but did not dare to tell her parents. When they eventually found out, they beat her badly and she was kicked out of the house. When she was allowed to return later, her parents decided to take the child from her and raise it as their own. Her daughter is now her 'sister'.

It is not something we talk about at home. I can't talk about it. But I hope that my sister, well my daughter, won't have to suffer the way I have.

Media, social relations and social spaces

Like most young people, the participants expressed a great interest and curiosity in matters concerning sexuality and relationships. However, it seemed clear that there was quite a big gap between the informants' dreams, ideals and aspirations on the one hand, and their more realistic expectations of life on the other. Whether the discussion revolved around fantasies and fiction – often in relation to some *telenovela* or the life of some celebrity – or more abstract political or ideological ideals of gender equality, social justice and so on, there was a tendency to distance themselves from their own experiences and relate more to other people's stories. For example, it took several discussions and conversations before one informant, a rather shy but serious woman of 19 who wanted to become a nurse, told me that she had a child. When I asked her why she had not thought of telling me before, she simply said that she had not considered it to be that important. She never mentioned anything about the father of the child, but said that she did not have, nor want a boyfriend until she had finished her studies. Yet, when discussing her favorite *telenovela*, her eyes glowed with passion when the protagonist and heroine conquered another admirer and left the previous one heartbroken and miserable at her door. "I think she was right to do so," she said. "He treated her badly and wasn't good for her."

Obviously, I began to think about similar stories that I had been told and wondered how the informants managed to detach themselves from these hard experiences. This is not to suggest that fiction or empowerment in general are not valuable concepts, but it does suggest that in order to internalize ideas and ideals, the informants have to be able to relate to some kind of experience beyond the mediated.

Issues regarding sexuality and intimate body parts represent subjects that are quite taboo to talk about and I could sense that some informants were intimidated and embarrassed to talk about them. In most cases, they would talk amongst women only. The private space that media consumption offered them was the mentally free space, but even this seemed quite limited by social and moral frames. In the first focus group, Nancy, a feminist aged 15 from Managua,

seemed far more confident, if not in her own body, then in her role as a young woman, strong and independent. She was quite critical of *telenovelas* and how they constructed false ideas about marriage and relationships and meant that the series often had a hypocritical attitude when it came to sex and sexual relations.

There is nothing real about those series and the ways in which they describe things. Women should always be beautiful and pleasant and are portrayed as either shameless bitches or saints. But hardly any *telenovela* touches on issues that are really important to women here, the true problems of women in this country, such as violence and *machismo*. Often men in the series are just as macho as any man in the street and that is like okay, that is the norm.

However, Nancy felt that some of the series were still good entertainment and confessed to watching several series quite frequently, but said that in her circle of friends they did not talk much about them. She did not think that she or her friends learned very much from the series either, but still had quite a few examples of how some scenes had spurred wild discussions amongst the friends. Although quite a few informants disagreed with her and insisted that they enjoyed and learned from what they were watching, some girls became quite silent after Nancy's 'declaration' and the discussion turned away from the topic.

Later, when I put this situation and the possible readings one could make of it to the women in the other focus group, meanings diverged. Half of the group did not have a TV set, and did not watch any shows on a regular basis, but still had enough knowledge about them to be able to participate in the conversation to some degree. Most of the informants seemed to think that the men in the series were not only physically more attractive than the 'real' men in their surroundings, but that they also appeared more appealing in many other ways. The men were considered to be more caring and much more romantic in the series, although still macho. One of the older girls objected, saying that this was because the series mostly portrayed relationships in the beginning. These feelings are confirmed by feminist research which shows how, traditionally, female bodies belong to a man, a family or society; basically anyone but the woman has control and power over herself.

Final remarks

The media play a central role in the production and circulation of images and representations. Media texts often blend in with other narratives and serve both to reflect and re-affirm these narratives and the norms on which they are based, but they can also provide an opportunity to discuss and deal with 'real' problems while engaging with or discussing fiction or mediated life stories and other media content. It is not that the participants in the focus groups could not separate fact

from fiction; on the contrary, most of them knew too well that the *telenovela* bore little resemblance to their own reality, but they enjoyed the shows for what they were and found that they could discuss personal issues while apparently discussing a soap opera, 'hiding' behind some protagonist. This suggests that the media not only provide opportunities for escapism, but, implicitly, can also help the informants to process difficult experiences.

Socio-economic backgrounds and levels of social control proved to be quite significant for how the informants experienced media and the ways in which they would use different media and communication technologies. The internet and mobile technologies were considered valuable tools for networking, social relationships, and political mobilization; but in terms of more personal issues, these media served as tools for engaging anonymously in, for example, chat rooms where the informants could talk openly about questions and problems concerning sex and bodies, and so on. To them, these forums were more important than any other 'real life' space and they felt that the anonymity and uninhibited atmosphere in them were more honest and secure.

Those who had more education, mobility and individual freedom in real life also expressed greater on-line liberty and independence. They also talked differently about representation, self-representation and how they related to the mediated world. It appeared more natural for them to conceive of themselves as both objects and subjects, and they could play with their identity. Not surprisingly, this communicative capital also made them feel more comfortable and confident in relation to media, and made it natural to perceive themselves as participating in and producing media content. Community media were important not only for the relevance of the topics and the proximity to production, but also because the underlying message was that working with media or making one's voice heard is not impossible.

I am not in Managua so I never listened to *Mujeres Arriba*, but I admire them for what they do, their courage. I think it would be possible here too, to do something like that. But talk about sex...I don't know. Or, well yes. If they can do it why couldn't I do it?

Notes

1. The concept of intersectionality was first used by the feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, but spread quickly after she introduced the term at the World Conference Against Racism in 2001 (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In 2002, at the 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, "the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes from a gender perspective" was recognized (Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L.59). However, the idea of multiple forms of oppression is not new. For my research, an intersectionality perspective implies that the construction of identity depends on social divisions, such as gender, race, social class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, disability, civic status, etc. Identities are regarded as fluid and cannot be essentialized.

2. Grupo Venancia is a feminist, civil society organization located in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. It was founded in 1991. The name Venancia derives from a rural woman who fought for better education and living conditions in the 1960s and who joined forces with the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, Sandinista National Liberation Front) and participated in the 1979 revolution. Grupo Venancia specializes in popular education and communication and its members are active at local, national and international levels.
3. This radio show was financed by FED (El Fondo para la Equidad de Género y los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos), a multi donor foundation for gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights operating in Nicaragua since 2006. The young women running the show were members of a feminist youth organization and had received training in radio production at Puntos de Encuentro (a Nicaraguan NGO in communication for social change). All decisions regarding the content and structure of the show were taken by the team.
4. Here, I have chosen to adopt an understanding of 'media culture' in a rather broad sense, taking into account not only the actual use and knowledge of the informants, but also the wider more indirect, or perhaps more correctly, the implicit influence of the media.
5. In this article, I refer to two focus group interviews, with 6, respectively, 8 participants. The participants were women between the ages of 15 and 19.
6. In Nicaragua, abortion was outlawed completely in 2007.

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Youth, Media, and Respectful Conversations about Health

Lessons Learned from an Exemplary Project in Nepal

Arvind Singhal

The purpose of the present article is to explore the interconnections between youth, media, and health through an analysis of an exemplary project – *Saathi Sanga Manka Kura* (Chatting with My Best Friend) in Nepal.

Here I describe and analyze this mass-media initiative dealing with youth and health, highlighting, first, the important role of formative research in the production of the program and, second, the value of creating a safe media reception environment in which young audience members could engage in open, honest, and authentic conversations about their body, sexuality, health, and interpersonal relationships. I conclude by distilling the lessons learned about the role of mass-mediated interventions in enhancing the health of youth and children.

*Chatting with My Best Friend in Nepal*¹

For the past eleven years, once a week, some 6.5 million young people in Nepal, including 50 per cent of its 15 to 29 year olds, have been tuning their radio dials to listen to *Saathi Sanga Manka Kura* (SSMK) (Nepali for ‘Chatting with My Best Friend’).² In this one-hour long radio program, the male and female program hosts – both 20-something youth icons – banter with each other, raising issues to equip Nepali youth with life skills to address everyday problems, tackle peer-pressure, and become more informed citizens of Nepal. With over 575 episodes broadcast by mid-2012, SSMK is the longest-running radio program of, by, and for the youth in Nepal, and perhaps the world (www.ssmk.org).

Based on an extensive formative research with a sample of 1,400 youth, SSMK was developed under the aegis of UNICEF Nepal in 2001. Research indicated that Nepali youth had little or no access to reliable life skills information and there were few people whom they could openly talk to about their problems and

concerns (Singhal, 2008). They needed skills to negotiate relationships, continue their education, plan a career, and to stay away from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and IV (intravenous) drug use. Research further indicated that young Nepalese relied heavily on counsel from peers and friends, and that the medium of radio, cheap and accessible to most youth in Nepal, would be the most appropriate to reach them.

Designed to be interactive with listeners as peers, each episode of *SSMK* combines music with drama and an open, honest conversation between its male and female hosts. *SSMK* encourages young people to break the silence and cultural taboos surrounding physiological and emotional needs and curiosities that come naturally with puberty. The radio program is broadcast on the national Radio Nepal, the Equal Access Satellite Channel, and over 30 FM radio stations in the country.

SSMK listeners are invited to write in, text-in, and have open conversations about their anxieties and concerns over social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The tens of thousands of mailed listeners' letters since the program's inception, and some 5,000 sms' that are received each month, indicate that *SSMK* is perceived as a non-judgmental, confidential space, where anyone can open their hearts about sensitive issues and maintain their anonymity (Singhal, 2008). *SSMK* has handled letters such as from a girl whose father had raped her but whose mother would not believe her; a boy whose HIV-positive girlfriend was pressuring him to marry her; a girl who had contracted a sexually transmitted disease and didn't know what to do; and girls facing sexual harassment on the streets.³ Sound advice and referrals are provided, as appropriate.

Every letter that is received by *SSMK* receives a personal response, a key factor that has helped build the trust of its growing pool of listeners.⁴ Along with these responses, appropriate life skills booklets are enclosed. In addition, four to five letters are carefully selected every week to be addressed on air. These letters are discussed within the program team and possible options for addressing the stated problem are broached with experts to ensure that responses are non-judgmental, factually correct, and that they incorporate life skill messages. Listeners write back to say how the life skills techniques discussed in the program and in the letters helped them in dealing with their problems. For instance, a 14-year old listener wrote to *SSMK*:⁵

I was so excited because I could perform *pūja* (a prayer ritual) for my brother but my mother objected because I was having my regular menstruation period. My mother considered performing religious activities during menstruation a dire sin. But I knew she was wrong! *SSMK* had dubbed these rituals as a mere myth. I took a stand and told her that I was not going to follow this superstitious belief. My brothers supported me and later my mother gave in to our wish. Thank you *SSMK* for the knowledge that you have imparted because it

has enabled young people like us to take stand and change the thinking pattern of our rigid society!

SSMK's reach and impact are significantly multiplied by its over 1,200 active listeners' clubs scattered across the country. These *SSMK* listener clubs, networked as a legal entity at the national, regional and district levels, can apply for grants and carry out local development work in their communities.⁶ Most clubs were started by listeners who felt uncomfortable listening to the program at home, and recruited other peers to listen with them. After listening to an episode, once the radio set is switched off, conversations invariably follow. In these conversations, issues are discussed in depth and collective decisions and actions are agreed upon to resolve problems in their communities, or in a particular household. Through interpersonal discussions, peer influence and collective actions, these clubs reinforce the messages raised in *SSMK*, serving as catalysts to bring about positive behavior changes in the lives of listeners (Singhal, 2008). These include mobilizing health workers to provide information on HIV prevention, holding of health camps and campaigns, and the organizing of local discussion groups related to gender and caste discrimination. Several clubs have played a key role in fostering reconciliation activities in the aftermath of the Maoist conflict in Nepal.⁷

SSMK has also spun-off other exciting media initiatives to supplement and complement its mission to empower Nepalese youth. A monthly regional youth magazine is issued from the five development regions of Nepal, as well as a quarterly magazine, *Manka Kura* (Matters Close to the Heart), from *SSMK* headquarters in Kathmandu. Strategically, these magazines are published in coordination with *SSMK*'s expanding listener club network. While providing more shelf life to issues concerning young people, these magazines also facilitate networking between and among listeners' clubs.

For its e-savvy listeners, *SSMK* has an active website, www.ssmk.org, a Facebook page, and a Twitter feed which represent sites for peer conversations, posting of life skills materials, as also another way for the *SSMK* team to collect audience feedback and respond to questions and concerns. Based on feedback from listeners, *SSMK* launched another half hour weekly radio program *Kaamka Koora* (Talking about Work), which focuses on building youth skills for employment and productive careers.

SSMK inspired *Catmandu*, Nepal's first television program hosted, produced, and directed by young people for young people. Broadcast by Nepal Television, the national television network, every Saturday evening, the drama series improvises stories created in *SSMK*, and draws inspiration from the letters and sms' that *SSMK* listeners send in each week.⁸ *Catmandu*'s plot focuses on enhancing life skills for youth. Young protagonists are put through emotional conflicts, tough choices, setbacks and situations that demand empathy, creative and critical thinking, problem solving and other skills (Singhal, 2008).

For sustainability, and to institutionalize *SSMK* for the long-run, UNICEF entrusted the radio program to an NGO – Equal Access Nepal – two years after its inception. Equal Access is an international NGO focusing their efforts on reaching underserved people in developing countries through information and education that is locally produced, is cost-effective and involves the local community. In this respect, *SSMK* could not have a better home.

Over its decade long-tenure, *SSMK*'s focus has shifted with the times, adapting to the changing situation in the country and the resulting demands from the listeners. An AC Nielsen Survey in 2006, as well as a Demographic Health Survey⁹ the same year, revealed *SSMK* to be the most popular program for young people in Nepal. Research indicated that regular *SSMK* listeners not only stayed in school longer for educational achievement, but also were less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors.

SSMK's audience success has inspired similar youth, media, and health projects in Cambodia and Laos. In Laos, a radio show *We Can Do It* boasts a regular youth audience of a million Cambodian youth.

Lessons learned

What lessons can be distilled from the experiences of *Saathi Sanga Manka Kura* in Nepal about the role of mass-mediated interventions in enhancing the health of youth and children? Here I distill the *principles* behind the effectiveness of this youth, media, and health project, and do not wish to recommend the lessons as prescriptions. In communication for social change projects context matters and one size does not fit all.

1. *SSMK* points to the value of *formative research* in conceptualizing a youth, media, and healthy lifestyles project. Based on a thorough understanding of the needs, aspirations and problems of youth in Nepal, a safe interactional mass-mediated space was creatively established and maintained.
2. *SSMK* purposely employed an engaging and *respectful tone*. Most youth-based healthy initiatives have a preachy tone, that is, “These are the life skills you need; so you need to listen to me” (Singhal, 2008). *SSMK* was about real-life experience sharing, a less didactic and non-threatening approach than “telling” people what to do. Further, people connect better with real life stories, than with abstract ideas and concepts. Stories, whether real or fictional, allow for emotive engagement.
3. *SSMK* provided a *safe space* both on-air and on-the-ground (in listening clubs, for instance) so that audience members could dialogue, voice opinions, share experiences, challenge biases, negotiate different viewpoints, and make decisions about how and where to create change in their lives.

The lever of discovery, decision-making, and action resided with the young audience members in Nepal.

4. *SSMK* views communication processes not just as an accompaniment or an embellishment to accomplish social change, but as an *integral* part of the change enterprise. Such a communication-centric focus geared to questioning existing social realities, and the opening up of communicative spaces to broach new possibilities, is rare. *SSMK* puts communication front and center in articulating a rich and diverse identity for Nepali youth, and in defining their present and future function in society.
5. *SSMK* is anchored on *locally-produced media* fare which serves as the scaffolding for a more complex, multi-layered set of communication interventions coupled with advocacy, social mobilization, and behavior change communication. In this sense, *SSMK* understands the value of local knowledge and capacity-building along with training and experience-sharing.

Notes

1. This case is based on the present author's visit to Equal Access, Nepal on 11th January, 2008, and a several-hour meeting with the young team of *SSMK* and Nirmal Prasad Rijal, the Nepal Country Director of Equal Access. Further information on this program can be found on www.ssmk.org and http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/nepal_1454.html
2. See www.ssmk.org
3. Linnie Rawlinson (2007). Community Radio breaks taboos, brings education in Nepal, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/TECH/11/16/chatting.bestfriend>
4. Personal interview with the *SSMK* team in Kathmandu, January 11, 2008
5. Quoted in <http://ssmk.org/saathi-sanga-manka-kura-chatting-my-best-friend>
6. The network of *SSMK* clubs plays a key role in the publication and distribution of magazines and materials such as *Manka Kura* (Matters Close to the Heart).
7. e-mail correspondence with Equal Access Nepal's country Director, Nirmal Rijal, on March 12, 2008
8. See http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_8802.html
9. http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/nepal_1454.html

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Children as Agents for Social Change

Soul Buddyz and Soul Buddyz Club

Susan Goldstein

In the year 2000, South Africa was six years into its new democracy; numerous reforms had been introduced including free primary health care for pregnant women and children under 6 years old. However, the AIDS epidemic was beginning to escalate and AIDS denialism at its highest levels in the country was rife. Gains in health were being eroded by AIDS and, due to very poor education and poor environments, preventable illness was still a huge problem. Soul City, a South African NGO using television, radio and easy to read print, became a household brand for information about health and development. However, although children were a substantial audience, the development process did not include children, nor did it directly address children's issues. Thus, *Soul Buddyz*, a separate edutainment vehicle for children, was born.

Soul Buddyz in the media

The *Soul Buddyz* television programme was shaped by an extensive consultation process, a pilot and intense qualitative research with children and parents. The *Soul Buddyz* target age group was 8-12 years, and the approach was a rights-based approach.¹ The television was developed bearing in mind the issues that came up in research, such as the inability of children to express their emotions, the belief of parents that children were not capable of understanding issues and children's lack of aspirations, particularly among girls. At the time, there was still an almost total separation of races in relation to where people lived and schooled. In addition, there are 11 official languages in South Africa and children in this age group may not understand languages other than their home language.

The *Soul Buddyz* television programme was a 26 episode, half hour series about a group of children who met up in a park after school and formed a

group called the Soul Buddyz. Each child in the group was the protagonist of a two episode story which was filmed from their point of view, dealing with a particular health related issue like bullying, gun safety, HIV or sexual abuse. To enable other children to understand their inner thoughts, there was a child's voice-over describing how the child felt. The child also had fantasies to bring in their imagination and to enable a bit of fun. After the production of each episode, it was shown to a variety of children and their responses were recorded (Buddy Buzz) to enable their voices and the reality of the issues to be emphasized.

Critical to the *Soul Buddyz* series was that the children were the protagonists and that they investigated, and tried to solve their problems. For some problems they needed adults to assist (for example child abuse) and for others (like bullying) they tried a number of ways to deal with it and finally found that standing together was effective.

Soul Buddyz radio in 9 languages was a drama also featuring children as protagonists.

The *Soul Buddyz* print material built on the television and the edutainment approach. Each chapter was introduced by a photo comic of the original story and this was followed by true stories, exercises, projects and information boxes. The materials were young and colorful.

The evaluation of *Soul Buddyz* (both quantitative and qualitative) showed that it was a huge success. The findings of the *Soul Buddyz* evaluation indicated that, in terms of audience reach and reception, Soul Buddyz reached an unprecedented 67 percent of the children in the age range, having watched, listened to or read *Soul Buddyz* material.² Further, the *Soul Buddyz* television programme was the favourite programme on television at the time.

I like Soul Buddyz because it teaches what is right and what is wrong. (peri-urban school child)

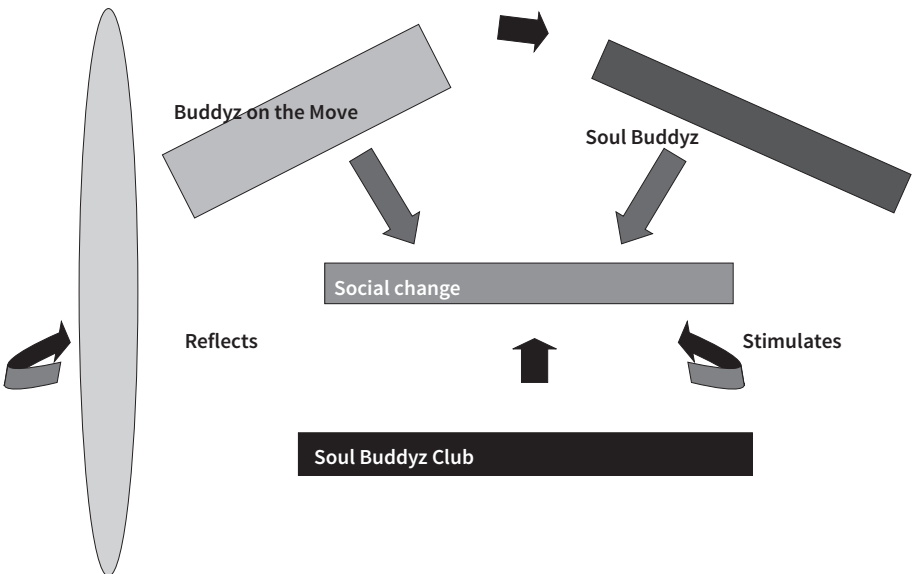
Over 70 percent of children talked about things they had seen on TV, or read in the booklet. The evaluation also showed that there were significant associations between improved awareness, knowledge and attitudes in relation to children's rights, youth sexuality and bullying and exposure to *Soul Buddyz* materials after controlling for possible confounders.

We faced a number of challenges in developing and producing the *Soul Buddyz* series. In South Africa there had never been radio drama performed by children; the radio producers wanted to use adult voices to represent children. To overcome this, Soul City formed a partnership with the BBC who sent out experienced child producers to train the South African producers and in an interactive way enabled them to work with children. A second challenge is that in South Africa there are 11 official languages. This creates a tension at a national level as all children want to hear their language spoken, and not all children

in the 8-12 year age group read well enough to follow sub-titles. In an attempt to overcome this, the children (protagonists) spoke English when together and in school, but at home spoke their home language. The *Soul Buddyz* group had children who spoke a variety of languages. In addition, after filming of an episode, it was shown to groups of children whose comments were recorded in their home language (Buddyz Buzz). Finally the stories were designed to be as visual as possible so that, even if one didn't understand the language, one could follow the story.

After the airing of the first series of *Soul Buddyz* there was a huge response from children wanting to be a "Soul Buddy". This prompted the process of developing the Soul Buddyz Club. The model is illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1. *Soul Buddyz* and Club model of change



Soul Buddyz Club

The Soul Buddyz Club engages with children, helping them to take positive action in their own lives and communities. Soul Buddyz Club is the platform where children are exposed to positive peer interaction, information about their health and rights as well as fun and adventure to stimulate their growing minds.

Children become members of the Soul Buddyz Club and meet after school, usually once a week. The Club is based on the following principles:

- children are proactive, valuable and productive members of the community
- children are responsible agents for change
- non-discrimination and gender sensitivity
- the best interests of all children
- respect for the right to life, survival and development
- alternate values to the dominant individual, consumerist set of values
- respect for the views of all children
- respect for, exploration and interaction with the environment
- problem-solving and encouraging active learning

Soul Buddyz is committed to promoting the rights and potential of all children. Engaging with children about every aspect of the Soul Buddyz Club (i.e., materials, activities and general well-being) is fundamental to the success and sustainability of the project. There are currently over 7,000 clubs around the country, reaching 145,000 children.

Members are between the ages of 8-14 and membership is free. All Soul Buddyz Club activities are supported by trained educators or librarians who have volunteered to support children. Learners and educators are recruited via their schools. Recruiting members has never posed any challenges. In fact we are usually overwhelmed with requests.

Soul Buddyz Club materials include Soul Buddyz Club unit guides, posters, the *Club Zone* magazine (see example in Box 1) and a magazine for parents. The unit guides provide information and activities relating to the themes covered by SCI (Soul City Institute) and the *Soul Buddyz* television drama.

- Children discuss and debate the issues raised in the Soul Buddyz Club quarterly magazine and posters.
- They complete projects relating to various health and development issues such as HIV and AIDS, sexuality, caring for the environment, bullying, nutrition and alcohol free schools.
- They do research within their communities about issues which affect children.
- They identify vulnerable children and families and assist them in various ways.
- They prepare dramas and present these within their schools.
- They network with local organizations, e.g., clinics, community radio stations.

Box 1. An extract from a Soul Buddyz Club Zone, the quarterly magazine that goes to all members:

What would you do if you were the president?

Maybe one day a Buddy will become president of South Africa. Job! Imagine that! Club Zone asked the Rise-Up Buddyz to tell us the first thing they would do if they became president. Read what some of the Buddyz said:

If I were president I would make sure that children who are poor don't pay school fees. I would also get donations for children who don't have school uniforms. (Thandiwe Mazibuko)

Many people don't have jobs. I would assist people to start businesses so that they can work for themselves. (Nonsikelelo Maseko)

People from other African countries should be able to stay in South Africa. I would make sure that they are treated fairly. (Bheki Buthelezi)

I would make sure that I stop the spread of HIV. I would encourage young people in the country to stay away from sex. (Lebogang Ncokwana)

I would put money in making medicine that can cure HIV and Aids. These medicines would be given to people for free to patients. (Themba Thanjekwayo)

I would improve the hospitals and how the patients are treated there. Some nurses keep patients waiting and dying while they take long breaks. (Kgomotso Mangena)

Over the years, we have seen many clubs doing excellent work in their communities, and we have been overwhelmed by the motivation and commitment of clubs and the pace at which they have worked. However, there are some clubs that do not communicate about their work and some that are not doing any work. In order to maintain and increase motivation, we introduced an incentive system not only to encourage and affirm existing activities, but also to encourage continued activities.

Arising from the Soul Buddyz Club was the realisation that the excellent work it was doing was going unrecognised and that there was an opportunity to motivate children not in the Soul Buddyz Club to engage in similar work. The *Buddyz on the Move (BOM)* docudrama was born. This television show was developed and shot working with the Soul Buddyz Club. Clubs would send in a proposal about their project and, from the many, 26 (the number of episodes) were selected. The Soul Buddyz Club and production team would then go to each club and follow them doing their projects (see example in Box 2). *BOM* is fascinating, moving and often fun.

Seeing what children are capable of doing in their communities is eye-opening, even for those who believe in children's agency. The biggest challenge with *BOM* was getting the public broadcaster to air it at a reasonable time. It was aired at

Box 2. BOM Badimong Buddies

The episode tells the story of Jimmy. The Soul Buddyz Club realised that Jimmy did not come to school regularly. Recognising that all children have a right to go to school, they began to investigate why Jimmy was not attending school. In the process they discovered that Jimmy was staying home to assist his sick mother. He was cooking, cleaning and looking after his younger siblings. The Soul Buddyz Club found a local organisation that did “home based care” and asked if they could assist Jimmy’s family. They also called a meeting at the school to which the principal, teachers, Jimmy’s mother and the local organisation were invited. At this meeting Jimmy’s plight was discussed and it was resolved to ensure that Jimmy’s mother was assisted so that Jimmy could attend school. In the meeting, Jimmy’s mother said “these children think better than the adults”.

7.30 a.m. on a Saturday and, thus, only reached very small audiences. Despite it being such an important programme about real children and their rights, it became unsustainable to continue producing it.

Between 2008 and 2010, a quasi-experimental evaluation of Soul Buddyz Club was conducted by Clacherty and associates. The study compared Soul Buddyz Club groups with non-club groups from a similar area and background. The study looked at four main domains: knowledge, social conscience, social skills and emotional health. The study was both quantitative and qualitative. The findings relating to each of the four domains are presented here (the quotations are from the report).³

Knowledge

The children’s knowledge in the Soul Buddyz Club and control groups did not differ significantly over the period; however, Soul Buddyz Club groups were more able to articulate and apply the knowledge that they had acquired.

This evidence of internalized information, the ability to act on it, and a sense of agency can together be seen as a more valuable gain than mere information around HIV protection as it is commonly given to children in all schools.

Social conscience

Soul Buddyz Clubs were found to have a statistically significantly higher level of involvement in their communities and a higher level of responsibility and active engagement with community social problems than the control groups.

From this evidence it is clear that children’s membership of Soul Buddyz clubs in 2008/2009 had had a demonstrable impact on their community involvement

and their engagement with the social problems that surround them as appropriate to their ages.

In addition:

[...the] Soul Buddyz club experiences had given these children the confidence and commitment to take action on their own initiative in order to help their peers or community. And this, in turn, has given these children a sense of agency and of their own power as individuals.

Social skills

By 2010, most of the Soul Buddyz Club children had developed quite sophisticated ways of communicating with peers on disagreements as an alternative to using violence, and they were confident enough to resist peer pressure. Standing up to parents remained difficult for most, but many understood that talking to other trusted adults about a problem is important. These changes were not apparent in the Control group over the same period.

Emotional health

The Soul Buddyz Club generally demonstrated increased empathy, a clearer future orientation, a greater sense of agency and, especially, a higher level of self-confidence. However, what was worrying was an increase in depression scores in 2010 (when children were no longer in Soul Buddyz Club but had gone to high school). This is perhaps indicative of a harsher environment in high school and of the contrast for children coming from the Soul Buddyz Club supportive environment to one where they have no formal social support group.

The findings of the study have been very useful in helping Soul Buddyz Club to look at improving focus and finding areas to strengthen. A big gap that SCI (Soul City Institute) is unable to fulfill due to lack of funding is supporting children into high school and through the first two years there.

Discussion

The *Soul Buddyz* / Soul Buddyz Club programme has grown over the years with increasing support from the education departments in all the provinces, and particularly from the teachers and schools. The value of the clubs has been recognised, particularly in under-resourced schools which are not able to provide the range of extracurricular activities that wealthier schools are able to. Given the massive divide in South Africa between the rich and poor (South Africa has a Gini coefficient of ca. 0.66 which is among the highest in the world, and unfortunately it hasn't decreased substantially since 1994).⁴ Long term development depends not only on formal education, but also on the ability of South African children to

understand democracy and to become active citizens, able to negotiate the harsh environment that is South Africa. *Soul Buddyz* and Soul Buddyz Club contribute to this by engaging children as actors and not passive recipients, and by building their skills. The philosophies of working together and gender equality are critical to the Soul Buddyz Club ethos, but they are generally not supported in the main stream media and the individualised and consumerist society that is the main stream in South Africa. This means that, although *Soul Buddyz* and Soul Buddyz Club present an alternative vision and provide support to young children, this support is not continued into high school where children continue to be vulnerable. (This is evidenced by the increase in the depression scores.) Ideally, the Soul Buddyz Club would be able to expand to high schools and continue at least into the first year-grade. Perhaps this will happen at some point in the future.

What is not clear is what impact Soul Buddyz Club has had for the thousands of children passing through in the long term. There is anecdotal evidence that some children have been able to achieve much more than they would ever have dreamed of without Soul Buddyz Club, but a long term follow up study is important to understand whether the long term health and development aims of *Soul Buddyz* and Soul Buddyz Club are achieved.

Future directions

Soul Buddyz Club is working more and more closely with the provincial departments of education and, with dwindling donor funding, new ways of supporting the clubs through field work will have to be found. Soul Buddyz Club is piloting a peer support programme that aims to enable children to support each other into the high school years. The Soul Buddyz Club Movement currently stands at 140,000 children, and ensuring that these children remain supported, enabled and stimulated is still an enormous task. Reviving the *BOM* side of the Soul Buddyz Club would be very exciting but, in the depressed economic climate, it is not likely.

The *Soul Buddyz* / Soul Buddyz Club / *Buddyz on the Move* model of television and social activism is a unique one for children. SCI and partners have been able to demonstrate significant change in many children's lives in South Africa.

Notes

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2. Scheepers E. Soul Buddyz Summary Evaluation Report. Soul City. 2001. Johannesburg
3. Clacherty G, Dlamini K, Donald D. Soul Buddyz Club Evaluation. Longitudinal Research Study. Final Report June 2010. Johannesburg.
4. Development Indicators 2009. South African Presidency. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/learning/me/indicators/2009/indicators.pdf>

Talking about Violence with Children

A Case Study of Children's Participation in the Communication Plan on Stopping Violence against Children in China

Bu Wei

Violence against children (VAC) is not only an issue of human rights but also of children's health. As in many countries in the world, VAC, in the form of physical violence, mental violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, neglect, and so on, is a common phenomenon in Chinese society. However, it is not considered to be an issue that requires a solution, as such violence mostly happens in the private sphere or during teaching at schools. The violence used is also viewed as an educational means, making VAC natural and even legal.

VAC was first given attention on an international level at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2001. In that year, the UN General Assembly asked the UN Secretary-General for an official study on VAC. This study was to look at the problem of VAC across the world and examine ideas on what could be done about it. The study was conducted using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guidance tool. The convention stresses children's rights to bodily and personal integrity and points out that member states are obligated to protect children from physical and mental violence.

On January 12, 2003, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi A. Annan, appointed Dr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro from Brazil as an independent expert to lead the global study on VAC. The study was intended to unveil in depth the prevailing situation, nature and cause of VAC, and put forward appropriate action plans to UN member states, UN organizations and civil society to prevent VAC. In 2004, the UN distributed a questionnaire to various national governments. To answer the questionnaire, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China convened a national coordination meeting with the participation of more than ten ministries and commissions on July 22-23, 2004, in Beijing. After the meeting, on August 2, 2004, the Chinese Government submitted the questionnaire feedback and was one of the earliest countries to respond to the questionnaire.

In 2005, UNICEF and All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) invited experts from the public health field to conduct a preliminary survey on the prevalence of VAC in six provinces/cities (Shaanxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Hubei, Heilongjiang, and Beijing). The results of this survey suggest that child abuse is a common problem in China. Child abuse is strongly associated with youth depression, suicidal intent, drinking alcohol, fighting and early sexual intercourse.¹ The results highlight the need for further studies and the introduction of child abuse prevention programs, including the provision of health and legal services for victims, and programs for raising public awareness of VAC. On May 16-17, 2005, the ACWF joined with UNICEF to hold the National Consultation on VAC in Beijing, China. Though Chinese civil society has launched several prevention and intervention programs against VAC (for example, China National Lawyers' Association for Protection of Minors and Shaanxi Association for Prevention of Child Abuse to provide legal aid for child victims), it was the first time that the issue of VAC was considered and responded to at a national level in China.

Upon the advocacy of the international community and advances from the Chinese Government, ACWF and UNICEF China launched cooperative pilot projects for the prevention of and intervention in VAC in the Guangdong, Shaanxi and Zhejiang provinces from 2006 to 2010. The aims of the pilot projects were to: (1) raise the awareness and sensitivities of governments, NGOs, schools, communities and families regarding VAC; (2) reinforce their responses, responsibilities and abilities regarding the prevention of and intervention in VAC; (3) explore the methodology on the prevention of and intervention in VAC in a Chinese context. Commissioned by UNICEF and ACWF International Department, I conducted the baseline survey and some participatory training workshops for communication plans at pilot project sites. This article focuses on the children's participation in the communication campaign on stopping VAC in China, and discusses the possibilities, action methods, and lessons from the children's participation through a case study. It comprises three parts: 1. theories and practice of children's participation in international and Chinese contexts; 2. the case study; and 3. conclusion and discussion.

Theories and practice of children's participation in international and Chinese contexts

In law, children's participation, as one of the rights of the child, comes from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). According to the CRC, children have four fundamental rights: the right to survival, the right to development, the right to protection and the right to participation. At present, almost all countries have signed and ratified the UN CRC. That means that governments should fulfill

all of their obligations as provided in the CRC to safeguard the human rights of the child, including children's right to participation.

In the CRC, the clauses regarding children's participation rights are mainly embodied in Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Article 12 is usually regarded as the main clause on children's participation rights. It says that:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child;
[and] For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child [...].

Article 13 focuses on children's freedom of expression, including:

[...] freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. [...]

This article is also viewed as the right to information.

Article 14 expresses that children have the right to freedom of thought and religion.

Article 15 endows children with the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, with the preconditions of not threatening national security or public safety, and not impairing public health, morals or freedoms of others.

In addition, other articles and clauses in the CRC support children's right to participation, including: the principle of non-discrimination in Article 2, the principle of the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in Article 3, the principle of providing diverse and proper information for children in Article 17, disabled children's right of participation in Article 23, the principle of education of the child in Article 29 and, in Article 31:

[...] States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 3 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Minors*, which was revised in 2006, stipulates that "minors have such rights as right to survival, right to development, right to being protected and right to participation". It is the first time in China that the law ensures that children have the right to participation. The right to participation challenges traditional ideologies and cultures, where the child was considered to be the private property of a family,

and required to obey the adults. The CRC empowers children as individuals with independent personalities rather than subsidiaries of adults.

However, what is child participation? We noticed that the CRC did not provide an explanation. The most common misunderstanding about children's participation is that children's "attendance" or "appearance" at public meetings is regarded as "children's participation". Usually, a child who makes a speech at a conference is viewed by adults as a "representative" of good children, rather than the children's representative. Instructed by adults, these children tend to declaim like adults and express adult viewpoints in an imitating way. If a child is merely requested to read out or perform what adults have prepared beforehand, this actually constitutes adults controlling the child or using the child as an ornament for the activity, and it is not children's participation at all.

Actually, it is difficult to find a perfect or accepted definition of "children's participation" as children's participation is comprised of different types, different areas and different roles. Nonetheless, what lies at the core is the "rights". Children's participation, in a real sense, should be a process in which all children are able to share the rights. By "rights" is meant: firstly, children have the right to express opinions about their own matters and these opinions should be heard, for it is also children's right that adults should hear children's voices (see Article 12 and Article 13 of the CRC). Secondly, children can become capable of exercising their rights through participation, that is, empowerment.

Many books on child participation mention "the ladder of children's participation" ² which, in a low-to-high order, is: (1) manipulation; (2) decoration; (3) tokenism; (4) assigned but informed; (5) consulted and informed; (6) adult-initiated, shared decisions with children; (7) child-initiated and directed; and (8) child-initiated, shared decisions with adults. On this ladder, the first, second and third steps are not regarded as participation, but are called non-participation. Some experts condense these 8 steps into 5 steps,³ which are as follows: (1) coercion "action on" children, including manipulation, decoration and tokenism; (2) informing "action for" children; (3) consultation "action with/by" children; (4) collaboration and partnership "action with" children, including adult-initiated, child-initiated, and jointly initiated action by children and adults; (5) children taking a leading role "action by", that is, child-initiated and directed action: children set the agenda and are politically active.

The advantages of using the "ladder of participation" are: (1) helping beginners know what participation is, thus distinguishing between real participation and false participation; (2) making readers aware that there are actually varying degrees of children's participation. However, relying too much on the "ladder of participation" can be risky or encourage thinking that the higher the step, the better the degree of participation. In fact, in the practice of children's participation, it is not difficult to see that neither good nor poor participation is determined

by the steps (or the degrees of children's participation), but is based on many factors, such as the influence of children's opinions on decision-making and actions/social changes, the representativeness of children's interests as a group and the principle of children's best interests. Therefore, apart from the three steps of non-participation (manipulation, decoration and tokenism), all of the other steps can be seen as various types of child participation, without any difference in higher or lower status. Children's participation is of value as long as it can increase children's benefits based on the principle of children's best interests.

In practice, "empowerment-oriented interventions" usually raise more concerns regarding different groups of disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender, while they neglect youth and child groups. This article discusses youth empowerment through participation. It is very important that we understand the relationship between participation and empowerment. Firstly, participation on an individual level is the main means of involving initiating organizations with others, of gaining access to resources, so that they can raise their awareness, establish confidence, develop critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment and learn to control their lives. Also, on organizational and community levels, participation can help to identify and improve these actions and goal achievement. In turn, empowerment is the goal of participation at different levels. Empowerment is a process that strengthens children's abilities to exercise their rights.

The case study: participatory workshop for children on stopping VAC

Usually, communication plans or actions are discussed and designed at the beginning of a pilot project. The purpose is to develop a comprehensive communication strategy for the promotion of a violence-free environment for children, and to explore methods of developing clear and effective programs concerning communication activities including advocacy, social mobilization and Behavioral Change Communication (BCC).

UNICEF places great emphasis on children's participation in the VAC issue as part of a holistic approach to affecting change. However, children's participation has many approaches – from conference, forum, performance, community meeting to child-led surveys. If empowerment is identified as an aim and a process that strengthens children's abilities to exercise their rights, we considered that a participatory workshop was the best choice in which child participants would have enough time to discuss the problems they faced, open their vision, learn new knowledge and find solutions together.

Therefore, in this pilot project, we developed a communication plan through a participatory workshop. On August 17-18, 2007, the participatory workshop was conducted among children, aged 9-12 years old (22 girls and 10 boys) in a

village in the Guangdong province. All child participants were migrant children.⁴ The aim of the workshop was to develop a communication plan by children for children and adults in community.

The workshop was divided into four parts: (1) Our rights; (2) Violence in our lives; (3) Children making changes; and (4) Communication plan. Each part lasted 2-3 hours. UNICEF projects provide some tools for participatory assessment on violence, e.g., role playing, drawing or picture construction, mapping and ranking responses, brainstorming, storytelling, comics, free writing and group discussions.⁵ We used pictures, group discussion, body mapping, storytelling, role playing, drama, rewriting stories and so on.

Our rights

The CRC and the rights of the child are not common sense or part of mainstream ideology in Chinese society, and even many of the children and their parents and teachers did not know anything about them. Therefore, understanding the CRC and the rights of the child is usually the first piece of content in any training workshop on children's issues in China. "Our rights" were introduced in activity 1, group discussion, and activity 2, drawing. In the group discussion, we invited the child participants to discuss questions such as "what is different between children and adults" and "what kind of help do children need when they are under 18 years of age". This discussion made children think about "needs" and "wants" and rights which meet their needs. In the drawing activity, children presented in 30 pictures the rights that society has not realized. Though the child participants understood many different rights of the child, they preferred to focus on the issue of violence as follows.

From the group discussion:

Adults can beat children but children can't beat adults. That is an important difference between children and adults.

My unhappy thing is about violence. When I do something wrong, my parent or teachers beat me or scold me. They should know that violence will not be useful for promoting my achievement in school. Violence made me hate them.

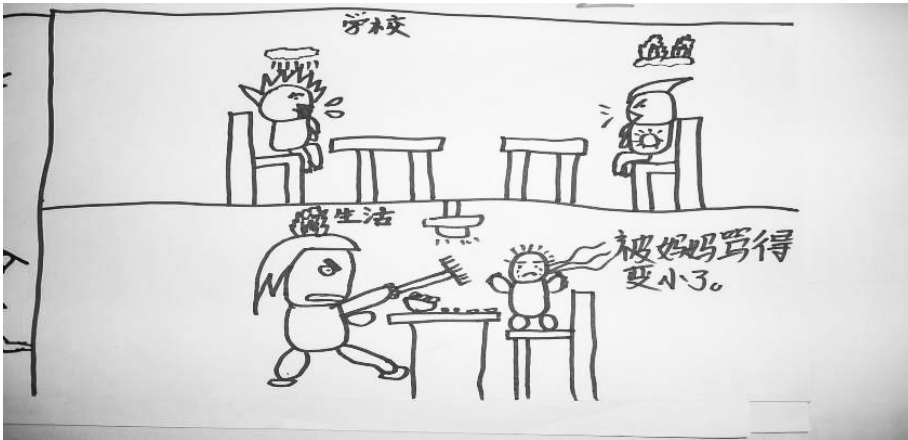
In pictures (see example in Figure 1), the child participants said:

Violence made me smaller and smaller, I felt that I am nothing.

When I am scolded, I can't see the blue sky and a black cloud is coming.

This discussion established the relationship between violence in daily lives and the rights of the child, and encouraged the children to discuss the issue of violence within the framework of children's rights.

Figure 1. An example of children's drawings on violence



Reproduced with permission from the child participant.

Violence in our lives

Before the workshop, we completed a baseline survey at the project site. It was a participatory baseline survey among children. In the survey, we tried to determine the definition of violence from children's perspectives and experiences in three steps. Step 1: focus groups in which we visited circa 100 children to talk about violence in their lives; step 2: designing questionnaires from children's perspectives and experiences and collecting data at pilot sites; and step 3: discussing the baseline survey data with children in participatory training workshops. The aim of this part is to encourage children to identify violence at home, in schools and in community within the framework of children's rights, and discuss the definitions of VAC from their child perspectives and experiences.

In the second part of workshop, we categorized some of the sentences from the baseline survey into three groups: family violence,⁶ bullying in school,⁷ and teacher violence.⁸ Thirty-two child participants were divided into four groups to discuss four questions: (1) Are these situations violence? Which situation is and which is not? How do you define the term "violence"? (2) Have the following situations happened to you in the past year? How do you feel it if they did, and what was the result? (3) Which three situations are most harmful to you? Please rank them; and (4) Have you found any other violence in your daily life besides these situations?

After a one hour discussion, each group presented their answers and arguments. They approved the definition of violence by UNICEF, that is, "violence takes place when someone uses their strength or their position of power to hurt someone else on purpose, not by accident" and "the harm involved can be to a

person's mind and their general health and well-being, as well as to their body".⁹ The child participants found that violence, including physical, mental and sexual violence, often happened at home and in school. Within families, children pointed out that parents beating, insulting or cursing them was a common phenomenon, and they identified other types of violence such as "confinement as a punishment", "threatening the child that she/he will be abandoned", and "parents forbidding us to eat meals". In school, the children hated bullying, including "classmates call me names (names I hate to hear)", "one or more classmates gang up on me", and "some classmates tease me", and the children condemned violence from teachers, such as "the teacher hits me (e.g., ear-twisting, face-slapping, pricking with needles, hand-caning, kicking and pushing, etc.)", "the teacher calls me 'stupid' or 'good for nothing', etc.", "the teacher throws books, pieces of chalk or bags at me or tears up my notebooks", and "the teacher calls me 'shameless' or 'shit' ". This activity broke the silence surrounding VAC in their lives. Before the workshop, there were many reasons why much of the violence remained hidden because of "fear", "stigma", it is "normal", "not reported" and "not recorded". Now, VAC has become visible and identifies as a problem we need to take action to end.

Children making changes

In the part "Children making changes", we invited four groups to each produce a drama "Unhappy Ending and Happy Ending". Here, children worked together to discuss their experiences and methods to respond to issues of violence, and they were encouraged to think about the best actions children could take. For example, we described two situations and encouraged the children to explore the best action methods to end VAC in the situations.

Situation 1: Xiao Li is 11 years old. She is always cursed and beaten by her mother because of her poor achievement at school. Today, Xiao Li didn't pass her test, and she doesn't dare go home for fear that ...

Action method for children to take: invite Xiao Li's mother to join the VAC training workshop; Xiao Li's friends will talk about VAC with her mother...

Situation 2: Teacher Zhang often sneers or laughs at students who are low achievers at school. Today, teacher Zhang listed the students' names by examination results, and ordered the last three students to give the first three students presents...

Action method for children to take: the last three students refuse to give the presents and together make a short speech on dignity and equality.

All child participants worked hard to try to find a "happy ending" and, gradually, established their confidence in drama performance.

Communication plan

The first three parts of the workshop were aimed at promoting children's awareness of VAC. In the last part, children would develop a "Communication plan" for their community.

Developing a communication plan is a process in which we must do situation analysis, audience analysis and compose a communication strategy including source strategy, message strategy, channel strategy and dissemination strategy. We appointed each group to be the actor to change a target group (parents, teachers, young aggressors and child victims), and then provided each group with a check list to encourage them to find answers together so that they could produce an effective communication plan. The child participants were encouraged to present their plan as a drama performance.

The check list included the following questions:

- What is our objective of communication?
- Who needs to be mobilized in order to get things done? And whom do we want to reach? (Target audiences)
- What are their characteristics? (Defining target groups to communicate with, knowing relevant characteristics: age, residence, educational levels, income levels, gender, household size, civil status, value system, customs and beliefs, aspirations, expectations, religion, ethnic group, dialect spoken, leisure activities, membership in organizations, and so on)
- How do they use media? (Access to mass media, media preferences, viewing and listening habits; also, traditional or folk media such as: street theatre, community theatre, songs, storytelling, puppet theatre; new media, such as: the Internet, web pages, e-mail, mobile phones; display media, such as: billboards, electronic billboards, bulletin boards, transit advertising, photo exhibitions, dioramas and tarpaulins.)
- How about their KAP (Knowledge: what do they know? Attitude: how do they feel? Practice: what is their behavior?) of VAC?
- What do we want them to do? (Behavior to promote)
- Why are they not doing it? (Barriers to ideal behavior)
- What can help them do it? (Factors encouraging ideal behavior)
- Who are their credible sources of information? (Source strategy)
- What do we need to tell them? (Message strategy)
- How do we tell them? Using what communication media? (Channel strategy)

- What is the best time and place to tell them what we have to say? Where, when and how will the audience access your message/material? (Dissemination strategy)

The child participants discussed the check list and developed four communication plans. For example, one group presented their plan targeted at violent parents. They did the analysis according to the check list: (1) mothers more often than fathers beat and scold children because they must look after the children after work, and fathers are usually not at home; most mothers are about 35 years old, have finished middle or high school, they work and they think that violence is useful and good for educating children; (2) we hope that their awareness of VAC is raised and that they realize that violence is wrong and harmful to children; (3) mothers never know anything about children's rights and the consequences of VAC; (4) they like to listen to teachers and educational experts; (5) they like to spend time with their children, and they like to watch TV, surf the Internet and shop; (6) we should tell them "violence is not a good method of education, and it will be harmful to children". After discussing the check list, these children developed some action methods: inviting parents to join a training workshop on child education in the community; organizing a parents' club to discuss family issues; doing performances by children in the community; and teachers educating about VAC by visiting families. The most creative activity the children developed was a "Birthday Party". They explained that a "mother's birthday or the child's birthday is a special day when a mother loves her children very much, and they can invite many of the child's friends to join the party by doing a performance about VAC". "It must be useful for parents", one participant said confidently.

Thus, for example, these and other actions were what they would like to do:

- Target teacher group: QQ (a large online network in China); meetings; speeches; letters.
- Target parent group: birthday party; family visit; parent club; drama; workshop on child education.
- Target community group: children's working group; drama; community center for migrant children; children's forum; child-led media; child-led family visit.

In the part on the communication plan, the children also produced 50 slogans for their posters, for example: "Violence is the worst friend of children, while peace is our best friend", "All we are saying: goodbye to violence", "Violence once can affect children's whole lives", "I hate violence just the same as a mouse hates a cat", and "May the tree of peace be strong enough and never fall down".

What is the result of children's participation in developing a communication plan? We found that awareness-raising, capability-building, and empowerment were the main results presented in the participatory evaluation among children.

Awareness-raising includes: understanding the rights of the child; knowing what VAC is and that VAC should be ended; and making VAC visible in families, schools and community, i.e., changing VAC from a private to a public issue. In this workshop, children learned a lot about developing a communication plan in which they must try to do situation analysis, audience analysis and communication strategy (source strategy, message strategy, channel strategy and dissemination strategy), and learn how to make use of media including mass media and alternative media to make their voices heard. The workshop also increased the children's ability to negotiate with their parents, peers and teachers and it helped with establishing their confidence.

Conclusion and discussion

The pilot project's participatory workshop taught us a number of lessons.

Lesson 1: Effective communication is not a top-down process. Successful advocacy should be a creative work rooted in children's needs coming from below, which is also a means of empowering children.

Lesson 2: If there is any resource or opportunity for the children, it is possible for them to play an important role in the project. One of the proofs was that when compared with the adults, the children made a better audience analysis.

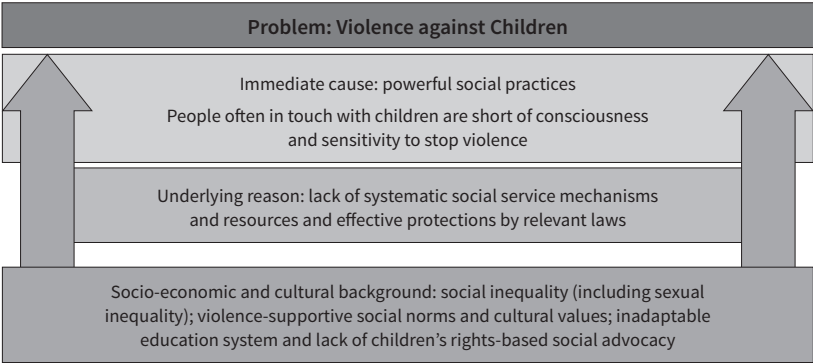
Lesson 3: Children are the experts on child issues; they are knowledgeable about their own lives and can find better solutions with the support of society.

Lesson 4: The main limitation is that there was not more inclusion of children's experience and sub-culture in the pilot project. We did not make use of the local popular culture to develop communication activities with children.

In the pilot project, we analyzed the causes of VAC in China, see Figure 2.

We can see that the ultimate reason for violence lies in the unequal structure of rights. In a family, the relationship between children and their parents is unequal and the children are considered to be the private property of the family; in school, the relationship between students and their teachers is unequal and the students are asked to obey their teachers; both in school and in the community, the relationship between big children and little children is unequal and the big children always dominate the little children; in workplaces, the relationship between employers and child workers is unequal and the children are usually regarded as a tool for their employer to use to make a profit, and not as respected persons with independent personalities. The rights relationship should be reconsidered if violence continues to occur. Any movement or project should include children's participation so that we can change the rights relationship and empower the children.

Figure 2. Analysis of causes of VAC



However, in some projects concerning the prevention of and intervention in VAC, the children are usually regarded as people in need of protection and care; they are seldom regarded as holders of rights. As a result, the keynote of such projects can hardly be put on children’s ability to exercise their rights.

Another problem is that we seldom consider supporting children by establishing their social capital so as to reduce their vulnerability. Social capital in communities and schools includes emergency aid systems, necessary aid systems like accommodation and transportation, economic subsidies or insurance subsidy systems, child care centers, medical aid systems, psychological health aid systems, parents’ education institutions, teachers’ education centers, child-support teams, visiting systems for families in crisis, and so on. Provision of social capital can facilitate children’s abilities to exercise their rights which, coupled with the systematization of children’s participation, enables them to play a more important role in the prevention of and intervention in VAC.

Notes

1. Chen Jingqi, “Analysis of Violent Injury on Children – Childhood Abuse Experiences of 3 577 College and Technical Secondary School Students in Six Provinces & Municipalities and Correlation with Psychological Health and Dangerous Behavior Issue”, May 16-17, 2005, Beijing, United Nations Secretary-General Survey on Violence against Children China Seminar.
2. Edited by Graeme Storer, illustrations by Chanin Balasai: “Promoting the Rights of the Child – A training package on the Convention on the Rights of the Child for ISCA members and partners”, International Save the Children Alliance (Asia), 1994, p.125.
3. Paul Stephenson with Steve Gourley and Glenn Miles, *Child Participation*, 2004, Roots Resource 7, Published by Tearfund, a company limited by guarantee, p.13.
4. According to national statistics, there are over 240 million rural-urban migrant workers. Some rural children went to live near cities with their parents. They are called migrant children.
5. *The VAC – Looking beyond experience: Introduction to the Participatory Assessment Tool (PAT)* by UNICEF.

6. Family violence includes:
 - Father/mother never allows me to do what I want to do
 - Father/mother often doesn't respect me
 - Father/mother forces me to learn something they arranged for me
 - Father/mother goes through my diary or letters, or checks my phone calls
 - Father/mother restricts my affiliation with my friends
 - Father/mother often curses me
 - Father/mother often threatens me
 - Father/mother hits me (twists ears, slaps in the face, etc.)
 - Father/mother hits me with a stick, belt or other objects
 - Father/mother usually doesn't care about me
 - Father/mother humiliates me in front of other people, for example, by praising other children instead of me
 - A family member sexually harasses me
7. Bullying in school includes:
 - Classmates call me names (names I hate to hear)
 - One or more classmates gang up on me
 - Some classmates tease me
 - Some classmates touch my breasts or back, or try to take my clothes off, etc.
 - I am neglected by others, nobody pays attention to me
 - Some classmates threaten to hit me
 - Some classmates curse me with dirty words
 - Some classmates kiss or hold me by force
 - Some classmates tease me or laugh at me
 - Most classmates look down on me
 - I was robbed of money inside school or at entrance of school
 - I am afraid of some classmates so that I have to obey them even when I am angry
 - Some classmates make jokes about my physical handicaps
 - I have handed protection money over to some classmates
8. Teacher violence includes:
 - Teacher hits me (such as ear-twisting, face-slapping, pricking with needles, hand-caning, kicking and pushing, etc.)
 - Teacher calls me "stupid" or "good for nothing", etc.
 - Teacher throws books, pieces of chalk or bags at me or tears up my notebooks
 - Teacher calls me "shameless" or "shit", etc.
 - Teacher sneers at me or laughs at me
 - Teacher punishes me by making me run, stand on one leg, kneel, do push-ups, transcribing or reciting texts many times, etc.
 - Teacher doesn't care about me and doesn't talk to me
 - Teacher sexually harasses me physically or verbally
 - Teacher makes other students neglect me
 - Teacher breaks my personal belongings intentionally
 - Teacher doesn't allow me to participate in class activities
 - Teacher shouts or screams at me angrily
 - Teacher makes students hit themselves
9. See the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children: Adapted for Children and Young People, p.8.

Statistical Indicators on Children in the World

Table 1. Demographics**

	Population 2010 ('000)		Adolescent population (aged 10-19) 2010 as proportion of total population (%)		Life expectancy at birth 2010 (years)	Urbanized population 2010 (%)
	under 18	under 5	total ('000)			
Industrialized countries	203,008	57,212	114,933	12	80	77
Developing countries	1,953,940	563,545	1,061,866	19	68	45
Least developed countries	389,258	122,520	190,445	23	59	29
World	2,201,180	633,933	1,202,710	18	70	50

Source: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/All-tables-including-general-notes-on-data.pdf>, Tables 6, 11.

Table 2. Economic Indicators

	Gross National Income per capita 2010 (US\$)	Population below international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day 2000-2009 ¹ (%)	Child labour ² 2000-2010 ¹ total (%)
Industrialized countries	40,845
Developing countries	3,304	26	17 *
Least developed countries	669	50	29
World	8,796	25	17 *

Notes:

1. Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading.

2. Percentage of children 5-14 years old involved in child labour at the moment of the survey. A child is considered to be involved in child labour under the following conditions: children 5-11 years old who, during the reference week, did at least one hour of economic activity or at least 28 hours of household chores, or children 12-14 years old who, during the reference week, did at least 14 hours of economic activity or at least 28 hours of household chores.

.. Data not available.

* Excludes China.

Source: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/All-tables-including-general-notes-on-data.pdf>, Tables 7, 9.

** Tables 1-8 contain statistics from *The State of the World's Children 2012*, UNICEF, New York, 2012. Permission to reprint these statistics was kindly granted by UNICEF.

Tables 3-5. Education & Media

	Primary school participation 2007-2010 ¹ Net enrolment ratio (%)		Secondary school participation 2007-2010 ¹ Net enrolment ratio (%)	
	male	female	male	female
Industrialized countries	96	97	90	92
Developing countries	90	88	61	49
Least developed countries	81	78	31	25
World	91	89	65	55

	Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate 2005-2010 ¹ (%)		Total adult literacy rate 2005-2010 ¹
	male	female	
Industrialized countries	100	100	99
Developing countries	91	85	80
Least developed countries	75	66	58
World	92	87	84

	Number per 100 population 2010		Use of mass media 2000-2010 ¹ (%)	
	mobile phones	Internet users	Adolescents aged 15-19 ² male	female
Industrialized countries	106	76
Developing countries	70	21	83 *	72 *
Least developed countries	34	4	67	59
World	78	29	..	72 *

Notes:

1. Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading.

2. Adolescents aged 15-19 who use at least one type of information media at least once a week.

.. Data not available.

* Excludes China.

Source: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/All-tables-including-general-notes-on-data.pdf>, Tables 1, 5, 11.

Table 6-8. Health

	Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births			
	1970	1990	2000	2010
Industrialized countries	24	10	7	6
Developing countries	156	97	80	63
Least developed countries	240	170	138	110
World	139	88	73	57

	Under-fives suffering from underweight (WHO) 2006-2010 ¹ moderate and severe (%)	Malaria ² 2006-2010 ¹ under-fives (%)	Estimated no. of children (aged 0-14) living with HIV 2009 ('000)	Children (aged 0-17) orphaned by AIDS estimate 2009 ('000)	due to all causes estimate 2009 ('000)
Industrialized countries	2	110	4,400
Developing countries	18 *	19 **	3,400	16,900	145,000
Least developed countries	25	34	1,600	7,400	41,700
World	16 *	19 **	3,400	17,100	153,000

Notes:

1. Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading.

2. Under-fives with fever receiving anti-malarial drugs.

.. Data not available.

* Model-based estimate.

** Excludes China.

	Population using improved drinking water sources 2008 (%)			Population using improved sanitation facilities 2008 (%)		
	total	urban	rural	total	urban	rural
Industrialized countries	100	100	98	99	100	98
Developing countries	84	94	76	52	68	40
Least developed countries	62	80	54	36	50	31
World	87	96	78	61	76	45

Source: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/All-tables-including-general-notes-on-data.pdf>, Tables 2, 3, 4, 10.

Box 1. The global number of under-five deaths is decreasing

The under-five mortality rate is used by UNICEF as the principal indicator of measuring the level of child well-being and its rate of change. “In 1970, around 16.6 million children [0-4 years of age] were dying every year. In 2010, by comparison, the estimated number of children who died before their fifth birthday stood at 7.6 million – highlighting a significant long-term decline in the global number of under-five deaths.” In 2011, the corresponding number was 6.9 million, and in 2012, 6.6 million.

Sources: *The State of the World's Children 2012*. New York: UNICEF, p. 125; *The State of the World's Children 2013*. New York: UNICEF; World Health Organization, September 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs178/en/index.html>

- More than half of these early child deaths are due to conditions that could be prevented or treated with access to simple, affordable interventions.
- Leading causes of death in under-five children are pneumonia, preterm birth complications, birth asphyxia, diarrhoea and malaria. About 45% of all child deaths are linked to malnutrition.
- Children in sub-Saharan Africa are about 16 times more likely to die before the age of five than children in developed regions.

Source: World Health Organization, September 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs178/en/index.html>

Box 2. Pneumonia

- Pneumonia is the leading cause of death in children worldwide.
- Pneumonia kills an estimated 1.1 million children under the age of five years every year – more than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.
- Pneumonia can be caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi.
- Pneumonia can be prevented by immunization, adequate nutrition and by addressing environmental factors.
- Pneumonia can be treated with antibiotics, but around 30% of children with pneumonia receive the antibiotics they need

Source: World Health Organization, April 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs331/en/index.html>

Box 3. Obesity and overweight

- Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980.
- In 2008, more than 1.4 billion adults, 20 and older, were overweight. Of these over 200 million men and nearly 300 million women were obese.
- 65% of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight.
- More than 40 million children under the age of five were overweight in 2011.
- Obesity is preventable.

Once considered a high-income country problem, overweight and obesity are now on the rise in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings.

The fundamental cause of obesity and overweight is an energy imbalance between calories consumed and calories expended. Globally, there has been:

- an increased intake of energy-dense foods that are high in fat; and
- an increase in physical inactivity due to the increasingly sedentary nature of many forms of work, changing modes of transportation, and increasing urbanization.

Many low- and middle-income countries are now facing a “double burden” of disease.

- While they continue to deal with the problems of infectious disease and under-nutrition, they are experiencing a rapid upsurge in noncommunicable disease risk factors such as obesity and overweight, particularly in urban settings.
- It is not uncommon to find under-nutrition and obesity existing side-by-side within the same country, the same community and the same household.

Note: Body mass index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. It is defined as a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in meters (kg/m^2). The WHO definition is: a BMI greater than or equal to 25 is overweight; a BMI greater than or equal to 30 is obesity.

Source: World Health Organization, March 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html>

Box 4. Child maltreatment

Approximately 20% of women and 5-10% of men report being sexually abused as children, while 25-50% of all children report being physically abused.

Source: World Health Organization, August 2010, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/index.html>

Box 5. Child labour

The global number of children in child labour has declined by one third since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million children in 2012. Child labour worldwide must be eliminated, with the eradication of the worst forms an urgent priority. More than half of the children in labour, 85 million, are in the worst forms, such as work in hazardous environments, slavery, or other forms of forced labour, illicit activities including drug trafficking and prostitution, as well as involvement in armed conflict.

Source: ILO-IPEC (2013) Marking progress against child labour. Global estimates and trends 2000-2012. International Labour Office, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Geneva: ILO. See also <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

Box 6. Climate change and health

Climate change affects the fundamental requirements for health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter.

Source: World Health Organization, October 2012, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/index.html>

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