CHILDREN, DIGITAL SCREENS AND FAMILY: PARENTAL MEDIATION PRACTICES AND GENDER

Carolina Duek
CONICET, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Marina Moguillansky
CONICET, National University of San Martín, Argentina

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to explore the gendered characteristics of digital parenting and parental mediation through a qualitative study developed with families and children in Argentina. Diverse typologies have recently been elaborated to better understand parental mediation of digital screens. Quantitative studies have correlated different styles of parental mediation with sociodemographic variables and have also assessed their effectiveness in preventing several online risks. In this paper we use qualitative data from a research developed using the technique of technobiographies to construct an in-depth approach to children's practices and representations with multiple voices involved (parents, teachers, school authorities). As we show, different types of parental mediation are associated to mothers or fathers, following more broader gender ideologies and stereotypes. With insights from different families, we built research questions that state that there is a gendered division of digital parenting.

KEYWORDS

parental mediation; Argentina; digital screens; children

CRIANÇAS, TELAS DIGITAIS E FAMÍLIA: PRÁTICAS DE MEDIAÇÃO DOS PAIS E GÊNERO

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo explorar as características de gênero da parentalidade digital e da mediação parental através de um estudo qualitativo desenvolvido com famílias e crianças na Argentina. Recentemente, diversas tipologias foram elaboradas para entender melhor a mediação dos pais em relação às telas digitais. Estudos quantitativos correlacionaram diferentes estilos de mediação parental com variáveis sociodemográficas e também avaliaram a sua eficácia na prevenção de vários riscos online. Neste artigo, usamos dados qualitativos de um estudo que recorreu à técnica de tecnobiografias para construir uma abordagem aprofundada das práticas e representações das crianças com várias vozes envolvidas (pais, professores, autoridades da escola). Como mostramos, diferentes tipos de mediação parental estão associados a mães ou pais, seguindo ideologias e estereótipos de gênero mais amplos. Através de dados provenientes de famílias diferentes, construímos a hipótese de que existe uma divisão de gênero na parentalidade digital.

INTRODUCTION

Parent-child care relationships have changed in recent years. The emergence and diffusion of multiple digital screens connected to the internet – such as tablets, notebooks, game consoles and smartphones – presents new challenges for contemporary parents. The early adoption of digital media at increasingly younger ages constitutes the starting point of this article. The relationship between children and the media has been a research issue for the last decades: around the 1980's, the television was the main target of researchers as it presented new demands and research questions that had to be answered without a theoretical background available. Television was "a problem to be solved" (Duek, 2011, p. 75) and the strategies that were used to build an approach to its uses and appropriations were intuitive and organized through fear and ignorance. The formulation of the concept of parental mediation appeared as a possible answer to social demands: what should we do regarding children and television? What can we do? Which might be the consequences of the mere exposure to television? These questions arose a new field of both research and of theoretical development that has changed with the appearance of new devices and demands.

In this sense, diverse typologies have ordered and classified the multiple interactions that parents deploy with the intention of moderating the encounter of children and media content. The constant worry of adults is reflected on media articles and researches that aim to propose global strategies to create an approach to the relationship between children and media. These attempts extend the preoccupation but their proposals, as they are general and non-representative of the particularities and varied situations that children all around the world go through, are mere symptoms of contemporary problems that appear in the adult-child relationship. Lists, tips, recommendations and YouTube tutorials appear in different apps and pages with guidelines for parents as an attempt to answer social worries regarding parenthood. In sum, parental mediation is a concept that has grown and developed along the years to answer the need for theoretical and practical knowledge to contribute to the understanding of the complex and tense relationship between children and their environment in general, and with the screens in particular.

In this context, we propose a particular approach to this matter using qualitative data. In this article, we use a set of biographical interviews and focus groups with children between eight and 11 years old, from middle-class urban families, in different cities and regions of Argentina. The research project in which this data was collected was titled "Childhood, gender and ICT: a study of the 'technobiographies of children in Argentina'". The general objective of the project was to identify gendered trajectories linked to devices, media and technology. One of the specific objectives was to explore the relations between gender, parental control and family-level negotiations. And that is the key aspect that we aim to analyze in this article: the diverse ways through which families establish

different sets of rules, negotiations and follow ups for children and screens, and the role that gender plays in this process. With this qualitative material, we propose to examine the supervisory, control and mediation practices that parents develop on a daily basis regarding the uses of devices connected to the internet by their children.

Parental mediation in the internet era

A general and accepted definition of parental mediation should be set up right at the beginning of this section: "the notion of parental mediation indicated the varied practices that parents adopt in order to manage and regulate their children's engagement with the media" (Mascheroni, Ponte & Jorge, 2018, p. 9). The literature on parental mediation was initially developed focusing on the activities that parents performed to model their children's television consumption (Austin, 1993; Banks & Gupta, 1980; Nathanson, 2001, 2002; Pereira, 1998; Warren, 2005). A scale was proposed to measure different styles of mediation: instructive, restrictive and coviewing (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters & Marseille, 1999). Valkenburg et al. (1999) and Natansohn (1999) define these three mediations and explain their principles. The active mediation assigns an important role to dialogue between parents and children; the restrictive mediation involves parent-children communication if the form of rule-settings and with follow ups regarding the respect of the rules; co-viewing is exactly what its name claims: a type of mediation that assumes that parents and children are exposed simultaneously to media content. This literature noted that parents had an active role in regulating their children's exposure and experiences with television. "It also assumes that interpersonal interactions about media that take place between parents and their children play a role in socializing children into society" (Clark, 2011, p. 325). Socialization is one of the core aspects to take into account when approaching parental mediation: screens seduce children and "have conquered a geographical, social, relational and temporal space in families offering them versatile possibilities of interactive and customized entertainment" (Ponte, Simões, Batista & Castro, 2019, p. 40). Even though in households the unit of analysis are the families, the social contact with others appears inevitably in the forms that rules, limits and worries are approached by parents. Nobody wants their children to be excluded because of too restrictive rules at home but, at the same time, nobody wants to allow unrestricted access to connection and media content.

The limits of the three positions regarding parental mediation are related to two dimensions: the first one is that the strategies that parents might use are directly linked to gender, age of the children but also with parental styles and socio-economic background (Ponte, et al., 2019); the second one has been examined by Clark (2011) who proposes that parental mediation theories should be revised taking into account the new modalities of the digital age. Regarding parental mediation of online activities, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) used a survey to examine parental strategies and their correlation with a range of risks, noting interestingly that co-use was not effective reducing online risks. Since cyberbullying has become a major issue of public interest, Mesch (2009) explored

the effect of specific online activities and the role of parental mediation in moderating the risk of being bullied, again finding that most parental activities are not effective.

New inquiries unveiled new demands on research: the individualization of screen time with the use of tablets, mobile phones, computers and game consoles were included by the European network "EU kids online" in a new classification of parental mediation strategies (Pasquier, Simoes & Kredens, 2012). Five parental mediation strategies were defined: 1) active mediation of internet use (to establish dialogues about the use and the content); 2) active mediation of internet security aspects (to present recommendations of both safe and responsible use); 3) restrictive mediation (to establish limits to time, contents and online activities); 4) technical mediation (through the use of software to filter and/or to restrict access to content) and 5) monitoring (to verify the children's activities after their use).

Different styles in parental mediation are correlated to several socio-demographic characteristics of parents and also to their digital skills (Kirwill, Garmendia, Garitaonandia & Martínez Fernández, 2009). A recent study states that both parents and children "are making choices about media and parenting based on their individual values and priorities but also that these decisions are significantly shaped by their specific family arrangements" (Mostmans, 2016, p. 493). In the same sense, qualitative studies have shown that digital parenting is part of overall parenting styles and relationship patterns in families (Rosen, Cheever & Carrier, 2008). Nikken and Schols (2015) conclude their study claiming that parents "have a broad view on the role of media for children that goes beyond the risk-benefit paradigm" (p. 3432).

Parental mediation is both a relevant and contemporary subject but also one that has to be constantly redefined as a result of the changes that technology prints to social practices. Livingstone and Byrne (2018) recognize that even though parental mediation is a task that demands from parents a certain level of intervention in their children's online activities: "parents are feeling challenged – especially as their children use mobile devices that are difficult for parents to supervise and technologically complex services that parents may not understand" (p. 20). They add "whatever is *normatively* expected of parents, there are *practical* limits to what they can do" (p. 20). In sum, parents are challenged, children are exposed and there is a constant tension regarding what they can, should and may do with screen-time (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018). According to "EU kids online", "girls receive more of all types of parental mediation except technical mediation" (Livingstone, Kalmus & Talves, 2014, p. 196). Considering the close relationship between parental mediation strategies and the context in which these practices are developed, the link between parental mediation and gender has also been examined and shown to be highly relevant. Digital parenting appears to be mostly a task of mothers or other feminine caregivers (Valcke, Bontea, de Wevera & Rotsa, 2010) and the distribution of daily tasks at home regarding children-care tends to be assigned to women as a result of cultural distribution (and reproduction) of gender roles at home (Benítez Larghi & Duek, 2019).

The gap that this article tries to address is the lack of sustained research on the matter in Argentina. In this direction we produced qualitative data in order to have an in depth first approach to the topic. Argentina is currently the Latin American country with the highest internet connectivity rate in homes (63,8%). With a population of 44,27 million inhabitants (INDEC, 2017), connectivity to 4G networks went from 5 million users in 2015 to 29 in December 2018 and the two main problems of the country are rates and speed (Giudici, 2018). 80,1% of the population has access to internet connection with an average of 4 hours 11 minutes a day (SINCA, 2017). Six out of ten inhabitants (62% of the population) use an individual mobile phone and, even though there is no official data, children have access to a mobile phone at the age of 10 (the average was constructed with the data of the current research). These pieces of information imply two dimensions: there are high connectivity levels in Argentina and there is a specific preoccupation that appears when children have access to their own devices.

As we have already mentioned, the relationship between parental mediation and gender has not been analyzed in depth in Argentina. There are no inquiries that have aimed, from a qualitative perspective, to understand how parental mediation strategies are built and deployed regarding gender. We still know very little about the tactics children display in relation to parental control strategies, and how these are affected by gender. This is precisely the vacancy area that this article tries to fulfill with data and analysis.

Methodology

In order to examine the gendered characteristics of digital parenting and parental mediation we explore how different types of parental mediation (as defined by Pasquier et al., 2012) are associated with a particular gender (feminine/masculine) following the heteronormative gender system of role assignation. This division of labor is correlated with gender ideologies and stereotypes on women and men characteristics (Benítez Larghi & Duek, 2019). Therefore, different interventions regarding the digital screens are seen as more typical of mothers and others are seen as father's responsibilities. Based on previous research, we intend to further elaborate on digital parenting as a gendered labor.

The data used to explore these research questions comes from an extensive fieldwork which combined different tools and methodological approaches to compose technobiographies. A technobiography focuses on the interviewee's encounters with devices and technologies "at various times and in various locations throughout their histories" (Ching & Vigdor, 2005, p. 4). The technobiography is a result of multiple interviews with key informants that surround the daily lives of the subjects. We focused on children and, from them, we organized focus groups with peers, interviews with their parents, their teachers and authorities of the schools they attended. The objective of the technobiography is not the confection of an inventory of devices but the comprehension, in its own particular context, of the meanings around practices and representations built in and through technology.

The methodological strategy of the project consisted of the realization of 24 focus groups with five to six children each (totaling approximately 130 children), which took place between March and November 2017. Considering the six regions of Argentina[1], we selected one city per region and then, at each city, a public and a private school were chosen. At each school we arranged two focus groups: one with girls and another one with boys. The conversation during the focus groups was guided by one researcher (while another one took notes) and covered issues about typical uses of electronic devices, representations on gendered practices, perceptions of parental mediation (such as what rules and supervision of their practices they acknowledge); fears, perception of risks and protective practices while being online. At the end of each focus group, we asked the children involved to draw themselves and their peers, while doing typical things with electronic devices.

After each focus group, we chose one boy or girl from each of the groups to perform individual interviews (totaling 24). The selection of these boys and girls was made according to what we learned about them during the interactions at the focus groups and following theoretical criteria: we tried to include different familiar situations and tried to select children with at least one brother or sister. These children were interviewed individually with their parents at their homes. Those interviews followed a script of open questions regarding the familiar and personal routines and the uses of electronic devices. The interviews with parents included questions about the availability of electronic devices, choices of purchase and issues of individual or shared use; family arrangements on daily activities; family rules on the use of electronic devices; and also, specific questions about parental mediation (such as typical strategies employed to control online risks, fears and desires about the relation that children establish with electronic devices, personal problematic experiences, etc.). The individual interviews with children addressed their routines at school, at home and other places (such as clubs or sports centers); their relations with friends and peers; typical uses of electronic devices; perceptions on rules and norms regarding desired uses of electronic devices; experiences and fears about online risks, and protective strategies employed; and also specific questions about their views on the role of mothers and fathers in parental mediation. We also inquired specifically in both kind of interviews on the history of the parents and the children in relation to technologies, digital screens, social networks and specific devices (first contacts, acquisition of digital screens, formative experiences, current preferences, and so on).

The field work was developed in 2017 and its results were processed between 2018 and 2019. Interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and afterwards coded in ATLAS.ti by a team of six researchers. During the coding, we combined two strategies: an axial system of codes was used to capture different responses to same questions and to allow us to compare typical strategies in dimensions of interest, using a shared codebook. In addition, we used a bottom-up coding strategy allowing each researcher to create specific codes when needed, in order to capture the singularities of different

---

[1] Metropolitan Area and Buenos Aires (AMBA), Center, North East, North West, Cuyo and Patagonia.

familiar arrangements and emerging aspects of the fieldwork[2]. With the interviews coded, we selected key dimensions to construct a technobiography for each of the children. These technobiographies are built with a combination of the perspectives involved in the child's life – parents, teachers, peers and the children themselves.

The result was an extensive fieldwork that in Argentina had never been done before on a research project. From all the available data, we selected ten technobiographies to further explore parental mediation strategies in middle-class urban families.

Gendered digital parenting and parental mediation

Digital parenting involves a series of activities that include the purchase and configuration of various devices such as mobile phones, tablets, computers and game consoles; the establishment of rules of use; supervising the compliance of those rules; solving problems and monitoring children's online activities. Parental mediation refers more specifically, as we have already mentioned, to interactions that occur between parents and children in relation to the latter's online activities in digital screens.

During the observations and interviews of our research, we found that the activities involved in parental mediation are gendered in complex ways: there are certain tasks perceived to be more typical of fathers and others supposed to be the domain of the mothers. As we will see, this gendered division of labor involved in digital parenting is closely related to broader and more pervasive gender stereotypes and ideologies (Talves & Kalmus, 2015) that appeared clearly in the field work. María's mother says:

> Interviewer (I): Does your husband do follow-ups on your children's on
> line activities?
> María's mother (MM): No, as he knows I'm on it, he asks me sometimes,
> but I'm in charge.
> I: Do you think it is a particular activity that mothers do?
> MM: Yes, yes. And my friends have the same activities. It is something
> more of the mothers domain. Men know that we are with our eyes on the
> children's screens.
> I: You mean that they are more relaxed on supervision?
> MM: They are more relaxed in general, you see...

Regarding the acquisition of technological devices, testimonies indicate that it is usually a joint decision of the adults – generally, at the request of their children[3] – but in which the fathers are the ones who execute the purchase, thus deciding on the model, brand and price of the devices. The family of Roberto (44, engineer) and Clara (42, scientific researcher) lives in the city of La Plata in a middle-class house; they are parents of

---

[2] These new codes were shared with the rest of the coding team and applied in successive coding waves.

[3] For example the mother of Faustino (11) remembers that after a long time of requesting to have a cell phone, when he was about to turn nine, he gathered the whole family and announced that he only wanted a cell phone as a birthday gift.

Agustín (11) and Emilia (five). As they recall, it was Roberto who was in charge of buying mobile phones, notebooks and video game consoles. Clara says that

> my son, Agustín, goes with his father and they might enter the electronic shop, sometimes just to look. Not even crazy would I be willing to do such a thing. Afterwards I enjoy the stuff they buy, of course, but if I have someone who does the searching for me, chooses and buys the electronic stuff, it's much better.

Regarding the acquisition of digital screens, we found that sometimes there are doubts or disagreements between the adults, and very usually when that is the case, it is ultimately the father who has the final decision. Leticia (46, school librarian) is married to Federico (47, owner of a food stand) and they are the parents of Eugenia (16), Alejandra (11) and Martina (six). The mother recalls that she had a long discussion with Federico, because when they were thinking about buying a computer for their home; she wanted a desktop computer, but he insisted on buying a notebook. "Finally we bought the notebook, because he wanted us to have the newest thing" she says, regretting that decision since she feels that the computer should stay in a fixed place, and not be taken to the bedroom, where they usually find the girls watching films and series. These tensions show, as Morley (1992) identified in a classic text regarding practices around the TV in the living room, that we are not analyzing trivial dimensions but the ways in which power is distributed and executed in each household and also the gender configurations that underly the decisions in the households. It is not about television nor about desktop computers or notebooks: it is about how gender shapes specific practices and decision-making processes.

In relation to the specific dimensions of parental mediation, we also find a genderization of the tasks that each family performs, that thus results in a gendered division of labor. Active mediation of internet use, which consists mainly in discussing uses and contents with the children, is performed by both parents with certain prevalence of the mothers. Almost all of the interviewed mothers in this research declare that they usually do the talking with the children, while fathers seem to be available to talk to them only in especially complicated situations. The conversations recalled by the mothers were mostly referred to security issues, therefore leading us to the second type of parental mediation: active mediation regarding internet security.

The most usual conversations are about contacts with strangers through social networks or videogame's chat windows; about violent content and manipulative games; and about the sharing of private information or personal images. Analía (42, accountant) is married to Esteban (44, lawyer), and they are the parents of Gerónimo (11), Rodrigo (nine) and Juana (six). She recalls having conversations with the children about social networks, the dangers of encountering violent or sexual content online, the adequate age for each kind of online activity. Analía asks her children to tell her with whom they are playing or chatting online, and she has explained the reasons why she considers that some social networks are not appropriate for them. Negotiating, explaining and even

dealing with children tantrums are always perceived as items comprised in "mummy territory". And what is particular about this is that none of the interviewed questioned this division. This is one of the major findings of the research regarding gender and parental mediation.

The prevalence of mothers as interlocutors is also confirmed by the interviewed children, as most of them say that they tend to speak to their mothers whenever they have doubts or feel uncomfortable with online contents. For example, Belén (nine years old) says during a focus group: "it is usually my mum who helps and supervises me when I am using my tablet or the computer, because she spends more time with me". This coincides with previous findings for different countries of the European Union (Ponte, 2018). Active mediation of internet security is most often a task performed by mothers. They are more present at home and they spend more time with the children; and they are chosen by them as interlocutors when they encounter something upsetting online or if there is a problem in chat groups in WhatsApp. These problems appeared constantly during our fieldwork, as children are engaged in many chat groups: aggressive discussions, teasing and inappropriate photos or videos in this context were the main worries of both mothers and children.

Even though the mothers are the main referents to talk about online activities and internet security, when there is *real* trouble the fathers enter the scene. From our observations and interviews, it was possible to understand that everyday issues are handled by the mothers, who are also the ones spending more time with the children and tend to express their worries with other mothers, for instance while waiting for their kids outside the school or the club. But if there is something extraordinary, like a bullying situation or something dangerous going on, both the children and the mothers think that the fathers must act. During a focus group with 11 year old girls, they told us the following story that can exemplify the fathers role: "once a girl was chatting with someone she didn't know, and they arranged an encounter...the mother found out about it, and then the father went secretly to the place they were supposed to meet".

In some cases, we also found that the children feel and express that fathers are the right person to call when they need to be defended. Joaquín (11 years old), for instance, says that if he ever experienced bullying himself, he would rather "talk to my father, because he has a stronger personality, he would go and talk to the authorities, he gives me more security than my mother". It is interesting to note how Joaquín describes both his father and his mother: one is a constant for him (his mother), the other is the exception when "reinforcements" are needed as he considers his mother not have enough symbolic and body strength.

Regarding restrictive mediations, we noted that they are present in all the families observed for this study. Every family sets some rules, time limits or places where digital screens are not allowed. The most pervasive example is the time spent by the family sitting at the table during dinner. For almost all families, this is a time and space where mobile phones and tablets are prohibited. The family rules about digital technologies are usually set by both parents, often with a limited participation of the children (and this is

only the case when they are at least seven or eight years old). These rules generally consist of more or less explicit agreements about schedules, time limits and spaces in which children can use technological devices such as the tablet, smart TV, computer, mobile phone or PlayStation. Children are often allowed to use the tablet or mobile phone only after completing school assignments. Another condition is that they should avoid fighting with their brothers or sisters.

It is also usual to set a time limit for the use of digital devices, and that some content or applications be prohibited, with considerable coincidences among the families of the study. Permission schemes often have modulations, conditions and frequent exceptions; most parents recognize that it is difficult for them to stick to the rules. For instance, Ricardo, father of Matías and Clara, aged eight and six, says:

> our rules are generally very flexible. It depends on our mood and the energy we have to sustain them. The rule is that they can use the computer for some time at night. But maybe one day it's rainy and then it's like ok, go to the computer and goodbye rules.

Restrictive mediation includes two different aspects: first rules are discussed, negotiated and established (even when they might have frequent exceptions). After that, once the rules have been established, they must be implemented. And here is where gender appears again to model interactions: again, it is mostly the mothers who are responsible for supervising the time limits and other restrictive rules regarding digital screens. Here again, the decisive factor is that women spend more time with the children and that they assume the task without discussions nor complaints. Martina (10 years old) said, during a focus group, that "the mums are more aware of what is going on with us, because the fathers are usually working".

There is one significant exception to the more common feminine domain that we encounter in almost all kinds of parental mediation: *technical mediation* is perceived to be a masculine task, mainly because of the digital skills needed, since it involves installing filters or monitoring applications that send messages to parents when certain activities are performed in the devices. For instance, Laura, 42 years old and mother of three children aged 11, eight and three years old, says:

> my husband was investigating about the controls, those that are there to limit the content a bit because you never know very well what appears to them suddenly (...) I don't have much idea of technology so I don't know how to apply those things, how to use them.

Laura recognized that she does not know much about how technology works but she is, at the same time, in charge of supervising her children's connectivity. She does not put herself in a place of knowledge but in one of follow-ups: she can overview online activities, but she acknowledges her limitations. It is interesting to note that, even though she is fully aware of what she can not do, there is no doubt about the possibility

of delegating the task to her husband. She accepts the division of labor even though she knows that, if something happens, she might not notice it nor know how to act and/or react.

Finally, monitoring is a task sustained by mothers, but fathers are sometimes informed, especially if mothers find something to worry about. Among the families observed in this study, we found that monitoring might include some or all of the following: having the passwords of mobile phones, tablets and notebooks; having the passwords for social networks; making aleatory revisions of chat and navigation histories; supervising the list of contacts; charging children's phones in the parental bedroom (to avoid midnight uses) and checking what kind of games or applications they are using. It is interesting to note that many of the interviewed women declare that the supervision and control of children's online activities is something that they own, as it were almost a feminine task. Carola (39, cosmetologist) explains that "this thing of supervising, checking what they do, is mine". On a different vein, Eugenia (41) says that "they – the fathers – know that we take care of it, then they leave it...there is a division of labor". Trust and privacy are two dimensions that appear throughout digital parenting and parental mediation: on the one hand, fathers rely on mothers for supervising and controlling their children's online activities. On the other, mothers are constantly trying to achieve a balance between being cautions – controlling exhaustively what they do – and being confident about their kids.

Conclusions

Contemporary families are digitally connected, and screens play a very important role in both entertainment and formative activities between young children. As media and devices appear, a need to control, to supervise and to regulate exposure demands new concepts and interventions. Following the classification of parental mediation in five strategies (Pasquier et al., 2012), we explored the routines of ten urban families. We found that all families engage, to some extent, in all the five styles of parental mediation, though in different combinations and with different intensities. Some families have more restrictive regulations for their children, basing their parental mediation in control and supervision. This kind of approach has the risk of demining the children's autonomy and right to privacy. Other families, while also relying on some restrictions, invest more time in creating critical capabilities in their children, through dialogue and formative joint experiences. We still need to elaborate further on a possible typology that would allow us to better differentiate among digital parenting styles.

In this study, we were able to show some testimonies on how digital parenting is gendered, following broader cultural representations based on the heteronormative gender system of role assignation and that this genderization is mostly embraced as something natural and uncontested (Benítez Larghi & Duek, 2019). The second research question sustained that parental mediation – as specific activity included in digital parenting – involves a gendered division of labor between mothers and fathers. First, we showed

that the acquisition of technological devices is a masculine task, both among adults and children. Second, we examined the five types of parental mediation in terms of gender roles and we found that women are responsible for most of the activities involved in parental mediation: mothers are doing active internet mediation (talking, orienting, discussing), active mediation of internet security issues, restrictive mediation and monitoring (four out of five activities). The fathers' domain is mainly in the technical mediation, and they also have a role in the setting of rules, a core aspect of restrictive mediations. Exceptions to this scheme appeared when there was a "major" problem to be solved and children stated that they called their fathers (not their mothers) showing how they valued their literal and symbolic strength.

We analyzed in depth the meaning for parents and children of the perceived role distribution that was very clear during our fieldwork. Mothers fulfilled the role of establishing dialogues, supervising and doing follow-ups on what their children do online while fathers participated only in the negotiation pre-connection stage and in specific cases in which both mothers and children demanded their presence, or in technical mediation aspects. It was surprising that even though many mothers stated that they did not have a great experience regarding technology and devices, they assumed full control of their kid's online activities. None of the interviewed complained about the distribution of tasks in their households. The distribution of tasks appeared to be almost "natural": the workload was clearly unequally distributed.

Parental mediation can be defined, within our data, as a task developed by mothers with an "emergency contact" at hand that are the fathers. A possible explanation to this might be that online activities enter the family scheme in continuity with school assignments and follow ups. And this task is historically assumed by mothers and not fathers (Duek, 2014). School meetings, field trips authorizations and purchases of school materials are a task usually fulfilled by mothers and children online activities entered the same structure in the division of family tasks in the households.

From the perspective of children, mothers are the adult who is always present and who is aware of their daily activities. They recognize that their mothers are reinforcing the rules about usage of digital screens at home, making decisions, on a daily, basis about time and limits. Mothers are perceived as main references to talk about online activities and they are the first to be contacted if something unpleasant happens, but if it is something very serious, the father figure appears. Fathers appear as responsible for the acquisition of digital screens (even when they are generally paid with family money), and these purchases are even indicated by children as "a gift from my father".

The naturalization of labour distribution in the households allows us to conclude that it is essential to de-naturalize these social constructs that are reproduced through the generations. There is both a theoretical and practical need to make visible the invisible structures that operate underneath these practices. The questions that arise are so evident that can only be explained by its naturalization: why is it "normal" for children that their mothers occupy the supervision spaces at home? Why do they considerate their fathers as indispensable in a major problem but not in their daily lives? Why do

mothers do not massively complain about their role? Why do fathers choose not to actively participate? The answer is both simple and complex: the labour distribution in the households is established in a direct link to social labour distribution, gender representation, expectations and power. That is why, to understand the ways labour distribution regarding children and online activities must be analysed, as the presented testimonies showed, in a double direction: the first one is the decision of who is in charge of that task, the second is why he/she is the one. The simple part of the answer is related to historical gender constructs that locate mothers as key responsible subjects in the daily errands, tasks and activities children do, should do, are expected to and are not supposed to do. The historical role of fathers-providers who arrive at their homes and should be able to rest from a day at work (Morley, 1992) is still valid in the ways in which labours are distributed. We are not saying that mothers do not work nor that they are not entitled to rest at home. We are signalling that the social representation of the roles is directly related to the historical gender roles that families built all along the XIX and XX centuries.

Technology arrived in society to stay. Parental mediation arises a mater not only of role distribution but of the gendered dimension of technology. Gil-Juárez, Vitores & Feliu (2015) state that technological contexts contribute to the reproduction of gender roles and activities through the differentiation of online activities for boys and for girls. This is also valid to the supervision and parental roles regarding connectivity. Technology is not gender neutral, and with this affirmation in mind, the need to build new knowledge about how children and parents negotiate, distribute and appropriate technologies, devices, roles, tasks not only in their present time but in the future, that unknown field in which current attitudes and assumptions will evolve, consolidate and crystalize. To intervein in the present means to shape a new possible future. The denaturalization of gender roles and labour distribution in the households regarding children online activities will be, undoubtedly, an important first step to build new representations of gender but also of the ways families bond to, and confront with, digital technologies and practices.

Acknowledgements

References

Austin, E.W. (1993). Exploring the effects of active parental mediation of television content. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 37, 147-158. https://www.doi.org/10.1080/08838159309364212

Banks, S. & Gupta, R. (1980). Television as a dependent variable, for a change. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 7(3), 327-330. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489017?seq=1

Benítez Larghi, S. & Duek, C. (2019). Infancias y tecnologías en Argentina: interacciones y vínculos intergeneracionales. *Revista Nómadas. Tramas contemporáneas en comunicación y educación*, 1(49), 121-135. https://www.doi.org/10.30578/nomadas.n49a7

Blum-Ross, A. & Livingstone, S. (2018). The trouble with "screen time" rules. In G. Mascheroni; C. Ponte & A. Jorge (Eds.), *Digital parenting. the challenges for families in the digital age* (pp.179-188). Gothenburg: The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, at Nordicom University of Gothenburg. Retrieved from https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/system/tdf/publikationer-hela-pdf/yearbook_2018_ digital_parenting.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=39884&force=0

Ching, C. & Vigdor, L. (2005, may). Technobiographies: perspectives from education and the arts. Communication presented at *First International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry*, Illinois. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/ publication/267794313_Technobiographies_Perspectives_from_Education_and_the_Arts

Clark, L. (2011). Parental mediation theory for the digital age. *Communication theory*, *21*(4), 323-343. https:// www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01391.x

Duek. C. (2011). Infancias globales, infancias locales. La televisión y la representación de los más chicos. In A. Entel (Ed.), *Infancias de Latinoamérica. Un cuadro de situación*, Buenos Aires: Fundación Walter Benjamin, Fundación Arcor. Retrieved from http://www.walterbenjamin.org.ar/down/LIBRO-%20 INFANCIAS-2014.pdf

Duek, C. (2014) *Juegos, juguetes y nuevas tecnologías*. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual.

Gil-Juárez, A., Vitores, A. & Feliu, J. (2015). Del género a la tecnología y de la tecnología al género: repertorios interpretativos de padres y madres sobre las chicas y los videojuegos. *Communication papers,* (6), 81-97.

Giudici, S. (2018). *Informe de gestión ENACOM, Secretaría de Modernización, Presidencia de la Nación*. Retrieved from https://www.enacom.gob.ar/informes-de-gestion_p3218

INDEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de la República Argentina. (2017) Documentos. *Censo nacional*, Argentina.

Kirwill, L., Garmendia, M., Garitaonandia, C. & Martínez Fernández, G. (2009). Parental mediation. In S. Livingstone & L. Haddon (Eds.), *Kids online: opportunities and risks for children* (pp.199-215). Bristol: Policy Press.

Livingstone, S. & Byrne, J. (2018). Parenting in the digital age. The challenges of parental responsibility in comparative perspective. In G. Mascheroni; C. Ponte & A. Jorge (Eds.), *Digital parenting. The challenges for families in the digital age,* (pp. 19-30). Gothenburg: The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, at Nordicom University of Gothenburg. Retrieved from https://www.nordicom.gu.se/ sv/system/tdf/publikationer-hela-pdf/yearbook_2018_digital_parenting.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=3988 4&force=0

Livingstone, S. & Helsper, E. (2008). Parental mediation of children's internet use. *Journal of broadcasting and electronic media, 52*(4), 581-599. https://www.doi.org/10.1080/08838150802437396

Livingstone, S., Kalmus, V. & Talves, K. (2014). Girls' and boys' experiences of online risk and safety. In C. Carter; L. Steiner & L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to media and gender* (pp. 190-200). London: Routledge.

Mascheroni, G., Ponte, C. & Jorge, A. (2018). Introduction. In G. Mascheroni; C. Ponte & A. Jorge (Eds.), *Digital Parenting. The challenges for families in the digital age* (pp. 9-18). Gothenburg: The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, at Nordicom University of Gothenburg. Retrieved from https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/system/tdf/publikationer-hela-pdf/yearbook_2018_digital_parenting.pd f?file=1&type=node&id=39884&force=0

Mesch, G. (2009). Parental mediation, online activities, and cyberbullying. *Cyberpsychology & behavior: the impact of the Internet, multimedia and virtual reality on behavior and society, 12*(4), 387-93. https://www.doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2009.0068

Morley, D. (1992). *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Mostmans, L. (2016). Internet mediation and the family gap: explorative ethnographic interviews in new family forms in Belgium. *Journal of Children and Media, 10*(4), 481-496. https://www.doi.org/10.1080/17 482798.2016.1222298.

Nathanson, A. (1999). Identifying and explaining the relationship between parental mediation and children's aggression. *Communication research, 26*(2), 124-143. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365099026002002

Nathanson, A. (2001). Parent and child perspectives on the presence and meaning of parental television mediation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 45*(2), 201-220. https://www.doi.org/ 10.1207/ s15506878jobem4502_1

Nathanson, A. (2002). The unintended effects of parental mediation of television on adolescents. *Mediapsychology, 4*, 207-230. https://www.doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0403_01

Nikken, P. & Schols, M. (2015). How and why parents guide the media use of young children. *Journal of child and family studies, 24*, 3423-3435. https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0144-4.

Pasquier, D., Simões, J. A. & Kredens, E. (2012). Agents of mediation and sources of safety awareness: a comparative overview. In S. Livingstone, L. Haddon & A. Görzig (Eds), *Children, risk and safety on the internet. Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 219-230). Bristol: Polity Press.

Pereira, S. (1998). *A televisão na família. Processos de mediação com crianças em idade pré-escolar*. Braga: Instituto de estudos da criança. Retrieved from http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/ bitstream/1822/4265/1/TVnaFam%c3%adlia.pdf

Ponte, C. (2018). Challenging online situations reported by Italian and Portuguese children in 2018. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación/Mediterranean Journal of Communication, 10*(1), 37-50). https://www.doi.org/10.14198/MEDCOM2019.10.2.3

Ponte, C., Simoes, J., Batista, S. & Castro, T. (2019). Implicados, intermitentes, desengajados? Estilos de mediação de pais de crianças de 3-8 anos que usam a internet. *Sociologia, problemas e práticas*, (91), 39-58. Retrieved fromhttp://journals.openedition.org/spp/6442

Rosen, L. D., Cheever, N. A. & Carrier, L. M. (2008). The association of parenting style and child age with parental limit setting and adolescent MySpace behavior. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 29*, 459-471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.005

SINCA [National System of Cultural Consumptions] (2017). Los jóvenes y los consumos culturales. Informe de investigación sobre los consumos culturales de los jóvenes en la Argentina, basado en los resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Consumos Culturales, edición 2017. Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Cultura de la Nación. Retrieved from https://www.cultura.gob.ar/media/uploads/jovenes_y_consumos_culturales_1.pdf

Talves, K. & Kalmus, V. (2015). Gendered mediation of children's internet use: a keyhole for looking into changing socialization practices. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2015-1-4

Valcke, M., Bontea, S., de Wevera, B. & Rotsa, I. (2010). Internet parenting styles and the impact on internet use of primary school children, *Computers & Education, 55*(2), 454-464. Retrieved from https://users.ugent.be/~mvalcke/CV/parenting.pdf

Valkenburg, P., Krcmar, M., Peters, A. & Marseille, N. (1999). Developing a scale to assess three different styles of television mediation: 'Instructive mediation', 'restrictive mediation', and 'social coviewing'. *Journal of broadcasting and electronic media*, *43*(2), 52-66.

Warren, R. (2005). Parental mediation of children's television viewing in low income families. *Journal of Communication*, *55*, 847-863. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb03026.x

Biographical notes

Carolina Duek is PhD in Social Sciences (University of Buenos Aires), Master Degree in Communication & Culture (University of Buenos Aires) and currently has a position as adjunct researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research. She has been Visitor Proffesor at Catholic University of Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium), Campinas (Brasil), University of Valle (Cali, Colombia). She was a Professor at New York University in Buenos Aires and is currently teaching Communcation at the University of Buenos Aires.
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3103-0363
Email: duekcarolina@gmail.com
Address: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Viamonte 430, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Marina Moguillansky is PhD in Social Sciences (University of Buenos Aires), Master Degree in Cultural Sociology (National University of San Martín) and currently has a position as adjunct researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research. Has been Visiting Professor at University Degli Studii di Pisa (Italy), Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), Harvard University and Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB).
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8873-1136
Email: mmoguillansky@gmail.com
Address: UNSAM Campus Miguelete, 25 de Mayo y Francia, C.P.: 1650. San Martín, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina