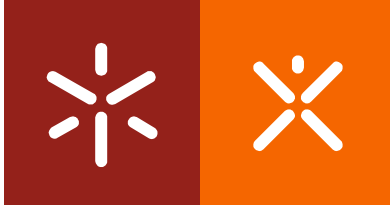




**Universidade do Minho**  
Instituto de Educação

Teresa Sofia Pereira Dias de Castro

**“It’s a complicated situation”. Harm in everyday experiences with technology. A qualitative study with school-aged children**



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A qualitative study with school-aged  
children**

Tese de Doutoramento

Doutoramento em Ciências da Educação

Especialidade de Tecnologia Educativa

Trabalho efetuado com a orientação do

**Professor Doutor António José Osório**

## STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted my thesis with integrity. I confirm that I have not use plagiarism or any form of falsification of results in the process of the thesis elaboration.

I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

University of Minho, 25/05/2015

Full name: Teresa Sofia Pereira Dias de Castro

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**“Promise me you'll always remember:  
You're braver than you believe,  
and stronger than you seem,  
and smarter than you think.”**

**— A.A. Milne**

---

## Acknowledgements

My warmest and deep gratitude goes to,

the children, for accepting me in their lives and their lively participation. I genuinely hope to be able to do justice to their voices,

my dear parents, for the love, moral values and faith,

my supervisor for the thought-provoking questions and generously allowing me to expand my mind, the friendship and trust,

Emma Bond for the invaluable and consistent guidance, stimulating feedback, challenges, care and friendship,

my closest friends for the patience, and in particular, to Vera Duarte and Catarina Carvalho for the stimulating brainstorming and amusing moments,

the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) for funding this project, within the framework of QREN - POPH - Type 4.1 – Advanced Training, European Social Fund and Portuguese national funding from MCTES (scholarship reference SFRH/BD/68288/2010),

‘Programa Escolhas’ and CATL Palmeira, and notably to Glória Carvalhais, Graça Correia, Bárbara Santos, Paula Ferreira, Andreia Silva and the staff for the sharing, cooperation, suggestions and making me feel welcome,

University of Minho, the Institute of Education, my colleagues, and in particular to Catarina Liane, Vanêssa Mendes, Ana Monteiro, Elaine Barbosa, Maribel Pinto, Luís Valente, Raquel Patrício, Joana Osório, Elisabete Barros e Rita Osório for the help, companionship, encouragement and decompressing moments,

University Campus Suffolk, and in particular, to Simon Hallsworth, Christian Dogaru, Stuart Agnew, David James, Sarah Coombs, Heidi Dix and Allison Boggis for the intellectual sharing, Ricardo Morais (Idea Puzzle) and Cláudia Moura (CMstatus) for the inspiration,

AAUM for the enriching experience, and mostly, to Paula Lobo for the exchange of ideas,

Sonia Livingsstone, Michalis Xenos, Lucyna Kirwil, Hinduja Patchin, Ana N. de Almeida, Edward Donnerstein, Liesbeth de Block, Maria Kaspersson, Deborah de Felice, Ann-Marie Cook and other researchers I've met from all parts of the world for the accessibility, articles and feedback.



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## **“It’s a complicated situation”. Harm in everyday experiences with technology. A qualitative study with school-aged children**

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study was guided by two objectives: to understand the personal values and meanings children might use to interpret their technologized lives and, to uncover unintended harmful outcomes that may be (more or less) hidden in children’s everyday digital lives. Recognising children as competent ‘agents in their own right’, a dynamic participatory approach was used to reach the intricacies of the relationships between the participants (a total of 41, mostly girls and aged 10-12) and digital and online technologies in late modernity. Drawing from everyday situations, children’s voices were privileged as the main source of understanding to inform a multi-lens approach drawing perspectives from the sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies and Zemiology. The qualitative data generated by participants’ heterogeneous and critical accounts is organized in three key themes: i) digital inequalities, ii) controlling parental control and iii) online participation. The findings provide relevant information to society in general and to families and other agents in charge of the care and education of the child, in particular.

Control and agency are central aspects that cut across each key theme and destabilise romantic westernised constructions of childhood that no longer embody the contemporary child. From a harm perspective, evidence in the study suggests that children’s rights can be compromised when digital expectations and needs are not met or collide with digital assumptions taken for granted. Protection and participation rights online are challenged when parents use panoptical and paternalistic strategies that affect children’s decisions, judgements and development. However, the narratives do not exclusively depict the child-victim. Findings insinuate that children are excluding adults’ from their digital lives, based on digital competence, freedom and moral values. Moreover, children are actively engaging in ambiguous behaviours online that include sexual socialization, carelessness, rude and abusive behaviours and criminal practices. Granting access and use does not *per se* support children to pursue wise and empowering participation online. This thesis concludes that inclusive strategies instead, would enable to enhance children’s digital wisdom, engage generations, strengthen bonds of solidarity, reintegrate adults in children’s lives and encourage children to exercise their agency and individuality within the broader societal framework.

## **“É uma situação complicada”. Dano no uso quotidiano das tecnologias. Um estudo qualitativo com crianças em idade escolar**

### **Resumo**

Perceber que valores e significados as crianças utilizam para interpretar as suas vidas tecnológicas e aclarar situações de dano (mais ou menos) encobertas nas experiências digitais das crianças são os dois objectivos que nortearam este estudo. Reconhecendo a criança como um agente social competente, foram utilizadas estratégias participativas que permitiram desenredar as complexidades intrínsecas à relação que desenvolvem com as tecnologias digitais. As suas vozes (maioritariamente de raparigas e idades compreendidas entre os 10-12 anos, num total de 41 participantes) constituem, por isso, a principal fonte de entendimento que enforma este estudo que alinha com contributos teóricos da sociologia do risco, estudos da infância, estudos sociotécnicos e da Zemiologia. Os dados qualitativos gerados pelas narrativas heterogéneas e críticas das crianças foram organizados em três temas: i) desigualdades digitais, ii) controlando o controlo parental e iii) participação online e incluem informação pertinente para a sociedade em geral e para as famílias e outros agentes encarregados do cuidado e educação da criança, em particular.

As evidências sugerem que controlo e agência são aspectos-chave que cruzam os eixos temáticos e desestabilizam uma construção social ocidentalizada e romântica da infância, não mais vigente. Os dados lidos numa perspectiva do dano, insinuam que os direitos online das crianças são comprometidos como resultado de: expectativas e necessidades digitais que não são providas ou colidem com pressupostos digitais tomados por garantidos e por consequência de estratégias panópticas e paternalistas dos progenitores. No entanto, as suas narrativas não representam exclusivamente a criança-vítima. Os resultados demonstram que as crianças estão ativamente a excluir os adultos das suas vidas digitais e a envolverem-se em experiências ambíguas. A partir dos seus resultados este estudo conclui que acesso e uso por si só não garantem que as crianças tirem efetivamente partido de uma participação online empoderada e sábia. Em jeito de conclusão, este trabalho realça a importância de promover soluções inclusivas ajustadas ao terreno que permitam promover a sabedoria digital das crianças, envolver gerações, fortalecer laços de solidariedade, reintegrar os adultos na vida das crianças e incentivar as crianças para o exercício da sua agência e individualidade dentro de uma estrutura social mais interdependente.



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## 1. Introduction

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*This first chapter offers an overview of the context and objectives that guided this research underpinned by a 'with' children approach, in which school-aged participants were encouraged to reflect and share their understanding vis-à-vis their digitally mediated everyday lives. It briefly describes the theoretical choices and methodological decisions used to approach and scrutinise the phenomenon under study. It explains personal and academic motivations that drove the interest in researching about the informal use children make of online digital technologies in their everyday lives. And finally, offers a description of the structure of the thesis.*

*Succinctly, the chapter develops in line with the following sections:*

- 1.1. Overview of research issues and objectives;*
  - 1.2. Explanation note;*
  - 1.3. Personal and academic motivations;*
  - 1.4. Organization of the thesis.*
- 

### 1.1. Overview of research issues and objectives

During this research a child within the community that the study took place committed suicide. Although not involved in this study as a participant, the child was well known to some participants, and for that reason, the event affected the children involved in this investigation and the research itself. Following the episode and acceding to participants' request, it was given space for children to talk about the occurrence in the research meetings. In line with the participatory approach privileged in the field, the participants freely expressed feelings and critical perspectives. Nevertheless, ethical imperatives prevent from exploring this event in empirical terms but it is important to understand the context in which the fieldwork took place.

In the days that followed the event, one was able to recognise that reality cannot be understood or perceived under polarized explanations. At best it can offer an angle (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008), a small fragment of knowledge centred on specific problems and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, cited in Aires, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; 1998b).

In listening to a diverse group of informants, a mismatch was found between adults' perspectives, collected from the media, the adult staff of the institution, and from children themselves. The episode revealed how children's lack of voice may lead to a harmful misrepresentation or misinterpretation (Thomas, 2007) of their everyday lives and experiences.

And this is what this thesis is about. The study presented here is informed by children's rights to participation in research and an endeavour of respectfully give a space to children's voices and constructed understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; James & James, 2001; Mayall, 2003; Riessman, 1993; Santana and Fernandes, 2011; Wyness, 2012a) concerning the complex and challenging nature of their digital everyday lives. Within the scope of this research, the term 'children' follows the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition as those under 18 years. The concept 'online digital technologies' refers to devices and services connected to the internet that afford flexible communication and connectivity for the user. Nevertheless, sometimes the conjunction 'and' is used between 'online' and 'digital' to include the reference to devices or experiences that do not afford or imply a connection to the internet.

Children's active choices and decisions in how they use the online digital technologies in the everyday lives context reveal "a highly complex and complicated network of relationships" (Bond, 2014, p. 3), that changes and challenges social norms, rights and values taken for granted (Bond, 2014). Scrutinizing children's accounts, a truer, yet, unbiased argument could not be found than the one stated by Alice (aged 10), in a group discussion about parents digital competencies, and is used to summarize this research – "It's a complicated situation" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214).

Alice's statement, moreover, is significantly important in the way it dissolves dualisms as the ones encapsulated in public and academic debates when addressing technology, more vigorously if referring to children, underpinned by social or technological determinisms (Bijker & Law, 1992; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999), with a powerful focus on hopes and fears (Buckingham, 2000; Papert, 1997; Postman, 1994; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009; Valentine & Holloway, 2002), and risks and opportunities (Helsper et al. 2013; Livingstone & Helsper, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011a). This research aims to mature and overcome these dualities by embracing a multi-lens dialogue, stimulated by participants' narratives and covering different perspectives coming from the sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies and strands of critical criminology literature. As each perspective represents a different positioning to reflect the complexities characterized in the technologized social world in which children grow, move and participate (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). In particular, Zemiology, as proposed by critical criminology, plays a key role when scrutinizing the qualitative data generated by the participants guiding both its analysis and interpretation to move beyond the

narrow and limiting scope of risk, its unpredictability and the individualization thesis that denies children's agency (Mayall, 2005). Instead, its more holistic and inclusive model enables a better understanding of the intricacies of children's digital and online experiences, taking as a starting point, everyday situations and by privileging children's voices and perspectives as the main source of understanding. Only one study (Hope, 2013) was found which suggested that Zemiology can be applied to real problems arising in the context of children's digital lives, under the authorship of Professor Andrew Hope, Department of Education of the University of Adelaide, Australia.

In line with the theoretical contributions, this study draws on the standpoint that online digital technologies are subject "to rapidly rapid and ongoing processes of change" (Hasebrink, 2014, p. 1) and, simultaneously, changing with them are the ways children engage with and through communication-based technologies and ultimately childhood itself (Buckingham, 2000, 2006). This is also supported by two EU Kids Online reports released in 2014, in which more attention is paid to these biographical and societal changes (Hasebrink, 2014; Stald et al., 2014). The documents highlight how European children's (aged 9-16 years old) online experiences have changed since 2010, as a consequence of the fast pace of incipient online trends grounded in interwoven factors considering i) technological innovation; ii) increasing availability and accessibility of children to online environments – children are going online for the first time at younger ages and the majority of children go online everyday or almost every day (Ólafsson et al., 2013); iii) new options for online activities, in particular, mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets; iv) new opportunities and new risks (e.g. geo-locational data and software that connect with co-present strangers); v) changing patterns of societal and cultural contexts and practices that encourage children to express themselves online, with a focus in social media environments; vi) mobile internet access linked to scarcer parental supervision.

This research is, therefore, contextualised within the scope of such change, unpredictability and uncertainty featuring the late modern society landscape (Sarmiento, 2011), in which childhood, parenting and online digital technologies are challenged and simultaneously viewed through the double-edged sword perspective of modernity (Giddens, 1990). The premise that children's digital experiences can no longer "be understood as 'online' or 'offline' or 'virtual' or 'real'" (Bond, 2014, p. 44), but instead as "just another setting in which they carry out their

lives” (Third et al., 2014, p. 8) in an off/online *continuum*, that is also considered by the research presented here.

Recognising children’s competency and considering children as agents in their own right (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Livingstone, 2009), participatory dynamics were planned and combined as part of the methodological approach to the study to enable children to express their feelings, share experiences, concerns and understandings and reflect on everyday situations (Santana & Fernandes, 2011). To understand the subjectivity, the delicacy and complexity of matters and meanings children bring to their online experiences and explore the various aspects enclosed in children’s heterogeneous and complex networked lives, two research objectives (RO) were drawn in the scope of the study:

RO1 – To understand the personal values and meanings children might use to interpret their technologized lives;

RO2 – To explore the various aspects enclosed in children’s heterogeneous and complex networked lives with the purpose of uncovering short and long term unintended harmful outcomes that may be (more or less) hidden in their digital experiences.

In order to gain a deeper insight of the complexities and subjective matters and meanings to which children contribute in the span of their digital and online experiences, this study is informed by the constructivist tradition (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and a qualitative approach to generate in-depth narrative data with school-aged children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and from younger ages in line with gaps identified in the literature (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013; Ólafsson et al., 2013). To analyse and interpret the empirical data, two methods were privileged: thematic and narrative analysis were for their flexibility and compatibility with participatory and constructionist research paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The qualitative data generated by children’s heterogeneous, reflexive and critical accounts encapsulate the complex network of human and technical *actants* (see Latour, 1996) embedded in the relationship between children and online digital technologies in terms of access and use, relationships, and meanings; aspects explored by the three key themes identified in the data analysis process: i) digital inequalities, ii) controlling parental control and iii) online participation.

Children’s online participation is significant. According to INE-Statistics Portugal (INE, 2012), the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is widely widespread among

children aged between 10 and 15 years: 98% are using the computer, 95% accessing the internet and 93% using a mobile phone. Nevertheless, upholding studies carried in the Portuguese context (see Almeida et al., 2008; Cardoso et al., 2007; Cardoso et al., 2009; Espanha et al., 2007; Paisana & Lima, 2012; Ponte et al., 2008; Taborda, 2010), this access is diversified, as it encompasses complexities that go beyond the digital divide rhetoric as the children's accounts suggest. Participants' narratives illuminate the discussion around the taken for grantedness of access, the centrality of digital consumption in children's social and identity development processes and the harmful and complicated dynamics enclosed in the seductive demands of commercial industries.

Furthermore, this thesis centres in children's relationship *to, with and through* technology (Heidegger, 1977; Matthewman, 2011). Evidence suggests a gap existing between adults and children in terms of digital concerns and knowledge that is harmfully aggravated by panoptical and resistance dynamics arising in the family relationships context.

Also new forms of sociality (Matthewman, 2011) and new meanings and cultures of use (du Gay et al., 1997) are outcomes that encourage and are encouraged by the corollaries of post-modernity and heightened by a complex actor-network structure (Latour, 1996; Matthewman, 2011; Prout, 2005). Children's narratives exemplify they are actively engaging in ambiguous experiences, including sexual socialization, gossip, rumours, rudeness, abusive requests, abuse of trust, criminal practices, such as hacking and the illegal downloading of copyright protected contents is occurring. This reflects a more complicated picture of children's online participation, proving that new vectors of victimisation, vulnerability and harm are emerging and challenging the romantic westernised vision of childhood (Clarke, 2010), that no longer seems to apply (Prout, 2005).

Children "reside in quite a different world to their parents, guardians and legal institutions who are charged with protecting them" (Stokes, 2010, p. 320), a reality very distant from past experiences and close to the almost infinite range of present (and future) technological possibilities and its challenges (Osório, 2010). Supporting this, Stald and colleagues (2014, p. 2) reflect on the added difficulties adults (involved in the care and education of children) nowadays face regarding children's technologized lives:

"Once children are in a position to access the internet on a personal, handheld device, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents (and researchers) to keep up to speed with their online activities, and help prepare them to manage the



experiences and risks they may encounter – hence, the challenges in mediating their online activities, while supporting them in exploring new opportunities and helping them cope with problematic outcomes, all at the same time.”

Parents cannot rely on their own past childhood experiences (Livingstone, 2004) to face the contemporary challenges. Aware of these difficulties, this study offers updated evidence and insights rising from children’s accounts about their technologized daily lives. Nevertheless, a major contribution comes from proposing a shift in the way of looking and framing the complexities enclosed in these interwoven relationships using a social harm theory approach – Zemiology. Reality proves to be more complex than inquiring about something or someone that has upset or disturbed children when online. Without overlooking its important contribution, the risk narrative, despite central in the research about children’s use of communication and internet-based technologies, as it is argued in this thesis, “has begun to reach the limits of its usefulness” (Green, 2009, p. 493).

Children’s and adults’ are both concerned about safety online, and the two are also learning to deal with digital and online changes, challenges and contradictions. In this perspective, a zemiological approach would enable the two generational groups to engage together in an intergenerational and interconnected dialogue to seek dynamic and positive solutions, putting aside pessimistic, restrictive and over-protective behaviours that simultaneously constrain children’s and adults’ rights and relationships.

## **1.2. Explanation note**

In 2010<sup>1</sup>, when the present research was designed and submitted to a doctoral grant from Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)<sup>2</sup> – a national funding agency for science, technology and innovation, under the responsibility of Ministry for Education and Science – the aim of the project was to study:

“Emerging phenomena such as cyberbullying, sexting, cyberstalking, social engineering or cyberpedophilia [...] that reveal a facet of violence, at least unsettling, which has sprinkled all over the world (Muir, 2005). Real and virtual merge and (in)(a)ccidents of

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<sup>1</sup> The research project was submitted in July 2010. The approval of the grant was conceded in January 2011. This research project was funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia from April 2011 to March 2015, under the reference SFRH/BD/68288/2010.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fct.pt/>

this nature may be initiated with an innocent, thoughtless and indiscreet click within cyberspace. [...] Alongside the socializing nature of web 2.0 (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), there is a still understudied phenomenon: violence perpetrated by, with and among children in online context, which found in new technologies the tools and methods that favour the perpetrator with impunity and anonymity; and allow an inversion of roles when compared to the offline world. The online offender can be the victim or bystander in the real world and move in the virtual world for revenge or rebellion, for example (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). In this context of violence there is no safe place for the victim, and even though children know that they must protect themselves and report abuse, according to Byron (2008), they rarely do so, sometimes because they: i) are not conscious of the magnitude that these episodes may reach; ii) just take the blame for it; iii) do not think it is possible to solve the problem; iv) not always are aware of the denouncing mechanisms.”

The research purpose was very clear: to signal and study episodes of ‘online violence’, an emerging and worrying phenomenon that deprives children of the right to security (Castro & Osório, 2011, p. 1825) and may arise from four types of online risks classified by the EU Kids Online Project (aggressive, sexual, values, commercial) where children can: receive passively unwanted and risky content (e.g. violence, pornography, racism, hate, marketing), be targeted and participate in stranger initiated activity (e.g. harassment, stalking, grooming, meeting strangers, sexual predators, ideological persuasion, misuse or personal information), or have an active role as perpetrators in risky activities (e.g. bullying, hostility to peers, sexual harassment, sexting, produce harmful content, gambling, infringe copyright).

Considering research as a process of discovery that evolves and matures its theoretical and methodological model, the definition of ‘online violence’ underwent an ongoing process of review and refinement. A first definition was proposed by Castro and Osório (2012, p. 172),

“[...] by "online violence" we mean the use of digital devices or Internet to actively engage in physical, verbal, psychological or emotional aggression, that being repeated can lead to serious physical or psychological self-harm or deliberately and intentionally cause harm to another human being.”

In Castro and Osório (2015, p. 36), a revised definition was suggested,

“By ‘online violence’ we mean the use of online digital services and devices to participate in activities that may result in child’s own physical, psychological, emotional harm or in causing harm to other people.”

However, as new European research was published, the data collected driven by the ‘online violence’ focus, started to lose relevance and become redundant. Driven by this setback, the need arose to look at the data from new angles and redefine and readjust the research objectives in line with the new approaches. The research internship at University Campus Suffolk (UCS) – Ipswich, Suffolk county, UK, under the supervision of Doctor Emma Bond, proved to be a valuable experience that enabled the opportunity to access cutting-edge international literature and to mature the theoretical approach and discuss the data with experienced experts in the fields of criminology, technological studies, social work, education, sociology and children and youth studies.

‘Online violence’ ceased to be the theory-driven approach to the qualitative data and instead a data-driven approach was pursued considering the complexities enclosed in children’s technologized lives. A multi-lens and data-driven approach enabled to gain a more inclusive and holistic perspective by privileging children’s voices and perspectives as the main source for understanding the everyday real problems that emerge from the complex network of human and non-human agents enrolled in the embedded relationship between children and online digital technologies in the context of late modernity.

### **1.3. Personal and academic motivations**

The growing personal and academic interest in researching about the informal and private use children make of online digital technologies in their everyday lives developed in the confluence of the following circumstances: i) the Master’s degree in the field of Child Studies, specializing in Information and Communication Technologies; ii) the contact with children, parents and teachers in public talks about internet safety; iii) the collaboration as a research assistant in the European Internet Safety Project, SimSafety – Flight Simulator for Internet Safety, co-financed by the European Union (Activity 3: ICT – European Commission, EACEA); iv) the exploratory study about harmful online pro-anorexia and self-harming contents produced by children and young people; v) the participation in national and international scientific events; vi) the research period held at the University Campus Suffolk, UK.

The Master's degree (2005-2008) offered the possibility to develop research about children's informal and private use of text-based communication technologies. The dissertation "When keys speak, the words stay silent – the use of mobile phone and Messenger service by children of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the district of Braga (North of Portugal)" (supervised by Doctor Maria José Machado) was the result of a quantitative exploratory study that involved a sample of 513 respondents distributed by two schools in the region of Braga. Some of its main findings highlighted that children take advantage of the communication affordances to talk with friends. The study found that the average number of contacts children have in their instant message service is 52 people; 20% (mainly boys) reported talking with people they met online; over 40% block a contact when they do not like the conduct of the person; more than 40% reported 'never' having parental controls when using the instant chat service (42.5%) or using the mobile phone (47.9%). In line with the research findings, recommendations for future research were made in order to raise awareness and a larger follow-up of online trends; deepen research about the influence of online digital technologies in peers' interactions; sensitize parents to symptoms of addictive behaviours; study the impact of online digital technologies in children's lives; educate children for a responsible use of online digital technologies.

Following some invitations, the opportunity to talk (2008-2015) about internet safety to audiences of children, teachers and parents and other professionals involved in the care and education of children, made possible to hear the anguishes and concerns enclosed in their narratives derived from internet (mis)(ab)use.

The experience as a research assistant from 2009 to 2011 in the European Project "SimSafety – Flight Simulator for Internet Safety" instilled a more focused interest in the complex venues arising from children's digital and online participation. Given the assumption that children adopt risky behaviours on the internet, a European team of experts created a safe internet browsing simulator (<http://www.simsafety.eu>). This simulator adopted an intergenerational collaborative approach to promote literacy for a healthy and responsible use of the internet by simulating a controlled exposure to internet risks. Parents, teachers and students working together had the opportunity to create an adult-children cooperating bond, where experiences and knowledge were exchanged in order to deal with online challenges and threats. The University of Minho's Institute of Education led the project in Portugal, implementing it in four schools in the north region.

According to research developed by the European Project EU Kids Online, potentially harmful user-generated contents including suicide, self-harm and eating disorders, in particular anorexia, receive less attention than contact risks (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Moreover, the former are challenging and emerging online risks factors that need further research (see Haddon & Livingstone, 2012; Hasebrink, 2014; Jorge, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2011a; Livingstone et al., 2012; Staksrud et al., 2007). In the 2009-2011 European full report findings (Haddon & Livingstone, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2011b) potentially harmful user-generated contents appear as the second most common risk to which 21% of 11-16 year olds have been exposed (pro-anorexia, 10%; self-harm, 7%; suicide, 5%).

Acknowledging the existence of public blogs that promote anorexia as a lifestyle and/or encourage self-inflicted harmful practices, the need arose to understand more deeply the phenomenon with an exploratory purpose in the scope of the Doctorate. Incited by readings on user-generated and harmful contents on the internet, keywords used in literature, such as 'thinspiration', 'pro-ana', 'ana prayer', and 'thin is beautiful' were inserted randomly using the Google search engine. A non-participant observation of eleven public blogs, held from January to March 2012, offered a different vantage point into the understanding of the complexity of this phenomenon from children's and young people's own words.

The empirical findings were critically scrutinised through working papers and public talks. The study was very well received by international and national peer groups in scientific meetings and also recognized the importance of the research that is published in international peer-reviewed books and journals (see Castro & Osório, 2012; 2013a; 2013b; in press).

From 2008 to 2015 the opportunity to offer the Master's and the Doctoral data to the scrutiny of experts from different fields in the national and international landscape through the participation in scientific events and the submission of papers to peer-reviewed conferences and journals was an enriching learning process that allowed a more in-depth look to the empirical findings from a critical, informed and more comprehensive standpoint. Additionally, these challenging experiences enabled the researcher to embrace new academic and professional opportunities, expand the social networking connections, develop and enhance communicational, critical, argumentation, leading, social and researching proficiencies, and obtain trust and recognition from peers.

Finally, from May to August 2014, The research period at UCS – University Campus Suffolk, UK, supervised by Doctor Emma Bond, was an unforgettable, enriching and educational opportunity to mature and evolve at an individual, social and professional level.

#### **1.4. Organization of the thesis**

This thesis is structured in five chapters. Chapter one develops an overview of the study in its theoretical context, the research objectives and the methodological framework adopted. A summary of researcher's personal and academic interests and how these relate with the research presented. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

Chapter two provides a sample of the theoretical framework that contextualizes and offers explanations that help clarify the phenomenon under study. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of thematic analysis, the theoretical framework presented develops from the study itself drawing on contributions from the sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies and aspects of critical criminology. The five sections enclosed in the chapter provide the rationale that may shed further light on understanding the networked complexities enclosed in the embedded relationships between children and online digital technologies.

In the first section, aspects of 'risk society' and 'reflexive modernity' are central to analyse the contemporary social changes and how they affect adult-child relationships and biographies. In conformity with the research purpose, the second section focuses on two major social movements (feminist and children's rights) arising within the late modernity that impact on the social representations of childhood and through which children became visible or invisible in society, family and research. The third section sheds further light to understand heterogeneous and complex networks that link together human and non-human entities. Section four offers an overview of the current core debates around the embeddedness of the digital realm in children's everyday lives. Section five offers a comprehensive theoretical model to help comprehend and solve day-to-day digital and online problems by privileging the voices and perspectives of children as the main source for understanding social harm beyond the narrow spectrum of risk and crime.

The third chapter details the research design, including the participatory methodology used, access to the participants, the data analysis decisions and the centrality of ethical principles and considerations throughout the research process.

The fourth chapter centres on the analysis and discussion of the qualitative data generated by the participants in which real life situations, experienced by school-aged children in their everyday mediated lives, are addressed. The chapter offers a profound and detailed description and interpretation of real and everyday problems enclosed in three key themes: digital inequalities, controlling parental control, and online participation. The events were selected considering the complexities and subjectivities they represent and how they may affect children's needs, development and rights (provision, protection, participation) in a different sort of aspects (e.g. social, educational, emotional, criminal) in the everyday context.

Finally, chapter five summarizes the research, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the study in its entire process and points for future research paths.

## 2. Theoretical framework

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*This chapter provides the theoretical corpus of the thesis. With the purpose of supporting, giving coherence to and framing the phenomenon under study, relevant contributions from different research fields such as sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies and critical criminology inform the arguments presented in this thesis. Drawing from Maxwell (2013), the following theoretical map was inductively constructed with relevant theories, as well as concepts borrowed from different disciplines that reflect a constant interaction and dialogue with the data collected in the field. The following multi-lens and data-driven approach (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) benefits from a wider scope by offering a deeper understanding of society, childhood and technology in late modernity, and the potentially harmful outcomes enclosed within the complex and embedded relationship between children's lives and online digital technologies.*

*In the approach outlined above discussions about 'risk society' and 'reflexive modernity' are unavoidable, where the notion of risk and reflexivity become central to society, individuals in general, and children in particular, as they construct their own life biographies. Based in the highly influential analyses of contemporary social change driven by Beck (1992), Giddens (1990) and Douglas (1982) the first section offers an overview of the risk society thesis – its uncertainties, complexities, ambiguities, but also the anxieties and fears that guide obsessive over-protecting parents (see Furedi, 2001) in the struggle for the utopian safety of their children.*

*Drawing from the work of the foremost social-scientific specialists on childhood, such as Jenks, Prout, Allison James, Adrian James, Corsaro and Qvortrup in the international landscape, and Sarmento, Tomás and Soares (also signs as Fernandes) in the Portuguese setting, the second section is a contribution towards a better comprehension of the paradoxes that surround children and childhood itself at the crossroads of a second modernity, by the examination of two influential milestones – the feminist movement and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (henceforth referred to as UNCRC) – that gave rise to a new context for the re-evaluation of childhood within society, family and science.*

*To understand the ambiguities of contemporary life and the remarkable transformations brought by progress and technology that have drastically changed both childhood and children's contemporary lives, the third section develops from three main prominent socio-*



*technical theories: the social shaping of technology (SST), the social construction of technology (SCOT), and the actor-network theory (ANT). More attention will be given to the latter, as it represents a prominent epistemological possibility to overcome the technology/society dualism and a valuable lens to understand the hybrid and interconnected phenomenon of childhood as argued by Prout (2005).*

*The complex relationship between children, childhood and online digital technologies is the topic that opens discussion in section four, where present-day debates are explored with the purpose of obtaining a rich interpretation and reflexive understanding across the context of children's networked worlds, from a mediated consumption perspective (Buckingham, 2011).*

*Finally, section five offers a critical revision of the risk narrative, through explaining why this rationale became a limiting theoretical framework. The need to move the focus from potential risks to real harms is discussed and concludes with the presentation of the proposal arising from the field of critical criminology – Zemiology. The Zemiology approach is presented as an alternative for understanding how 'harm' affects individuals' dignity and rights. The final part of the chapter progresses from theory to practice and illustrates how Zemiology can be applied to real problems.*

*In summary the chapter contains the following sections:*

*2.1. Risk society: uncertainty and the scrutiny of the utopian safety*

*2.2. Children's childhoods in late modernity: the paradoxical (in)visibility*

*2.3. The networked effect of technology: connecting human and non-human*

*2.4. Complex landscapes in children's digital and online participation: uses, meanings, relationships*

*2.5. Beyond the risk narrative: Zemiology as applied to the complex landscape where children, digital and online converge*

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## **2.1. Risk society: uncertainty and the scrutiny of the utopian safety**

Literature and related research with a focus on late modernity cannot ignore noteworthy contributions from theorists such as Beck, Giddens and Douglas, who are considered key and influential references in the understanding of societal mutations, arising within the scope of the demands, challenges and complex dynamics of the late modernity (Boudia & Jas, 2007; Cottle, 1998), also known as risk society (Beck, 1992) or reflexive modernity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990). Their societal (Bauman, 2007b; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990) and cultural

(Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982) critical analysis (Zinn, 2004, 2006) and interpretive theories surrounding second modernity have been central in various domains (Green, 2009) and, more recently, in research that places the idea of risk at the core of interpretative analysis concerning children's technologically mediated lives.

The science and technology paradox is a central part of the 'risk narrative' and an inevitable discussion in the frame of this research (see section 2.3.) and as a starting point from which to understand late modernity corollaries and its social impacts, and, subsequently, analyse research carried out under the western risk society rational. Although children are not central in the scrutiny of these authors, their theoretical dialogues offer important insights for understanding the impacts of post-industrial society on childhood in late modernity. Within the scope of this research, children are perceived as reflexive<sup>3</sup> networked agents building their life biographies while actively engaged in their everyday technologized and complex worlds.

This first section offers an interpretative overview of the risk society perspective by focusing on three contexts: science, experience and representation (Hamilton et al., 2007), and begins by outlining important contemporary debates and issues. Throughout the second part, the focus is on how economic, social and technological changes are fragmenting social order (Prout, 2005) and impacting adult-children everyday relationships by creating complex and harmful dynamics, where protection collides with participation (this discussion is further extended through section 2.5).

Risk is a major topic of research in social sciences these days. However, Hamilton and colleagues argue that the meaning of 'risk' is often taken for granted, making its perception and communication problematic. Beck chose not to define risk (Hamilton, 2007), but the linguists, Fillmore and Atkins (1992), define risk as the "possibility of an unwelcome outcome such as 'harm'" (1992, p. 79, cited in Hamilton, 2007). Still, uncertainty and an interesting history mark the origins of 'risk' (see Hamilton, 2007). In this sense, although it is an idea of paramount importance when referring to second modernity, 'risk' is not *per se* a modern concept.

References to risk date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, alongside first modernity, circumscribed to nautical hazards, and following the destruction of ships in storms (Boudia & Jas, 2007). As the concept unfolded over the nineteenth century and more emphatically with the rise of capitalism, throughout the twentieth century, an increasing

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<sup>3</sup> In this situation 'reflexivity' refers to 'self-confrontation'.

development of diverse forms of insurance emerged as a response aiming to control and manage a wide range of risks (e.g., natural, household, health) (see Boudia & Jas, 2007). No longer limited to a response to natural causes, risk developed into a multidimensional characteristic feature of modernity and a central parameter when analysing contemporary post-industrial society (Boudia & Jas, 2007). Either perceived as disjunction (Beck, 1992) or continuity (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982), risks enclose side-effect elements of progress (Wilkinson, 2001). In this regard, and as Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) argue, modern risks and hazards are not longer circumscribed to time (future generations will be affected), space (they cross nation borders) or generational boundaries (affect elder and younger) (Ekberg, 2007).

Marked by uncertainty and vulnerabilities that result from a darker side of techno-economic development (Beck, 1992, p. 19), the 1960s-70s represented the turning point for an advanced stage of modernity: a global and reflexive second modernity (Boudia & Jas, 2007), also known as risk society (Beck, 1992). New technologies and their associated risks, in accordance with Beck, are the cornerstone of risk society, creating a new era where hazards are greater, more threatening, and more unpredictable than ever before (Beck, 2002; Draper, 1993; Lacy, 2002) (e.g., Chernobyl; 9/11). And, paradoxically, as sovereign borders fail to provide protection, more than ever, science and technology are needed to handle such risks (Boudia & Jas, 2007).

The risk society era did not become more dangerous – on the contrary, in some sense it became safer (Beck, 2006); rather it became more uncontrollable (Beck, 2002). In this sense, Giddens (2002) assigns Beck's risk society as a collateral effect of the emergence of a globalised and networked electronic economy (Castells, 2010) reinforced, in the end of the twentieth century, by the intensification of a global interconnectedness, where "patterns of worldwide economic, financial, technological and ecological interdependence" (McGrew, 1992, p. 62) contributed to the reshaping and shrinking of the world into a new global and transnational order (McGrew, 1992).

Giddens (1990; 1991; 2002) perceives globalisation as the most visible consequence of modernity in which global ICT contributed to the disembedding of social practices that can no longer be primarily defined by the embeddedness of their locality, as those local restricted processes are influenced, recombined and shaped by events taking place in other part of the world (Bauman, 2007b; McGrew, 1992; Stones, 2012). Globalization is the interpenetration of

the global, in the particularities of place and individuality and the intersection of time-space and presence-absence (McGrew, 1992) where, by consequence, “events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe” (McGrew, 1992, p. 65-66).

To further understand the nature of risk and how it is perceived, Giddens (2002) recognises the existence of two types of risks: *external risks* – that come from tradition and nature and *manufactured risks* – that “are a result of human progression, of the development of science and technology” (Pelzer, 2013, p. 70). The latter are more threatening because they “are an unintended after-effect of techno-scientific achievement” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 348). In compliance with Ekberg, technologization and scientization have been fuelling fears among risk society theorists who “fear that technology has become uncoupled from social control and at the same time, is being used as an insidious form of social control” (2007, p. 346). Science represents the double-edged sword of modernity as it is both the cause and the source of solutions to risks and “[a]s a result, perceptions of danger are increasingly focused on technology: human created or manufactured risks” (Furedi, 1997, p. 36). This comparison between external (natural) and manufactured (technologic) risks is central to the different approaches to risk (Ekberg, 2007). Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), however, propose a different categorisation. They consider four types of risks: *foreign disputes and conflicts*, *crime and civil disorder*, *concerns for the environment and the misuse of technology*, and *economic problems affecting levels of affluence* (Linsley & Shrides, 2009). Furedi (1997) argues that within the hazardous context of the second modernity, ‘risk’ evolved into a vague concept broadly applied to a variety of situations (e.g., crime, diseases, nuclear power, reproductive technology, politics, and the risks that follow from the use of the internet), making risk communication difficult (Ekberg, 2007; about risk communication see Hamilton et al., 2007). Also different approaches are considered in respect to risk. Ekberg (2007), in his review and examination of the parameters of the risk society, argues there is a tension between real and actual risks and socially constructed and perceived risks. The realists’ perspective conceives that the risk is real and can be identified, measured, classified and predicted by methods and techniques of the quantitative sciences (Ekberg, 2007). The cultural, relativist and structuralists standpoint argues that nothing is a risk in itself, because risks only represent possible scenarios (Williams, 2008); but anything can be a risk; it depends on how the event is analysed (Ekberg, 2007). To social (moderate) constructionists (it includes risk society

theorists), risks are both real (they exist and can cause harm) and socially constructed (they can be changed, magnified, dramatized or minimized over time) (Beck, 1992; Ekberg, 2007; Latour & Woolgar, 1979), because “there is no world outside the social, but [...] there is no objective risk accessible beyond social interpretation” (Zinn, 2004, p. 5). Within the risk society framework, risks are theorised as

“[...] constructs of competing social, political and commercial powers, [and] they are also understood as perceived risks rather than actual risks. This means the risk may be real or imaginary, but people believe the threats are real whether or not they actually exist and decide based on this assumption. Perceived risks actually exist in the private consciousness of individuals and public consciousness of society and really influence personal, political, social and financial decisions” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 350-351)

In this regard, potential risks are also a political issue (in its social, economic and political latent side effects), encouraging societal intervention (Elliot, 2002) to anticipate and control threatening and unpredictable risks that have not happened yet. Hence, risk became a force of social change (Van Loon, 2002). This is what Giddens (2002) designates by ‘*precautionary principle*’ (this concept emerged in the 1980s, in Germany, in relation to environment issues). The ‘precautionary principle’ implies that action must be taken “if there is a potential of harm independent of whether this potential is scientifically proven or not and independent of the probability of its realization” (Pelzer, 2013, p. 72). To Williams (2008), the future-oriented evaluation of risk is the factor that legitimizes governments to act (in the present) in order to prevent possible future events (for example, this principle was used during Bush administration to justify the military invasion on Iraq, in 2003). This possibility of anticipation, in accordance with Beck, has a dark side in the way that “increasingly limit civil rights and liberties, with the result that in the end the open, free society may be abolished, but [...] threat is by no means averted” (2006, p. 330) (for example, surveillance measures).

Risks also presuppose *individualization* (Beck, 1992), *self-confrontation* (Beck, 2007) and *decisions* (Beck, 1997, cited in Elliot, 2002; Giddens, 1990) in order to search for new means to deal with uncertainty (Giddens, 2002). This on-going process is based in decision-making processes, where individuals “develop an increasing engagement with both the intimate and more public aspects of their lives, aspects that were previously governed by tradition or taken-

for-granted norms” (Elliot, 2002, p. 298). In the decision-making process, individuals seek “adaptable individualized approaches to the insecurities and vulnerabilities that characterize risk society” (Anais & Hier, 2012, p. 2) to apply in a future scenario (Williams, 2008). To Beck (2000) the decision-making process is radicalised in this second modernization, as individuals are impelled to decide in a context of uncertainty and non-knowledge. Following this idea, Douglas argues that during modernity, “[t]he calculation of risk is deeply entrenched in science and manufacturing and as a theoretical base for decision making” (1990, p. 2), providing a new way of analysing the probabilities of any activity’s success or failure. Thus she perceives risk in the late modernity as a political talk connoted with undesirable and negative outcomes. The construction of risk is legitimised by dynamics of economy, culture and politics and they are organised in terms of legitimacy/illegitimacy.

To respond to the no longer adequate and internalised principles of the first modernity, new demands are required to evaluate, manage, negotiate and govern risk. In the context of reflexive modernity the response to risk and uncertainty becomes grounded in freedom, self-realization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), sense of global responsibility and solidarity, sensitive to the demands of an ethical globalization, as Beck observes (Lacy, 2002). Reflexive modernity embodies “the awareness of risk, uncertainty, contingency and insecurity and [...] an increase in attempts to colonize and control the near and distant future” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 345); and is structured under the ‘self’ and ‘individualization’ that demands individuals to become more ‘reflexive’ and develop their biographies; where individuals have agency free of previous structures and are required to make their own life decisions (about perceptions of risk, risk taking decisions, and risk management); and reflexively (re)construct their individual biographies (Giddens, 1990; Lash, 1992), based in an active trust (Beck, 2002) and in the light of new information and knowledge (Giddens, 1990). Bauman refers to this reflexivity as “a level of liquidity, plasticity or flexibility that allows them [individuals] to manage and respond to risk and uncertainty” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 354), allowing “adjustments to be made as new knowledge is acquired and interpreted” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 354). However, as threats replace active trust with active mistrust (Beck, 2002), the individualised process of liberty dissolves into the collapse of solidarity leading to a “collective consciousness of anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty and ambivalence” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 346).

While Giddens and Beck focus on the individual (self) “outside the organised social environment” (Draper, 1993, p. 643), Douglas argues that the perception of risk has to be

informed within a cultural bias and a social structure (others). To explain how the social experience of risk perception is culturally biased (meaning it is a historical and local experience), Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) developed a grid-group model to understand different logics of risk as they are expressed in social groups or organizations (Zinn, 2004) by classifying and differentiating four types of societies: *individualists* (place more emphasis in economic risks); *egalitarians* (privilege the environmental and technological risks); *hierarchists* (more concerned with risks related with foreign disputes and conflicts); *fatalists* (focus on crime and civil disorder). This model clarifies how social interactions enhance (if low-grid state) or constrain (if high-grid state) individuals' personal autonomy (if low-group state) or solidarity (if high-group state) in decision-making processes (Linsley & Shrives, 2009). However, Douglas' approach was subjected to several criticisms as being deterministic and not considering individuals' free will (Tansey & O'Riordan, 1999, cited in Linsley & Shrives, 2009). In the socio-cultural approach, individuals are strongly influenced by their cultural context (e.g. social class, gender, ethnicity) and by their emotional and personal experiences (Zinn, 2004), as the grid model describes. Individuals are subject to a moral code (Douglas, 1966), and have a moral responsibility to the society they belong and undertake a "restricted set of social roles" (Rayner, 1992, cited in Linsley & Shrives, 2009). "For Douglas, collective representations of risk perform an important integrative function in the maintenance of social solidarity" (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 4); and how risk is perceived is "determined by our prior commitments towards different types of social solidarity" (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 1).

In this sense, risk is a social construction and a double-edged sword (Giddens, 1990) that holds individuals accountable as it reflects people's assumptions about order, hierarchy and justice (Draper, 1993) throughout blaming processes that are used to coerce individuals to be good citizens. This allocation of responsibility (influenced by moral judgements that call for self-justification or others to account) and social principles are the reason why societies fear some risks and exclude others (Douglas, 1966) (for example, a disease that is caused by sexual promiscuity). Furedi seems to corroborate this idea and elaborates from there stating that "public perception and response to any event are subject to influences that are specific to the time and the place" (1997, p. 17) and "[t]he selective way in which the media and other institutions pick and choose what constitutes a risk underlines the social dynamic behind the formation of risk consciousness" (1997, p. 16; for a reflection about the relationship between risk and the media and the role of media in constructing social problems see also Anderson's,

2006).

Although Beck seems not to pay a great deal of attention to media in his writings, he recognises the power of media and its role in processes of risk coverage (Anderson, 2006), or how risks become socially constructed (reality or representation (Anderson, 2006)) and made visible in the public discourse (Cottle, 1998), “offer[ing] a complex range of meanings that may be interpreted in various ways by audiences” (Anderson, 2006, p. 115); and how they “produce homogeneous groups in relation to risk” (Zinn, 2004, p. 12), when they generalise and emphatically engender risk anxieties, (for example, when tensions arising between media instil risk anxieties and the desire of keeping children, result in autonomy and opportunities restriction).

To Beck, risk is ambivalence. Modern life is more uncertain, threatening and global than ever, but the western world appears safer than ever (Beck, 2006). To face modern uncertainty only three reactions are possible: *denial* (the modern culture response); *apathy* (post-modern nihilism response); or *transformation* (the risk society cosmopolitan response) (Beck, 2006). In line with Beck, the latter is the freedom response inscribed in action and in the hope of a new beginning. This is the path that somehow seems to bring Beck closer to Douglas social solidarity commitment. Instead of debating, preventing and managing risks that they have produced, modern societies must respond to uncertainty within the promise of a cosmopolitan order in the basis of international cooperation, human rights, global justice and solidarity, Beck (2002) suggests.

The risk society analysis may also be applied to the triangle: children, online digital technologies, and adults. Late modernity is perceived as the age of insecurity and human-made uncertainties that span across many aspects of modern life, colonising adults and children’s lives, as it contributes to instil in adults fear for children’s well being, pressuring them to put children under surveillance (Furedi, 1997; Kehily, 2010) and compromising children’s digital and online freedom in harmful manners (see section 2.5.).

Regarding parenting styles, incongruent positions cloud their role in late modernity. Parents either are blamed for children’s criminality, lack of protection or over-protection (Furedi, 2001; Pain, 2006).

On the other hand, the distinction adult-child is blurring and representations of childhood are changing as children become more active, participative, and more difficult to manage (Prout, 2005). In the particular case of the embeddedness of online digital technologies in the child’s



everyday lives, as children gain digital autonomy, new family dynamics of conflict, control and negotiation emerge (Cardoso et al., 2008).

According to Furedi (2001) in contemporary western society the role of parents is contaminated by the culture of risk, fear and paranoia eroding parent's rational judgement about their child's safety; confidence in their parental competence and parenting skills – through their own, other parents' and society's judging eyes. Sutterby (2009) argues that parents' anxieties throughout late modernity are mainly increased by the rise of 'child-protection industry' (boyd & Hargittai, 2013), a token of the risk society narrative. First, an increased access to information (especially as portrayed in the media) instead of bringing relief, heightens more anxiety in deciding what is a real or a potential threat; second, the huge increase of advice from experts (for example, magazines and books available in print media but also online) make parents more insecure about parenting decisions, since experts' advices seem to contradict over time (Furedi, 2001; Skenazy, 2009); and third, the media enhance parents' anxieties, pervasive moral panics and risk aversion when they focus on sensational, dramatic but rare events rather than real hazards (for example, abduction, despite being a rare phenomenon, its dramatization by the media evokes moral panic and irrational fears) (Franklin & Cromby, 2009; Gill, 2007; Mathiesen, 2013; Rosier, 2011; Stokes, 2009; Sutterby, 2009; Tynes, 2007).

In accordance with Giddens and Beck and the risk society thesis, Furedi (1997) and Skenazy (2009) refer to safety as a 'growth industry' where questionably "a range of software products and internet services are available that claim to help keep children safe online" (Gill, 2007, p. 59) (and also arguably offline products like stair gates, baby alarms, plug socket covers among others are products offered by safety industry around the idea of being a good parent) and, ultimately, contribute to the 'islanding' of childhood, as argued by Gillis (2008). For every aspect of personal security a safety measure is proposed and, when referring to children, this is exacerbated with security measures to protect newborn babies from being abducted, or monitoring systems for parents to supervise their children's activities at nursery or at home (Furedi, 1997). Nevertheless, as Furedi discusses, "[w]hen safety is worshipped and risks are seen as intrinsically bad, society is making a clear statement about the values that ought to guide life" (1997, p.15). Risk is increasingly negatively connoted as more risk avoidance strategies are adopted. "Indeed, the positive connotations traditionally associated with 'risk-

taking' have given way to condemnation" (Furedi, 1997, p. 26) and disapproval. This erases the possibility of a 'good risk' and enhances anxieties, fear and harm.

Furedi (1997) and Bauman (2006) conceptualised and introduced the concept 'culture of fear' as the "wide spread sense of anxiety with regards to the future, a mistrust of others, and an increased sense of danger and risk" (Franklin & Cromby, 2009, p. 1). In respect to this, Kaspersson (2014) contends about the attractiveness enclosed in labelling (in media, political and public discourses) something or someone as 'evil' as a way of creating distance between 'us' and 'them'. Allowing dangerousness to reside in strangers (e.g. paedophile, stranger danger) the popular media reduces the problem of sexual violence to stereotypes. The idea of a few 'dirty old men' reassures that children and family are protected (see Kaspersson, 2014). More than a reaction to a specific risk, this became a cultural representation and an interpretation of life in the beginning of the twenty-first century, much encouraged by elements of popular culture (Furedi, 1997). According to Furedi (1997) different times and cultures face different kinds of 'fear'<sup>4</sup> – Gods, witches, death, unemployment or nuclear war. Fears arise from personal experiences, or are instilled by the media, or by fiction (Furedi, 1997).

Fear is a response to life and how individuals view humanity. Furedi's discourse of fear reveals how panics about environment and technology have a very similar structure in human relationships matters and how it also reveals a lack of trust in human beings and human relations causing more anxieties, risk aversion (Gill, 2007), paranoia and controlling behaviours that destabilize (Prout, 2005) and intoxicate children's development (Forward & Buck, 1989; Palmer, 2007) and family relationships. As Bond (2014) explains social constructions of risk became central not only to understand social constructions of childhood in western societies, but also parenting styles in late modernity. Corroborating Bauman (2006), the lack of trust in human bonds is 'bad news' and asserts that human relationships are no longer based in confidence bonds. They became instead a "prolific source of anxiety" (Bauman, 2006, p. 69), alert and distress.

Furedi introduces the concept of 'paranoid parenting' (Furedi, 2001) to label parental western obsessive preoccupation with child safety as a response to the risk society context. According

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<sup>4</sup> 'Fear' not always had a negative connotation. In the sixteenth century fear was a reasonable response and "essential for the realization of the individual and of a civilized society" (Furedi, 1997, p. 7), in conformity with the English Philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Based in the work of David Parkins, Furedi observes that in the nineteenth century fear was connoted with religion and was an expression of respect, reverence and veneration. Afterwards fear was dissociated from its positives attributes accompanied by preponderance for the unpredictability that was dominating the society.

to Parker (2004) this obsessive concern is a lifestyle that affects children, parents and other adults involved in the care of children. The misanthropic representation of adults as a risk: the 'stranger danger' effect (Furedi, 2001; Pain, 2006; Stokes, 2009). 'Stranger danger' is a key concept in children's personal safety education and refers to a symbolic rather than real threat to children (Pain, 2006; Stokes, 2009) However, to Furedi this can be a double-edged sword, since "[w]hen parents instruct children about stranger-danger [...] they are also communicating a negative statement about the adult world – and, by implication, about themselves" (2001, p. 11). The fear of the stranger is "the fear of the abduction or abuse of a child by someone outside the child's family [...] or community or maybe mere acquaintances, which would not usually have direct contact with the children in question" (Stokes, 2009, p. 8). Nevertheless, empirical data indicates "online sexual solicitations that youths received came not from strangers but from family members, family friends, and peers" (Pain, 2004; Tynes, 2007, p. 576). This argument is a good example of how good intentioned educational initiatives can bring harm to children as it can potentially lead children to "read places and people in this particular light" (Pain, 2004, p. 66).

This contemporary pessimistic attitude, imbued by risk and fear discourses affects the relation between adults and children in a harmful fashion; encourages the construction of more social problems as it reveals a lack of trust in community (individuals, institutions, governments), "particularly regarding foreigners ('strangers')" (Stokes, 2009, p. 11; about the association between strangers and 'evil' see Kaspersson, 2014); favours the path for suspicion, vulnerability and individualization that Beck proclaims – as a growing sense of anxiety and insecurity; increases and legitimizes adults supervision and policing strategies instilling in them the illusion of control (Piper et al., 2006; Stokes, 2009; Wong, 2010); and ironically promotes a new confinement and return of the child to the safety of the private sphere (representing a regression of the feminist struggle, see section 2.2.). The safety of home within the private sphere is debatable although children construct their lives around the idea that home represents safety and security, home has been the place of neglect and abusive behaviours towards children (Giddens et al., 1995; Harden, 2000). This construct is also challenged by the ubiquity of digital online technologies, 'bedroom culture' (see Harden, 2000), and media-rich environments (see Bovill & Livingstone, 2001). In this sense, a setback seems to be promoted by characteristics such as mobility and portability introduced in children's quotidian by technological devices, as they have the power to blur the boundaries imposed by adults in

order to control and limit children's participation, in what Bond (2010) designates as 'adults spaces' (referring to public spaces as adults areas of dominance over children participation).

Referring in particular to children, from an adult perspective, risk seems to lurk everywhere (Franklin & Cromby, 2009; Furedi, 1997), since each (and all) adult(s) – parents included – and situation(s) is(are) regarded as a potential contact risk (Piper et al., 2006). In this respect, once healthy and fun activities in the open space are threatened by a plethora of risks, like for instance, sun exposure (Furedi, 1997), stranger danger (Pain, 2006) and paedophilia (Franklin & Cromby, 2009) – “an emblem of parental fear in an anxious society” (Franklin & Cromby, 2009, p. 2). “[T]he outside world has become a no-go area” (Furedi, 1997, p. xix), but also activities in the private sphere pose problems, like the ones that arise from children's online activities (Furedi, 1997), giving children “access to things which used to be kept hidden from them, and which they really ought not to know” (Buckingham, 2009a, p. 133), like pornographic contents (see Best and Bogle, 2014; Brownlie, 2001; Buckingham, 2014).

Dichotomous fears are evicting children from public life sphere (boyd & Hargittai, 2013; Pain, 2006) and inhibiting children from experiencing the world and engaging in activities without being supervised by an adult (Sutterby, 2009). Nonetheless, in accordance with Sutterby (2009), children's playing under the observation of adults is not a new trend, nor children grouping in hidden areas away from adults' supervision. Consequently, in many situations, ‘to take risks’ or to allow children unsupervised is to court social disapproval” (Furedi, 1997, p. 26) and regarded as a sign of neglectful and irresponsible parenthood or even child abuse (Furedi, 2001, Gill, 2007, Sutterby, 2009; Sutton, 2008).

To Gill (2007), through the last 30 years, the erosion of children's freedom paradoxically coincides with “the emergence of the intellectual fashion for children's rights” (Furedi, 1997, p. 121) and the growth of adult control and supervision (children as bearers of rights is discussed through section 2.2.). Parenting became a full-time job (Furedi, 2001), where parents chaperone children from home to school and then from school to their after-school activities or back to home, where they are confined to be locked away (Sutterby, 2009) and safeguarded by responsible parents (Furedi, 2001). This return of children to the confinement of the private sphere, to some extent may offer an explanation of why children turn to the internet for entertainment and social development (Byrne & Lee, 2011). Corroborating this premise, some have hypothesized that as children have been evicted from public places and were “discouraged from taking risks in their lives” (Furedi, 1997, xix), “young people have

turned to the Internet” (boyd & Hargittai, 2013, p. 245) in order to “reclaim a public space where they can gather with friends, hang out, and have fun” (boyd & Hargittai, 2013, p. 245). Gill (2007) observes that this may be offered as a plausible explanation, however, he contends that children’s immersion and engagement with the online world as suggested above is part of being inserted in the world-culture (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2014) and its demands. In line with this, it may just be part of their peer culture in order to seek adventurous, creative and stimulating activities,

“[...] it is wrong to see this as simply a compensation or substitution of one kind of space for another. The reality is that the very boundaries between these spaces are dissolving as people’s work, leisure and social lives unfold in interconnected ways in the real and virtual worlds.” (Gill, 2007, p. 14)

## **2.2.Children’s childhoods in late modernity: the paradoxical (in)visibility**

By the end of the nineteenth through the twentieth century, economical and emotional shifts determined the value of childhood and how children were treated and viewed by adults in western societies (Kehily, 2013b). From supplementing family income in working-class families to becoming economic inactive members protected from adult world culture and responsibilities (Abbott et al., 2005), children became emotionally priceless (Kehily, 2013b; Waller, 2012) as they became rarer (also a trend in Portugal, see Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997; Tomás et al., 2011) – a consequence of modern lifestyles choices (Giddens, 1990).

Marked by continuities and discontinuities, the theorization of childhood within the rapidly transforming conditions of risk society is not straightforward, which may result in the unfortunate consequence of “operat[ing] with an inappropriate set of expectations and demands on today’s children [...] remaining unreflexive in our research concerning our own relationship with children” (James et al., 1998, p.196). To avoid these pitfalls, and since childhood(s) differ systematically, one needs to scrutinise today’s childhood by integrating macro (external to the child) and micro (age, race, gender, class) instances through which elucidating insights can be obtained about children’s everyday lives, without putting the children’s rights project at risk (see James, 2010; and Qvortrup, 2008). Meaning that, although late modernity *per se* fails to offer geographically and temporally situated (James, 2010) explanations about complexity, singularity and plurality in childhood(s), macro-parameters as worthy of consideration need to be acknowledged in order to uncover

generalities and commonalities in childhood and to understand how childhood is affected by major interdependent societal changes (Qvortrup, 2008). As Wells contends: “Childhood is socially constructed, and children’s lives are profoundly shaped by constructions of childhood – whether in conformity, resistance or reinvention” (2010, p. 2) with intersected transformations arising from economy, family, science, society, demography, culture and politics, as a consequence of the changing, uncertain and ambivalent landscape of risk society (as discussed in section 2.1.).

In the Portuguese setting, according to Tomás, Fernandes and Sarmento (2011), the condition of Portuguese children is paradoxical (Sarmento, 2004; Sarmento & Pinto, 1997). Social and economic indicators of discomfort (e.g. in health, education, justice and family) affect children’s quality of life and everyday quotidian (see UNICEF, 2012, 2013). The current context of economic crisis drags Portugal towards the periphery of the powerful economic European block, adding paradox to paradox. Understanding this situation is crucial to adequately interpret what is happening in Portuguese children’s everyday lives and to understanding the context in which the fieldwork to this study took place. As a result, social representations of the Portuguese child are placed in between two poles, heavily influenced by the media: *crisis* (images of children as agents of violence or social disruption that contradict Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’ image) and *hope* (the generation that by increasing academic qualifications appear strongly associated with the development and progress of the country). These polarised positions are not dichotomically opposed; instead they intertwine in a representational hybridity of Portuguese childhood, voicing the changes that occurred in all areas of the Portuguese society since the 1970s, in which the invasion of ICT in the home sphere began.

Influenced by media discourses (Buckingham, 2009a; Ponte, 2009; Ponte et al., 2009) and research shaped within developmental theories and a welfarist scope (Kelley et al., 1998), adults tend to adopt one of two contradictory positions regarding children: they are either “afraid *for* or afraid *of*” them (boyd & Hargittai, 2013, p. 245) and this occurs as a response to theories around “risk and its management [as they] are now central to how we in the West construct childhood” (Brownlie, 2001, p. 519) and as a reflex of the dilemmas and contradictions featuring the current position of children in the social context (Buckingham, 2009a). The end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century was fuelled by two types of discourses that reflect, on the one hand, the negative influences of the ICT in

children's everyday life, fuelling discourses announcing a crisis in childhood (Furedi, 2001; Palmer, 2007; Postman, 1994); and on the other hand, the positive influences of the ICT in children's everyday life, stimulating discourses that look at children as the "vanguard of the new digital society" (Buckingham, 2000, 2009a; Prensky, 2001; Prout, 2005, p. 15; Tapscott, 2009). In line with this, children's digital and online motivations and participation become a double-edged sword when triggering social and parents' concerns<sup>5</sup> and activating harmful, protective, policing and restrictive practices (Mathiesen, 2013; Leung & Lee, 2012) with the aim of constraining children's participation in digital and online environments (this topic is explored with more depth in sections 2.4. and 2.5).

Prout (2005) theorizes contemporary childhood as a hybrid and interconnected phenomenon affected by late modern global, social, technological and communication progress and processes that by consequence are: fragmenting and undermining previous concepts of childhood that once realised children as innocent and dependent; affecting children either in rich or poor countries (Tomás & Soares, 2004); influencing expectations and life projects (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009) of the Global Generation (Edmunds & Turner, 2005); and blurring the distinction between children and adults (Buckingham, 2009a; Postman, 1994; Prout, 2005; Sarmiento 2005b). As children became more active, participative and diverse, traditional discourses around the innocent and dependent child no longer apply to the modern notion of childhood (Prout, 2005). As an effect of the globalised, networked, mobile and wireless society (Castells, 2010, 2013), children not only became a source of concerns for adults, but also became a reflex of structural problems that society constructed or conspired to reproduce (e.g. stranger danger; online pornography) (James et al., 1998). To understand the contemporary childhood that emerges from the intersection of late modernity and the connectedness of lives mediated by online digital technologies, one has to consider the intersection of "personal biographies, structural factors, and subcultural meanings and ideologies" (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 2001, p. 1) with "a multiple set of constructions emergent from the connection and disconnection, fusion and separation of these heterogeneous materials" (Prout, 2005, p. 144). As Prout (2005) argues, childhood is more than a social phenomenon: it is a hybrid of nature and culture, and children's experiences and actions have to be studied within the scope of

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<sup>5</sup> In her succinct, yet substantial, journal paper about geographies of risk in childhood, Pain realizes that since "[d]iscourses of children 'at risk' are various and contradictory" (2004, p. 65) they need to be contextualised in order to perceive social divides – class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age – that inform how discourses around risk and safety are construed. Boyd and Hargittai's (2013) empirical findings demonstrate that parents' concerns about children's online safety issues vary according race, ethnicity, income, status and political ideology.

heterogeneous, complex and emergent social relations “made up from a wide variety of material, discursive, cultural, natural, technological, human and non-human resources” (Prout, 2005, p. 2). For the purpose, Prout suggests a more flexible way of thinking. He presents Actor-network theory (ANT) as a possibility that can reach the ambiguity of contemporary life “concerned with the materials from which social life is produced and the processes by which these are brought into relationship with each other” (2005, p. 70) (this topic is explored in section 2.3).

In order to understand contemporary ideas of childhood this section examines some historical, social and political events that took place at an international level and gave rise to a new context for the (re)presentation of childhood within society, family and science.

From invisible objects to visible and participative subjects (Qvortrup, 2008), two major and influent milestones contributed to the study and re-evaluation of childhood: the feminist movement, by bringing children to the public sphere; and the UNCRC, by giving a voice to children and enforcing the recognition of children’s as rights-holders. These two factors changed radically, but also paradoxically, not only the landscape of childhood, but also the role of children in late modern society where adults are perceived as key agents in the process of oppressing or emancipating childhood. In other words, children became: rights-holders (as universalised under the UNCRC), but also an asset of family and state (as inscribed in the UNCRC); sophisticated and critical media consumers (Haddon & Vincent, 2014), but also a target for consumer culture and commerce influenced by their (in)fluent pressure in family goods and media purchasing decisions (‘pester power’) (Cook, 2004; Korsvold, 2010; Wasko, 2010) (this topic is elaborated through section 2.4); recognised as experts in their own lives (Bond, 2014), but also challenged and constrained by participation ambiguities (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010).

Without making a detailed itinerary of the feminist movement(s)<sup>6</sup>, one cannot ignore how childhood (and Childhood Studies) is engaged with the feminist movement(s) and how women’s studies contributed to the debate, study and re-evaluation of childhood and the inclusion of children into the political, research and arguably policy agendas (Alanen, 2005; Alderson, 2001; Wyness, 2012a).

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Feminist’ is used in the broadest sense of the term, understood as the movement of the liberation of women from gender-based oppression (Burman, 2008).



Marshall's project of citizenship and of what being a citizen<sup>7</sup> means (1950, 2009) coincided with the image of a white man, holder of property, meaning that citizenship was beyond women's, children's and slaves' social aims as they represented socially excluded and disempowered groups under the property of the white man (Roche, 1999). According to his definition, "citizenship, even in its early forms, was a principle of equality [...] where all men were free and, in theory, capable of enjoying rights" (2009, p. 150). The reference to 'men' included in the definition enlightens how Marshall's gendered explanation of citizenship reinforced imbalanced power relationships and social inequalities by emptying these vulnerable social groups from the realms of citizenship.

Since the nineteenth century, feminists have been focusing their struggles in order to be recognized and respected as human beings in a white male dominant and gendered oppressive society that camouflaged exclusion and control under a cape of paternalistic and protective concerns (Wyness, 2012a). Abuse and exploitation linked women and children. They were both sexually controlled, oppressed and repressed (see Foucault, 1978, 1985), socially invisible, victims of familial and social abuses (Olsen, 1992), and neglected by law (as suggested in section 2.5). In the eyes of a male dominated society, children and women were socially, physically and mentally inferior, vulnerable to economic exploitation, and dependent of men. And both groups were under the rules and dominance of the head and economic household provider - husbands and fathers - on various aspects of the public and private spheres. A passage from the "Dialect of Sex", by Shulamith Firestone, illustrates how women and children's treatment in the familial sphere intersects with the male dominant discourse masked under a paternalistic and protective rhetoric tone:

"Both women and children were considered asexual and thus "purer" than man. Their inferior status was ill-concealed under an elaborate "respect". One didn't discuss serious matters nor did one curse in front of women and children; one didn't openly degrade them, one did it behind their backs. [...] Both were set apart by fancy and nonfunctional clothing and were given special tasks

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<sup>7</sup> According to Marshall, one is recognized and respected as an equal inside of a community, and is in the full exercise of rights and duties comprised in civil, social and political dimensions; civil rights concerned the "liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice" (Marshall, 1950; 2009, p. 148); political rights concerned the "right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such body" (Marshall, 1950; 2009, p. 149); social rights concerned "the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (Marshall, 1950; 2009, p. 149).

(housework and homework respectively); both were considered mentally deficient (“What can you expect from a woman?” “He’s too little to understand.”). The pedestal of adoration on which both were set made it hard for them to breathe. Every interaction with the adult world became for children a tap dance. They learned how to use their childhood to get what they wanted indirectly (“He’s throwing another tantrum!”), just as women learned how to use their femininity (“There she goes, crying again!”) (1970, pp. 89-90)

The feminist movement(s) challenged the “traditional notions of citizenship” (Roche, 1999, p. 476), and drew public attention to the social oppressive dynamics public/private; gender/age; and exclusion/inclusion that oppressed women and children participation (Helleiner, 1999): Those dynamics are mirrored in Mayall’s observation:

“In this scenario men occupied the public, economically productive sphere; women, naturally, occupied the private sphere and introduced their children to socially accepted norms and behaviours. But as women have pointed out, what women do at home is economically productive: it produces children – new people; and through housework and people-work it provides the conditions through which family members are fit to go out to work. The private is not private – it intersects with the public. What happens to women and children at home is structured by public theories and policies; and what happens in the private domain affects the public domain. Indeed, the conceptual division of the social order into public and private, the economic and the cultural, begins to fall apart once you consider the work of women – and even more so now when you begin to consider the work of children at home and at school.” (2000, p.247)

Despite the shared set of nature-nurture ties (Firestone, 1970) and social invisibilities that link the two minority and marginalized groups together (women and children), the child did not always had the same importance and significance in the feminist agenda. Through the first wave, feminists were further concerned with children's issues and rights within the context of the woman's mothering role. However, throughout the second wave children's issues had a weaker presence in feminist matters, although they were still engaged in some sort with children's and childhood's liberation (sexual and family) and motherhood (Helleiner, 1999).

There were times when children were used as a double-edged sword against women's claims to prevent them to perform as full social agents. As Olsen observes, "[c]hildren have been used as hostages to force women to remain in completely unreasonable marriages and domestic situations" (1992, p. 193). However, children did not oppress women. Instead, the patriarchal family, along with motherhood and housework, were in the basis of women's oppression, "(...) women are not oppressed by children but by the *institution* of motherhood i.e. how their roles as mothers are configured. (...) Feminism is not a movement to liberate women from children (for example) but from oppression" (Burman, 2008). Despite the complexities and ambiguities that surround the presence of children in women's struggles, the feminist movement(s) brought significant understanding to the debate surrounding children's labour, children's agency, power in relationships, methodological and epistemological approaches for the study of childhood (Burman, 2008).

The women's movement included children as allies in their equal human rights claim (Firestone, 1970; Wyness, 2012a), and drew attention to a range of problems, abuses and suffering that children, alongside women, faced in the private (home, family) and public spheres of society. Children and women became partners in a joint agenda for the vindication of equality, respect and a place in the public (society) and private (home and family) domains. Power differences remained between these two marginalised groups that disadvantaged children. "While women have struggled for and won 'inclusions' over the past 150 years" (Roche, 1999, p. 481), children were in a more underprivileged place, since they remained dependent on adults to alter their position in society (Wyness, 2012a). Feminist studies did not result in a political development for children's liberation; however, they contributed to the bringing of children as empirical objects (Alanen, 2005) from the margins to the centre of child-related research processes held in their everyday socialization contexts (for example, family and school). Nevertheless, children were mostly envisioned as empirical objects of adult actions rather than full subjects and learners of instead of producers of culture (Alanen, 1988; 2005; Helleiner, 1999). This circumstance explains why they were addressed indirectly in research or through discrete voices registered within field journals, captured and biased from an adult researcher's standpoint (Alanen, 2005).

The growth of scientific interest in children has coincided broadly with the human and children's rights movements (Freeman, 1998), stimulated by women alongside other philanthropic movements held during the nineteenth and twentieth century. According to Wells

(2010), challenges posed by the American and French Revolutions and the dramatic social and economic transformations, introduced by urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century and globalization in the twentieth century, fuelled social anxieties that gave rise to new problems related with the government and management of childhood (e.g. increasing poverty, diseases, prostitution, war, child labour) (Tomás, 2011; Tomás & Soares, 2004). Concerned with the welfare of children, the state took a more active role in order to improve children's well-being and living conditions. This shift from private charity to public responsibility altered the position of children within the society and brought childhood into the political landscape, giving rise to several initiatives in favour of human and children rights throughout the twentieth century (see Wells, 2010; Wyness, 2012a).

Until the middle of the twentieth century, children's international support networks focused their intervention in the provision and protection of children's welfare rights (Wyness, 2012a), including the Declaration of the rights of the Child (1924) and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) (Wells, 2010). Both documents had a Rosseau-inspired romantic and welfarist rights-based approach (provision and protection) that recognised the child as vulnerable and innocent requiring protection (Pressler, 2010) for themselves in a world of dangers and obstacles (Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997).

The UNCRC became the first and most worldwide-ratified document of international law that, by incorporating protection, provision and participation rights, and, arguably, changed the political, legal and social status of the child within society, family and science forever. In Portugal, the ratification of the UNCRC was made through Resolution N.º 20/90 of the Assembly of the Republic (published in *Diário da República*, n.º 211, I Série, 12/09/1990). Portugal has a centuries-old tradition in the production of laws to protect the child. However, in the late twentieth century and early twenty first century, optimism gives way to a more pessimistic attitude towards the Committee on the Rights of the Child evaluation of the application of UNCRC in the national context. Scarce applicability of legislation and late effective responses in the social, educational and health sectors are highlighted in the evaluation as negatively impacting the quality of life and social and political visibility of Portuguese children (see Fernandes, 2005).

The UNCRC represents a shift from a concern with protection through welfare to a concern for children as bearers of rights (Jones, 2005). The principles on which it is based have been hailed it as the most influential document worldwide that aims to universalise the landscape of

how childhood is construed and constructed (at least in theory). Despite maintaining welfare protective and provisioning measures, already covered in the previous documents, this is the first international document that i) has international legal coverage; ii) aims to govern and regulate childhood at a global scale iii) applies to every child despite their nationality; iv) conceives the child as holder of rights; v) recognises that children's rights are human rights; vi) acknowledges children as equals in rights to adults; vii) introduces participation and decision-making rights; viii) opens space to include children in decision-making processes (Burr & Montgomery, 2007; Montgomery, 2010; Wells, 2010; Wyness, 2012a).

Protection and provision rights, according to Wyness (2012a) and Montgomery (2010) are more practical (Burr & Montgomery, 2007) and for that matter consensual, as children do not really possess them, but are rather provided to them by adults. Participation rights are more abstract, and for that reason also more controversial, problematic and "still a peripheral feature of child policy and common discourse on childhood" (Wyness, 2012a, p. 228).

"In ratifying the UNCRC local governments are not simply saying that they support children's rights in theory – they are agreeing to change national laws and to devote the necessary resources to promoting and enforcing these rights" (Burr & Montgomery, 2007, p. 151). However, implementing the UNCRC locally has not been a straightforward task for the signatory parties. Indeed its implementation raised many cultural, geographical, political and practical tensions and difficulties "on normative or on practical level of social reality" (Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000, p. 152). In order to minimize and harmonize the UNCRC theoretical principles with national laws, some countries needed not only to adapt already existing legislation but also create more detailed laws and supplementary agreements concerning children's rights (Burr & Montgomery, 2007).

Following the adoption of the UNCRC, academic discourse is compounded by a divergence on views that coexist alongside – those who support and those who criticize the document for its theoretical and practical implications and limitations, which are worthy of examination in this section, although they have not yet reached a comfortable consensus (Ferguson, 2014).

To Wyness (2012a), the UNCRC Preamble is deceiving because it is culturally biased. It appears to safeguard and respect cultural differences; nevertheless, ambiguities appear as it collides with local<sup>8</sup> imperatives. Its generalisation disregards local particularities and cross-

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, in some communities children are expected to contribute to the local economy. In these communities marked by poverty, one cannot radically assume "that school is always in the best interest of children" (Wyness, 2012a, p.235). Or in cases that the UNCRC assumes

cultural differences (Wyness, 2012a, 2012b) making it harder to implement locally (Burr & Montgomery, 2007; Fernandes, 2005). Some parties argue that the UNCRC was designed rendering “the liberal, humanist values of the West which have limited meaning in societies where they have a different understanding of the relationships between parents and children and between people and the state” (Montgomery, 2010, pp. 151-152). Also the universalization of the concept ‘childhood’ (Wyness, 2012a) in itself, defined as a “time of play, innocence and learning” (Wells, 2010, p. 19), alludes to ‘First-World’-based values. By imposing white, urban, middle-class, western values and also an individualistic culture (Wyness, 2012b) the UNCRC i) it interferes in the private sphere of family<sup>9</sup> and its definitions in some societies are locally inexistent or difficult to understand (Montgomery, 2010). For example, that is the case of the concepts ‘child’, ‘childhood’ and ‘individual’, which do not apply or are difficult to translate in other societies (for instance, in Japan ‘individualism’ is negatively connoted with the western ‘selfishness’ and “the child is not seen as a self-sufficient individual with rights independent of the family but is viewed as being embedded in a web of relationships, which come with duties, obligations, and sometimes the expectation of sacrifice on behalf of the family” (Montgomery, 2010, p. 152)).

Some argue that the UNCRC contributes to highlight differences between northern (the minority industrialized world) and southern countries (the majority world); developed and developing countries “in which the values of the former are foisted onto the latter in a new form of neo-colonialism” (Pupavac 2001, cited in Montgomery, 2010, p. 152; Wyness, 2012a) that results in inequalities and discrimination against and among children (Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997). Adrian James also problematizes the North/South divide and argues that what was once an unified project (the UNCRC) appears to: i) reflect a diversity or northern trivial agendas and interests that appear to ignore “the enormity of the problems faced by children and young people in the majority south” (2010, p. 486); and ii) fails to protect the “appalling plight of homeless and stateless children in south-East Asia” (2010, P. 486). To this respect, James (2010) forewarns that these dichotomies and tensions often centre on emergent differences and pluralities of childhood coming from the southern hemisphere, and south of Europe that

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the nuclear-family as the centre of affective life (Olsen, 1992) and the effective guarantors of child welfare ignoring diverse patterns of child care, such is the case of Ghana where “*adult*-child rather than *parent*-child relations are more significant.” (Wyness, 2012a, 236).

<sup>9</sup> For additional reading about how social changes affected the traditional concept of family and how family responded to new imperatives that affected the settings and relationships within families and children, see Boocok & Kimberly (2005); Corsaro, 2005; Gill, 2007; Oswell, 2013; and Almeida et al., 1998, Almeida & Vieira, 2006, in the Portuguese context.

must be addressed, understood and unified by childhood studies.

Others see in the UNCRC a duplication of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), “which ensures equal rights for everyone regardless of age” (Burr & Montgomery, 2007, p. 142). Burr and Montgomery (2007) argue that because they are still growing, children have different interests from adult, as well as different vulnerabilities – especially those who are deprived of the provision of shelter, food and care – that put children in a powerless position and at risk of being abused and exploited. In theory, the UNCRC treats children as equals to adults in rights (which also raises problematic issues that will be explored later in this section), adds special safeguards to protect their physical and mental vulnerabilities (this topic is further developed in James, 2001; Montgomery, 2010; Wyness, 2012a), provides the child with participation (also known as self-determination) rights, which enable their positioning closer to decision-making processes, and gives them voice to express their interests and experiences (James & James, 2001; Wyness, 2012a).

The UNCRC proclaims the rights of the child and the duties and responsibilities of the state and adults to ensure children’s rights. However, no mention is made to children’s duties and responsibilities (Burr & Montgomery, 2007). According to James and James (2001) this focus in children’s individuality and autonomy may lead to a generational clash where children’s and parents’ rights collide and consequently increment the use of controlling and monitoring measures (Reynaert et al., 2009; Sinton Rogers, 2009; Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000) (as discussed in sections 2.1. and 2.4.). “[T]he recognition of children as rights-holders separate from their parents implies an implicit mistrust of their carers, and a legitimization for outside professionals to intervene” (Pupavac, 2001, cited in Reynaert et al., 2009, p. 525).

The Philosopher Thomas W. Simon (2000) follows a different approach when discussing the UNCRC document. The American Philosopher and his colleague Elizabet Wolgast (1987) call for a deeper question concerning the language of the UNCRC that needs to be addressed. To them the UNCRC “makes a misleading reference to rights in its title” (Simon, 2000, p.1) since it “places more emphasis on obligations and harms than it does on rights and entitlements [...] promot[ing] a right as a remedy to harm” (Simon, 2000, p. 1) instead of focusing on the real and complex problems that affect children (and adults, he adds) internationally. As Freeman explains, remedies “require the injection of resources, a commitment” or else they are of token importance, nothing more (2007, p. 8). Simon’s critics are supported by Wolgast, who also defends that rights do not always give protection for all the problems, and when misguided can

lead to more injustices, for instance when rights in the hands of children can be exercised “against those on whom they depend” (Wolgast, 1987, p. 31). They do not deny the important contribution of the UNCRC but they assert and reinforce that several wrongs exist in this world, and that “children are the victims is not open to argument” (Wolgast, 1987, p. 31) and something has to be done about that. Nonetheless, Wolgast urges further debate is necessary as: “a murder is wrong because a person has a right to life. [...] Isn’t murder simply wrong, wrong in itself?” (1987, pp. 39-40). With this statement she observes that a focus on the rights discourse may distract from what society should really be concerned about: the harms and the wrongs. Furthermore, the UNCRC does not target prostitution *per se* but “the exploitative use of children in prostitution” (article 34); analogously it does not protect children from work *per se*, but from economic exploitation (article 32), as Simon (2000, p. 8) observes. Additionally it is worth observing from Freeman that: “If we do not put in place structures to tackle domestic violence, we will not protect children from child abuse. And if we do not eradicate child abuse, we can never hope to conquer domestic violence” (2007, p. 7).

As previously stated the rights that embody children’s rights in relation to participation<sup>10</sup>, in particular the Article 12<sup>11</sup>, are the ones that raise more controversy, since “in theory give[s] them [children] opportunities to articulate their interests in a number of different ways” (Wyness, 2012b, p. 432). ‘In theory’ participation rights give ‘voice’ to children (Wyness, 2012b), yet in practice it is not that straightforward. Participation became a matter of great importance and debate in childhood studies and children’s rights discourse (James & James, 2009). According to Hanson (2012) there are four perspectives<sup>12</sup> that can be adopted in reading and interpreting the rights contained in the UNCRC, directly reflecting how adults (in research and society) envision children’s role: the *paternalistic viewpoint*, a traditionalist approach that asserts that children need to have their “‘needs’ met rather than their rights upheld” (Roche, 1999, p. 446). This approach sees children as an incomplete process – “‘becomings’, not yet as ‘beings’” (Burman, 2008, p. 444; Stoecklin, 2012) or ‘not-yet-fully-

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<sup>10</sup> Articles 12-17 and 31 of the UNCRC.

<sup>11</sup> The Article 12 mentions that: 1. 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. 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

<sup>12</sup> Daniels and Jenkins (2000, cited in Balen, 2006) propose a three-perspective model: welfare, participatory and independence model because the ‘welfare’ model encompasses both ‘paternalistic’ and ‘welfare’ models proposed by Hanson (2012).



formed' (Roche, 1999). Meaning that children lack adult competencies (Reynaert et al., 2009; Roche, 1999) and life experience to make decisions in their best interest (Roche, 1999). And for this reason they need protection and be looked after (Roche, 1999); the *welfare viewpoint*, also a protectionist approach, is rooted in a very traditional view of child in which the children are seen either as rebels or victims; a "source of trouble or [...] in trouble" (Roche, 1999, p. 477); and the world is an "increasingly hostile and dangerous" place (Roche, 1999, p. 477) the *emancipation or empowerment viewpoint* "considers the child as being competent as long as the contrary is not evidenced (the burden of proof lies with the adult)" (Stoecklin, 2012, p. 444). This is not always an easy task, because adults are not comfortable with giving up power in favour of establishing horizontal power relations in which children become their partners (Roche, 1999); and the liberationist viewpoint considers "children as independent actual citizens ('beings') who make competent and rational decisions, and therefore claim for equal rights to those of adults" (Hanson, 2012, p. 74).

The first two approaches (paternalistic and welfare) reflect imbalanced power relationships between children and adults that are an obstacle to respectfully recognize children as social actors. The children are the powerless and excluded by an oppressing, dominant 'adultism'<sup>13</sup> (Roche, 1999) where commonly adults decide what are children's best interests (Mayall, 2000; Wyness, 2009). These standpoints tend to render children to misrepresentation, silence and invisibility under the control and protection of their family (Roche, 1999). The last two approaches (emancipation and liberationist) denote more concern with children's 'interests', than with children's 'needs' (Wyness, 2009) which means that children have a direct involvement in participatory activities and they are able to decide to what extent adults are involved (Wyness, 2009).

It could be argued that the over-protecting welfarist models as well as the liberal model can be diametrically harmful approaches. The first two models (paternalistic and welfare) may contribute to rendering children silent and invisible; the fourth model (liberationist), corroborating studies developed for the purpose, is a model that focuses on children's individuality and autonomy which may contribute to a distorted conceptualization of childhood (Roche, 1999). An excessive focus on rights may disadvantage children for it is an unrealistic approach - "children do not have this autonomy" (Reynaert et al., 2009, p. 525) and it ignores

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<sup>13</sup> 'Adultism' is a concept used by Dalrymple and Burke (1995); Barford and Wattam (1991), cited in Roche (1999). Adultism is the oppression of children and young people by adults.

cultural and social subjectivities of the community in which children are inserted and in which they construct their interdependent and interconnected lives (Reynaert et al., 2009, p. 525). Therefore, the emancipation/empowerment model also poses challenges to child-adult relationships.

The major contribution of the UNCRC is that it conferred to children protection, autonomy and agency. Nevertheless, the 'voice'-based (Wyness, 2012b), also known as participation rights, represent a very problematic feature, since it may collide, with parental exercise (Burr & Montgomery, 2007; Mayall, 2000; Reynaert et al., 2009; Sinton Rogers, 2009; Simon, 2000; Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000; Wolgast, 1987); and with protection rights (Olsen, 1992; Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997; Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000; Wyness, 2012b). Arguing that children must be heard and consulted in any decision that affects their life might lead to adults feeling their power challenged (Burr & Montgomery, 2007); and by consequence convert children's participation into a tokenistic process (Wells, 2010), since children's political role (Wyness, 2009) and competence to participate in decision-making processes is dependable of adults evaluation (Wyness, 2012a). To Sarmiento and Pinto (1997) the controversy around the participatory rights also echoes a paradoxical representation of the child whilst social actor and recipient of care.

The participation rights also pose different tensions in western and non-western societies. Western societies manifest reluctance to see children as equals and problematize to what extent children should be consulted. In non-western societies this is not even an issue because "children are not seen as individuals on their own right, where they are not seen as having any right to be consulted in matters concerning them and where they are viewed as their parents' dependents, and sometimes even their property" (Montgomery, 2010, pp. 152-153).

The discussion around children's rights is far from consensus and requires reflexivity. According to Reynaert and colleagues (2009), the topic is enclosed in a two-way debate: i) the 'technocratic discourse' (concept introduced by Fernando, 2001), which is no longer discussing children's rights. Instead is a technical debate about "the most effective and efficient way to implement children's rights, how best to monitor this implementation and how this can be organized" (Reynaert et al., 2009, p. 528); the so called 'global children's rights industry'; ii) and the 'decontextualization discourse', which treats children as a homogenous group and does not take into account the diversity among children and among social, economical and historical diversified contexts. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the

importance of the UNCRC in the promotion and the enforcement of the dignity and integrity of children as an individual with a social role in the community. And despite its ambivalence, the UNCRC represents: an unprecedented contribution for the recognition of children (individual or group) as active participants with freedom of thought and expression to contribute in decisions regarding matters that affect them (Balen, 2006); and an important step forward to reinforce that “children and childhood need to be taken seriously” (Wyness, 2012a, p. 234).

According to Alderson (2001), the UNCRC was a crucial moment that changed children’s status in both society and in research. Recognised as social actors worthy of being studied in their own right (Hill et al., 2004), children’s agency and competence is placed in the centre of (or *child-centred*) research, and their experiences and perspectives about life became most valued contributes (Grover, 2004; Wyness, 2012b). This shift in research, as a result of the events described through this section, gave rise to the emergence of a new paradigm for the study of childhood in new directions, rescuing children from biologists and psychological prospects (Sarmiento, 2005b) and from social invisibility (James & Prout, 2005) – the *competence paradigm* (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Jenks, 2009).

In the competence paradigm, childhood is a historical, cultural and social construction and children are considered to be both rational and competent. Competence is a dynamic activity held by children in *social arenas of action* (e.g. family, peer group, school), that they routinely share with each other and with adults; where they struggle for power (working out their own agenda), contest meanings, exercise social competencies and negotiate relationships (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). Nevertheless, children’s competence has been recurrently challenged based on age attributes as a result of the dominant discourses of developmental psychology (about levels of competency, see Freeman, 2007). To struggle against this, Alderson (1993) has been a fierce advocate demonstrating children’s (even young children’s) ability to arrive at informed, wise decisions even in very serious health conditions (see *Gillick decision* in Alderson, 1993). Children have demonstrated themselves to be very helpful cooperating, entering into dialogue with and contributing to research in helping them to understand complex and vulnerable life experiences and identities in several delicate topics. Examples of this abound: for example, war experiences (Davis et al., 2008; Martins, 2011); street experiences (Davis et al., 2008); disability (Davis et al., 2008; Monteith, 2004; Wickenden & Kembhavi-Tam, 2014); care (Roche, 1999; Wihstutz, 2011); health and welfare (Alderson, 1993; Balen, 2006; Coyne et al., 2009; Kiely, 2005; Kline, 2005; Murray & Hallett, 2000); domestic

violence and physical punishment (Freeman, 2007; Iversen, 2013; Saunders & Goddard, 2005); family decisions and divorce (Hemrica, 2004; Holland, 2006; Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000); and sexual abuse (Robinson, 2005). Brutalities committed against children and children's experiences as murderers, carers, or soldiers reveals their powerlessness in relation to adults, their power over others and a demonstrated competence that "thrown into disarray any notions of an all-embracing childish innocence" (James & Jenks, 1996, cited in James, 1998, p. viii) and dependency (James, 1998).

Yet, as a "direct consequence of the pervasive impact of developmental psychology" (James & James, 2009, p. 92), children's participation in research is not a subject of peaceful discussion, on the contrary, is marked by ambiguities and tensions that are still unresolved (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010) on issues related with children's competence, age, maturity, and credibility of their testimonies (Davie et al., 1996, cited in Komulainen, 2007), harming and weakening children's rights to participation in research and, ultimately, in society. Hart (1992) reasons that this occurs because the UNCRC is more concerned with protecting children, relegating to second place that children only learn to become responsible citizens if they engage in collaborative activities within the community. Inspired by the Arnstein's ladder of citizenship participation, he proposes a 'ladder of participation',<sup>14</sup> "a beginning typology to think about children's participation in projects" (Hart, 1992, p. 9) and better perceive the different level's of children's active enrolment and power (agency) in decision-making processes. Thomas (2007) proposes that children's agency is not always evident in the research process and may contribute to some misinterpretation around the 'participation' and 'consultation' dichotomy.

Participation is child-orientated, giving them more power to see their engagement translated into a real social contribution; and by enabling children to be heard and actively involved in decision-making processes about matters that affect their lives, whether individually or collectively. Consultation, on the other hand, operates in one direction (asking for opinions, that may or may not be taken into account) and means that one may not hear children directly. In consultation children's voice may be reduced to a glimpse of their views.

In each process children have different levels of decision, and different levels of power over adults. Consultation may be a mean of enabling children to participate, but it can also be a

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<sup>14</sup> This model would inspire other versions, see Treseder (1997) and Franklin alternative models in Thomas, 2007 and the Portuguese version proposed by Fernandes, 2005.

substitute for participation in decisions that are made without the direct involvement of children, though their views may be feed results. To overcome some negative charge assigned to consultation, and to avoid the greyness of participation/consultation dichotomy, some opted to use instead 'dialogue'.

Children's participation implies "some presumption of empowerment of those involved" (Sinclair, 2004, p. 111) in decision-making processes in order to achieve 'change'. In James and James' terms, participation means "to take part in and contribute actively to a situation, an event, a process or an outcome, although the extent of the contribution and the autonomy with which is made may vary considerable and may be constrained in various ways" (2009, p. 92). As Sinclair (2004) argues, in practice, participation has a more passive connotation simply meaning to be 'listened to' or 'consulted', which may explain the frequent misunderstanding and that would lead us back to the beginning of the misinterpretation.

To avoid the limitations of participation as outlined above, further consideration and a reflexive approach is needed about 'what children are' and how they can be comprised in society so children's contribution can develop positively throughout the process and progress of research (James, 1998). Drawing from Sinclair's (2004) argument, it is necessary to move to a more positive and embedded model of participation undertaken in partnership between children and adults.

Nevertheless, as it has been highlighted in this section, children's active participation is not straightforward in the reality of intersected children-adults' lives. Constrictions often arise and create tensions, inhibiting children from being seen and heard and being able to positively exercise their participation rights (as suggested in sections 2.1. and 2.4.). Wyness observes that as children's participation became more central, due to the rights agenda and as a reflex of "much broader cultural global trends" (2012b, p. 433), adults were relegated to more marginal positions of research; and as research moves towards an adult-free form of children's participation, children's voices loose authenticity. Reynaert and colleagues also support this idea and reinforce that the stimulus of children's individuality and autonomy "may distort the social conceptualization of childhood" (Reynaert et al., 2009, p. 523). In order to avoid this, Wyness proposes to follow "more interdependent adult-child relations" (2012b, p. 433; Mayall, 2000), which he designates as 'relational approach'. Adults and children are what one could describe as 'agencies in tension' involved in a dialogic process where they "simultaneously are determined by their environment and help determine their environment" (Jans, 2004, p. 39).

According to Tomanovic (2000), participatory rights postulate individuality and solidarity and taking this in mind, she asserts that children and adults may have to i) rebalance the participation dichotomy autonomy/solidarity; ii) relinquish some autonomy in favour of establishing more solitary relationships; and iii) create a more comfortable environment where children and adults can participate alongside each other (Wyness, 2012). According to Wyness this means that both groups (adults and children) would benefit in working together and use creative strategies in order to overcome the downsides that this approach implies, such as generational clashes and power imbalances.

To fight back the weakening bounds between adulthood and childhood as part of the complex and contradictory process of late modernity (Prout, 2005) (discussed in section 2.1.), the adults' and children's relationship needs to be equated in light of Beck's solitary cosmopolitan response (2002) that finds consistency in Tomás (2008, 2011) inclusive 'childhood cosmopolitanism' thesis. Corroborating the child as a bearer of rights paradigm promoted by the UNCRC, Tomás advocates that to materialize the idea of the child, as citizen and subject of rights with a voice in their everyday worlds, implies, first the inclusion of children in the citizenship process through the interaction between adults and children, recognizing their differences but also their rights; and second, axiological, ontological and praxeological changes need to be taken regarding how to understand the social group of children in order to overcome the obvious gap between theory and practice in relation to the participation rights of children. Childhood cosmopolitanism is a social space where children can exercise their citizenship within a network of cooperative actors (other children and adults). In other words, exercise their agency, make informed decisions about their daily lives and be an active part of adults' decisions.

New and creative responses to face emergent challenges, adults and children need to find a path to trust in one another (and in others) "to get their messages across" (Wyness, 2012b, p. 432), otherwise their voice is incomplete. Adults have to share power with children and respect and value children's contribution.

### **2.3. The networked effect of technology: connecting human and non-human**

Given the ubiquity of technology and the changes it has undergone in terms of its multiple uses, meanings and effects (see Heidegger, 1977; Matthewman, 2011), in the later decades of the twentieth century a growing attention started to be paid to *social studies of science* and

*social studies of technology* (Goggin, 2006); and to technology (world of production, or what technology does to people) and the social (world of consumption, or what people do with technology), as part of a sociotechnical order (Matthewman, 2011).

The aim of this section is not to present a historical approach to technology although those readings are reflected in this document. That sort of approach is strongly underpinned, documented, systematized and organized in several studies (e.g. Bond, 2014; du Gay et al., 1997; Goggin, 2006; Matthewman, 2011). Such contributions provide a common thread to understand the “fundamental continuities and interdependencies between new media and the old media [...] [where] the advent of a new technology may change the functions or uses of old technologies, but it rarely completely displaces them” (Buckingham, 2006, p. 10).

Because everything is technology and everywhere one is able to find technology (Heidegger, 1977), this section develops from three main prominent theoretical frameworks. Emerging in the 1980s, three approaches will assist this navigation through the comprehension of the embeddedness of online digital technologies within children’s everyday lives, once each is transformed and transformative of the other (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), though neither “cannot be understood as either human or technical, as neither human nor technology controls the resulting patterns of relationships” (Bond, 2014, p. 62). Put simply, to understand how online and digital technologies frame children’s worlds and how children shape online digital technologies in their everyday lives. In this scope, technologies and children are both agents in a relationship that implies more than an object/subject correlation. Technologies stress interactivity (between human and non-human materials), convergence (by implying the combination of different technologies – the object, the activity, and the knowledge), and agency (by stimulating and allowing the usage), while ‘enframing’<sup>15</sup> and revealing their non-neutrality (Heidegger, 1977). Children, on the other hand, give subjectivity to technology in the way they use them to act in their own worlds and by how they relate to, with and through technologies (Heidegger, 1977; Matthewman, 2011), while affirming and confirming a modern mode of thought and being, as proclaimed by Heidegger (Van Loon, 2002).

As the society and technology context became more complex, thinking about the meaning and use of technology, especially when referring to children, entails reasoning about its effects, which sometimes are good and sometimes are bad (Matthewman, 2011) (a more in-depth

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<sup>15</sup> The word ‘enframing’ is used by Heidegger (1977) “to describe modern technology’s way of revealing the world as standing-reserve” (Matthewman, 2011, p. 14).

discussion is offered in section 2.4.). When unforeseen consequences occur, more questions are raised about technology (Matthewman, 2011). In this respect, the debates around politics cannot be ignored (see Berg & Lie, 1995; Joerges, 1999; Latour, 2004; Winner, 1980) behind the design of technology, paradoxically encapsulating architectures of social control and domination (e.g. school, prison, hospital as institutions of modernity grounded in the principle of panopticism, see Foucault, 1979) that determine “human experience, behaviour and action” (Matthewman, 2011, p. 50). While at the same time it enables rich experiences, new freedoms, heightened pleasures of consumption, and new forms of public privacy (Matthewman, 2011, referring to Benjamin, 2004 dissertation about the Arcades of Paris project, a structure made of iron and glass he designated by the ‘human aquarium’).

Reactions against technological determinism<sup>16</sup>, strongly suggested in the literature on perceptions of risk (Anderson, 2006; Beck, 1992; Buckingham, 2009a; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Furedi, 1997; Giddens, 1990; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999), invited theorists to rethink technology in light of its social effects and on “explaining how social processes, actions and structures relate to technology” (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992, p. 685). Such theories are the *social shaping of technology*<sup>17</sup> (SST) and *social construction of technology* (SCOT). However, the interwoven relationship between online digital technologies and children’s everyday lives is far more complex than can be accounted for or reduced by technological or social determinisms (Bijker & Law, 1992; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). Since both positions are equally flawed (Van Loon, 2002), a more cautioned position between contingency and control is proposed. Actor-network theory (ANT) appears as an alternative to the previous deterministic models. This model assumes a high degree of contingency foregrounding the role of technology in the construction of society (Matthewman, 2011), where “the power of things depends on how they are (as Latour says) ‘syntagmatically’ networked with other things, in competition with paradigmatic counter-programmes of differently coupled actants. The power of things does not lie in themselves. It lies in their associations” (Joerges, 1999, p. 5).

Within the new set of objectives to study how technology impacts on society (Prout, 2005), the three theoretical models highlighted (SST; SCOT and ANT) will be considered in this section.

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<sup>16</sup> “Technological determinism is the notion that technological development is autonomous with respect to society; it shapes society, but is not reciprocally influenced. Rather, it exists outside society, but at the same time influences social change.” (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992, p. 686).

<sup>17</sup> The SST “is seen as playing a positive role in integrating natural and social science concerns; in offering a greater understanding of the relationship between scientific excellence, technological innovation and economic and social well-being; and in broadening the policy agenda, for example, in the promotion and management of technological change” (Williams & Edge, 1996, p. 545).



Nonetheless, more attention will be given to the latter approach since, as claimed by Prout (2005), ANT solves the technology/society dualisms unresolved by the previous proposals and is a valuable possibility to understand the hybrid and interconnected phenomenon of childhood growing in the context of the globalised, mobile and wireless late modern society. For Prout, an ANT approach is a flexible epistemological possibility that can reach the ambiguity of contemporary life and the remarkable transformations brought by progress that have changed drastically childhood and children's contemporary lives (as examined throughout sections 2.1. and 2.2.).

*The Social Shaping of Technology (SST)* (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999) aims to understand technology as a social product. MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999) offer a critique to technological determinism and propose the SST demonstrates that society and technology are "complementary and mutually influencing agents" (deB. Beaver, 2002), influencing the social and technical development of technology and society. According to the authors, new technology emerges from new combinations of existing technology (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999), but since technology is inextricably part of society it depends also on social, political and economical decisions. Furthermore, technology design and implementation involves a set of organisational, political, economic, cultural and social factors that affect technical decisions that by its turn will influence the content of technology and its resultant social effects (Williams & Edge, 1996). Despite the economic and social forces that may shape technology, SST considers the role of final users in the interpretation of the technology. According to Buckingham (2011), this process can be creative or unexpected as du Gay and colleagues (1997) point out. SST "goes beyond traditional approaches, concerned merely to assess the 'social impacts' of technology, to examine what shapes the technology which is having these 'impacts', and the way in which these impacts are achieved" (Williams & Edge, 1996, p. 868, referring to Mackenzie & Wajcman and SST theory).

Turkle developed important work about the SST (see Turkle, 1984; 1997, 2011, 2008). She highlights the active role of the user in bringing his/her intentions (symbolic, functional, ideological encodings) to the deployment of technology. People translate the 'text' and the 'context' (the statement) within the technology (Latour, 1991) in order to give shape and meaning to technology (instead of adapting to it, as technological determinists would argue). However, it is pointed out that Turkle's approach ignores "the intent behind their development

and the embodiment of this intent in the material technology” (MacKay & Gillespie, 1992, p. 709).

Interestingly, the ‘domestication’ of technology by the final consumer was not anticipated in the designer process (Williams & Edge, 1996) of several technological artefacts. For instance, the telephone was originally conceived for business communication, a field dominated by men in the public sphere, however, women re-invented the medium for person-to-person, social communication and conviviality purposes bringing it to the domestic sphere (Fischer, 1988; Hutchby, 2001a; Matthewman, 2011; Williams & Edge, 1996).

The same happened with the personal computer (PC). As Mackay and colleagues state the PC enables a diversity of choices. Initially, it was oriented and marketed for work and useful activities rather than leisure-oriented. According to Williams and Edge (1996), citing Haddon’s (1992) standpoint, “this was largely subverted by boys, whose enormous interest in computers, leading to the creation of a specialised market for these products” (Williams & Edge, 1996, p. 889). This shift in computer usage created a new market niche with children’s reshaping of technology in order to meet their “emotional and functional needs” (Bond, 2010, p. 525).

Likewise, women (Gamito, 2007) and children (Cardoso, 2007) were initially ignored and viewed as powerless users in a male-oriented technological arena (Berg & Lie, 1995). In the Portuguese landscape, several studies translate the significant weight and space that both groups appear to have conquered in terms of access and use of mobile and online technologies: women's access is equivalent to that of men; and children are showing increasing and diversified trends of access and uses (see Almeida et al., 2008; Cardoso et al., 2009; Cardoso et al., 2007; Espanha et al., 2007; Paisana & Lima, 2012; Ponte et al., 2008; Taborda, 2010).

Corroborating children’s adaptive role, it can be argued that the PC is a constructed artefact, which means that users give it meaning and project different meanings (or meaningless) onto technological devices. These two examples – the telephone and the PC – illustrate how gender and generation (in this case women and children) adopted, redefined and re-invented the technology (Williams & Edge, 1996) and brought the technology into the private sphere.

*The Social construction of technology (SCOT)* (Pinch & Bijker, 1987; Bijker et al., 1987) “was advanced as a radical new approach for the study of the history of technology” (Clayton, 2002, p. 351) as representing the convergence between sociology of scientific knowledge and

sociology of technology. SCOT is a sociological approach to analyse artefacts within a social context (Clayton, 2002, deriving from the work of chief inventor Trevor Pinch). This theoretical framework approaches technology as a social phenomenon embodied in complex social processes (in its design and development) that encompass social interests (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992) and technological politics (Matthewman, 2011). “However, they still maintain that there are particular properties of technologies which do have some kind of social effect” (Hutchby, 2001b, p. 443). This approach has been used in case studies, but it is often criticised for its strong focus on the design stage (Clayton, 2002).

According to the SCOT model, technological content is tied to social context; hence, as technology cannot explain itself, relevant social groups (comprising engineers, advertisers, public interest groups, and consumers who share a meaning (Clayton, 2002)) construct, negotiate, shape and give meaning to technology (Matthewman, 2011). To the proponents of this framework, technology develops through the following process, first, *interpretative flexibility* – technological artefacts are culturally constructed and interpreted; second, *closure and stabilisation* – when the artefact represents a solution for a problem; and third the *wider context – the meaning relevant social groups give to the artefact* (Pinch & Bijker, 1987).

In this respect, technology is contingency and conflict (Pinch & Bijker, 1987). Technological artefacts are socially (re)shaped in their form and meaning, meaning that they can “take novel forms, or are subverted by users to be employed in ways quite different from those for which they were originally intended” (Bijker & Law, 1992, p. 8). Technology encloses an interpretative flexibility that allows social groups to mould its essence and take different takes on the technology (Matthewman, 2011).

“In other words, meanings are not just ‘sent’ by producers and ‘received’, passively, by consumers; rather meanings are actively made in consumption, through the use to which people put these products in their everyday lives” (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 5). This is the example of the ‘personal stereo’, or better known as Sony Walkman. As du Gay and colleagues (1997) explain, this portable and personal music stereo device was designed for the young consumer. Nevertheless, it was used by a wider generational range of people and in a more personalised and individualised way than its creators anticipated. In its first version, the Walkman was designed to be a shared device; it contained two headphone jack sockets for a more interactive expected experience based on the principle “that it would be considered rude or discourteous for one person to listen to music alone” (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 59). Rather, it

became a 'device for self-absorption', an equipment to promote public privacy, isolation and social invisibility (Matthewman, 2011). The Walkman potentiated from that moment forward what Jean-François Lyotard (1979) had already prophesied in the late 1970s, in a discussion about the computerization of society: "we all live in 'clouds of sociality'" where each human being became an island with new levels of control, autonomy and mobility (Matthewman, 2011, p. 144).

However, the SCOT approach was criticized for withdrawing ontology and agency to technology and for replacing one determinism for another (technological for social), which "weakens objects and it downgrades the important roles that they play" (Matthewman, 2011, p. 106); and by the usefulness of the closure and stabilization process when applied to, for instance, the mobile phones, which never stabilized since their appearance, constantly being reshaped and constructed by social processes and contexts (Matthewman, 2011). Hence, ANT (also known as *sociology of translation*) appears as a discontinuity with social constructionist and, for that matter, with SCOT approach for downplaying the role of technology.

In cultural and media studies one theory attracted attention, the ANT (Goggin, 2006), a "conceptual frame for exploring collective sociotechnical processes" (Crawford, 2004, p. 1) and a conducive approach to benefit from a deeper understanding of the mutually constituting interaction, between technological affordances (Parchoma, 2014) and modern childhood (Prout, 2005), arising from the intersection of late modernity and the connectedness of everyday lives, increasingly mediated by online digital technologies. Deriving from Bruno Latour's, Michel Callon's, and John Law's work, the ANT method "draws on semiotics, social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, while being quite distinct from each of them in certain crucial respects" (Prout, 2005, p. 70). Despite its debilities and limitations – ANT is criticized for reducing the importance of human materials (Matthewman, 2011) but it is argued that ANT offers a radical analytical method capable of opening the black-box of technology, by tracing its complex and heterogeneous relationships, reframing, engaging and intervening in familiar issues using an unfamiliar perspective (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010), "while controversies are still ranging" (Matthewman, 2011, p.107).

This approach is particularly helpful in understanding shifting landscapes, like children and online digital technologies, since it avoids the distinction between 'technical' and 'social',

replacing them by 'actants'<sup>18</sup> and 'networks'<sup>19</sup> (an actant is a network and vice-versa) enrolled in relationships of negotiation and translation (Neyland, 2006). And "[s]ociety, technology, and even agency, are network-effects" (Matthewman, 2011, p. 110) combining and exchanging competencies and exerting agency within the actor-network structure (Matthewman, 2011). The heterogeneous structure of ANT reclaims to technology the ontological materiality and agency previously replaced by stabilization and meaning in the SCOT model (Matthewman, 2011).

ANT examines social life through the relational associations between human and non-human entities (Prout, 1996), enrolled in a network and performing micro-interactions (e.g. social, economic, natural, educational) (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Human and non-human entities share the same ontology and agency within symmetric relationships, i.e. none has a privileged status over the other, and it is through these networked associations that all entities change and are changed by each other, since all (things, persons, knowledge, processes) are relational effects (Crawford, 2004; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Matthewman, 2011). In line with this, all entities confer significance, action, subjectivity, intention and essence to each other (designated as relational materiality) (Crawford, 2004). In short, ANT scrutinizes how the network is created, its associations and what holds the network together temporarily (e.g. resistances, negotiations, exclusions) (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Drawing from Foucault's intellectual influence, ANT also envisages the materiality of politics and power affecting the position of actants in the network; and shares his definition of power as a strategy to affect action in a chain of human and non-human entities (where, simultaneously, objects can act on subjects; and subjects can become objects) (Matthewman, 2011).

To deal with the ambiguity brought by the dissolving boundaries (e.g. public/private; agency/structure; inclusion/exclusion; adult/children) ANT discards the social dualisms that mark contemporary networked children's experiences. The ANT model is a "more rigorous monistic strand" (Prout, 2005, p. 71) – a framework to understand the complexities that

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<sup>18</sup> An actant is an actor with agency after being translated and becoming part of the network. However, it is not helpful to distinguish between them once 'actant' is not much used in ANT analysis (Latour, 1991). For the sake of clarity, the concept 'actant' will be used instead of 'actor', to avoid being misinterpreted with 'actor' suggesting human agency (Matthewman, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Referring Latour's and Woolgar's work, Fenwick and Edwards state that "[i]n ANT's early years, the term network was employed to suggest both flow and clear points of connection among the heterogeneous entities that became assembled to perform particular practices and processes" (2010, p. 15). However, with the advent of technological networked systems, the network metaphor became problematic.

surround late modern childhood and the technological texts<sup>20</sup> (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010), because things only have significance through their relationships within a collective (Matthewman, 2011).

Nevertheless, Star (1991) offering a criticism to ANT, contends that also those outside the network must be brought in to the analysis:

“[...] we should consider the marginalized and the oppressed, those that do not get to design technologies, those that cannot access them, and those that, nonetheless, are compelled to feel their effects. Being outside the privileged network does not mean that you will be free of the effects of the technologies.”  
(Star, 1991, cited in Matthewman, 2011, p. 121)

The network metaphor is a theory that describes – in Latour’s work description coincides with explanation – the social context as it arises from the connections between the actants through their activities<sup>21</sup> (Mutzel, 2009). As Latour asserts, “[t]he meanings of artifacts are to be found in their use” (Matthewman, 2011, p. 71), which means that the social context does not arise *a priori* out of the networks; the social context is built from the networks and from the links that modify the actants, which means that nothing really exists outside the networked relations (Bajde, 2013; Latour, 1996). In line with this, ANT suggests that the relations between actants denote movement, displacement, transformation, enrolment and any contact and action is mediated:

“[...] actants create the social by association and by translating<sup>22</sup> one meaning into another – and therefore are always much more than ‘mere informants’. Analysts follow the actors and their constitution of categories instead of defining categories *a priori*.” (Mutzel, 2009, p. 877).

Regarding the human-technology relation, the ANT model introduces the concept of affordances, proposed by Akrich and Latour. By affordances one understands “[w]hat a device

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<sup>20</sup> Hutchby refers to Grint and Woolgar work to explain what ‘texts’ are. “[T]echnologies should be treated as ‘texts’ that are ‘written’ (i.e. configured) in certain ways by their developers, producers and marketers, and have to be ‘read’ (i.e. interpreted) by their users or consumers” (Hutchby, 2001b, p. 445).

<sup>21</sup> See Latour (1991) example of the hotel-room key.

<sup>22</sup> Translation is a term applied by Latour to “describe when entities, human and non-human, come together and connect, changing one another to form links [...] [e]ntities that connect eventually form a chain or network of action and things, and these networks tend to become stable and durable” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p.9).

allows or forbids from the actors – humans and nonhuman – that it anticipates; it is the morality of a setting both negative (what it prescribes) and positive (what it permits)” (Cited in Bloomfield et al., 2010, p. 416). For Latour (2002) the affordance is at the same time permission and promise in which the tool becomes an embodied experience, where technology fulfils more than a purpose, their mediation creates new possibilities, what the author calls *being-as-another*.

“[...] thanks to the hammer, I become literally another man, a man who has become ‘other’, since from that point in time I pass through alterity, [...] This is why the theme of the tool as an ‘extension of the organ’ makes such little sense. Those who believe that tools are simple utensils have never held a hammer in their hand, have never allowed themselves to recognize the flux of possibilities that they are suddenly able to envisage.” (Latour, 2002, p. 250)

Technologies also delegate and exhort morality, which means humans do not need to be present, as they can act on their behalf, displacing *public morality* to *public interest* to achieve changes in form and substance (Matthewman, 2011). An interesting example (see Christie, 2014) recently highlighted in the news, illustrates how through the panopticon principle technology may exert morality. The following example unfolds how human, non-human, knowledge and symbolic relations (Matthewman, 2011) work together to explain the public morality-interest movement.

A mother, tired of her son’s inability to answer her calls or texts (public morality – e.g. ‘answer the phone, it is important’), decided in association with an application developer, to create an application (named ‘Ignore no more’)<sup>23</sup> that enables the deactivation of children’s mobile phone in case they don’t answer parents calls (morality role of technology), making it impossible to call or text anyone but the parents (public interest – e.g. ‘answer the phone, it is going to be deactivated’).

The affordance concept is compatible with the analytical tool for the social study of technology that later would be proposed by Ian Hutchby – inspired in Gibson’s work about ‘action possibilities’ – as a ‘third way’ to overcome the technological determinism/social constructionism impasse (Bloomfield et al., 2010; Matthewman, 2011). Hutchby (2001b) explains that different technologies have different affordances and to ignore this is to constrain

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<sup>23</sup> Information retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2014/aug/18/app-forces-teenagers-to-call-parents>

technologies possibilities – in terms of meanings and uses. Affordances emerge during the interaction process between user and digital device (Still & Dark, 2013). To study the affordances of the tool, it may be a helpful methodology to develop a better insight of the properties (positive and negative affordances (Scarantino, 2003)) of different technologies and take advantage of this knowledge, in terms of avoiding unintended consequences and abuses (Conole & Dyke, 2004), that may arise from misinterpreting the technology.

Affordances can be designed<sup>24</sup> and anticipated in order to enhance their detection (Xenakis & Arnellos, 2013) as pre-existent properties of the artefact (independent of users perception) or dependent of user's experience or goals (Kannengiesser and Gero 2012, cited in Still & Dark, 2013). The designer invites users to behave (Withagen et al., 2012) and communicate meaning through the artefact (Xenakis & Arnellos, 2013). By the end of the process, the final consumer perceives (or not) the affordances and may also decide how he/she wants to give meaning to them (Hutchby, 2001b). In agreement with the users context, knowledge, personal needs and intentions, he/she redefines affordances that were not found previously (e.g. as in the case of the telephone, PC or the Walkman). Hartson (2003, cited in Tsai & Ho, 2013) predicts four types of affordance in the design and evaluation process: cognitive, physical, sensory and functional:

“[...] cognitive affordance is design feature that helps users in knowing something; physical affordance is design feature that helps users in doing a physical action in the interface; sensory affordance is design feature that helps users sense something such as seeing or hearing, and functional affordance is design feature that helps users accomplish work.” (Tsai & Ho, 2013, pp. 1250-1251)

Tsai and Ho (2013) explored how design affordance may affect smartphone usage and explain how the four types of affordance considered in the design process apply in the design-device and inferential-user interaction:

“The label font size in the icon of icon [*sic*] on smartphone screen is large enough to read easily is an example of sensory affordances. In comparison with other three types of affordances, the functional affordance is a higher-level affordance and it could be seen as the usefulness of a system function. For

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<sup>24</sup> About the interaction of aesthetics and affordances in the design process of a product see Xenakis & Arnellos, 2013.



instance, the process of accomplishing screen unlocking (functional affordance) on iPhone 4 might be decomposed into three stages – seeing the arrowhead displayed on the screen (sensory affordance), understanding on the meaning of arrowhead (cognitive affordance) and swiping the arrowhead touch panel (physical affordance).” (Tsai & Ho, 2013, p. 1251)

In summary, ANT avoids technological and social reductionisms/determinisms, since what entities do when they meet is unpredictable (see Latour key example, “[t]he key does not act by itself, but is also acted upon by other entities linked in the network” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 10)) meaning that,

“Social life cannot, therefore, be reduced either to the ‘purely’ human or to the ‘purely’ technological (or animal, vegetable, mineral, abstract...). Neither the human nor the technological determines the overall patterning or ordering that results from their combination”. (Prout, 2005, p. 70-71)

According to Prout (2005), with ANT new forms of childhood arise as a result of complex and heterogeneous network connections established between children and technologies. Artefacts influence human actions, intentions, meanings, relationships, routines, memories, perceptions of the self; and ideas, desires, meanings and actions influence the artefacts (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Matthewman, 2011). Drawing from a school playground as an example, Fenwick and Edwards (2010) note that non-human materials (playground) when combined with human entities (children) “produce particular activities, speech, social groupings and exclusions, injuries, even gender identities” [...] [that] exclude, invite and regulate particular forms of participations. What then is produced can appear to be ‘gender identity’ or ‘expertise’ or ‘knowledge’ or a social ‘structure’, such as racism” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 7). Matthewman (2011) uses the concept ‘politics of space’ to explain how such social practices can determine meaning (as discussed in sections 2.4. and 2.5.). He suggests that ritual reinforces the political effects of technology, and since social relationships are spatial, one needs to understand “[t]his new economic world order [that] rests on new technology” (Matthewman, 2011, p. 87). As Buckingham (2000) states, “we can neither simply blame nor celebrate these new media and their impact on our conceptions of childhood without understanding their complexity and their potential contradictions” (Moinian, 2006, p. 51).

#### **2.4. Complex landscapes in children's digital and online participation: uses, meanings, relationships**

Investigating about childhood and online digital technologies became important as these artefacts became increasingly embedded in children's everyday lives, blurring generational boundaries (Buckingham, 2006) and influencing their active reconstruction and reconfiguration of their social relationships and identities (Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Prout, 2005; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). Digital online technologies are not just part of children's late modern lives, they are creating meanings and cultures of use (du Gay et al., 1997). Along the process, *technologies of the self* (Foucault, 1988), (e.g. blogs, mobile digital devices, social networking sites or online gaming websites, to name a few), invite a reflexive and dynamic construction of the self (Giddens, 1991) "through which individuals remake their persons" (Matthewman, 2011, p. 3) and become "the text they write" (Siapera, 2012, p. 178). Additionally, they stress a "new form of sociality" (Matthewman, 2011, p. 149) in which the "ICT activities and the children's everyday lives are mutually constitutive" (Prout, 2005, p. 120) and "not [...] disconnected from their off-line identities and relationships" (Valentine & Holloway, 2002, p. 316).

The combination of childhood and technologies serves as a powerful focus for debates (not new in the media field) that have been struggling between renewed hopes and fears, and risks and opportunities (Buckingham, 2000, 2006, 2009b), where digital and online technologies are responsible for liberating and empowering (Papert, 1997; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009) versus destructing and betraying the essence of childhood (Postman, 1994). These debates (for an overview of the cybercritic/cyberutopian debate, see Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2002), in assent with Buckingham, often express emotional perceptions of the child that, on the one hand, "constrain children's lives" (Buckingham, 2009a, p. 128) and, on the other hand, reflect a sort of technological determinism (Buckingham, 2009a). Clearly, children's online participation pose new and complex challenges and though most of children's digital and online experiences are positive, evidence suggests that a significant minority is engaging in negative interactions, either as aggressor, victim, or both (Werner et al., 2010).

To Buckingham (2006), the embeddedness of technologies in children's quotidian has to be understood in light of other societal changes that affect the social reality of children's everyday lives. Conforming with this, the previous sections in this chapter provide the wider context

adjoining the social processes arising within the scope of late modernity, enhancing tensions (e.g. adult-children, agency-structure, public-private) that impact on social representations of childhood and through which children become visible or invisible (Lee, 2001; Oswell, 2001) (as approached in sections 2.1. and 2.2.); and the rationales that may shed further light on the extent to which the digital realm is embedded in children's everyday lives through heterogeneous and complex networks that link together human and non-human entities (as discussed in section 2.3.). As Valentine and Holloway provide within their empirical work: "children's social worlds are formed, not just through their associations with other children, but also through their association with their material surroundings" (2002, p. 317).

Considering this matrix, this section opens discussion about the complex relationship between children and online digital technologies, from a *mediated consumption* perspective (Buckingham, 2011). In other words, it positions the child in terms of "consumer involvement" (as proposed by Schor, 2004, cited in Nairn et al., 2010), rather than in materialistic standings, capable of engaging (Miller, 2002, cited in Bond 2014) with new gadgets and environments; in order to understand personal values children might use to interpret their 'technologized interactions' (Hutchby, 2001a).

In line with this, it also may be useful to develop further the importance of brand labels, in reference to internet-based spaces, texts and tools (Skaar, 2010) – for example, Apple, Facebook, Stardoll, Ask.fm – as they are part of the world-culture proclaimed by Lipovetsky and Serroy (2014) the link that connects the Miller's Caribbean boy to any child in the West that has a profile on Facebook; and for they are part of children's lived experiences (Skaar, 2010), and help reinforce tribal and belonging feelings (Maffesoli, 1996), present themselves, develop their identity and social skills (Miller, 2011), perform roles (Skaar, 2010), challenge and redefine generational differences (Buckingham, 2006), judge (Buckingham, 2011; Miller, 2011), gossip (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012), chat, browse and game online (Miller, 2011), create rumours (Best, & Bogle, 2014), explore their sexuality (Best & Bogle, 2014; Bond, 2014; Brownlie, 2001; Buckingham, 2014; Monteiro, 2013), learn collaboratively (Meirinhos & Osório, 2014); but also because these are growing industries (Wasko, 2010) that are worth of analysis and deeper reflection on the way they stimulate children's participation and agency (Miller, 2011), affect children's self-esteem (Nairn et al., 2010), transform familial relationships (Cardoso et al., 2008; Mathiesen, 2013; Leung & Lee, 2012), and may enhance digital inequalities (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008).

For the generation born in the new millennium, these e-tools are mesmerising and addictive objects of desire, which they shape to meet their own meanings and needs (Hutchby, 2001b). In this sense, one has to consider children as more than consumers or producers of contents, they gave rise to a new class of *prosumers* (Toffler, 1980), in the way they creatively adjust and adapt to technological innovations and subsequently, its social changes (Ólafsson et al., 2013). However, children's love affair with technologies (Papert, 1997) and the arise of 'cool culture' (Wang, 2005) fosters into a set of antagonistic feelings attached to it. The online and digital technologies are either regarded as empowerment tools that liberate children from social inequalities or as worries that develop from contradicting feelings about technologies and the negative impacts they may bring to children's lives, as a result of a mismatch between parents and children's expectations and wishes respecting online participation (Buckingham, 2012; Mesch & Talmud, 2010). As Bond (2010) states in reference to Ling's (2008) research in Norway, also children experience contradictory feelings regarding the e-communication technologies (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011), once they simultaneously provide security/insecurity and reassurance/anxiety. To Bond the online digital technologies are "simultaneously viewed as both supportive but also potentially damaging, exemplifying the double-edged sword of modernity" (2010, p. 515). Others, like Katz (1997, cited in Buckingham, 2009a) on the other hand, regard the internet as a liberation tool, giving children the opportunity to pass beyond adults boundaries, escape their control and create their own cultures of meaning and communities of practice (Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2002).

Deriving from Baudrillard (in Poster, 2001), children's relationships with online digital technologies goes beyond the use or utility value. In Miller's words, the hours spent online are "a pretty good use of [...] time" (2011, p. 87) in the way that how children manage (sufficiently and wisely) their online life can make "the difference between a happy life and an unhappy one" (Miller, 2011). Children are becoming articulated masters of innuendo (Miller, 2011), and their technological choices are implicated in manipulative and subliminal marketing messages (Buckingham, 2011), taste and status *p(e)receptions* that shape their interactions (Hutchby, 2001b), and orientate their social lives (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992) in terms of the belonging *versus* exclusion relation (Hagen & Nakken, 2010). In Buckingham's perspective (2011), this happens because, on the one hand, children's increasing engagement with consumption goes well before they can speak and is already implicated in parent-child relationship; and, on the

other hand, children are becoming “increasingly important both as a market in their own right and as a means to reach adult markets” (Buckingham, 2012, p. 45).

Online digital goods and internet-based services developed into social and cultural products and activities, instilled with consumption and production of meanings, that help children build their identity, express themselves and make statements about the self (Buckingham, 2011; Goggin, 2006; MacKay & Gillespie, 1992).

Within this context, online digital technologies must be understood around the constructivist idea that as artefacts they are interrelated and intertwined in social processes (Hutchby, 2001a). In other words, “understand the ways that technologies can impact on the interactive social world of humans, and how humans can find ways of managing those impacts” (Hutchby, 2001a, p.3). Supporting this statement, online digital technologies are more than commodities; they are a “major constituent of modern culture” (MacKay & Gillespie, 1992, p. 704). Hence, children’s digital consumption has to be understood as Matthewman clarifies, in terms of associations between heterogeneous assemblages, where “[s]ociety, technology, and even agency, are network-affects” (2011, p. 110) (see section 2.3.).

Children’s consumer culture is an accomplishment of the twentieth century (Cook, 2004), but not only children are the most targeted groups of consumer culture (Korsvold, 2010), they are also responding to that “increasingly more developed and sophisticated” appeal (Wasko, 2010, p. 113). Their response to such seductive demand positions them as “avid consumers of an array of media and other cultural products” (Wasko, 2010, p. 113) and recognised meaning-making beings, in account for their active participation in the world of goods (Buckingham, 2000; Cook, 2010). To Cook (2004), children’s agency, competence and influence (‘pester power’) is recognised by advertisers, researchers and marketers in the way they use their creativity to make unanticipated meanings “in their appropriation of consumer goods and media” (Cook, 2004, p. 5); and (re)make their personhood through self-identification processes with digital commodities. Cook (2004) develops from here arguing that the rise of the child consumer market and the commodification of childhood is part of a larger picture, where marketers saw the trends that gave autonomy to children to turn them into selling opportunities: i) the role of UNCRC in the recognition of self-determining rights to children (e.g. self-expression, participation, privacy) (as developed in section 2.2.); ii) smaller sized families and the emotional value added to children; iii) the increased presence of parents in the workplace and simultaneous increased absenteeism at home, leads parents to try to

overcome their absence with goods they buy for children (Buckingham, 2012); iv) children's digital consumption became more private, individualized (bedroom) (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001; Buckingham, 2011; Mesch & Talmud, 2010) and contaminated by global merchandizing (Nayak & Kehily, 2008), as they began spending more time indoors and parents not having the time or energy to monitor children's media activities (Buckingham, 2011; Goggin, 2006).

The e-communication technologies (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011) afford children information, entertainment, diversion, 'self-presentation'<sup>25</sup> (Goffman, 1959), online sociability and communication (Goggin, 2006; Wasko, 2010), but also to less positive and harmful behaviours and experiences attached to it (Bond, 2014), confirming the double-edged sword of modernity proclaimed by Giddens and revisited by Bond (2014), in her study of children's perceptions of risk in their everyday mediated lives. These days the mobile and wireless devices play an indispensable role in children's digital consumption (Goggin, 2006). Children's pursuit for the 'next latest' also reflects the 'extremely virulent infection' introduced by the social networking sites (SNS), where they happily "reveal intimate details of their personal lives" (Bauman, 2007a, p. 2). These tools became increasingly challenging and complex social arenas for activity, interactivity and connectivity, and concern, given their design and wide use (Staksrud et al., 2013; for an explanation of the properties of the internet: persistence, searchability, replicability, and audiences, see Baym & boyd, 2012; boyd, 2007, 2014).

Mesch and Talmud (2010) observe that interpersonal lives and online activities magnify one another. They "fit into new ways of being oneself [...] new ways of organising and conducting one's life" (Goggin, 2006, p. 2), reinforcing and expanding social bonds and relationships (strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973)) with peers, family and romantic partners; and giving a sense of autonomy (Mesch & Talmud, 2010), mobility, portability and customisation (Goggin, 2006, referring to the mobile phone) as they enable:

"[...] staying in constant contact, text messaging, fashion, identity-construction, music, mundane daily work routines, remote parenting, interacting with television programs, watching video, surfing the Internet, meeting new people, dating, flirting, loving, bullying, mobile commerce, and locating people". (Goggin, 2006, p. 2)

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<sup>25</sup> This concept reflects Goffman's (1959) "view of identity as a product of everyday [...] face-to-face interaction [...] in a way that captures the specific nature of self-presentation on interactive web pages" (Skaar, 2010, pp. 211-212).

Mesch and Talmud (2010, p. 88) define this endemic phenomenon as the *network effect* to explain how digital trends expand among children. They “adopt the system initially because someone has told them about it, later they may adopt a service because everyone they know uses it” (as a consequence of peer pressure). In the online environment new rules and online personalities or conducts can emerge, they enlarge their social group, find support, and intimate topics are covertly communicated in perpetual communication with the peer group, but they also learn to develop social (Miller, 2011) and digital skills and literacy to deal with risky situations that may arise.

Deriving from the work of DiMaggio *et al.* (2001), to acquire those skills implies to have access and to use the digital technologies. Different accesses and uses are related to ethnic, gender, socio-economic, age, and cultural inequalities and will continue to exist and contribute to a digital inequality (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008). Social exclusion constrains children’s participation rights in our society (Charlton et al., 2002) and has profound consequences, which reflects on the maintenance and decline of on/offline friendships, class division and individuals’ self-image. This research adopts the terminological shift from *digital divide*<sup>26</sup> (more concerned with internet penetration and access; inequality between ‘have’ and ‘have-nots’) to *digital inequality*, proposed by DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001). This change is justified by the authors after revising empirical data on internet penetration and confirming that “[m]ost people now have access to the internet, if not on their mobile devices, laptops or PCs, then at school, work or in publicly accessible locations” (d’Haenens & Ogan, 2013, pp. 41-42); and building from the 25 years of debriefing of the educational technology policies in Portugal (Almeida et al., 2011). In compliance with DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001), digital inequality is more complex than just the access implied by digital divide rhetoric; it encompasses differences in formal access to internet – equipment, autonomy of use, skill, social support, and the purposes for which the technology is employed (Siapera, 2012). Supporting this line of thought, Selwyn (2004) asserts that digital inequality goes beyond having access (at home, school or libraries), it concerns about effective access to and meaningful use of digital technologies, with users exercising control and choice over the media and the contents they are using. As an illustration, developing from empirical findings

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<sup>26</sup> Digital divide refers to “gaps in access, inequalities in the extent of use, types of internet use, quality of technical connections and ability to evaluate the quality of information” (Mesch & Talmud, 2010, p. 100).

from two studies: Charlton and colleagues, regarding mobile phone ownership among 10-11 years old, assert that,

“[...] non-ownership of a mobile phone may – in particular circumstances – vitally limit interactions with peers, the consequences of which can impede the development of social skills, hinder a sense of belonging (i.e. to the peer group)” (Charlton et al., 2002, p. 153)

A second example is brought to attention by Bond (2010; 2014), in a study about how English children, aged between 11-17 years old, use mobile phone technologies and understand risk in their everyday lives, where she corroborates that owning a mobile phone helps increasing cohesion in relationships and friendships,

“Many of the children spoke of the phone in these terms – that without a mobile you would have no friends, demonstrating the centrality of the mobile phone in the children’s everyday social lives and their friendships” (Bond, 2010, p. 517)

In the Portuguese context, the concern with the promotion and introduction of information technologies in education arose in the mid-1980’s (with the Minerva Project) and since then the Portuguese Government has carried out various policies and incentive programs (Almeida et al., 2011) to promote ICT access in schools. Given the importance being placed on computer literacy in the Information Age (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), in 2007 the Portuguese government, following the lines of action outlined in the Lisbon Strategy and the Education and Training 2010 Programme and the Technological Plan for Education (PTE)<sup>27</sup>, promoted e-inclusion through the nationwide program “e-escolinha” ([www.pte.gov.pt](http://www.pte.gov.pt)) stimulating the purchasing of low cost laptops (Magalhães laptop) and mobile broadband connections by families.

In Portugal, in conformity with Eurostat, 2009, internet reaches 95% of children under 15 years old. Nevertheless, Portuguese children’s access to the internet remains taken for granted, diverse, heterogeneous and not universal despite families and government efforts (Almeida et al., 2011; Almeida et al. 2012).

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<sup>27</sup> The aim of PTE (2007) was to put Portugal among the five European countries more advanced in terms of technological modernization of schools by 2010.



Field constraints are highlighted by Valente and Osório (2008) vis-à-vis the integration of ICT in Portuguese schools' *curriculum*. The authors outline several adversities: i) complications in attracting teachers to adopting the ICT in classroom despite the training initiatives; on one hand teachers feel the adoption of ICT in classrooms is not valued professionally; on the other hand their entrepreneurship often collides with more sceptical and conservative teaching approaches; ii) lack of knowledge and skills is often pointed out by teachers as a constrain to not adopt ICT in classroom; iii) the instability of Portuguese education; iv) resistance from teachers to adopt new teaching methodologies; v) school "ignored, for decades, research evidence from the most remarkable educational researchers on the field of technology integration in education" (Valente and Osório, 2008, 335); vi) difficult access to computers because school locks them in rooms; vii) instead of taking advantage of their learning value, the school promotes activities that focus on the technical resources of the machine, rather than promoting strategies for its use for learning.

More recently, in March 2014 another setback occurred. The Ministry of Education restricted the internet access in Portuguese schools to social networking websites, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr as well as Android and iPhone applications stores. The reason for this restrictive procedure, as quoted by the media<sup>28</sup>, relates to the fact that the Ministry of Education claims these are not pedagogic tools, and justifies that the restrictive measure is intrinsically linked to the high number of cyber-attacks that have targeted the network, during January and February 2014. Although debatable, making a parallel with an example discussed by Hope in a school setting in the UK, the author classifies this over-blocking practice as "new managerialist practices" (2013, p. 271), an 'over-zealous' response that reflects an "outdated educational ideology" (2013, p. 271), that undermines digital educational experiences, literacy, and erroneously "assumes that all students have broadband access at home" (2013, 272) (this example is further considered in section 2.5.).

Both examples, as Bauman (2007a) states, reveal perceptions of children as rebellious and troublesome (Prout, 2005), the trigger to activate banning responses from security-obsessed and nervous adults (whether parents, teachers or headmasters) that favours the growing sense of suspicion, insecurity and anxiety proclaimed by Beck (1992) that legitimizes adults policing measures and the return of the child to the private confinement and social invisibility and denies them autonomy (as explored in more depth in sections 2.1. and 2.2.).

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<sup>28</sup> Information retrieved from <http://www.publico.pt/portugal/noticia/ministerio-da-educacao-limita-acesso-a-internet-nas-escolas-1629720>

The mobile and wireless digital online technologies, especially with the incorporation of do-it-yourself commodities, gave a new impulse to how children express and present themselves and how they use self-presentation to socialize (Goggin, 2006) and fit in their peer groups, while at the same time challenges families (Livingstone & O'Neill, 2014). As never before, technologies afford new possibilities and embodied experiences (Latour, 2002) that took the technologies, previously perceived as extensions of human senses of the self, to a new level. "[W]e have already extended our senses and our nerves" (Siapera, 2012, pp. 70-71) to a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). The internet and mobile-based technologies extended senses and personhood. The incorporation of an always-ready-to-use digital camera, and the free access to image and video free editing software's enabled children to edit and personalise portraits they will share in social networking websites, for others to scrutinize, comment, 'like' (the 'Facebook gifting' mentioned in Miller, 2011), save, manipulate or distribute.

The 'selfie phenomenon', although now new (Warfield, 2014), called the attention of the Oxford English Dictionary, recently updated with this new word (in 2014)<sup>29</sup>. In a small online survey in Canada (Warfield, 2014), involving women aged 16-28 years, findings suggest a connection between the embodied offline subject and the online 'selfie' as the disembodied ontology of post-humanism. In Portugal a study held in collaboration with the World Health Organization about adolescents' health (Matos et al., 2014), involving 6026 adolescents, aged between 11-15, reveals that when asked about how often they photograph and send their 'selfies' to friends or publish them online, 3.2% responded doing it on a daily basis (other, 15.6% weekly). In the study, girls appear as more likely to engage in 'selfie' practices.

Another phenomenon involving taking and sending pictures, 'sexting' is a source of considerable concern and controversy not only in terms of justice, but also among health professionals, paediatricians and psychologists (Wolak et al., 2011). Though the sending messages and photographs of sexually suggestive nature is not a new behaviour, what is new is the ease with which children can easily engage in 'sexting' (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Indeed, the widespread use of texting and 'sexting' has made sexual arousal and sexual exploitation take different contours regarding children (Barry, 2010; Katz, 2013, Zhang, 2010).

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<sup>29</sup> Information retrieved from: <http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/june-2014-update/new-words-list-june-2014>

This and other negative events occurring via the internet light up the discussion on the redefinition of the boundaries between adulthood and childhood and public and private, as the relationship between these two spheres are in constant flux (Bond, 2014; Chalfen, 2009).

Livingstone argues that, young generations have many friends, a narcissistic attraction for self-display and little sense of privacy, which may explain why they embrace so enthusiastically the online realm of display and the SNSs, as “it represents ‘their’ space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance” (2008, p. 5). To Buckingham (2011), as children’s peer group relationships become permeated by consumer culture – consumption is central to social inclusion – the internet-based spaces and tools also represent more possibilities of being marginalised. Children seem to be receptive to SNSs for a handful of reasons: i) enhances connection to peers without adult supervision<sup>30</sup> (Ong et al., 2011); ii) enables to explore identity needs changing (Livingstone, 2008) – also theorised as ‘performance’ (Goffman, 1959), ‘simulacrum’ (Baudrillard, 1994), ‘identity tourism’ (Nakamura, 2002) and ‘self-disclosure’ (Wheless & Grotz, 1976, 1977); iii) facilitates communication and connection with others (Cheung et al., 2011; Nosko et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2010); iv) can be used for fun (Cheung et al., 2011) and entertainment (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012)<sup>31</sup>; v) gives a sense of belonging (Seidman, 2013) and social support (Carpenter, 2012; Castro & Osório, 2012; 2013a; 2013b); vi) allows to be ‘friends’ with celebrities (Miller, 2011).

On the other hand, SNS, in particular the Facebook phenomenon, changed the nature of privacy and information disclosure (Christofides et al., 2009), raising more anxieties and concerns amid adults about: i) stranger contact (Cheung et al., 2011; Christofides et al., 2012); ii) over-sharing of personal information (e.g. where they live and school they attend) (Cheung et al., 2011); iii) personal security (Nosko et al., 2010); iv) privacy (West et al., 2009); v) moral judgements (Buckingham, 2011); vii) time and dedication (Miller, 2011).

Regardless children’s motivations, parents’ concerns<sup>32</sup> about children’s participation in the online environments often shape into policing and restrictive practices (Mathiesen, 2013; Leung & Lee, 2012) to i) protect children from online risks; ii) limit the access to risk; iii) to

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<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, within the scope of the data collected in the field, some children reported parents’ control on their SNS profile.

<sup>31</sup> In this parameter are included the online games available on SNS’s as well as browser-based games.

<sup>32</sup> Pain (2004) in her succinct yet substantial journal paper about geographies of risk in childhood, realizes that since “[d]iscourses of children ‘at risk’ are various and contradictory” (Pain, 2004, p. 65) they need to be contextualised in order to perceive social divides – class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age – that inform discourses around risk and safety are construed. boyd and Hargittai (2013) empirical findings demonstrate that parents concerns about children’s online safety issues vary in concert with race, ethnicity, income, status and political ideology.

overcome their own (parents') fears (boyd & Hargittai, 2013).

Furedi assigns to media and the child safety industry the responsibility for reinforcing overreacting and obsessive concerns among parents, cultivating the idea that children and young people are "permanently at risk" (Furedi, 1997; 2001, para. 5) or "all children are 'at risk', thereby amplifying moral panics that result in anxious calls to restrict children's internet access, increase surveillance or legislate against online freedoms" (Livingstone, 2013, p. 16) (in line with the discussion held in section 2.1. and 2.2.). Online digital technologies reinforce, reformulate and magnify old and offline concerns and fears, anxieties about technology – 'technopanic' (Marwick, 2008, cited in boyd & Hargittai, 2013) – and reopen the public debate in order to address children's online safety (boyd & Hargittai, 2013) (e.g. COPPA – Children's Online Privacy Protection Act; 'The right to be forgotten' ruling; European Strategy to make the internet a better place for kids). However, as this environment becomes increasingly difficult to regulate, the focus of responsibility is passed to parents (Livingstone & O'Neill, 2014). Thus, parents' pro-active engagement is stimulated through 'good parenting' recommendations that go towards closely monitor<sup>33</sup> what children do online<sup>34</sup> (Mathiesen, 2013). Responding to risk avoidance demands, some parents use monitoring activities to watch children's online activities<sup>35</sup> (Mathiesen, 2013; Wong, 2010). In Portugal, drawing from Simões (2012), findings suggest parents chose to monitor children by using strategies such as, antivirus software; consult internet history; check SNS profile.

The monitoring approach can be covert or overt, Mathiesen (2013) notes. In covert monitoring, parents check up on children's online activities without children's knowledge. The covert monitoring that although may allow "parents to see what children do when the children do not think their parents are watching" (Mathiesen, 2013, p. 264), is considered deceptive and arguably a violation of children's privacy rights (Mathiesen, 2013). The overt monitoring style is an approach based on openness and honesty – children know that they are being monitored – but as children appear not to like being monitored by their parents its downside is that it may "lead the child to engage in counter-measures to escape such monitoring, by, for example,

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<sup>33</sup> Monitoring is defined as "checking up on the child's activity covertly or overtly after use" (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, p. 9).

<sup>34</sup> For example, check the browser history folder; revise children's computer contents; use software to track children's online activities; scan social networking sites accounts (Mathiesen, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> The parental mediation varies consistent with i) age, gender and maturity of the child – younger children and girls receive more parental mediation, however, boys and the more skilled ones are more likely to encounter online risks; ii) parents internet skills – more skilled parents tend to be more active mediators (see Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

using computers away from home and learning how to avoid monitoring on home computers” (Mathiesen, 2013, p. 264; Byrne & Lee, 2011).

When Byrne and Lee studied 10-16 years old resistance to parental preventive strategies they found out that when children feel their online freedom threatened they may use resistance strategies to “get around” the restrictive measures, such as “resist giving their password to parents, or becoming “friends” with their parents on social networking sites [...] changing passwords without parents knowing, or adjusting the privacy settings on their parental “friend” in an effort to conceal online behaviours” (Byrne & Lee, 2011, p. 109). Livingstone and Bober (2005) in a study involving 1,511 children and young people also found out that “63% of 12-19 year old home internet users have taken some action to hide their online activities from their parents” (Livingstone & Bober, 2005, p. 81). However, despite parents being (c)overly and honest (or not) about monitoring children’s online activities, children seem to be aware about parent’s practices and reported using some resistance, control and auto-protective strategies to face, respond and circumvent parents control. Their strategies suggest that while parents are concerned in protecting children from outstanding hazards, children are concerned in protecting themselves from close ones – parents and sometimes siblings – which may “lead to parents having less information about their children’s activities” (Mathiesen, 2013, p. 271).

EU Kids Online Project latest reports (Duerager & Livingstone, 2014; O’Neill, 2014; Vandoninck et al. 2013) classify Portugal in the group<sup>36</sup> of parents that mediate through restrictive measures, which is considered the less effective approach to protect children (Helsper et al., 2013; O’Neill, 2014). The restrictive approach used by parents in Portugal may explain why they are allocated to the lower risk/harm cluster, meaning that parents’ monitoring style contributes to a low probability of children engaging in harmful experiences. The restrictive monitoring strategy was also found to be associated with a significant reduction in online risks in Livingstone and Helsper (2008) and corroborated, more recently, in EU Kids Online (Livingstone et al., 2012) report findings, which led the authors concluding that “it is encouraging that restricting online interactions has some benefits” (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, p. 12). However, the authors also highlight that restricting may keep teenagers safer but that has a cost in terms of reducing also opportunities. Following this statement, much of the work of the EU Kids Online, European project, has remained faithful to this line of thought that

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<sup>36</sup> Alongside with Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

restriction seems to constraint opportunities. In a more up-to-date report the authors assert that:

“[...] too much parental restriction in the *protected by restrictions* cluster [...] might lead to higher levels of harm when risk is encountered.” (Helsper et al., 2013, p. 5)

In this sense, experts seem to agree that more harm and negative outcomes than positive outcomes arise from restrictive risk management strategies, and suggest that monitoring: i) is not as effective as parents expected<sup>37</sup> (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Mathiesen, 2013; Wong, 2010); ii) shapes negatively children’s lives and view of the world (Wong, 2010) while “close[sing] off avenues for beneficial cognitive and psychosocial development that are available to young people in the online social world” (Tynes, 2007, p. 576); iii) does not protect children from harm, but instead is “deny[ing] them the myriad educational, psychosocial, and emotional benefits the Internet has to offer” (Tynes, 2007, p. 576); iv) reflects a paternalistic vision of the child as “unskilled in calculating risks or judging situations” (Mathiesen, 2013; Wong, 2010, p. 10); v) turns into a vicious circle, where parents influence the media while in turn being shocked and alarmed by the media (Wong, 2010); vi) undermines trust in the following direction: parent to child; child to parent; child to others; child not feeling trustworthy (Mathiesen, 2013), “signifying a lack of trust in and respect for his own autonomy and decision-making capacity” (Sarre, 2010, p. 68); vii) is usually over-protecting and contributes to make children more vulnerable and infantile at later stages in life (Furedi, 2001); viii) in an ethical perspective may represent an invasion of privacy (Mathiesen, 2013) – while parents have the legal right to monitor children, Mathiesen argues that “children have a right to informational privacy from their parents” (2013, p. 265) and since risk is overstated (Furedi, 2001; Mathiesen, 2013), failing to respect that right should not be done without careful consideration, and when evidence is sufficiently serious (e.g. distress, refuse to go to school or leave the room) and requires such intervention to prevent further harm; ix) is a practice that may lead to harm (Mathiesen, 2013), undermining children’s voluntary share of

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<sup>37</sup> Filtering software does not always blocks undesirable contents, but instead, sometimes blocks harmless others; children find alternative ways to circumvent parents’ monitoring strategies; requires technological skills that parents not always possess; are expensive (Wong, 2010; Tynes, 2007). To Livingstone et al., “[o]ne in three parents (33%) claims to filter their child’s internet use and one in four (27%) uses monitoring software. Overall, only a quarter of children (27%) and a third of parents think parents are effective in helping to keep children safe online” (Livingstone et al., 2012, p. 1).

information (Mathiesen, 2013).

Based on evidence that “indicates the probability but not the certainty of harm” (Staksrud et al., 2013, p. 41) research appears to have suffered a turning point, beginning to explore a different approach to risk, one that seems to smooth some internet panics asserting that risk does not necessarily mean harm<sup>38</sup> and accepting the possibility of children exploring risky opportunities in order to build coping strategies and resilience. More recently Livingstone (2013) states that children’s online experiences can be classified into three categories: positive (opportunities), negative (risks) or ambiguous. And she clarifies it with everyday examples: using educational websites is a positive experience; cyberbullying is a negative experience; making a new friend online (is an ambiguous experience), because it can go either way. It may expand their social circle (in this case, it is a positive experience) or it can open a door for abusive behaviours from strangers (in this case, a negative experience).

A variety of different fears and anxieties related to children’s use of the internet are identified in the literature (e.g cyberbullying, identity theft, sexting, infringement of copyrighted materials, to name a few). boyd and Hargittai (2013) identify three types of online risks that tend to dominate the public discourse – also corroborated by the European Project EU Kids Online: i) online contact from strangers leading to sexual victimization; ii) bullying and harassment; exposure to problematic content. Ponte and Simões (2009) from the EU Kids Online network – Portugal, state that Portuguese parents are more concerned about contact and content risks and reveal being less worried with conduct-related risks.

In order to prevent negative effects arising from children’s use of digital technologies, strategies borrowed from television studies are considered in research to typify parental mediation applied to children’s online activities (Almeida et al., 2011; Byrne & Lee, 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008) to know: i) *active mediation* – parents enrol critically in conversations with children about the *medium*, in this case, online digital technologies; ii) *restrictive mediation* (encompassing interactions and technical restrictions) – parents use a rules-based orientation to mediate children’s online activities and use of the internet; iii) *co-using mediation* – this style may involve “conversation about the online activity, including interpretative or evaluative comments or guidance [...] includes restricting the child in relation to personal information, buying online or completing forms and quizzes, perhaps through such

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<sup>38</sup> EU Kids Online definition of harm: “actual physical or mental damage as reported by the person concerned” (Livingstone & Gorzing, 2014, p. 8; Staksrud et al., 2013)

rules as, “you may only do X when I am with you.”” (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, p. 8). Despite being possible to adopt a similar style to the internet, new strategies are considered in order to match the online particularities and challenges, since “it is difficult to make Internet use a shared activity (because of screen size, sitting position, reliance on the mouse, and common location in a small or private room). Also, online activities are less easily monitored with a casual glance at the screen, given multitasking across multiple open windows. Most important, online risks to children are greater than are television-related risks” (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, p. 4); and the experience of the internet and its associated risks became more ubiquitous and experiences are not confined to home, they can happen in school or at friends’ houses (Leung & Lee, 2011).

The normative reaction to fear by using policing responses is the parents’ response to their desire to protect their children. Adults positioning in restrictive policies derives from fundamental changes that put childhood in-between an ‘extended youth’, where children stay dependent of family in terms of education and economically, and a younger independence, in terms of sexuality, leisure and consumption matters (Gadlin, 1978, cited in Livingstone, 2008). In respect to the online digital technologies, parent-child relations are complex and require ongoing negotiation, since parents want children to be digital competent – which explains why Portuguese parents invest part of the family budget in equipment and internet services (Almeida et al., 2011) – while at the same time they tend to control internet usage, undermining fundamental rights of the child, restricting children’s online opportunities (Wong, 2010), participation, freedom, responsibility and independence (Furedi, 2001; Pain, 2006).

## **2.5. Beyond the risk narrative: Zemiology as applied to the complex landscape where children, digital and online converge**

As discussed in previous sections, the concern that children will experience less positive and harmful experiences in their everyday mediated lives, triggers overreacting and obsessive anxieties among adults. Protective schemes gain expression over participation privileges, reinforcing surveillance or legislative measures to constrain online freedoms (Livingstone, 2013), under the postulate that all children are permanently ‘at risk’ (Furedi, 2001) in the fluid spaces of the digital realm (as outlined in section 2.1.). Though most online experiences are positive, evidence suggests that a significant minority of children engage in negative interactions, either as aggressor, victim, or both (Werner et al., 2010). Spaces that promote



digital and online conviviality became arenas for social problems, quite similar to those in school playground setting (e.g. aggressive behaviour, social exclusion, sexual harassment (Best & Bogle, 2014)), with the difference that, unlike in school setting, there is no one “to keep an eye on what’s going on” (Bauman, 2007a, p. 3).

When the ubiquitous access, the possibility of permanent connectivity, individualized and diverse uses of online digital technologies compromise the advantages for children’s online participation (Simões et al., 2014), an uncertain divide arises among adults: those who perceive children’s online experiences as part of the learning process of growing up; and the ones who worry about consequential harms that may lead children to develop in social undesirable ways (Best & Bogle, 2014); and two contrasting and conflicting representations of the child: the innocent victim in need of protection versus the autonomous and competent agent in control of his/her life (Buckingham, 2009b, 2012). However, these antagonistic positions cannot ignore that the frontier between a positive and negative experience can be blurred as they seem to be correlated by ambiguity (Bond, 2014; Staksrud et al., 2013), rising from the inflammatory combination of children, online digital technologies and change (Livingstone, 2004); where online digital technologies can, simultaneously, play a positive and negative role in children’s lives and, concurrently, be a token for safety and insecurity in parents’ perceptions (Bond, 2014). Furthermore, either position cannot forget that, as a result of the UNCRC, childhood took a new turn (as discussed in section 2.2.) in the off/online setting, as the digital and online environment became likewise a “relevant context for considering the rights of the child” (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013, p. 22), in terms of protection, provision and participation (Buckingham, 2009; Livingstone & O’Neill, 2014). Children are actively making choices and decisions in how they use online digital technologies in the context of their everyday lives, which by its turn “reveals a highly complex and complicated network of relationships” (Bond, 2014, p. 3) that change and challenge social norms, rights and values taken for granted (Bond, 2014) (see section 2.3.).

There is a growing empirical *corpus* of multidisciplinary work endorsing the complex and mediated worlds of children, associated with the risks arising in the context of internet use, in particular, the work undertaken by Sonia Livingstone and collaborators in the EU Kids Online project. The research network has been developing research about online risks since 2006, and made a major contribution mapping and categorizing such risks; approaching risks from children’s point of view; identifying which children are more vulnerable to online risks;

pinpointing research gaps and proposing guidelines for policy initiatives with a focus in harm experiencing reduction (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014). In the context of the European network, risk is “a calculation based on the probability and severity of harm” (Livingstone, 2013, p. 13) but does not imply that harm will follow (Livingstone et al., 2011a); and harm is defined as “actual physical or mental damage” (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014, p. 8; Staksrud et al., 2013) and can arise from four categories of online risks (aggressive, sexual, values, commercial) where children can: receive passively unwanted and risky content (e.g. violence, pornography, racism, hate, marketing); be targeted and participate in stranger initiated activity (e.g. harassment, stalking, grooming, meeting strangers, sexual predators, ideological persuasion, misuse or personal information); or have an active role as perpetrators in risky activities (e.g. bullying, hostility to peers, sexual harassment, sexting, production of harmful content, gambling, copyright infringement) (Livingstone et al., 2011a). The work undertaken by the EU Kids online project has made a major contribution to current understanding and has led to further academic interest, debate and further research from scholars across Europe.

This thesis contributes with additional evidence and insights rising from the children’s accounts about their technologized quotidian lives. Corroborating this, the data collected sheds light on the Portuguese context and Portuguese children’s digital lives. Additionally, significant original contribution comes from proposing a shift in the way of looking and framing the complexities of the information produced in the field. In line with this, the purpose of this section is, in a first stance, to critically evaluate the risk narrative despite its centrality in research during the last decade, explaining why this rationale became a limiting theoretical framework in the analysis of the late modernity social challenges, and arguing that such narrow approach calls for a revision. Secondly, to propose that contemporary global and local challenges and changes call for a more inclusive and holistic approach, borrowed from critical criminology and focused on the social harm theory, that resonates the Beck’s solitary cosmopolitan response (2002) and Tomás (2008, 2011) ‘childhood cosmopolitanism’ thesis. This section offers an oversight of how harm is addressed through the more comprehensive lens of Zemiology and considers its worth to interpret and discuss the data presented in this thesis. Zemiology is proposed as an alternative approach to rethink the heterogeneous networks of human and non-human entities emerging from late modernity, and reflect the sort of harms arising in line with the positioning of protection, provision, and participation as core principles of the UNCRC applied to the landscape of children’s everyday lives, where digital and online converge. To argue and

remonstrate the usefulness of Zemiology, as a positive and enriching approach to overcome the problems arising from children's connected and online lives, an empirical case study of a example of over-blocking in a UK school will guide this argumentation.

The risk narrative has been operationalized as a multidisciplinary and unifying approach in diverse topics, framing theory and empirical research to explain and confront the complex and uncertain facets of late modern societies. However, as Green notes, this theoretical framework "has begun to reach the limits of its usefulness" (2009, p. 493). In a study about the perspectives of children on the role of new technologies, in particularly the internet, have in their lives, Monteiro (2013), guided by the EU Kids Online risk theoretical framework conveyed by awareness-raising initiatives, suggests in her conclusions that the notion of risk is restricted, alarmist and stigmatizing. Risks are powerful only if they become real, until that moment, they are speculative and intricately linked to processes of signification and valorisation (e.g. how the media make problems visible to public attention) (Van Loon, 2002). As Zinn observes, criticisms point to 'risk' as a narrowed response that "fails to grasp the more general societal development" (2004, p. 7) and strongly linked to insurance and statistical methods.

Developing from Green's (2009) analysis, the dominance of a risk-approach-based research can subversively strengthen the discourse around risk overstating its probability (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013) and "constrain our ability to produce valid representations of world as understood by those in it" (Green, 2009, p. 495). The risk narrative envisions a narrowed theoretical framework in the analysis of contemporary social challenges and changes, since it tends to emphasise: i) the loss of trust in humankind, community and progress "where the *perception* of threatening risks determines thought and action" (Beck, 2000, p. 163), leading to a more individualised and lone experience in the resolution of problems. Consequently, a climate based on suspicion leads to further social problems (Stokes, 2009) as "citizens' definitions of a situation are informed by definitions which are institutionalized in policy and spread through policy measures" (Bröer, 2008, p. 95); ii) the promotion of safety around control and surveillance (Boudia & Jas, 2007; Gill, 2007; Van Loon, 2002), revealing a more adult-centred agenda (Sarre, 2010) than a child-centred approach, which in turn, can inhibit child's life in many ways (Stokes, 2009); iii) research on specific kinds of risks (that influence and are influenced by political and media agendas) may contribute to erode trust in expert decisions (Ekberg, 2007) and relegate other hazards to invisibility; iv) anxieties by opening up a threatening sphere of possibilities (Beck, 2000; Boudia & Jas, 2007); v) the politicisation of

risk discourse and risk society that “had great success among policy-makers and managers who adopted the ideas of a new form of governance based on a broader social base for political decision-making and co-management with stakeholders in various social sectors” (Boudia & Jas, 2007, p. 327) ignoring alternatives approaches. In line with this, Boudia and Jas observe that ‘risk’ is “a ‘method’ of managing problems and, the popularity of the concept of the risk society among decision-makers and social scientists indicate how political these issues have become today” (2007, p. 325); vi) the attempt to measure risk as an “objective fact and statistical value rather than describing risk as a subjective or intersubjective experience” (Ekberg, 2007, p. 350). This means that risk may be measured on a broader basis of how individuals perceive risk and how they may get involved in harmful experiences (voluntary or involuntary and familiar or unfamiliar source (Ekberg, 2007)) and how they respond emotionally to risk, but not to the subjectivity of the experience of being and dealing with risk in everyday life (for example, decision-making processes and peer pressure cannot be observed within a statistical survey); vii) the risk trap. The risk discourse strengthens the focus on the problems and on the sentiments of alarmism and powerlessness (Beck, 2000); viii) the negative hazards in the interaction between children and technologies as a “given and stable phenomenon” (Bröer, 2007, p. 41); ix) the “political and social alliances [that] often form from an attempt to cope with a perceived problem. This embodies the world risk society on a micro level, as individuals mobilize and gain comfort in numbers, analyse, predict or attempt to prevent possible risks to the safety and security of their own ‘biographies’” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, cited in Stokes, 2009, p. 10).

Gill advocates that “risk elimination is no more possible here than anywhere else in childhood” (2007, p. 60), and measures to reduce risk may have the unintended consequence of reducing opportunities, Livingstone and Helsper argue (2009). To withdraw children from the online realm can produce damaging consequences to children and society as a whole. In this respect, Gill (2007) in his analysis argues that the risk aversion narrative is undermining childhood, limiting children’s freedom of exploring physical, social and virtual worlds and corroding adult-children relationships, and he concludes by challenging researchers to “abandon the assumption that risk is the dominant [...] framework for making sense of public understanding [...] [and] to question whether the risk society is necessarily the most appropriate characterisation of late modernity” (Green, 2009, p. 507). This line of thought has guided and shaped the evolution of the investigation presented in this thesis. Risk is distinct

from harm (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013) but both concepts are interconnected, since harm is an unwelcome outcome of risk (Fillmore & Atkins, 1992). Hopefully, this thesis offers a solid vindication to move beyond the limits of probability and uncertainty (Beck, 1992) enclosed in the risk narrative and focus on real life problems that arise from the complex and interwoven relationships between children and technologies.

In line with Green, this thesis proposes an alternative approach, a shift from the risk-based framework to a Zemiology-inspired approach, as a lens to look to the more hidden but real problems using a fresh angle. In line with this approach, the “preference for sensitive qualitative and participatory methodologies” (Pain, 2004, p. 66) throughout this research, placed children as experts of their own lives and actively engaged in the construction of their worlds and biographies. Children value their safety, they are learning to keep themselves safe, and want adults to help them keep safe as long as it does not mean feeling constrained (Gill, 2007). In this perspective, a zemiological approach would enable engagement between children and adults in interconnected and open dialogue – respecting mutual rights and responsibilities – to seek dynamic, imaginative, creative and positive solutions, putting aside out-dated and pessimistic, restrictive and over-protective actions that simultaneously constrain children’s rights and opportunities, enhancing instead harm that follows from parents intoxicating anxieties and fears.

Gill observes that “[t]here is a growing recognition that the damaging consequences of excessive risk aversion need to be tackled” (Gill, 2007, p. 76). “Social co-use” and “interactive mediation”<sup>39</sup> are proven by Livingstone and Bober (2005) as having a positive effect on children, reducing risk and heightening children’s coping strategies when confronted with distressing on-line experiences. Mathiesen (2013) advocates that engaging in open dialogue helps to build trusty relationships (Stokes, 2009), alleviates the negativity from children’s harmful experiences and encourages children to be more open and discuss their online experiences with adults (e.g. parents, teachers, caregivers). In the case of parent-child relationship, evidence suggests that when children feel more supported by their family, they engage in fewer negative experiences (Park et al., 2008, study cited in Wong, 2011; Tynes, 2007). Gill (2007), Stokes (2009) and Pain (2006) seem to agree that facing adversity helps children to build their character; awareness; responsibility; and safety mechanisms that make

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<sup>39</sup> Parents engaging in activities such as: talking to their children about the internet; encouraging children to explore the internet; sharing online activities with children (Duareger & Livingstone, 2012).

them 'digital wise' (Buckingham, 2009a; Prensky, 2009), and competent to manage risk (Bond, 2013). Aligned with this, however, adults have to keep in mind that for children to live a meaningful and satisfying life (Gill, 2007, p.16), they also have to grant them some freedom to discover the world (Skenazy, 2009).

The concept of 'harm' was not in its beginning linked to the criminological field (it results from contributes in the field of psychology, philosophy, ethics, see Kleinig, 1978). But the concept was first brought up to debate by the American sociologist and criminologist, Edwin Sutherland, in 1949. Back in the 1940s, the city of Chicago in the United States went through socially challenging times that urged for the restructuring and revision of the criminal justice system in order to solve unequal and unfair discriminations triggered by 'power-based political-economic institutions' that alienated the 'marginalised or disenfranchised by power' (O'Brien & Yar, 2008; Tiff & Sullivan, 2001, p. 188). This became known as the 'white-collar crime'.

Before Sutherland, only harms against the state were recognized as crimes before the law (Tiff & Sullivan, 1980). This was considered a key milestone shift in the history of criminology. "By designating certain behaviours and events as 'socially harmful'" (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013, p. 430) "sexual harassment, racial violence, hate crime and so on" (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013, p. 430) became categorized as crimes and judged as such by the judicial system. 'Socially harmful' referred to behaviours and events that threaten human dignity (Tiff, 1995, cited in McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013). 'Social harm' referred to "[a]ny attempt to control another, to deny these rights to another" (Tiff & Sullivan, 1980, p. 112), such as "equality, self-determination, liberty, artistry, the consciousness of life" (Tiff & Sullivan, 1980, p. 111). However, this was not enough to tackle social harmful inequalities.

A group of criminologists disillusioned with the narrow vision of criminology, took the first step towards a new direction in thinking about crime and social justice. Two alternative lines of thought, *abolitionism* and *critical criminology*, argue that criminal justice intensifies social problems, social divisions, crime and its impact (Sim, 2005). Instead, they propose a new approach by privileging, harm rather than crime; social justice rather than criminal justice; treatment rather than punishment; human rights rather than discipline and control (Chadwick & Scraton, 2005). From their perspective, criminology was defined in terms of oppression, where vulnerable and poorer groups like the working class, women, and ethnic minorities were the most likely to be harmed by the outcomes of capitalism and the maintenance of the state and corporate economic and political interests throughout class division, sexism and racism

(Burke, 2005). As an alternative, abolitionism (although differences exist among abolitionists in Europe) advocates the “radical transformation of the prison and punishment system” (Sim, 2005, p. 2) by replacing it with a reflexive, solitary, participatory, and inclusive system to deal with complex social phenomena (Sim, 2005). Critical criminology focuses on the interpersonal and daily determining context of relations and dynamics that embody exploitation and oppression (e.g. classicism, racism, sexism) legitimized by criminalization processes. These dynamics, supported by Foucault’s (1979) ‘regimes of truth’, occurring within the range of capitalism and globalization, gain expression at the level of agency and structure, where agency refers to the social relations and interactions in the context of everyday world; and structure encompasses the institutions and structural relations that contain and regulate the social relations, throughout which relations of domination/subordination are legitimized and gain structural significance (Chadwick & Scraton, 2005).

One important contribution came from Schwendinger and Schwendinger, in the 1970s, by bringing the subject of human rights into the critical criminology debate and agenda. They advocated that the negligence of basic human rights undermined individual’s lives; therefore, they challenged their peers to reflect on criminology in terms of a broader scope, one that encompasses human rights (O’Brien & Yar, 2008; Pemberton, 2007). The authors considered two important aspects in the construction of theory on ‘harm’. In a harmful event they consider the ‘other’, the individual that inflicts/causes harm (the offender); the individual that suffers the harm (victim); and the behaviour that produces harm (Lanier & Henry, 2001). This approach presupposes that harm results from an imbalanced relationship of power between the offender (more powerful) and the victim (less powerful).

In the 1980s, Tiff and Sullivan presented a definition of harm that reflects the discussions under the criminological agenda: “behavior which attempt to control, invade and destroy another human being” (1980, p. 77). In their analysis about social harm, three other concepts were introduced: core values, power and self. Considering this, how individuals respond to social harm is the reflection of their core values in their everyday actions and how they interact with others. If the interactions are based on power-unbalanced relationships, the violence is directed to the victim (other) and towards the offender (oneself). To the authors, harm results from an imbalance of power that manifests itself through violent interpersonal relationships (e.g., theft, rape, child abuse, but also, prohibiting voluntary participation, subservience to authority, suppression) (Tiff & Sullivan, 2001).

During the 1990s another theoretical and conceptual crisis challenged criminologists to rethink and reconstruct the concept 'crime' in order to limit transgressions arising from the political and economic power against human rights (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2013). From the mid-1990s onwards, Henry and Milovanovic developed a constitutive criminology that defines crimes as the 'power to deny others' (Burke, 2005, p. 180)<sup>40</sup>. The authors' conception of harm includes acts that are not illegal or perceived as criminal. A harmful behaviour is always a manifestation that indicates a power differential between individuals, and it is analysed in terms of two possibilities: *reduction* and *repression*. Harms of reduction happen when the victim experiences immediate loss or injury. In the harms of repression the power is used to restrict future human development (Burke, 2005; Lanier & Henry, 2001).

The introduction of a 'social harm' perspective in the criminological debate was a major landmark in the history of the criminal justice. It forced criminologists (not without controversy) to revise the narrow concept of 'crime' and move outside its legal framework embracing a discourse more concerned with the individual and the society (Muncie, 1998; O'Brien & Yar, 2008; Pemberton, 2007; Tiff & Sullivan, 1980). By doing this exercise they "acknowledge a wide range of immoral, wrongful and injurious acts that may or may not be deemed illegal, but are arguably more profoundly damaging" (Alvesalo & Whyte, 2007; Matthews & Kauzlarich, 2007; McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013, p. 430). 'Social harm' and 'human rights' became more central in criminology and government policies (O'Brien & Yar, 2008). Taking this in consideration, a new definition appeared in the tomes. Despite the effort, criminal harms were still an irrelevant part of the vast immensity of harms that could occur in daily life and will never be apprehended by the criminal law (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004).

The revision of what a crime was (or was not), as well as the wider reinforcement of the concept of 'harm' in law was not an easy or peaceful task mainly due to: first, the difficulty of finding a satisfactory middle ground between a narrow and a broader scope that would fully satisfy the principle of fairness without transposing the legal boundaries (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013); second, the revisable characteristic of the concepts: 'crime' and 'harm'. 'Crime' and 'harm' are concepts that are permeable to temporal, cultural and social contexts (Lanier & Henry, 2001). In other words, what has been considered 'crime' and 'harm' may no longer be or the other way round; and what today is a norm in the near future may be a

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<sup>40</sup> In the traditional criminology, crime field of inquiry was defined by the state. In accordance with this more traditional faction, crime concerned "activities that violate some form of criminal law" (Matthews & Kauzlarich, 2007, p. 44).



deviation (for example, alcohol, there were periods along the epochs in which it was prohibited and punishable by law; and it also may depend on the cultural context, since its consumption is forbidden and illegal in certain societies). The problem here is where to draw the line between what is acceptable, or not, without running the possibility of changing the concepts and criminalise every deviation from the norm<sup>41</sup> (Burke, 2005; Lanier & Henry, 2001; McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013); third, the diversity of definitions built on what constitutes 'crime' and 'harm' depending on the temporal, cultural and geographical context they were construed. To overcome these limitations, a more social sensitive, discontent, and deconstructive group of criminologists, in the late 1990s, "began exploring the possibility of moving beyond criminology and developing a new discipline around the concept of social harm" (Hillyard, 2005, p. 27). In the 1990s, during a conference, discussions around criminology and the concept of 'social harm' inflamed the event giving a new focus to the debate. Criminology was facing a new crisis within its community. A more conservative group remained loyal to criminology. A second group, more progressive and post-modernist, was willing to abandon criminology, and look beyond the criminal limits, in order to embrace a social harm perspective, determined to "discover where the most dangerous threats and risks to our person and property lie" (Burke, 2005, p. 179). The focus of discussion around 'social harm' was moving from the narrow and distorted scope of criminology, more concerned with a political and economic agenda (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004), to a more inclusive and holistic approach to harm.

The aim of this more critical faction was to consider all varied types of harm that affect individuals thorough their living existence, even when most of those events were not criminal. Supported by evidence demonstrating that more harm is caused by events that are not defined by the criminal justice system as crimes (Hillyard, 2005), Hillyard and colleagues took a more radical position, arguing that a harm is a harm despite if it is categorised as crime or not. To them "it makes no sense to separate out harms, which can be defined as criminal, from all other types of harm. All forms of harm [...] must be considered and analysed together. Otherwise a very distorted view of the world will be produced" (Hillyard et al., 2004, p. 2). Hence, they advocated for "a social harm perspective detach[ed] from the criminal justice system" (Pemberton, 2007, 31).

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<sup>41</sup> "Conversely, if the definition is too broad, then almost every deviation becomes a crime. This was the case with the old concept of sin, where anything that deviated from the norm could be prosecuted by the church as an offence against God." (Lanier & Henry, 2001, p. 1).

Following the increasing body of ideas that were gaining theoretical ground, in the beginning of the twenty first century, an alternative discipline 'Zemiology' was proposed. Zemiology, with its origins in the Greek word *ζημιά*, which means 'harm', is a variant of critical criminology, that focus on the study of 'social harm'. The 'Zemiology project' recognised the contributions and the important steps taken by criminology to the understanding of 'harm' (Hillyard et al., 2004, p. 2), but their followers truly believed that it was time to move outside its limited sphere (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013). They remonstrate the advantages of a more coherent, imaginative (Hillyard et al., 2004) and "unified approach to the study of all types of harm that are likely to affect us in our lives" (Hillyard, 2005, p. 27). Their major criticism to crime and criminology is that "[i]t provides a highly partial, biased and distorted view of the nature and extent of harms people experience during their lifetime [...] [perpetuating] the belief that the solution to many different forms of social harm is by criminalizing them" (Hillyard et al., 2004, p. 2).

The followers of this project trust that only Zemiology can contribute with a more broaden perspective about 'social harm'. A method capable of "engag[ing] a human rights perspective that takes us beyond the confines of criminal law" (Hil & Robertson, 2013, p. 7), and apprehending the "nature and significance of current world<sup>42</sup> transformations and their effects on various aspects of contemporary social meaning" (Hil & Robertson, 2013, pp. 6-7). Units of analysis (defined by the state) and definition of crime (narrow perspective) were the main causes of contestation among criminologists (Mathews & Kauzlaric, 2007)<sup>43</sup>. On behalf of their cause, Zemiologists listed the weaknesses they found on criminology and 'crime'<sup>44</sup>: i) Crime is a social construction with no ontological reality. No particular event is by itself a crime, it is a social construction that needs to be predicted before happening; ii) crime controls are ineffective at the level of detention, rehabilitation and prevention; iii) it produces more harm because it inflicts pain (of various kinds); iv) discourses around crime and fear legitimate the expansion of crime control, which leads to more crime; v) criminology excludes many social harms that can cause serious damage; vi) crime has an intimate relationship with power,

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<sup>42</sup> This text was written after the 9/11 events.

<sup>43</sup> "On one hand, allowing the state to define the scope of inquiry for a discipline that claims to be scientific is highly problematic given the inherently political nature of criminal definitions. On the other hand, there must be some definitional framework for criminologists to use to label activities "crimes." Most criminologists have opted to use state-defined definitions of crime, and by doing so, have relegated the debate over definitions of crime to criminologists in the critical camp." (Mathews & Kauzlarich, 2007, p. 45).

<sup>44</sup> For a deeper analysis of the key critics addressed to criminology, see Paddy Hillyard et al., 2004; Paddy Hillyard & Tombs, 2007.

which in turn, degenerates in social problems; vii) the fact that crime works with statistical data provides a distorted picture of reality and instils fear in specific types of harm.

Instead, a social harm approach would: i) give visibility to 'minor' events that lack legal status and were segregated in the periphery of what is considered crime. Despite being hidden from "media coverage, policy debates and from academic research on crime and criminal justice" (Alvesalo & Whyte, 2007, p. 57) that does not mean that they do not cause serious social harm (e.g. poverty, malnutrition, war, environmental pollution, medical negligence, state violence, bullying, discriminations, harassment, medical negligence and exposure to various dangers and violations that jeopardize human rights and dignity principles); ii) give more precise and detailed information of what may harm individuals during their existence; iii) enable to classify and compare harm in a diachronic perspective; iv) produce data that would enable more appropriate policies and social responses; v) permit a better understanding about what/who causes harm (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004); vi) benefit from multidisciplinary contributes. (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004); vii) be able to deal with events using mediation, negotiation and empowerment instead of control, punishment and exclusion (Muncie, 2008).

More recently, in order to construct a definition on social harm, Hillyard and Tombs (2004; 2007) charted harm into four types: *physical*, *financial/economic*, *psychological and emotional*, and *cultural safety*. Recognizing the difficulty to measure psychological and emotional harm the authors do not point to examples of psychological and emotional harm and remit to the reading of the chapters of their edited book 'Beyond criminology: Taking harm seriously' (2004) that gather contributions exploring a range of topics (e.g. violence, state harms, murder, children, asylum and immigration policies, sexuality and poverty) and argue that criminology covers an insignificant amount of the harms experienced by people. In the chapter 'Re-orienting miscarriages of justice', Noughton argues that besides the harms experienced by the individual, also the '*social*' harms have to be considered, since "there are profound *social effects upon the families and friends of the victims*" (Naughton, 2007, p. 168). In the chapter 'Children and the Concept of Harm' (Parker, 2004), Parker adds two more types of harms to the initial list: '*educational*' and '*policy*'. Policy harms result from policies that have a negative impact on children (either if they are in their best interest and fail or if they are argued to be in their interest, but they are not) (Parker, 2004).

Parker (2004) argues that the concept of harm has been applied to children considering two positions: the child as victim or considering the child as offender. And in terms of intervention,

there is the harm inflicted within the private sphere (family setting) and the harm inflicted in other setting. Either way, children have been hidden individuals neglected by law. And children's safety is a recent and modern concern. Only from the nineteenth century onwards, justice took the first step to protect children from physical abusive behaviours and events (within the private sphere). Harms resulting from sexual abuse, for instance, just recently have received more attention, partly due to the emphasis given by the media in high profile cases and increasing pressures demanding the governments to act. By the mid-late of the twentieth century the fragility of those under eighteen was a concerning gap of the judicial system that urged for international measures in order to safeguard children's rights. Thus, the UNCRC became the most internationally influent instrument that guides the signatory states to guarantee and safeguard the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights and liberties of children (section 2.2. develops this issue in more depth). This international measure is a public and political recognition that harm should be taken into account in children's lives.

Parker contends that the concept of harm, when referring to children, should go "well beyond the limited range of circumstances that calls for criminal, or indeed civil, proceedings" (2004, p. 242). Indeed, with regard to children it is necessary to extend the limits of harm beyond the criminal instances and adapt its theoretical and conceptual demarcation to the current technological and social challenges. In line with Pantazis (2010), and due to the changes and context that ubiquitous communication technologies brought to social networked dynamics and to the realisation of children's rights (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013), within the confines of this study, 'harm' is concerned with the detrimental outcomes that may collide with children's psychological, physical, educational or social well-being, needs and development (Parker, 2004) as safeguarded by the UNCRC, applied to the digital and online environment (see Buckingham, 2009b; Livingstone & Bulger, 2013; Livingstone & O'Neill, 2014).

In order to progress from theory to practice and understand how Zemiology could operate, when applied to real problems, it was important the bibliographic research that led to the only, but recent, article written by Andrew Hope (2013), professor in the Department of Education of the University of Adelaide, Australia. In his article, the author privileges a social harm approach and applies the Zemiology method to the problem of over-blocking in a school in the UK.

Through the text, Hope analyses and compares two-model approach to solve the school as a result of "contested notions of online learning and responses to risk" (Hope, 2013, 270).

Taking the situation in context from the school perspective: the offenders in this equation are the students (the 'older ones'); the victim is the school; and the harm identified is the damage inflicted on the image and reputation of the school. In order to solve the problems, the school reacted with a restrictive and prohibitive response (enhancing power differential), by "over-blocking [the] school cyberspace" (Hope, 2013, p. 270).

The over-blocking solution applied by the school, as Hope argues is a harmful response that addresses harm with more harm and brings psychological and cultural harms (harm reduction and harm repression) to the students by i) "hindering or slowing of the learning process" (Hope, 2013, p. 271); ii) "undermin[ing] digital literacy" (Hope, 2013, p. 271); iii) "increas[ing] marginalisation of the 'information poor'" (Hope, 2013, p. 271); iv) denying students the chance of democratically participate in the solution of the problem (Hope, 2013, p. 271); v) "misinterpretation of student online behaviour" (Hope, 2013, p. 278).

An alternative solution is proposed by Hope, who contends that a zemiological approach to the problem, instead, would provide a positive and democratic solution by "moving the focus away from the potential impact of risks that may never be realised" (Hope, 2013, p. 277); and privilege a "more informal, cooperative approach" (Hope, 2013, p. 276) in which students would be empowered and enrolled to participate and have a voice in school policy-making (Hope, 2013). This approach would not only be empowering the marginalised (Hope, 2013), but also "highlight neglected issues" (Hope, 2013, p. 278) and reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. To sum up, operating the positive and collaborative zemiological approach would help to identify problems without a connotation in blame; to understand how the problem is addressed; and to point directions in other to solve problems by engaging students in school policy-making. Additionally, the benefits highlighted by Hope of using a zemiological approach are: to achieve resolution based on harm reduction; to focus on real problems (harm), rather than hypothetical ones (risk); to open democratic discussion; to raise new questions; to contribute with a social problems agenda with real problems.

For Hope (2013) adopting restrictive measures to solve problems perpetuates harm, because it privileges control, blame and fear; reinforces unbalanced power relations; justifies disciplinary controls; limits the chance of debate and participations and is socially stigmatizing. Instead, a more holistic approach of harm is a positive and creative approach that points solutions to deal with everyday problems. It applies and responds to immediate local needs and calls for finding a concerted response by the community and for the community. In a

zemiological approach the voices of those involved are valued and heard. Individual voices count for taking decisions. It gives empowerment to the most vulnerable, and marginalised involving them in the search for solutions. The zemiological method invites to an open discussion and open negotiation.

Thus, a zemiological approach would also help to understand how the problem is addressed as the concept of harm applied to children can be seen in line with two perspectives: the child who is harmed (victim); the child who harms (offender); and the child who self-harms (Hope, 2013; Parker, 2004). This is a challenging process. Since not all damage is physical, one has to consider that real constraints exist and may difficult the approach to harm. The Zemiologists recognize that some harms pose more difficulties to measure (in nature and impact), thus Hillyard and Tombs encourage a more operational and pragmatic definition of harm, evolving and adapting to an evolving society. They suggest to read people, what they say and how they behave, what expressions they use, and attitudes “take some account of people’s own expressions, [...] understandings, attitudes, perceptions” (Hillyard et al., 2008, p. 16), but also be attentive to “silences, denials, lies and cover-ups” (Hillyard et al., 2008, p. 16). In this sense, the definition of harm rises from operating in the field, a never completed process that evolves and adapts to changes in society.

## **2.6. Synthesis**

The need to understand the complex landscape where children’s lives, digital and online converge, from a harm perspective, guided this study. In conformity with the research purpose, the previous sections in this chapter provided a multifaceted account of the social processes arising within the scope of late modernity, enhancing tensions (e.g. adult-children, agency-structure, public-private) that impact on social representations of childhood and through which children became visible or invisible (Lee, 2001; Oswell, 2001).

The work on the socio-technical studies shed further light to understand not only the relationships between society and childhood, but also how these relate to another important concept: technology, on the extent to which the digital realm is embedded in children’s everyday lives through heterogeneous and complex networks that link together human and non-human entities.

This research is contextualised within the scope of change, unpredictability and uncertainty featuring late modern society landscape, in which childhood and adults are challenged and

simultaneously considered through a double-edged sword perspective. In line with this, present-day debates adjoining the interwoven relationships between childhood and the rapidly changing technological landscape were discussed with the purpose of gaining an enriching interpretation and reflexivity across the true purport of children's insights in the context of their networked worlds.

In terms of theoretical approach, this chapter ranges across fruitful contributions from well-established perspectives that cement in the closing section with the proposal of the zemiological approach, as a positive and collaborative model to comprehend and solve day-to-day digital and online problems by privileging the voices and perspectives of children as the main source of understanding.

### 3. Methodology

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*The focus of this research is children, drawing on their experiences and expertise to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity around their digital and online everyday lives.*

*In view of this principle, which underpins this research, the following chapter covers the methodological, ethical and quality decisions that guided this empirical journey, discussing key issues to consider when researching ‘with’ and ‘about’ children. The sections in this chapter detail the research design of this study, including the methods and strategies adopted to access school-aged participants, collect and analyse the data, and the centrality of ethical considerations in the research process.*

*The methodological framework will be described throughout the following sections:*

*3.1. Research design;*

*3.2. Ethical considerations;*

*3.3. Data collection;*

*3.4. Data analysis;*

*3.5. Quality criteria;*

*3.6. Synthesis.*

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#### 3.1. Research design

“The history of humankind is replete with instances of attempts to understand the world” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 14), is the opening sentence in Lincoln and Guba’s first chapter of *Naturalistic Inquiry*. ‘Understand’ is the word in the opening that highlights the epistemological principle of qualitative research design, guiding this research through the subjective constructions and complex relationships underlying children’s everyday digital lives (Flick et al., 2008). However, at the conditions of late modernity, difficult to understand, predict and prevent, one is not moved by the presumptuous aspiration of achieving the truth – after all, truth is elusive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yet, an attempt is made to get a glimpse and a better understanding of the complex and heterogeneous technologized world in which children interact and develop. In this sense, ‘understanding’ is accepted as a never-ending path (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), an active-constructive process throughout which one organizes the experimental world (Flick, 2008). Within the postmodern perspective of knowledge, it is assumed that objectivity cannot be attained. Nevertheless, the researcher must compromise and seek rigour within the analytic processes and the results he/she achieves (Ramos, 2005).



The previous chapter in this thesis draws on theoretical rationalisations that help frame and offer clues to contextualize and historically, culturally and socially situate contemporary childhood and technology and the “nature of children’s everyday interactions with mobile internet technologies in late modernity” (Bond, 2014, p. 4). A reality very distant from past experiences and close to the almost infinite range of present (and future) technological possibilities and their challenges (Osório, 2010). Within this scope, moreover, it is important to remember that children “are not necessarily passive recipients that are simply ‘influenced’ by media and/or group dynamics” but that they are also “actively creating, changing and making sense of their social worlds” (Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006, p. 285) across a complex interplay between people and digital convergence (Bond, 2012). In line with this approach, one has to consider children as more than consumers or producers. Children have become prosumers (Toffler, 1990), as they creatively adjust and adapt to technological innovations and, subsequently, its social changes (Ólafsson et al., 2013).

To gain insight into the complex, ever-changing and intertwined relationship of online digital technologies in children’s everyday lives, this research follows a structured, interpretative and holistic analysis of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a). To better understand that reality, its complexities and subjectivities of matters and meanings to which children – as social agents (Hendrick, 2003), holders of rights, actively engaged in the construction of their digital culture – contribute in the span of their online experiences, this study draws from a social constructivist tradition (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

According to Sarmiento’s (2003), in order to know ‘our’ children it is important to understand society as a whole, with its contradictions and complexities. Contemporary childhood is embedded in an ambiguous and paradoxical society – marked by change, distrust, uncertainty and progress, in which, ultimately, online digital technologies embody a place of conflict and tension as a consequence of variations concerning social, inter and intra-generational use and transformation of daily life and material culture of children (Sarmiento, 2011). Additionally, Lankshear and Knobel (2008) state that to understand the world, one needs to focus on the contexts<sup>45</sup> and individuals (in this case, school-aged children) “must be studied as a single instance of more universal social experiences and processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. xiv). Hence, this research is contextualised in line with the pace of change, unpredictability and uncertainty featuring contemporary society landscape, in which contemporary childhood

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Context’ is understood as “something that impacts *on* the child” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. xii, emphasis in the original).

became a complex reality as a result of cultural, social and economic transformations and the impact of online digital technologies in their daily lives (these discussions were considered in chapter 2). The choice of a qualitative research design is guided by the need to understand social contexts, framed in late modernity settings of no absolute or timeless truths, constant change and diversity, but also the “changing nature of late-modern childhood” (Bond, 2014, p. 1) with which the researcher tries to comprehend and reflect the subjective meanings and daily practices (Flick, 2005) of children’s digital lives from their own voice, understanding and knowledge (Mayall, 2003). Drawing from Mayall, ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ is preferred to ‘point of view’ or ‘perspective’; since the aim of the researcher is to “enter children’s world of understanding”, learn from sharing their experiences and from how they reflect on their digital experiences and, from there, build a body of understanding that is under constant revision and reflexion (Mayall, 2003, p. 121).

How the researcher views the world reveals a set of organized basic beliefs that encompass personal ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological values guiding action (Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and the thinking that shapes research (Doyle, 2013). ‘Thinking’ is defined as the “means by which reflexivity is accomplished” (Doyle, 2013, p. 249); and ‘reflexivity’ is the intersubjective process of awareness operationalized through thinking, without losing the focus on the research and in research participants’ experiences (Doyle, 2013). Inevitably, those decisions are not exempt as they mirror the personal biographies of the individuals involved in the research biasing how understandings about the reality are (re)constructed (Aires, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; to deepen the dilemmas of reflexivity, see Doyle, 2013). In this respect, the research presented here developed through “a “dialectic” of interaction, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243) process, shaped by the researcher and participants’ “personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 4) “that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e., findings or outcomes)” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243).

Developing from Guba and Lincoln’s approach (1998), reality is relativistic (ontology), transactional and subjectivist (epistemology), hermeneutical and dialectical (methodology). The researcher attempts to interpret and make sense of experienced reality “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b p. 4). Reality is a mental construction that is interactively linked – in form and content – to “the individual persons or

groups holding the constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). Drawing from feminist interpretative tradition, participants, along with researcher, construct meanings through intersubjective relationships that are later interpreted as ‘data’ (Olesen, 1998). In this regard, “[c]onstructions are not more or less “true,” in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as are their associated “realities”” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206).

According to Schwandt (1998), the researcher’s mind is active in the process of constructing knowledge. Furthermore, this is a process that is continually tested and modified “in light of new experience” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 237) in which the researcher does not discover knowledge. Instead, the researcher creates version(s) of constructions which allow an interpretation or making sense of experience and, in line with reflexivity in research, is aware of the personal influence in the process and outcomes of research (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Consistent with the complexities and the changing nature of the phenomena, similarly, this research was not a linear process (Aires, 2011). The “questions change[d] during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19), meaning that each stage is refined through an open, flexible and dialoguing relationship between the theoretical model, research strategies, methods of collecting, analysing, reporting and evaluating the information (Aires, 2011).

Accordingly, throughout the course of this investigation there was a constant concern in upholding an open, dialogical and flexible methodological approach capable of adapting to the subjectivity of the phenomenon and parties involved in the study (Flick, 2005) – researcher, participants, institutions – but also, as stated by Lanskhear and Knobel (2008), the narrative, theme, speech and other interrelated and simultaneous events. Corroborating Woodhead and Faulkner’s observation: “significant knowledge gains result when children’s active participation in the research process is deliberately solicited and when their perspectives, views and feelings are accepted as genuine, valid evidence” (2003, p. 31). To achieve this purpose, a participatory methodological approach was used to encourage school-aged children to express their opinions, share their experiences, and reflect on situations with the purpose of helping and guiding the researcher in the process of interpretative reflection and “developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. xviii).

This investigative journey was developed on the premise that social science no longer produces absolute truths (Flick, 2005). Instead, this thesis offers an angle (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008), a small fragment of knowledge, a small-scale theory centred on specific problems and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, cited in Aires, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b), based in empirically driven interpretative theories, that flexibly fit in the complexity (Flick, 2005) of the phenomenon under study.

As stated previously in chapter 2, section 2.2., the growth of social scientific interest in children has coincided broadly with the children's rights movement – in particular, by the participation articles set out in the UNCRC – leading to a shift in the way research is conducted and how children can be enrolled in the process (Alderson, 2001; Freeman, 1998). Before that, “children have been denied both a voice and, an essential feature of human identity, a rational standpoint” (Hendrick, 2003, p. 38). Children were considered incompetent, and for that reason, relegated to silence, invisibility, in short, to inexistence. Like women, children were constrained to domestic, social and legal abuse, exploitation and negligence in a male dominant and oppressive society.

Ariès (1962) argued that in the mid 20th century this generational social group was finally rescued from oblivion into a place in history and society as the historian initiated the debate around childhood and children's experiences (Hendrick, 2003). Developmental psychology encouraged a universal, traditional and western, masculine view of the child that ultimately “oversimplif[ied] the reality of children's lives and actually hinder[ed] our understanding of childhood” (Waller, 2012, p. 30) while it masked “age, gender, ethnic or cultural dimensions or inequalities” (Waller, 2012, p.36).

Influenced by Mead's work<sup>46</sup> (Montgomery, 2013), the sociology of childhood recognised childhood as a social construct. Childhood is understood as a heterogeneous and complex group crossed by contradictions, the uncertainty of times, and its social transformations and inequalities (Sarmiento, 2011). As Almeida and colleagues observe, even “[c]hildren's appropriation of the internet is thus far from homogeneous or uniform” (2012, p. 222) – shaping a digital divide based in diversity in the way they access, use and give sense to the internet (Almeida et al., 2012). The claim “[c]hildhood is not one thing but many” (Kehily, 2013b, p. viii); “is not fixed and is not universal, rather it is ‘mobile and shifting’” (Waller,

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<sup>46</sup> “Margaret Mead emphasised that adolescence and childhood were always ‘social constructions’ rather than biological facts and this idea was enthusiastically endorsed by the new social studies of childhood” (Montgomery, 2013, p.183).

2012, p. 28), became effective as consequence of “[c]hildren’s exposure to visual culture, commercialism and new technologies fragment the possibilities of preserving an idealised childhood in the Romantic sense” (Kehily, 2013a, p. 13).

By the 1990s children were no longer seen as a homogeneous group; instead children were recognised by researchers as agents and respected and competent informants capable of describing their lived experiences (Montgomery, 2013). Developing from Montgomery, recognising children as ‘agents’ implies recognising that children can and do “influence their lives, the lives of their peers and that of the wider community around them” (Waller, 2012, p. 38). From passive beings, relegated to the social context of family and home, the UNCRC earned for children the recognition of active participants with freedom of thought and expression to contribute in decisions regarding matters that affect them (Balen, 2006). Children are agents capable of constructing their social worlds where, drawing from Latour’s ANT model, “also non-human actors such as technical artefacts” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010, p. 31) have to be considered in the process.

Nevertheless, children’s participation in research is still marked by ambiguities and tensions (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). Agreeing with Boyden and Ennew, when they declare that “[i]n research terms, children present a special challenge” (1997, p. 9), the researcher assumes that an *a priori* inability prevented from clearly assimilating the children as competent agents in the beginning of the research. Nevertheless, as the work in the field progressed, the preconception naturally became diluted, giving an invigorating impulse to the research and how the researcher faced the challenges prompted by field inexperience. Validating Santana and Fernandes’ (2011) standpoint, the research came to be perceived as a process for learning (Boyden & Ennew, 1997) and for developing investigation skills; and children for being perceived as active subjects in their observation, description, explanation, interpretation, whose voice and social activity were pertinent and central to this study. In agreement with that belief, as initial insecurities were overcome, the researcher was willing to – with serenity and an open mind – learn *from* and *with* children, and be faithful to their story, through their own words and constructed understandings. Thus, children’s own understandings are central to the research presented in this thesis.

Children “regard digital spaces as just another setting in which they carry out their lives” (Third et al., 2014, p. 8). Considering the rapid pace of technological innovation and how children (re)adapt to its fast pace, creatively interpret technological affordances and (re)construct media

trends, the fieldwork follows a research *with* children approach in which children were encouraged to reflect and share their understanding vis-à-vis their technologized quotidian.

To gain a deeper understanding of the complex interwoven relationships between children and online digital technologies, the work in the field with school-aged children was guided with the two research objectives in mind.

### **Research objectives (RO):**

RO1 – To understand the personal values and meanings children might use to interpret their technologized lives;

RO2 – To explore the various aspects enclosed in children's heterogeneous and complex networked lives with the purpose of uncovering short and long term unintended harmful outcomes that may be (more or less) hidden in their digital experiences.

To meet these objectives and gain access to the complexities of children's technologized lives, the research took place in settings where children had a free access to the internet and where an informal use of online digital technologies prevailed. To access children's accounts, a flexible approach to the field was followed and participatory techniques were privileged to generate rich in-depth narrative data. Access to the field was granted from two institutions: the Portuguese nationwide government initiative, 'Programa Escolhas' (hereinafter designated as 'Choices Program' or 'Choices')<sup>47</sup> and the Palmeira School Parents Association in Braga region. 'Program Choices' is a social inclusion initiative enacted by resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 4/2001 (9 January) and integrated into the 'Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural' – ACIDI ('High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue'). The nationwide program key role is to promote social inclusion, equal opportunities, and social cohesion for children and youth (aged between 6-24) coming from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, particularly the descendants of immigrants and Roma<sup>48</sup> communities. The strategic areas of intervention are: i) school inclusion and non-formal education; ii) professional training and employability; iii) community supporting and citizenship; iv) digital inclusion; v) entrepreneurship and empowerment. 'Choices' is presently in its 5<sup>th</sup> generation (2013-2015) and this research was incorporated in the 4<sup>th</sup> measure (digital inclusion) in two assigned

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.programaescolhas.pt/>

<sup>48</sup> In this study, the European word "Roma" will be used to refer to an ethnic group self-designated, in Portugal, as 'ciganos' (gypsy).

institutions: one in Braga – social and community centre of St. Adrião (T3tris project), in Fajal neighbourhood; and one in Oporto – institution ‘Lagarteiro e o Mundo’ (‘Lagarteiro and the World’), in Lagarteiro neighbourhood.

The School of Palmeira Parents Association is a Private Institution for Social Solidarity (Portuguese acronym, IPSS – Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social) and a children’s activity centre, incorporated in the Sá de Miranda school group, and functioning in Palmeira school’s facilities (corresponding to Middle School, from year 5 to 9). According to the Portuguese social security practical guide for social support, children’s activity centre (Portuguese acronym, CATL – Centro de Atividades e Tempos Livres) is a social initiative, which aids families with the purpose of promoting children and young people’s (from age 6) personal and social development in a safe environment.

The selection of the host institutions was a process undertaken under convenience and opportunity criteria that took in consideration aspects related with geographical location and the monetary costs for the researcher. Both host institutions (‘Choices’ and Parents Association) were contacted to meet access and economic conditions, without putting at risk diversity in the participants. Field entrance was prepared with local coordinators during September 2013 and the fieldwork was carried out from late September 2013 to March 2014. The research involved forty-one school-aged children (aged between 6 and 15 years old; 8 boys and 33 girls), distributed among four groups in two cities of the North of Portugal: Braga (3 groups) and Oporto (1 group).

Group meetings were scheduled in agreement with the institutions so that they would not collide with the weekly activities timetable; and the selection of participants was confined to the children’s available free time. The host institutions collaborated by contacting the children and handing out an information leaflet. Children’s participation was voluntary. In the cases in which parents signed the consent, but children were not willing to engage in the research activities, the children’s right not to participate prevailed. In line with this criterion, 7 children (4 boys and 3 girls) were not enrolled in the research activities.

The following table offers an overall picture of group composition (sex, age and number of participants). Groups were organised from 1 to 4.

Table 1. Children participating in the research distributed per institution, group sex and age

Group 1			Group 2			Group 3			Group 4		
Age	Boy	Girl	Age	Boy	Girl	Age	Boy	Girl	Age	Boy	Girl
10	2	8	10	0	4	6	0	1	11	1	4
12	1	1	11	1	2	9	0	2	12	1	2
13	0	1	12	0	2	10	1	5	13	0	1
									15	1	0
Participants: 13			Participants: 9			Participants: 9			Participants: 10		

**Total participants 41 (8 boys; 33 girls)**

*Note: Participants' age was collected at the entrance in the group.*

As Table 1 clarifies, there were fewer boys than girls who participated in the research, which inevitably makes the participants' group more female (33 girls and 8 boys). The dominance of girls voices influenced the research process, because they were more talkative and their contributions had a more disclosing and intimate trend in their narratives, constraining boys' voices and biasing the research outcomes by giving a more gendered view of the children's technologized lives.

The research was inevitably also influenced by the practicalities of 'real life' events and thus the children's participation in the research was not static. Children's attendance was frequently influenced by family commitments, dropout from the institution (this occurred in two cases, one in group 3, and one in group 4), institutional conflicts (one case in group 3; and one in group 4), school activities (in group 1 and 2 reported by children themselves), and colliding activities promoted by the host institutions. Group meetings were interrupted during Christmas holidays, followed by the researcher's temporary absence for family and academic reasons. This extended period of interregnum (between December and January) resulted in a significant loss of participants in groups 1, 2 and 4, upon the researcher's return in late January. Moreover, children's random participation frequency sometimes posed some difficulty in carrying out group activities or a closer follow up.

Participants from the two groups of 'Choices' (T3tris project, in Braga; and 'Lagarteiro e o Mundo', in Oporto) come from families with low educational qualifications and low incomes with at least one of the two parents unemployed and living on a social subsidy. Both



institutions have, on average, a daily frequency of 30 children (from 6 to 14 years old) in the facilities, mostly Roma.

The T3tris project (Braga) is located in the Fajal neighbourhood, home for more than ten different cultures, including Portuguese and Roma. Most adults are unemployed; 63% of the population receives a social subsidy (in Portugal known as RSI – Rendimento Social de Inserção) and numerous social problems are reported, such as unemployment, poverty, low education and risky behaviours (illegal practices, substance use, poor health habits, aggressive behaviour), which puts this population at a strong risk for social exclusion<sup>49</sup>. Participants from ‘Choices’ – Braga group are mostly Roma (8 in 9 participants), which allowed a stimulating insight of how ethnicity can disclose diversity in access, use and meaning regarding online digital technologies.

‘Lagarteiro e o Mundo’ (hereinafter, referred as Lagarteiro) facilities (Oporto) are located in the eastern part of the city of Oporto, isolated from the surrounding urban fabric zone. The neighbourhood is isolated, since the collective transport network and road accesses are deficient and limited; the neighbourhood has several social problems that often require intervention from the authorities; and lacks basic care (hygiene and nutrition, among others) (Pereira, 2011). During the stay in the field the director of the institution disclosed some problematic domestic situations involving the participants (e.g. domestic violence, parents arrested for drug abuse and traffic, unemployment). 75% of households subsist through social subsidies (see Pereira, 2011). The young adults that have the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion generally leave the neighbourhood. All these factors have an impact on the children’s lives.

The participants integrated in the groups of Palmeira School Parents Association – children’s activity centre come mainly from families with medium and low socioeconomic status. Following the National Classification of Professions<sup>50</sup> (Portuguese acronym CNP – Classificação Nacional das Profissões), the most common professions among participants’ parents are: Services and Vendors (11 parents); Labourers, Artisans (7 parents); Unskilled workers (6 parents). Eight parents are unemployed. Likewise, concerning the groups, the director of the institution in the course of the research disclosed vulnerable domestic situations concerning the participants, mostly related with the Portuguese economic crisis.

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<sup>49</sup> This information was collected from T3tris’ local coordinators.

<sup>50</sup> Information retrieved from <http://cdp.portodigital.pt/profissoes/classificacao-nacional-das-profissoes-cnp>

The Palmeira children's activity centre has one large room at the entrance with round tables, chairs and four computers for children to use freely, and a comfortable space in one corner equipped with a sofa, television, hi-fi and games for leisure moments. On the right side there is an office, a study room and a kitchen; on the left side two offices and two restrooms (female and male) (see Figure 1 above). The centre supports families by offering recreational and educational activities for a monthly fee of up to €35, calculated based on families' income tax (Portuguese acronym, IRS - Imposto sobre o Rendimento das Pessoas Singulares). The target audience is aged between 10 and 13. Group meetings usually took place in the study room and sometimes in an office on the left, because these were more quiet spaces. The study room is equipped with tables, chairs, a whiteboard, and cupboards; the office has a table, chairs, a bookcase, a cupboard, a computer and a printer. The centre has a Wi-Fi broadband internet connection to which children connect through their personal digital devices.

T3tris (Braga) has a hall at the entrance where one can find a sofa and table with chairs; a CID@NET room on the left with six computers, printer, digital camera, digital camcorder, and furniture (tables, chairs, bookshelves), a study room, an office (inside the study room), and one restroom (see figure 2. above).

The CID@NET spaces are digital inclusion centres geared for occupational activities, ICT development courses, support for academic success and employability and, when there are no scheduled activities, children can use the computers freely after doing their school tasks. The group meetings were held in CID@NET or in the study room.

Lagarteiro (Oporto) has a shared meeting room; and a CID@NET room equipped with six computers, printer, digital camera, digital camcorder, broadband internet access and furniture (tables, chairs, bookshelves), and a study room with furniture (tables, chairs, bookshelves) (see Figure 3. above). Group meeting activities usually were held in the meeting room and once or twice in a gym that exists in the sports hall.

Both T3tris and Lagarteiro have a Wi-Fi broadband internet connection, but children use mainly the institutions' laptops to go online. They rarely showed or used their handheld digital devices publicly. The recreational and educational activities provided by these institutions are free of charge.

Figure 1. Overview of children's activity centre in school of Palmeira, Braga.

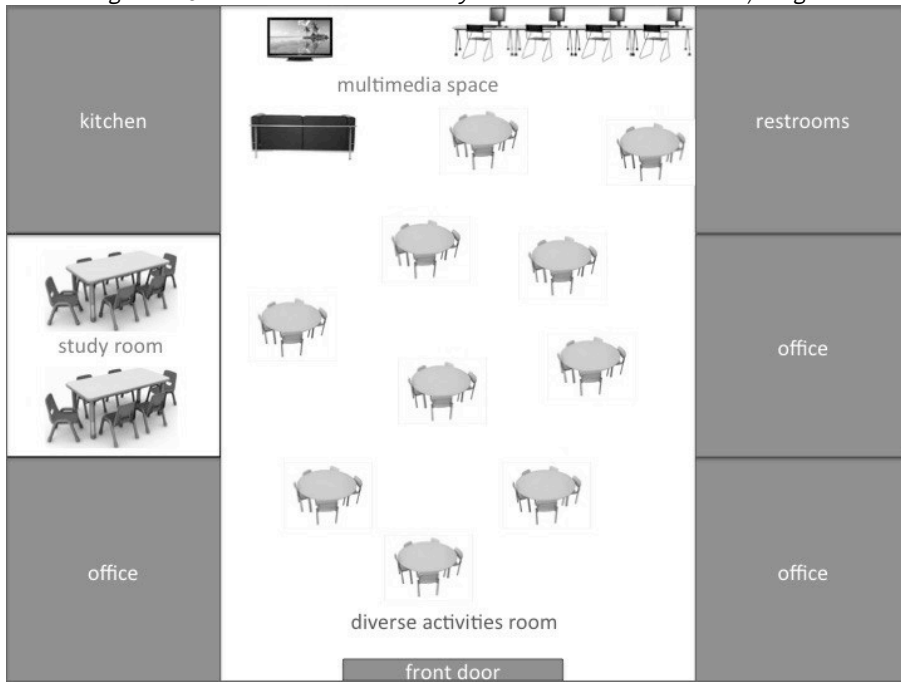


Figure 2. Overview of T3tris facilities, Braga.

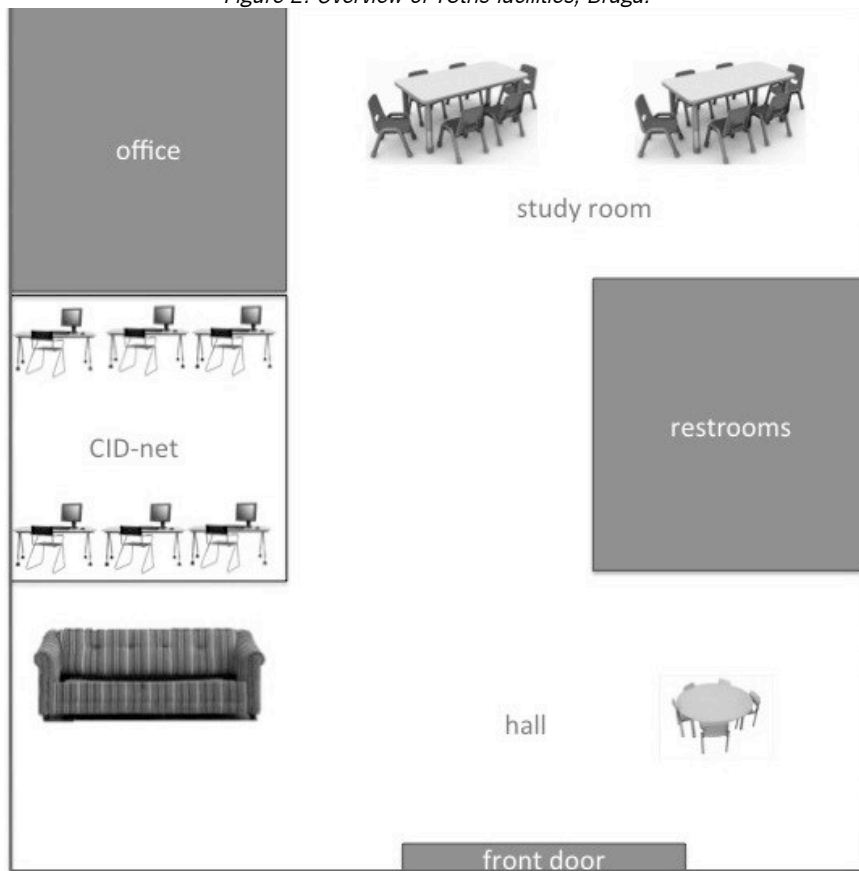
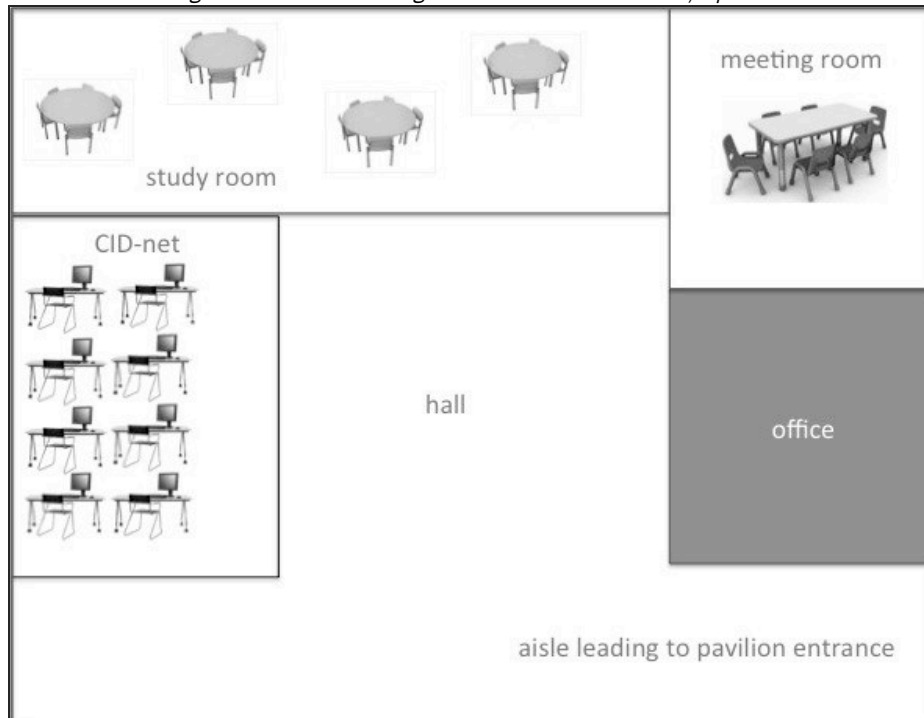


Figure 3. Overview of 'Lagarteiro e o Mundo' facilities, Oporto.



### 3.2. Ethical considerations

The recognition of children as social actors, followed by the upsurge in empirical interest in childhood, raised new ethical discussions, dilemmas and responsibilities for researchers (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Investigations with children understandably heightens particular anxieties and, therefore, ethical considerations took a crucial place in the study. In line with this matrix, the ethical framework that guided this investigation endorsed the consequentialist model elaborated from the feminist ethic of care (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and 'ethical symmetry' (Christensen & Prout, 2002), and is sustained by three documents, including the code of ethical conduct of the University of Minho and the ethical guidelines, supporting research with children, from Barnado's (Tyler et al., 2006) and Save the Children (Laws & Mann, 2004). To avoid undesirable and instrumental pitfalls, hence, consideration of ethics was a reflexive exercise that happened "before, after and during the research" (Boyden & Ennew, 1997, p. 42) to ensure that children's rights and well-being were protected. In accordance with this, key ethic issues are considered in this section, as follows: access to children; protecting children's privacy and confidentiality, managing power in adult-child relationship, building trust, entering children's space.

As specified previously, one of the greatest achievements of the UNCRC was to the rights for children to participate in research in order to have a voice and to be listened to about matters

that concern them and affect their lives. Still, despite having the right to be heard and being the major focus of this research, gaining direct access to children raised a number of challenges inherent to negotiating (directly and indirectly) with gatekeepers (institutional coordinators and parents or legal guardians), which in turn, hold the responsibility to ensure children's best interests and protect them from harm (Coyne, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2013).

The institutional gatekeepers were informed of the research goals, design, strategies and ethical guidelines through a written proposal (see appendix 1) and face-to-face meetings (these happened regularly before and during fieldwork). After being granted institutional approval, gatekeepers were enrolled in the planning of the field entrance. They were extremely supportive by taking the lead in scheduling the activities, contacting the participants, giving information about the research to parents and children, recruiting children, introducing the researcher to the staff and to the children, and by offering suggestions and information about the participants during the fieldwork. Although highly accessible and cooperative, it is not possible to assure the level of control and bias introduced by institutional gatekeepers in the final group of participants (Coyne, 2010; also see O'Reilly et al., 2013).

Simultaneously, to formalise the process, procedures for gaining parents or legal guardians and children's consent were considered. Respecting parents'/legal guardians' primary consideration to ensure the child's safety and interests (Morrow & Richards, 1996), a document containing information about the research project, protection guidelines, and researcher contacts was prepared; in the same document permission for children's participation and for recording the sessions was requested (see appendix 2). Nevertheless, parents'/guardians' agreement for their child to take part in the research was not the ultimate condition to compel children to participate in the research. To seek equilibrium between protection and participation, children's consent was also sought (see appendix 2). Notwithstanding their choice to be part of the study, to avoid being coerced to participate, participants were invited to partake in a session where explanations about the study and their role in the research were offered: *children's role in the investigation* – to help the researcher get a better understanding of the phenomenon; *how data is used* – for academic and public interest purposes; *the purpose of informed assent* – to guarantee participants' free choice to join the research and assure their rights of confidentiality and privacy protection; and *what happens to the recordings made during the research meetings* – saved in a secure place and for the use of the research. The final part of the session was opened to children's questions.

Participants were additionally informed that their role in the study was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw their agreement and end their involvement at any point.

To protect children's rights to privacy and confidentiality, identities and personal information about the participants were concealed. Respondents' identities were replaced by a pseudonym and personal information is not disclosed in this thesis nor will be in the dissemination of the research findings (e.g. media, scientific events, articles, reports). To protect children's anonymity, narratives capable of identifying the participants were omitted. However, from a safeguarding perspective giving priority to the best interests of the child, confidentiality would have been overridden in order to fulfil a stronger obligation, in situations of actual or potential harm to the child or others, for example, of a child disclosed they have been victim of abuse. Steps would have been undertaken to get permission from the child to violate confidentiality and, then, the situation would have been reported to the director of the host institution. Fortunately, no such situation arose during the course of the fieldwork.

No monetary retribution was offered to guarantee participants' active enrolment in the research activities. The data collected was stored in a safe place and is only accessible by the persons responsible for the research (researcher and supervisor) and will be securely deleted after five years, in accordance with the University of Minho's ethical guidelines<sup>51</sup>. To guarantee the confidentiality and privacy given to research participants, access to data may be conceded to third parties, after determining the public interest and relevance of the request and under a signed form ensuring the obligation to prevent data from being published or released in a form that distorts the information, discloses personal information, or disrespects the participants. Also the study findings will be shared with the participants and host institutions.

As discussed formerly, children's participation is not a linear or straightforward process and, even when theoretically accepted, it does not always reflect authentic practice, as some authors observe (Mayall, 2000; Reynaert et al., 2009; Roche, 1999; Thomas, 2007; Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000; Wyness, 2009; 2012b).

Taking into consideration Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic's (2000) and Wyness' (2012b) perspectives, in the scope of the study, on reflection the researcher considers that this has genuinely been achieved and that the study both established and exercised ethical symmetry and a solidarity in the relationship developed between researcher and participants, where both worked

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<sup>51</sup> See Resolução da Assembleia da República n.º 1/2001, de 3 de janeiro, Diário da República – I Série - A, n.º 2. Retrieved from: <http://dre.pt/util/getpdf.asp?s=dip&serie=1&iddr=2001.2A&iddip=20010014>

alongside as partners. This, however, does not mean that generational differences were prevented. For example, at the beginning of the process, due to lack of experience in qualitative fieldwork with children, the researcher was not always comfortable in sharing decisions with the children but this did not turn out to be a negative outcome, as it enabled to the researcher to approach these interactions reflexively and learn (see Doyle 2013) that “children are fully aware of adults’ dominance” (Tomanovic-Mihajlovic, 2000, p. 153) and children, individually or in group, are capable of developing strategies to resist adults’ “pressures and diminish the uneven distribution of power” (Tomanovic-Mihajlovic, 2000, p. 153). To mitigate the potential imbalance of power between adult researcher and participants, strategies were initiated by the researcher (empowering) and by the children themselves (resisting), as is illustrated below (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Balancing power in adult-child relationship (strategies)*

<b>Empowering strategies (Initiated by the researcher)</b>	<b>Resisting strategies (Initiated by the children)</b>
<p>In order to build horizontal relationships children were asked and encouraged to call the researcher by the first name. However, despite the efforts in two groups, when addressing the researcher or talking about the researcher, participants kept calling the researcher 'teacher'.</p>	<p>At first, children decided the time that each session lasted. In one group, a 13-year-old girl decided the duration of the meeting before its start and controlled the time, by frequently looking at her watch. During the meeting she warned the researcher that it was time to leave. This is a more explicit example of a situation that was surpassed as children began to accept the researcher and requesting for longer meetings.</p>
<p>Activities were not compulsory for the participants. Activities were proposed and negotiated with children and they could decide to participate or not; or make suggestions to enrich the activity or adapt to what was more interesting to them.</p>	<p>Sometimes they readjusted the activities with tasks of their own choice, for instance in a storytelling activity, some chose to write, others to draw, and others to improvise orally. They also shared videos and stories they thought important for the group.</p>
<p>Participants were free to use their online digital devices during the meetings.</p>	<p>Participants were free to choose whether to participate or not in meetings and in the activities. None of them gave up the meetings, although their attendance was not always regular.</p>
<p>The choice for participatory and group activities satisfies children's right to be heard.</p>	<p>The fact that children in the group were friends or acquaintances reduced power imbalance between researcher and participants.</p>
<p>The adoption of non-authoritative, humble and learner attitude.</p>	<p>Children assumed the expert role willing to help the researcher understand their digital everyday lives.</p>
<p>Besides the informed consent requested to parents/guardians, also children were able to decide their participation in the study.</p>	<p>Children's choice to participate was voluntary. Minor cases in which parents signed the consent but children were not motivated to engage in the research process, children's right to non-participation prevailed and they were not included in the group meetings.</p>
<p>Withholding judgement from an adult perspective and demonstrating respect for children's understandings.</p>	<p>Interventions in order to see researcher's reactions.</p>

The generational, cultural and social gap between the researcher and the children involved in the research cannot be ignored. Aware of this deterrent gap, a humble, sensitive, friendly



approach facilitated the building of bonds and reliable relationships, and sharing in a comfortable, safe and trusted environment.

The research was carried out in places with social and cultural meaning (James & James, 2009), infused with subjectivity in which relationships were developed; a considerable amount of participatory work was done; information was 'freely' shared and disclosed through narratives conveyed and constructed within an interactional environment (Renold, 2012). Despite being spaces designed by adults and from adults' perceptions about children's needs and interests (James & James, 2009), children appropriated these spaces in a relaxed and informal fashion, enabling face-to-face conversations, free speech and eye contact between the participants and researcher. Nevertheless, it was not possible to engage all the children to the same level of participation or interest.

Meetings were held in a leisure activity centre (in the school facilities) and two community centres (Choices Program). The educational/school setting where meetings were held, may have had an influence that may have biased participants' by leading them to socially expected or 'right' answers, which may not resemble their thoughts or experiences (Kenney, 2009). In order to overcome this the researcher was concerned to provide a space of freedom of speech, sharing, mutual respect, where children could express their true feelings and thoughts, without fearing lectures or judgements, and build knowledge. In short, research meetings attempted to be a place where participants could exercise their citizenship. With time, group meetings became that expected secure and reliable environment, a space for participants to openly express their opinion, worries, expectations, and share their personal digital and online experiences, embodying the role of experts of their own lives (Bond, 2014) and "the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences" (Alderson, 2003, p. 253).

Corroborating with Santana and Fernandes (2011) that significant gains come when spaces for free dialogue are opened to children, group meetings were structured through the use of participatory and group activities with the purpose to capture children's understanding, experience and perceptions of their digital and online everyday lives. Research activities became a work in progress, planned to combine work and play (O'Kane, 2003). In the first meetings ice-breaking activities were employed to get the participants more relaxed and engaged. Through group meetings there was opportunity for carrying out research activities, using the internet freely, sharing jokes, stories and talking about day-to-day life in school, friendships, family, gossip and relationships, dance and play.

Throughout the fieldwork there was also the likelihood of time constraints for both the children and the researcher. In order to minimise the pressure of collecting data, it was important to have the ability to lower data collection anxieties and, instead, enjoy the research process, making the activities as embracing as possible and providing enjoyable moments for everyone. Alice's words reflect their vivid enthusiasm during the group meetings, "Ask us more questions" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214); or in the last meeting when asked which session they enjoyed the most, she states "They were all cool" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_240214) or the quote from Hera, "Oh Teresa, why are you leaving us?" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_240214).

When doing qualitative research with people and, in this particular case, children, forming relationships is almost inevitable and important to get them to participate (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2003). As fieldwork progressed, relationships developed and became stronger and closer (self-disclosure was a way to maintain the adult-child power relationship balanced) (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Punch, 2011). Several signs indicated researcher's acceptance by the participants (e.g. invitations to take part in school events and anniversaries, sitting next the researcher in the meetings, offering help, personal compliments, showing interest and curiosity in the researcher's personal life, seeking the researcher to confide about personal concerns, asking for advice in digital and personal matters). Obviously, not all relationships gained the same level of empathy and reciprocity. Not all participants contributed in identical ways. For instance, despite the effort to stimulate everyone's participation, in particular, the boys became more invisible within the meetings as girls were more numerous in the groups and were more talkative. To overcome this power differential, steps were taken to encourage the boys to give them voice and the use of more interactive and fun activities, such as role-playing or games was introduced. In another situation, ethnicity was also a source of exclusion inside one group, as the dominant culture routinely excluded the minority group. To mitigate the problem, the work was developed with smaller groups or individual one to one sessions.

In the research process it is important to remember the role of the researcher themselves. As a female researcher with a youthful presentation, a friendly approach and an ease in communicating was crucial to create a good first impression with the children in order to develop friendly relationships. Whilst, if this is considered 'good for the job', according to Duncombe and Jessop words, it is not necessarily so good for the researcher when confronted by guilty feelings of 'faking a friendship' (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). On reflection it could be

considered that participants gave more to the research than the researcher was able to give them back, but during the research period at least, the meetings were able to raise awareness among the participants, by stimulating reflection on the complex venues enclosed in their technologized lives. Similarly, there was the feeling of achieving a balance “between being their friend, [...] an adult and a researcher [...]”(Punch, 2011, p. 99) by letting children “lead wherever possible, letting them decide how they preferred to negotiate our relationship in different contexts” (Punch, 2011, p. 99).

When entering children’s space there are several implications that need to be pondered. Although video and audio recording were authorised by children’s parents/guardians, the option to record the sessions in audio format, instead of video, is associated with the protection of children’s privacy. However, during the meetings some moments were video recorded – the role-playing activities. The option to audio record instead of taking notes was due to the fact that some interactions would be ignored during the process.

Taking advantage of the uptake of post-pc devices (Clark & Luckin, 2013), a tablet – Apple, iPad Mini, Wi-Fi – was the equipment selected to assist the research meetings and other research tasks (also used by Linder et al., 2013).

The preference for a tablet, instead of using of more traditional technologies, certainly opened up empowering opportunities for collecting data in more efficient and flexible way, as it converged in just one easy-to-carry and easy-to-use tool with various possibilities (text, video, audio, image) that could be used in a less intrusive fashion. Corroborating Clark and Luckin (2013) and Linder et al. (2013), the use of the iPad for research purposes equally motivated and engaged the participants by representing an opportunity and an incentive for them to explore and enhance technological skills. The children responded positively to the use of a tablet. However, they were not just stimulated by the opportunity to explore the device; they were also seduced by the brand (Apple). Some even said that they wish to have one. Since no games were installed, at the end of the sessions they used it to access Facebook or YouTube, to take pictures, edit photos, make short videos, and explore software. This will be further discussed in chapter 4, as despite being under-aged most participants have a Facebook account.

As a security measure, by the end of each session, the files (audio, video, and pictures) were synchronised and safely stored on the researcher’s laptop and then deleted from the tablet

(this measure was explained to the participants when they asked to see their files in the following meetings).

### 3.3. Data collection

Since the main focus of the study was to gain a deeper and enhanced understanding of the complex and changing nature of late-modern childhoods within the scope of children's digital everyday lives, a qualitative approach with a small number of participants was deemed suitable to meet the research purpose. Dialogical, flexible, reflexive methodologies supporting participation and power balance were privileged with the aim of grasping the subjectivities, complexities and contradictions inherent to children's digital lives and giving children the opportunity to express their knowledge, share experiences and reflect on situations through different languages (text, visual and video).

Research *with* children and *about* children is a complex challenging assignment as the meanings and values will continuously have a twofold interpretation: that of adults and that of children (Soares, 2006). Yet, in line with Livingstone and Bober (2003), it is important to listen to children, as the childhood condition is changing in a technologized shifting landscape (Livingstone, 2002), where children keep surprising adults in the way they creatively appropriate and shape their digital lives, either in the on-going stream of their social life or reorienting them to alternative uses. In agreement with this, more than 'beings' (not 'becomings') (Qvortrup et al., 1994), children are '*doings*' by being simultaneously actors, authors, authorities and agents who are making a difference in the world (Oswell, 2013).

Taking the principle that children's participation is fundamental in research (Santana & Fernandes, 2011) into account, and that children communicate "through mediums other than the verbal" (O'Kane, 2003, p. 139), a range of qualitative strategies, materials, techniques and procedures (see Table 3) were used in participatory ways (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). Firstly, to involve children in interactive and dialogic group activities, enabling them to express their feelings, concerns and understandings and secondly, to understand the subjectivity, the delicacy and complexity of matters and meanings children bring to their online experiences; and third, develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Kawulich, 2005). Group activities (games, drawing and role playing games<sup>52</sup>) were strategies applied during the ice-breaking sessions with the goal of relaxing and engaging the participants in dialogue while

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<sup>52</sup> The role-playing game plot and roles were decided and improvised by children themselves (Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

observing group dynamics. The European street and peer violence prevention guide (Escape, 2012) served as a basis to design the ice-breaking activities, adapting them to the phenomenon under study.

Focus groups (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Frey & Fontana, 1993) were the most frequently applied technique, supported either by visual techniques (videos, pictures) (Boyden & Ennew, 1997), to stimulate discussion about a topic (Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Mack et al., 2005), or by an interview script with inquiries about a topic. This technique enabled the researcher to engage well with the participants (Frey & Fontana, 1993) and access participants' accounts in a relaxed and dialoguing fashion, where, over-time, convincing natural and everyday interactions were (re)produced (Kitzinger, 1994). Nevertheless, limitations were also found in the use of this technique, for example, as each session and group had its own dynamic it was not always possible to engage the participants in the same level and some voices became more represented than others (Kitzinger, 1994). As the strategy requests a minimal input from the researcher (Kitzinger, 1994), was not always possible to keep children focused in one subject for a desired period of time.

The group interview strategy was used when "the research process [was] well under way and other methods have been used to develop children's confidence in themselves and the researcher" (Boyden & Ennew, 1997, p. 54). Because participants knew each other besides the research context, group dynamics empowered participants to sometimes act as co-researchers, taking the research to an unexpected level, when they revealed information about other participants, provided support to each other, disagreed or challenged others in contradictions, persuaded each other; encouraged open conversation about other issues (Kitzinger, 1994). There were times participants requested (and were allowed to) to use the interview guide, and make the questions themselves. In other cases, after the interview, they requested to hear their voices on the audio file. They also enjoyed watching themselves in the videos made during the role playing activities. These experiences proved very stimulating and amusing to the children, as it made them feel part of the research. However, less naturalistic than participant observation and less informative *per* participant than individual interviewing (Morgan, 1997), this technique provided a large amount of data enabling to explore a set of subjects from children's own and diverse understandings, emotions and experiences (Morgan, 1997; Morgan et al., 2002).

Despite the potential bias introduced by researcher's gender, class, memory, subjectivity or theoretical approach affecting the data collected (Kawulich, 2005; Mack et al., 2005), using participant observation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) allowed the study to record the participants' behaviour, routines and events occurring in their everyday contexts (Mack et al., 2005), offering interesting insights about their digital habits and interactions, how they pass the time, the games they play or the songs they hear.

Although group activities were the preferred data collection techniques, by virtue of the challenges posed by qualitative research, moments occurred when the researcher had to act as a *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and adapt creatively to the situations, adjusting group strategies to one-to-one sessions (i.e. group interviews scripts applied in individual interviews and unstructured casual conversations about issues as they occurred (Punch, 2011)).

Table 3 beneath summarises activities and strategies employed during the research process.

*Table 3. Activities and strategies held with the groups*

<b>Method</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Facebook paper project</b>	Facebook is a very popular social networking site among children. Most of the participants involved in the research had a Facebook account. Though almost were under 13 (two girls were 13 and a boy was 15), the activity challenged children to (re)create and customise an offline profile using a white cardboard, collages and markers. This was used as an ice-breaking activity.
<b>The ball game</b>	The ball game was a warm-up activity. The ball was thrown and whoever caught it had to complete the sentence given by the researcher: 'When I'm on the internet, I don't like it when...' After the first exercise, participants took the lead and proposed new sentences to continue the game.
<b>Role playing</b>	Improvised stories were developed and represented by the participants.
<b>What would you do?</b>	Some hypothetical situations were given to the children for them to decide what to do.
<b>Video/Picture discussion</b>	Some videos/pictures were shown to enable group dialogue.
<b>Drawing/Collages</b>	Participants working in groups decided to present their perspective about a topic using pictorial representation.
<b>Story telling</b>	Several pictures were presented to the participants. They were invited to choose a picture and use it as inspiration for creating a story.
<b>Pictionet (game)</b>	Inspired in the game Party&co, this game was played in groups. Tasks had to be accomplished to gain points, such as: drawing, multiple-choice questions, explain in your own words and mimicry. All tasks were related with the use of online and digital technologies.
<b>Child interviewing</b>	Short semi-structured interviews were conducted with children individually or in-group.
<b>Writing</b>	Children were requested to give written information through completing sheets.

At the end of each session, a reflexive report was written, containing follow-up notes about the activities, participants, host institutions, fieldwork concerns, difficulties, interactions and other general considerations. Data was compiled in computer folders organized identifying the host institution, research group and date. In the scope of this research, 'data' refers to transcriptions from audio-taped sessions, writing and pictorial materials, videos, and field reports. Table 4 offers detailed information about the fieldwork and describes the data collected in each group.

*Table 4. Descriptive of the fieldwork and data collected per group*

Group	Time period	Number of sessions	Average participants per session	Strategies applied	Type of Data	Quantifying data
1	21/10/2013 to 24/02/2014	14	10	Group discussion; Role playing; Storytelling; Group interview; Draw and writing; Visual techniques; Games; Participant observation	Video/audio transcription Field report Pictorial materials	16h30m (audio/video) and 8000 words (field report)
2	22/10/2013 to 25/02/2014	14	6	Group discussion; Role playing; Storytelling; Group interview; Draw and writing; Visual techniques; Games; Participant observation	Video/audio transcription Field report Pictorial materials	21h00m (audio/video) and 9600 words (field report)
3	24/09/2013 to 25/02/2014	14	4	Group discussion; Role playing; Group interview; Individual interview; Draw and writing; Visual techniques; Games; Participant observation	Audio transcription Field report Pictorial materials	3h15m (audio/video) and 10900 words (field report)
4	04/10/2013 to 28/02/2014	13	6	Group discussion; Group interview; Individual interview; Draw and writing; Visual techniques; Games; Participant observation	Audio transcription Field report Pictorial materials	11h00m (audio/video) and 7600 words (field report)



### 3.4. Data analysis

The chance to develop the empirical study in institutions as part of 'Program Choices' and in Palmeira children's activity centre, enabled the generation of rich in-depth narrative data with socially vulnerable children from diverse and contrasting socio-economic backgrounds and children from younger ages in line with the main gaps identified in literature (see, for example, Livingstone & Bulger, 2013; Ólafsson et al., 2013).

Across the groups of participants, diverse understandings were registered, situating the embodied, complex and ambivalent experiences of children's digital and online lives, relations and meanings. However, the data not only captured what it currently means to navigate children's digital and online worlds with new challenges and contradictions, it also does so in ways that invite adults to think differently about some meaning-making practices, and ultimately childhood, from the standpoint of children themselves.

The choice to scrutinize these rich and diverse views and perspectives inductively through the narratives implies that data are treated as constructions resulting from a dependent interplay between children's and researcher's values, meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), voices (Creswell, 1998) and reading of those meanings (Schwandt, 1998). This means that the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the events is not as objective as one could expect (Ólafsson et al., 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); it is the result of an active reaction of the researcher to children's constructions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher makes a construction of the constructions of the studied actors (Schwandt, 1998) including biases, beliefs and assumptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Creswell notes:

“We (re)present our data, partly based on participants' perspectives and partly based on our own interpretation, never clearly escaping our own personal stamp on a study.” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52)

In this sense, the (re)construction of reality translates the gender, social status, ethnicity of those involved in the study; in particular, the child's “shyness, willingness to talk to adults” (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 100) and the researcher's theoretical background and cultural knowledge (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Hence, it represents a chance to “learn to listen, letting the data speak” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 59). In this regard, the empirical results represent a fabric of children's own words and understandings (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2003) intersected

with the researcher's interpretation and organization of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) which, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 97), is not a negative trait once one is able "to recognize when either our own or the respondents' biases, assumptions, or beliefs are intruding into the analysis. [...] [T]o do justice to our participants and give them a proper "voice," we must be able to stand back and examine the data at least somewhat objectively". Since the process of interpretation is not pure or innocent (Aires, 2011), precautions were taken to minimize its effects, such as, triangulation (see the Quality Criteria topic in this chapter), self-awareness and reflexivity (Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

Data analysis developed in three distinct phases that will be further detailed: i) description; ii) analysis; iii) interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The first corresponds to the discovery and descriptive phase, happening hand-in-hand with the fieldwork and guiding its development. Intuition and, to some extent, serendipity played an important role in the identification of developing themes, by letting the data speak. In the second phase, after fieldwork, an intensive analysis by questioning the data led to comparisons, connections and pattern search (Wolcott, 1994, cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Taking advantage of the development of software packages designed to assist the researcher, the use of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10 for Mac was an invaluable help to organize, code and structure the data corpus during the first two phases of data analysis. Thirdly, the interpretative phase is when "the researcher attempts to offer his or her own interpretation of what is going on" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9) and gain a deep knowledge and understanding of the data. This level of certainty and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon was achieved in a manual fashion (due the lack of satisfactory experience and skills to use the beta version of NVivo 10 for Mac throughout this step), by drawing, combining and rearranging dynamic thematic maps.

During data analysis two analytic methods were applied: *thematic analysis* (TA) and *narrative analysis* (NA) for their flexibility in organising the data in rich detail, as well as compatibility with participatory and constructionist research paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Drawing from Braun and Clarke (2006), TA was a data-driven tool used for identifying 'what is said' at the semantic level (Riessman, 2008) and getting a 'thick description' of the data set, through patterns (themes, stories) of interest, identified by the researcher as relevant (not always prevalent) to understand the phenomenon under analysis. This method is very much akin to *grounded theory* in its procedures for coding data (without the need to subscribe its

theoretical commitments), in which the themes did not 'emerge' from the data; on the contrary, required an active role from the researcher in its identification and selection (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A first approach to data using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) generated 162 descriptive codes (see Table 5) within data collected. Drawing from Braun and Clarke (2006), 'code' refers to segments of information that appear meaningful within the data during the analysis, generating an initial list of ideas. This initial coding was followed by the demanding process of getting more familiar with the data in order to interpret, organise and reduce the information into more analytic and interpretive data-driven categories, imbued by the researcher's field experience, theoretical background and personal subjectivities.

After the coding process, in a second phase, the 162 blocks of information were analysed in order to grasp how they could be collated and rearranged to combine and fit under themes. A 'theme' represents a pattern within the data that is important to respond to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase involved more interpretative work to identify more constructionist themes. A first list of twelve potential or candidate themes follows (see Table 5):

1. Being rude online;
2. Body and image;
3. Consumerism;
4. Copyright and internet piracy;
5. Gaming platforms;
6. Inclusion and exclusion;
7. Parents and siblings;
8. Pornography;
9. Privacy and security;
10. Sexting;
11. School;
12. Contacts with Strangers.

Although reorganizing the data under candidate themes was helpful to collate the information, it was not insightful enough to provide a rich and useful theoretical map. In a third phase, a deeper familiarization with the data took the following reviewing task to a more complex level. Induced by theoretical approaches driven by data itself propelled to submit the twelve

candidate themes to a refinement process by establishing relationships between them to reach more conceptual groupings (Riessman, 2003). Through the refinement process some initial codes fell for lack of relevance, some were regrouped under another theme, candidate themes were broken down into separated themes in order to give them internal homogeneity and “clear identifiable distinctions between themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20), where each theme tells a story that fits in the overall story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three final key themes structure the findings, offering information about the complex and challenging intertwined relationship between children and digital and online technologies and answer the research purpose that, ultimately, in a more abstract level align with the three core principles (provision, protection and participation rights) enclosed the UNCRC (see Table 5):

1. Digital inequalities;
2. Controlling parental control;
3. Online participation.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis

Code	Candidate theme	Key theme
Technological possessions Hanging out Love associated with things Games invite to consuming practices Technological devices are attention grabbing	Consumerism	Digital inequalities  <i>Definition:</i> How diversity in digital consumption and digital inequalities impact children's lives, reinforcing belonging or exclusion feelings and behaviours based on: technical apparatus, autonomy of use, digital competence, social support, and variation in use.
Why they have Facebook Who has Facebook Tech-Savvy? Using the internet to communicate with friends Using Wi-Fi on school Exclusion by peer group Self-exclusion She uses the mobile to see the time The internet is slow in school	Inclusion and exclusion	
About parents digital literacy Children teach their parents Why don't they have Facebook? Who knows more at home? Siblings are more tech-savvy Games strategies to ensure daily access	Parents and siblings	
Parental control – sanctions Parental control – internet history Parental control – Facebook Parental control seen as inconvenient Parental control seen as unfair Parent-children conflicts because of Facebook	Parents and siblings	Controlling parental control  <i>Definition:</i> How parents' restrictive and monitoring approaches to children's digital and online participation and freedom triggers children's reactance strategies, challenging adult-

They have better devices		child relationships by the clash between protection and participation.
What they think about parents supervising their digital activities		
Parents with Facebook		
Parents advice about the internet		
What advice would they give to parents		
How they created their Facebook account		
Siblings as gatekeepers		
Circumventing parents rules		
What they feel when parents control		
Being friends with siblings on Facebook		
Parental control – computer		
Parental control – mobile phone		
Facebook: an addiction?		
Abuse of trust private pictures	Being rude online	Online Participation
Online impersonation		
What if someone gossips about you - perspectives		<i>Definition:</i>
What if someone mistreats you - perspectives		How children's relationship <i>to, with</i> and <i>through</i> technology uncovers the changes and challenges brought to social dynamics, where the boundaries between positive and negative experiences often get blurred, and ultimately reveal the tensions enclosed in the adulthood-childhood and public-private boundaries.
Pranks on Stardoll		
Pranks on mobile phone		
What if someone posts something embarrassing about you - perspectives		
They decide how one should behave on the internet		
They define Ask.fm		
They define Cyberbullying		
They do Facebook jacking		
Not accepting a friend request from a peer		
Insulted through mobile phone		
Negative interactions on Facebook		
Going through each others mobile		
'when I'm on the internet I don't like it'		
They talk about online flirting		
They define Netiquette		
They decide what to do if receiving insulting text messages		
Receiving rude comments on Facebook		
When they are rude online		
They define online reputation		
Being victim of rumour on Ask.fm		
They share stories of people being insulted on Ask		
Expressing feelings to comments on Facebook		
Expressing feelings to comments on Facebook paper project		
Diet advertisement online	Body and image	
Self-harm cases in school		
They talk about beauty		
They share about someone suffering from anorexia		
Diets advertisement online		
Observing them eating in the canteen		
Internet made it harder doing school tasks	Copy right and piracy	
Copyright and piracy perspectives		

They decide about internet information sources	
You can ask for help in Habbo	Gaming platforms
Behaving bad on Stardoll	
Game with sex and alcohol	
They define Habbo	
They define Stardoll	
Stardoll is dangerous	
Facebook games ask for personal information	
Why they do/don't like Stardoll	
Problems accessing Stardoll account	
Who plays Stardoll	
Stardoll users are racist	
They have more than one Stardoll Account	
They decide if someone sends a link to pornography	Pornography
They define pornography	
They search for xxx, 69	
Pornography on Ask.fm	
Pornography on school computers	
Finding pornography	
Storytelling about finding pornography online	
Feelings when finding pornography	
They report abuses on Stardoll accounts	Privacy and security
Giving false personal information	
About sharing personal data on Facebook	
How to avoid virus	
They decide about a strong password	
They decide if one must share the password	
They decide about what is a fraudulent email	
They decide about what kind of information to share on Facebook	
They ignore privacy settings	
They guess peers' passwords	
They define virus	
They talk about what can happen to pictures they publish online	
Who shares personal pictures online	
They decide if Facebook is public or private	
They define password	
They define personal information	
Pop-up pages	
Advertising is virus	
'You won' advertisings	
What they are concerned about online	
They define identity theft	
Someone entered on Facebook account	
They decide what to do if someone sends a link	
Relating Facebook with risk	
They ignore the existence of help lines	
Playing Pou in classes	School
Sending text messages in classes	



digital lives, oral and written stories complemented the data following, spontaneous incidents occurring during group meetings, account of daily life experiences imagination stimulus (when asked to develop or complete a story), inquiring processes and informal conversations. Such contents encouraged a an in depth look at those interactions and narratives as tools of reality construction – “*the chronicle* (what is happening), *the mimesis* (how does it look, a dimension that allows the listener to construct a virtual picture of the events), and *the emplotment* (how things are connected; a structure that makes sense of the events)” (Czarniawska, 2012, p. 23). In compliance with Riessman, the narratives’ individuals construct are representations of their identities and lives; thereby interpretation is inevitable if one aims to understand “how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean” (1993, p. 2). The stories or narratives sometimes arose out of the purpose, as a figment of vivid imagination, in bits and pieces (interrupted, complemented or aborted), as a frame for a new event; but all carry a message (Czarniawska, 2012): they elucidate about extremely important and otherwise hidden aspects of how children live, perceive, represent and construct their digital experiences (and what they include and exclude from those narratives), their network of meanings, and claimed identities (Czarniawska, 2012; Riessman, 1993). To analyse and interpret these samples of reality the NA was the method applied to selected stories and texts constructed by the participants (Riessman, 1993).

Synthetizing, TA was the method employed in small pieces of information that, depicted from a wider context, do not lose significance or strength, such as “question-and-answer exchanges, arguments and other forms of discourse” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). NA was privileged to give prominence to children’s agency and imagination (Riessman, 1993), when particular events and experiences were narrated by them, “[p]recisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents’ way of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished” (Riessman, 1993, p. 5).

### **3.5. Quality criteria**

As the outside world is exposed to constant change and social (re)construction “data is the result of collective interactions” (Bohnsack, 2008, p. 215) with empirical results, which, for that reason, are impossible to replicate (Steinke, 2008). Nevertheless, quality criteria must be



considered to ensure the quality of the analytical generalizations (Schwandt, 2007; Yin, 2010) and the research process carried out with the purpose of building theory.

To meet the quality criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1998) – *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* – as a way to solve the quality issue from a social-constructivist research standpoint, triangulation was the methodological technique employed to gain a “broader and deeper understanding of the research issue” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Flick, 2005; Steinke, 2008, p. 185) and compensate for the “one-sidedness or distortion that may result from an individual method, theory, database or researcher” (Steinke, 2008, p. 185). Triangulation was applied by combining different techniques for data collection: inter-methods triangulation, triangulation of data, and theoretical triangulation (Flick, 2005). Methodologies and techniques of participatory nature were employed as tools oriented to better capture the subjective understandings of the participants (Flick, 2005). To guarantee that informants were sincere in their testimonials an open, trusty research setting was pursued with the lowest possible power differences between researcher and participants (Steinke, 2008). The use of inter-methods collection helped to check for “misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the [...] informants” (Creswell, 1998, p. 201; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

From 2011 to 2015, the present doctorate research was submitted to an evaluation process comprising the following techniques (Steinke, 2008): i) *documentation of the research process* by submitting it to national and international scientific meetings, annual reports, field reports, blind peer-reviewing, giving an external public the possibility to follow and evaluate the research under their own criteria; ii) *interpretations in groups* by discussing the research process, results, and problems with colleagues, peer groups (not involved in the research) during scientific meetings, and during the research period in University Campus Suffolk, in Ipswich, UK, under the supervision of Doctor Emma Bond. This enriching international experience enabled the researcher to benefit from the opportunity to access key international literature, attend seminars facilitated by expert lecturers, discuss the research with experienced researchers from distinct areas (e.g. sociology, criminology, techno-social studies, childhood studies, sciences of education and social work) and gain a deep and fresh insight that allowed the data to be considered using a multidisciplinary lens and consolidate the theoretical approach and the data analysis process.

### 3.6. Synthesis

Since the main focus of the research was to gain a full and rich understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny, a qualitative approach with a small number of participants was deemed suitable to meet the changing nature of late-modern childhood, as its subjective meanings and daily practices “cannot be translated in mute and dreading ‘thud’ of an aggregate statistic” (Silverman, 2010, p. 6). As Taylor and Bogdan contend:

“When we reduce people’s words and acts to statistical equations, we lose sight of the human side of social life. When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.5).

The choice for qualitative, flexible and participatory methodologies, gave children the opportunity to express their expertise and opinions, share their experiences and reflect on situations through different languages (written, oral, symbolic), guiding the researcher through a reflexive and interpretative process of getting a glimpse and a better understanding of the subjectivism and complexities within children’s digital lives.

To get a better understanding of the complexity of this reality, the empirical work developed in line with the feminist empiricist perspectives, reflected through the researcher’s interpersonal relationship with participants; reflexivity during the research process; “the assumptions of intersubjectivity and commonly created meanings and “realities” between researcher and participants” (Olesen, 1992, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b, p. 311); ethical concerns, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b) as discussed throughout the sections of this chapter.



## 4. Results and discussion

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*This chapter is centred on the findings from the qualitative data collected from the participants' reflexive, knowledgeable and critical accounts using participatory methods. This study involved 41 participants, with more girls than boys, aged from 6 to 15 years old, coming from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. During the research meetings children were invited to express their opinions, share their experiences and reflect on situations that emerge within the context of their digital and online lives. With the purpose of gaining a rich interpretation and reflexivity across the true purport of children's understandings, feelings and experiences, two methods, including thematic and narrative analysis, were applied to scrutinise and organise the data. Hence, the following chapter represents the woven strands that resulted from the interplay between the participants' and the researcher's interpretation of reality and social construction of knowledge, organised in three key themes and sections that are interrelated with each other:*

*4.1. Digital inequalities;*

*4.2. Controlling parental control;*

*4.3. Online participation;*

*4.4. Synthesis.*

*In analysing participants' voices, relevant contributions available in the literature proved to be of fundamental importance to meet the two objectives that guided this research:*

- i) To understand the personal values and meanings children might use to interpret their technologized lives;*
- ii) To explore the various aspects enclosed in children's heterogeneous and complex networked lives with the purpose of uncovering short and long term potentially harmful outcomes that may be (more or less) hidden in their digital experiences.*

*The chapter addresses real life situations experienced by school-aged children in their everyday mediated lives. The events were selected considering the complexities and subjectivities they represent. Complementing the theoretical contributions coming from sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies, and Zemiology which plays a key role as it enables understanding of harms beyond the narrow spectrum of risk and crime (as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.5.), both approaches are more concerned with adult-centred agendas. In the scope of this research 'harm' is understood in line with Zemiology principles instead of hypothetical situations, that may or may not occur, or in terms of its criminal categorization. In*

turn, a Zemiology approach offers a broader scope of harm. It focuses on events and behaviours that may affect children's needs, development and rights (provision, protection, participation) in a different sort of aspects (e.g. social, educational, emotional, criminal) in the everyday context. In highlighting 'minor' but no less important events and its impacts upon childhood, children and their families, this thesis aims to contribute with a comprehensive and inclusive analysis that enables a detailed look at more hidden but real and everyday challenges that would not otherwise be considered, but are not of less importance in children's lives.

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#### 4.1. Digital inequalities

The use of flexible participatory methodologies facilitated reaching the participants' analytical and expert arguments and the subjectivities experiences in the children's digital contexts. Within the key theme 'digital inequalities', identified in the data analysis process, participants' reflexive narratives go beyond the 'haves' and 'have nots' paradigm, uncovering intersected aspects of the late modernity and a multifaceted reality where human and non-human entities play an important role that, inevitably, cross the five crucial dimensions highlighted by DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) including *technical apparatus*, *autonomy of use*, *digital competence*, *social support*, and *variation in use*.

Taking the verbatim talks selected from children's accounts as the starting point, this section draws an unequal picture of participants' daily lives in terms of digital consumption and technological choices. The data depicted in this section reflects children as *prosumers* (Toffler, 1980) seduced and involved in a complex and heterogeneous network of human and technical actants that cannot be disregarded from their offline identities, social processes, and family and peer relationships, nor from the role of growing industries (for example, Apple, Facebook, Stardoll), as they jointly stimulate children's agency and participation; enhance uneven power relations based on digital inequalities; reinforce belonging or exclusion feelings and behaviours. In this sense, an important discussion emerges from children's accounts as they reflect the tensions and problems arising in terms of belonging *versus* exclusion (Hagen & Nakken, 2010) that, ultimately, collide in a negative fashion with children's provision rights and future development.

#### 'You poor thing'

Kiara [aged 10]: [...] and Facebook, only from time to time and it's my mother's.

Giselle [aged 10]: You poor thing.

Kiara [aged 10]: It's not from time to time [pause] I can go anytime.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

The brief dialogue between Kiara and Giselle, opening this section, arises during a group interview under the topic 'parents and the internet'. When the subject 'internet rules' was brought into the discussion, Kiara comments that she is allowed to go to the Facebook "only from time to time", through her mother's Facebook profile. Such a statement produces in Giselle compassion resonated through her words, "You poor thing" that, arguably, weakens Kiara's sense of belonging (Maffesoli, 1996) in the peer group. Giselle's response illustrates how she generates her understanding of the world and the taken-for-grantedness of children's digital autonomy and technological consumption, as observed by Bond (2014). Clearly she puts herself in a favoured position, suggesting being aware of the digital inequity between them, based in the *autonomy of use*, as suggested by DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001). The situation illustrated in the girls' talks resonates the power dynamics discussed in Milovanovic and Henry (2001) as constitutive of social harm, where Giselle is the harm creator of social injury; as well as the Elias and Scotson (1994) study of tense relations in a local community, when Giselle claims a sort of digital aristocracy, which confers her with a powerful and ruling position. It is interesting, however, to observe how Kiara recovers her digital status when she rectifies her initial statement adding a contrasting piece of information: "It's not from time to time [pause] I can go anytime". The adverb 'anytime' is the keyword in her statement. By using it, Kiara recovers her digital dignity and, despite not being allowed by her parents to have a Facebook profile, she manages to balance the digital differential pronounced by Giselle. Kiara's response, ultimately, lines up with Buckingham's (2011) reflexion about how peer pressure is an essential component in children's (digital) consumption, making the difference between being accepted and included or marginalised and excluded from the established peer group (Elias & Scotson, 1994).

The evidence collected suggests that some parents allow their children to use the Facebook through their parents' profile, while other parents help their children create their own Facebook account, as Jessica observes, "My mother created mine [Facebook]" (aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG1\_211013). Despite Facebook's policy requiring a minimum age of 13 years old to create an account and the use of false information as a violation of their terms, evidence confirms that parents and children circumvent rules, which means that children under 13 are

using Facebook, and, at least some, are using it with parental consent. Statistics from a EU Kids Online survey, in 2011, indicate that 17% of children aged 9 to 12 have a Facebook profile (see Livingstone et al., 2011b). This tendency is followed among under aged children in Europe (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012). However, considering that the act entails deception, the real picture remains hidden. In the context of this study, from the 41 participants enrolled in the research, 38 are under 13. 28 have access to a Facebook account; and 25 have a Facebook profile of their own (the youngest is aged 9; 24 are aged between 10 and 12); 3 use parents' Facebook account (aged 10); and 10 do not have a Facebook profile (aged between 6 and 10). To note parents' role (mostly, the mother), on the one hand, enabling child's digital inclusion, despite Facebook's age policy; and on the other hand, creating an opportunity to control the child's online participation. As this study did not include interviews with parents, their reasons and rationale for allowing children to have a Facebook profile cannot be commented on here. However, a study conducted elsewhere about parents' awareness of, and attitudes and behaviour toward their under-aged children's Facebook use (see Dor & Weimann-Saks, 2012) suggests that mothers express more negative attitudes and reservations towards children's use of Facebook than fathers; however, both parents lacked internet skills to appropriately escort children's use of Facebook. Children's perceptions about this topic and the tensions arising in the domestic context are further discussed in the next section.

This small, but significant, excerpt was selected to open this section, because it offers some clues through which to understand how digital consumption is central in children's social and identity development processes and how it is complex and also harmful to the social processes (Buckingham, 2011) enclosed in the heterogeneous networks of human and non-human actants. During the fieldwork period, several other clues reinforced how not being able to be part of the Facebook community can enhance network effects and harmful responses that weaken parent-child relationships (this issue will be discussed in the next section), children's self-esteem and sense of belonging. The children's talk replicates the harmful dynamics and tensions enclosed in the uneven balance of power found by Elias and Scotson in terms of "monopolistic possession of non-human objects" (1994, p. xviii) that confirm the superiority of the dominant group (those who have a Facebook account), in relation to the 'others', the inferior group (the ones who do not have a Facebook profile). Corroborating this, a kind of 'digital superiority' is mirrored in Alice's, "She doesn't have Facebook"

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214), reinforcing the cohesion of the superior group and the exclusion of the ones who are 'digital inferior'.

In another episode, Nala's account strengthens the uneven balance of power inherent to a sense of 'digital stigmatisation', "You don't have [Facebook]? Outdated." (GM\_EL\_PG4\_111013). In this situation is noteworthy to add that, although having a Facebook profile, Nala does not have access to the internet at home. Nala's example clearly remonstrates the role that school and other public institutions play in the digital inclusion of socio-economically vulnerable children; and the empowering role the use of the internet has to liberate children from social inequalities, preventing Nala from feeling digitally excluded (this aspect is explored in the section further ahead).

The previous talks are arguably important to demonstrate how peer dynamics and tensions derived from digital consumption can be harmful in the sense that they can effectively stigmatise and stick (Elias & Scotson, 1994) to those who come to also see themselves as 'digital inferior'. During the meetings when the topic 'Facebook' arises in the discussion, the ones who do not have a Facebook profile shut themselves from the conversation by stating e.g. "I don't have Facebook" (Wendy, aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG1\_111113) or by highlighting that stigma, as the following accounts reveal:

Excerpt A:

Esmeralda [aged 10]: I don't have Club Penguin, wish I had, but I don't. I wish I had Facebook, but I don't.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

Excerpt B:

Researcher: And what about you Esmeralda?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: Eh [pause] I have nothing to tell.

Researcher: And you Wendy?

Wendy [aged 10]: Neither.

Researcher: Neither.

Hera [aged 10]: Wendy never has anything to tell.

Ariel [aged 10]: Neither has Face[book].

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)



The analysis of the data suggests that the popularity of Facebook among the participants is fed by the network effect (Mesch & Talmud, 2010), the need to fit in (Whitby, 2011), the tribal feeling (Maffesoli, 1996), social cohesion (Ling, 2008), and group charisma (Elias & Scotson, 1994). Upholding Buckingham's reflexion "children's primary point of reference is much more likely to be the desires and preferences of other children" (2011, p. 164), to which, ultimately, not only children, but also parents are forced to surrender to that "exasperating reminder of the limitations of their own power and authority" (2011, p. 164) and to the double-edged character of modernity discussed by Giddens (1990).

Facebook's social and entertaining features are the main attraction according to the participants. The SNS is used by "almost all", according to Figaro (aged 12, GM\_AP\_PG1\_211013) to "talk to my family and friends (...) and play games there" (Jessica, aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG1\_211013); and though data confirms that Facebook is widely used (even) among under aged children, one girl firmly states, "I don't want [to have] Facebook. Facebook has no use. It only serves to play games that I cannot play on my iPod. [Pause] It has no use at all." (Jenny, aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113). Using her right to non-participation, Jenny's example corroborates the *variation in use* outlined by Boonaert and Vettenburg (2011), revealing diversity in children's use of the internet.

### **'She only brings the mobile phone to see the time'**

#### Excerpt A:

Morgana [aged 10]: My father told me he would give me a [SIM] card.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: He's going to give you what?

Morgana [aged 10]: A [SIM] card for my mobile phone.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: A card for your mobile phone?

Giselle [aged 10]: She only brings the mobile phone to see the time.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: Do you want one [SIM card] I have at home?

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Seriously, you have no phone card?

Morgana [aged 10]: [Nods her head]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: A card is not very expensive.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

Excerpt B:

Morgana [aged 10]: I finally got a [SIM] card

[Undifferentiated noise]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Is it a Christmas gift?

Morgana [aged 10]: Just [pause] not Christmas.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_031213)

The two excerpts presented above centred in *technical apparatus* (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001) happened with one-week's difference before Christmas and confirm Buckingham's (2011) argument that the material goods are a symbolic language shared by children of all backgrounds and central to their social inclusion and sense of belonging.

Informal conversations about Christmas holidays opened the research session and children were talking about their Christmas gift wish list. One was talking about wanting a tablet, another a new mobile phone and another a computer. Then, unexpectedly, Morgana comments that her father is going to offer her a SIM card for the mobile phone. Their requests were unexpected to the researcher part, in the sense that those commodities do not immediately relate with a romanticised perspective of childhood and related playful activities, and because they could instead be part of an adult wish list, which confirms how online digital technologies are blurring child-adult boundaries (Buckingham, 2009b).

From the socio-economic information collected from the institution's director and from the contact with Morgana, it transpired that she came from a socioeconomically vulnerable family. During the meetings Morgana's discourse provides more hints that challenge other contemporary rights and values taken for granted (Bond, 2014; Ling, 2012) in the social context of consumer culture (Buckingham, 2011) in late modernity. For instance, she had never been to MacDonald's or to the cinema as she discloses in the following dialogue.

Morgana [aged 10]: Teresa do you want to know something? I never went to MacDonald's.

Researcher: Never?

Morgana [aged 10]: Or even to the movies.

Peter Pan [aged 11]: What the hell?

Giselle [aged 10]: You're so outdated, girl.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: You never been to MacDonald's? Ever?

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_191113)

Neither has she a television set in her bedroom.

Morgana [aged 10]: I don't have television in my room.

Giselle [aged 10]: Are you poor?

Morgana [aged 10]: No. I'm rich.

Giselle [aged 10]: Now all rooms have a TV.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

Coming from a socio-economically disadvantaged family, Morgana is not able to access or share with the peer group other typical experiences of consumer culture. However, she is cleverly aware of the power that possessing a mobile phone has in the wider social world (Buckingham, 2011; Charlton et al., 2002) and particularly how its symbolic language affords the vehicle of social equality (see Baudrillard, 1998) that enables her acceptance in the tribe (Maffesoli, 1996). In this respect, Morgana's situation is a remarkable example of children's competence and the paradoxical role of online digital technologies as it encloses an intertwined human/non-human network where she efficiently performs (see Goffman, 1959) the rituals that, on the one hand, enhance in her a sense of belonging and, on the other hand, facilitate her acceptance in the established group (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Embodying the reflexive demands of late modernity (Giddens, 1990), Morgana breaks with dynamics of domination and subordination that undermine individual's social lives, aspects reflected in the construction of a theory of harm (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004).

In this example, the mobile phone represents more than a communication tool. It is a social token, which prevents Morgana from suffering (more) harm arising from social discriminative or exclusion effects and take advantage of the inclusive status it provides her. The examining of this episode reinforces Charlton and colleagues' (2002) and Bond's (2010, 2014) findings about the mobile phone as a crucial device in children's lives that helps develop social relations and a sense of belonging.

What is remarkable to observe from the previous extracts, which are around technological devices, in particular, and consumerism, in general, is the individual reactions of the participants. To note Tinker Bell's persistent questioning, suggesting she wants to make sure that she understands Morgana's situation. Afterwards, during an informal conversation, Tinker

Bell clarified that the persistent inquiring was an attempt to comprehend why Morgana takes her mobile phone to the school. The strategy adopted by Morgana to keep up with the peer group was not reasonable to her, because a mobile phone without a SIM card does not allow her to send or receive text messages and voice calls.

The latter piece of dialogue occurred during a session where the group was asked to fill in a sheet with the technological devices they have in their living room and bedroom and which they carry with them on a daily basis. Throughout the previous dialogues the discrimination and the lack of empathy revealed in Giselle's talk become increasingly notorious in how she assumes that having a television set in the bedroom is a commodity taken for granted upholding Ling's (2012) argument that the embeddedness of technologies in the social fabric is changing and challenging social expectations. In other words, having a mobile phone or a television set in the bedroom is no longer a remarkable possession; instead it has become an assumed and expected one.

### **'Because he loves her'**

The following stories occurred spontaneously during the meetings and confirm the complicated and ambivalent dynamics enclosed in the consumer culture network and how it influences technological agency (Latour, 1996) and underpins the contemporary relationships of care between parents and children more oriented to things (see Buckingham, 2011; Miller, 2008; 2010). Hera and Alice's accounts are crucial to grasp this complex picture where children, online digital technologies, market, and relationships are intrinsically implicated within the consumer and the material world with impacts on children's social and self-esteem, as the next conversation depicts.

Hera [aged 10]: Oh Teresa, my cousin, she is 8 [years old]. Her father and mother are separated. Her mother is a teacher and the father, I don't know what he does, but he gives my cousin everything. She has PSP, Nintendo, Wii, tablet.

Researcher: Why do you think they give everything to your cousin?

Alice [aged 10]: Because they love her.

Hera [aged 10]: Not all. And just the father, that gives her everything.

Alice [aged 10]: Because he loves her.

Researcher: Does she [the cousin] live with her father or with her mother?

Hera [aged 10]: One at time<sup>54</sup>.

Researcher: Ah.

Hera [aged 10]: A week with her mother, a week with her father.

Alice [aged 10]: Oh. I only lack one thing, a Nintendo. Oh Teresa, I have a Wii, but it's in repair.

Hera [aged 10]: I go to my cousin's home, because I have nothing.

[Undifferentiated noise]

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_091213)

The dialogue transcribed above occurred during a group meeting before Christmas holidays, when children were talking about the gifts they were hoping to receive from their parents. Hera abruptly redirects the topic to how her cousin has “everything” and she has “nothing”. Throughout the dialogue the picture of the material repercussions of divorce emerges (Collins & Janning, 2010) in which the divorced couple tries to fulfil children's emotional needs and compensate for the absence of a parent with material goods (Nairn et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the girl's interpretation of the situation drives from a wedge between parents and children that affects the relationship as they construct a direct association between materialism and parental love and care, as discussed by Buckingham (2011) and Buckingham and Tingstad (2010) but aligns with Miller's (see 2008; 2010) attempt to overcome materiality and consumption concerns and situate artefacts in the culture domain where commodities are identified with love instead of waste. According to Miller, children develop relations with people and relations with things without detrimental consequences. In this sense, children's avid responses to consumer culture goes beyond the consumption of material goods. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that meeting children's consumption needs can challenge in particular the more socioeconomic vulnerable families to make demanding economic efforts (and sometimes even this is not feasible) to keep up with late modern consumption demands and pressures.

According to Buckingham (2011; 2012) a growing number of industries are well aware of the central role the consumer culture has in children's social relationships (with parents and peer group) and they are increasingly targeting children's interactions through participatory forms of branded content and resources. During the fieldwork, recurrently children's conversations

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<sup>54</sup> In Portuguese: “É à vez.”

focused on material goods and a subject that effectively interested them – free online games – in particular Stardoll. In the final phase of the study, they also mentioned Habbo Hotel. The fashion dress up game community for girls (as the website claims), Stardoll was the online game mostly referred by the participants, mainly girls (33 in a total of 41 participants). One boy, Roger, reported playing both massive multiplayer online games (MMOG).

Although intended as a game for girls, Stardoll can be played by boys and girls, where they can build and customise a female or a male doll. The focus of the game revolves around the doll's appearance and consumerism practices: dressing and makeup for the doll; shopping; fashion; and participation in interactive activities with other players (games, clubs, chat rooms). It should be noted here that Stardoll has an online safety guide for parents and teachers that includes a child block that prevents, among other things, means of communicating with other members via chat, message centre, guest books and clubs<sup>55</sup>. However, none of the participants reported having created a gaming account with the support or guidance of an adult. The participants mentioned that they created the account by themselves or with the help of a peer. In one situation, it was possible to observe that, when unable to log into her account, because she did not remember the password, Ariel (aged 10) immediately created a new account (GM\_AP\_PG1\_240214). In another group the participants created an account on Stardoll for the researcher proving their expertise (GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113).


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<sup>55</sup> Information available in the link: <http://www.stardoll.com/pt/help/section.php?sectionId=15>

Figure 4. 'What is Stardoll' information note available in the website


## WHAT IS STARDOLL?

**Stardoll is the largest online community for girls who love fashion, making friends, shopping, decorating and being creative!** Start by making your own stardoll, go shopping, dress up, decorate your suite, socialize with new friends and express yourself creatively however you want to - because it's all about you!




**FAME**

- Become a Superstar! Get Stardollars!
- Shop for designer brands and look like the stars!
- Dress up Celeb Dolls! Join Celeb Chats!




**CREATE A STARDOLL**

- Can look like you or whoever you want!
- Every stardoll is different. Over 60 billion possible variations!
- Hairstyles, makeup and cool accessories all available!




**FASHION**

- Thousands of items to choose from!
- Design and sell your own fashions!
- Decorate your suite to fit your style!



**GO SHOPPING! DRESS UP!**

- Shop for clothes at Starplaza!
- Always the latest fashion!
- Express yourself or try something new!



**FRIENDS**

- Over 100 million members worldwide!
- Make new friends and socialize!
- Join Clubs! Throw Parties!

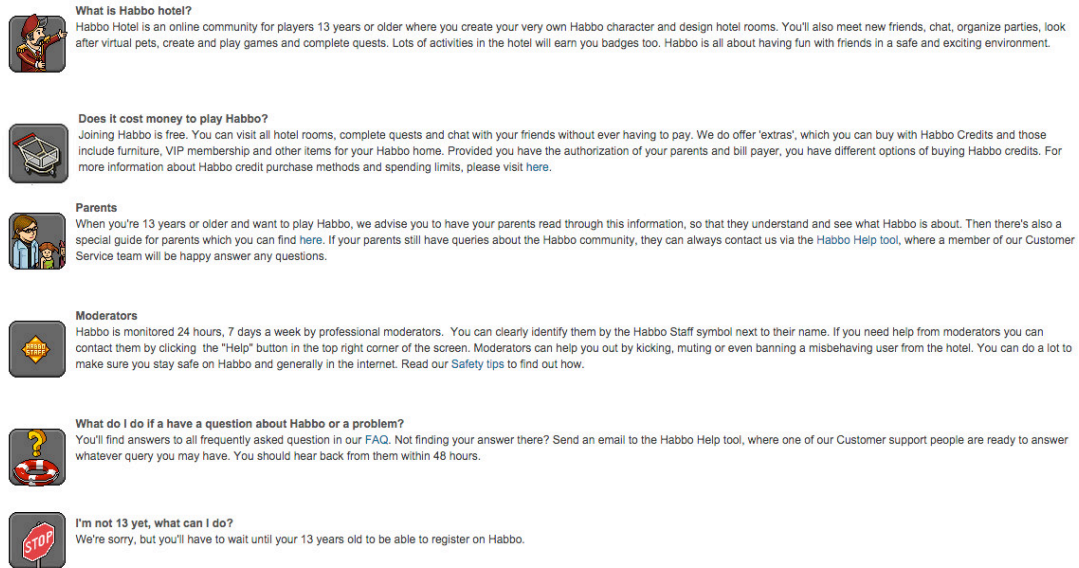
**I want to sign up NOW!**

In Habbo Hotel users can create their character, design and decorate their house, buy furniture, decoration material, and meet and interact with other players through the 120 million user-generated rooms<sup>56</sup> in the Habbo community. The virtual game has an age policy recommendation for users with and over the age of 13 years or older and an information support forum for parents with safety tips and tools<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Information available in the link: <http://www.sulake.com/>

<sup>57</sup> Information available in the link: <https://help.habbo.com.br/forums/311751-informacoes-para-os-pais>

Figure 5. Habbo Hotel information note available in the website



Both games and virtual communities use cross-platform software, which means they are accessible through the website, a handheld device or Facebook account. These communities invite players to interact with other (un)known players and seem to stimulate and reproduce offline social inequalities in the online setting, through the frivolous pursuit of ostentatious appearances as a token of having a privileged status inside the community. Most activities revolve around consuming practices and the games have their own currency. The social distinctions inside the communities according to Tinker Bell's critical thinking are "very bad indeed".

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: There's one thing I hate in Stardoll that is [pause]. Me and everyone [pause]. Is that some can be that thing [pause]. What is that? It's superstarlet.

Jenny [aged 10]: Superstar. [Correcting Tinker Bell]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yes.

Researcher: Who are the superstars?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Those who pay every month.

Giselle [aged 10]: Those that pay to have privileges.

Researcher: I don't understand.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: To be a superstar you have to pay every month. And one has more coins, more money and all of that.



[Undifferentiated noise]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: And so they go [to parties]. Since they are more beautiful than the others, they have everything. They have a lot of money.

Jenny [aged 10]: They have the latest hairstyles.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They go to parties. They make the parties, right? And then they never talk to the others. They just speak to superstars. They are some kind of racists.

Giselle [aged 10]: Ah. That doesn't bother me, because I do not care with what comes from below.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: And this is bad, very bad indeed.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

The fear of being excluded or having feelings of exclusion based on material possessions seems to fuel negative feelings that reveal complex aspects of ANT theory and reflect a mismatch between children's material expectations, either in online or offline settings. The exclusion vector is also corroborated in the following dialogue that occurred during the completion of a sheet where participants were asked to indicate which technological devices were a part of their daily lives from a given list with several technological suggestions (participants could add their suggestions too).

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't have any of this. I don't have a smartphone or tablet.

Giselle [aged 10]: Your father has a smartphone.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Ah. All right. And mine? Is mine a smartphone?

Giselle [aged 10]: It's a Galaxy mini.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't have it here. It's a white, Galaxy mini 1.

[Undifferentiated noise]

Jenny [aged 10]: And now it's always at home.

Researcher: It's always at home?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I never take it [to school]. It's always at home. But I have another one.

Researcher: Why do you bring that one and the other stays at home?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I'm afraid someone will steal it from me.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

It is worth noting how Tinker Bell responds anxiously when she notices that she does not have 'any of this'; how by 'this' she means a smartphone and a tablet; and how instead of describing the mobile phone's features she focuses on the brand. Giselle's supportive response has a central role in the negotiation and management of Tinker Bell's belonging feelings and 'cool' status within the peer group (Buckingham, 2011).

According to Nairn et al.'s findings, brand attachment does not prove to be linked with self-esteem responses in materialism research. Furthermore, "[s]imply being involved in a consumer culture is not necessarily detrimental *per se*" (2010, p. 202) unless "when it is implicated in dissatisfaction with what the child owns" (2010, p. 202) or when in association with "depressive, anxiety, obsessive and behaviour feelings" (2010, p. 202). Although none of these responses were detected from the participants' behaviour and accounts, there is no doubt that technological devices and brands often triggered attention-grabbing behaviours, like the extract below from the researcher's field report captures.

"I sat at a table and opened the computer to work while I was expecting the activity centre director. Quickly I changed my idea, as my computer [an Apple MacBook Air] soon attracted the attention of a young boy (aged 11) and a girl (older than him). They love games. They play Team Fortress 2 and have a game channel on YouTube where they upload videos with streaming of their games. As he talks to me this small, slender, but energetic, boy easily takes hold of my computer command, while he also asked me 'when' and 'where' I bought it. He shows me videos with tutorials, and the weapons. His mastery is recognized by other boys that gather around us (and the computer) to hear and ask questions about things they can't manage to set up at home, or on their YouTube channel. [...] Another boy says he also likes to play and has 230 followers on Twitter, where he shares videos (streaming). He gets interested. He shows him his Twitter account and they start following each other. [...] Ruben after a while says 'goodbye'. The other boy who asked to show his Twitter account tells me that 'he's always like this, and doesn't let anyone get near the computer'."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG1\_240214)

There is no evidence that suggests that the use of a specific brand is the main reason to attract children's attention to the researcher. Nevertheless, using an iPad in the field gave children the opportunity to explore the device on their own, and triggered some thought-provoking behaviours in the children as the following examples reflect.

Excerpt A:

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I want an iPad, just like yours. I'm asking for money for Christmas and birthday gifts so I can buy an iPad

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_031213)

Excerpt B:

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's from Apple. It's the best brand, isn't it?

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_031213)

Excerpt C:

Jane [aged 11]: It's an Apple. Are they expensive?

Melinda [aged 11]: Do you earn a good salary?

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214)

Excerpt D:

"The girls were all happy to see a short film and I found it curious how in the presence of other girls, who missed several sessions recently, they clearly stated a territorial position through the devices. (I observed them through the door). When the arriving girls asked to whom the iPhone belonged, Wendy stated that it was mine, adding that they didn't know that because they were not present in the previous sessions, as if they had acquired property rights as compared to the others. This was undoubtedly a very curious behaviour indubitably."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_GP1\_240214)

Children who were born in the new millennium perceive online and digital inclusion beyond use or utility as previous generations did/do, but as a vital aspect embedded in the hierarchy of necessities that guides their networked lives. In line with this, the participants' narratives

depicted in this section lighten up the discussion that links the taken-for-grantedness of access and autonomy in the use of digital devices and online services with children's expectations around the importance of consumption to achieve social inclusion (Buckingham, 2011; Ling 2012) and the sense of connection (Cheung et al., 2011; Nosko et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2010).

However, the picture that emerges from their accounts is very ambivalent as the children's quality of life and daily social dynamics reflect the effects of the economic impoverishment of many Portuguese families in the past years. Implicitly families suffer from pressure to meet children's peers' digital demands and from the industries focused on trends of consumption that rapidly change. Being a part of the peer group demands keeping up with a fluid and continuous negotiation that seems to never stabilize. More than having access to the internet, being able to afford social tokens, such as a profile on Facebook or possessing a handheld device, preferably with an internet connection, makes the difference between belonging (Seidman, 2013) or being socially ostracized. A fierce negotiation is reflected in children's talks presented throughout this section. In line with this, it is noteworthy how participants struggle to balance digital power differences through creative and positive solutions, which, ultimately, is illustrative of how they acknowledge the social importance and advantages of being digital included.

#### **'Here it has [internet], but the net is so slow that it's not even worth it'**

Across the belonging *versus* exclusion picture examined in this section, the *social support* enabled by educational institutions needs to be considered, as they contribute significantly to balancing digital inequalities by reducing the gap in terms of access to the internet (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001), in particular among children that come from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Nonetheless, empirical data confirms this is a more problematic issue that goes beyond digital inclusion simply based on access.

The children attending the activity centre are used to connecting their mobile devices to the internet using Wi-Fi and are allowed to a more autonomous and anytime, anywhere connection and interaction, provided by their handheld devices and Wi-Fi access.

Not having a handheld device with internet connection is not *per se* a tangible impediment, because they can access the internet using the school library and the activity centre computers or even through peer group's devices. Most participants are usually connected *to* and *through*

their handheld devices. And, often, individual activities flow into peer group activities where they spend time together and decide collectively.

Excerpt A:

“Hera was showing me a picture of her and her best friend and cousin, while simultaneously, talking to friends on Facebook chat. Then, she told me that people think she and her best friend are very alike. I said she looked very cool in the picture. The others agreed (Ariel and Wendy), so she used it to change her profile picture. After a while, it was Ariel's turn to use the iPad. So, Hera asked me if she could use my smartphone to access Facebook. Ariel was also on Facebook and, therefore, Hera began chatting with her through it. She asked her 'where are you', sent several emoticons and voice messages. Wendy was playing, possibly Pou<sup>88</sup>. Ariel's mobile phone was connected to YouTube, where the music 'Tira a mão da minha xuxa' (something like, 'Take your hands of my boobs') was playing. The three of them sang the song. I got the impression that this is what it means to hang out together. Each one of them was on their Facebook profile (except for Wendy, she is not allowed to use Facebook, so she was playing a game). They were humming the song (Hera doesn't like the music, it annoys her) and sending messages to each other, while they were right next to each other. I regret not having the opportunity to take a picture that captured that state of 'being together separately'. Eyes on the screens, they kept speaking to each other. Ariel also looked at Facebook photos and replied to Hera in the chat. After a while, she too wanted to change her profile picture and so she took a selfie using the iPad and published it online.

Hera was entertaining herself by sending voice messages (she had already tried it on the iPad, but it didn't work).

The chat messages were more or less something like this: 'hello', 'where are you', 'LOL' and sequences of emoticons that were put together as if they made a sentence.”

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG1\_100214)

Excerpt B:

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<sup>88</sup> Pou is an online game where children can have a virtual pet. The game was designed to be played using mobile devices (see <http://pou.softonic.com.br/android>)

“By the end of the meeting, Wendy was playing a game on her mobile: ‘Who wants to be rich’. Despite using her personal device, the group got involved in the activity and also asked the researcher for help. They speak at the same time and share suggestions, “Choose bipolar disorder to see if it’s right” (Figaro, aged 12); “You can ask for help, you know?” (Alice, aged 10); they get curious to know the results and to hit the correct answer, “You see, I was right. Wasn’t I?” (Figaro, aged 12); express less friendly reactions, “What a dumbass” (Hera, aged 10); and negotiate divergent opinions:

Figaro [aged 12]: Ask for help or ask for the 50-50.

Wendy [aged 10]: Help. Choose a friend for help.

Alice [aged 10]: No. Don’t choose.

Wendy [aged 10]: Oh Hera.

Figaro [aged 12]: Seriously. It was the other.

Alice [aged 10]: No. This one that is closer.

Figaro [aged 12]: The dog is the dog.

Alice [aged 10]: But the dog also knows.

Wendy [aged 10]: But he said it was Francophobia.

Alice [aged 10]: And it is.

Figaro [aged 12]: Then, it’s Francophobia.

Wendy [aged 10]: Teresa said it wasn’t.

Hera [aged 10]: But put it anyway. He should know.

Figaro [aged 12]: Agree. Teresa can also make mistakes.

Alice [aged 10]: They always say the right answers.

Wendy [aged 10]: You see?

Hera [aged 10]: Wrong.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_100214)

The way children stay connected through the day varies across the groups and confirms the complexity enclosed in *diversity in use* analysed by Boonaert and Vettenburg (2011) in which those who deviate from the economic and competitive dominant representation of the ‘digital generation’ and, in particular, minority groups and children coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, may once again be excluded and the focus of intervention. With the

aim of promoting digital inclusion, 'Program Choices' has CID@NET spaces under the supervision of technicians that support socially disadvantaged children's digital and online experiences (e.g. they are not allowed to play games that are violent). Although they possess handheld devices, the 'Program Choices' participants' use of technology in the institution is more discrete and static. During the day the access to the internet is more based around on using the institution's computers and less on using individual mobile devices, which were hardly noticed during the research meetings. Roma children mostly composed the group and most of them said that they did not have access to the internet at home. However, taking advantage of living in the same neighbourhood, the girls stated that when they want to use the internet they go the balcony or to Bianca's (aged 9) doorstep to connect to her Wi-Fi network (GM\_ET\_PG3\_011013), and Geppeto's access to the internet is provided from his uncle's house (GM\_ET\_PG3\_280114). No statistics were found to support this evidence in reference to the internet access and use by Portuguese Roma community. However, according to Akkaya (2015) limited access to 'new media', among the Roma community in Turkey, is due to the lack of economic, social and cultural capital.

At the beginning of a meeting, children were talking about their school grades. Taking advantage of the subject, they were asked if parents ever forbade them from using the computer or the internet based on their school grades. Figaro [aged 12] states that he does not have a computer or an internet connection at home. He only uses the computer and goes online at the school, however the schools' internet speed discourages him of using it, "Here it has, but the net is so slow that it's not even worth it" (Figaro, aged 12, GM\_AP\_PG1\_270114). Likewise, during a break, Flora (aged 13) comments that she was trying to send an email, but she gave up because the internet was very slow (Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG1\_091213). Both these examples, although not highly prevalent among the participants (as most of them in the activity centre had their own handheld device to connect to the internet), are, however, relevant in considering the lack of access to technologies and the internet in the home sphere and the government initiatives and investments to equip schools with computers and the internet. Providing schools with an internet connection, software and hardware becomes a purely cosmetic gesture if this investment is not continuously sustained (Buckingham, 2009b). "As technological euphoria wore off" (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001, p. 1), equal access turns into a (larger) social problem when it takes access and use from home for granted, undermining the learning process,

hindering children's digital competence, increasing the marginalisation of the information poor, constraining children's provision and participation digital rights, and restraining children's on/offline social capital. When access and use are dependable of slow connections and old soft/hardware, digital experiences are reduced to a less gratifying use (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Hope, 2013) that undermines and denies children's cognitive, social and educational development based in *harms of repression* that limit children's intellectual, cultural, social development, enhancing digital segregation and lowering self-expectations and self-esteem (Henry and Lanier, 2001; Lanier & Henry, 2001).

Deriving from the work of DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001), different accesses and uses were also found. When compared with same-age girls from the other groups, Roma girls reveal an equivalent level of fascination with the internet and communication-based technologies, but there is an inequality denoted by a lower level of access and use of the internet. When given the opportunity to freely use a device or the internet all the participants responded with a vivid enthusiasm, but for the Roma girls this was also a distressing activity. They were always impatient to access and use the computer and go online, however, after switching it on, they did not seem to be able to take advantage of its opportunities neither did they demonstrate a meaningful use of technologies (Selwyn, 2004). They opened and closed the browser at a hectic pace repeatedly and stared or asked for help, as the following transcript from a field report describes.

“They open the search engine and ask for help: “Teacher, write something in here”” (Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013).

When asked about what they wanted to search for on the internet, they used to reply,

““I wanna see pictures”; “I don't know. Write something”; or “Write Roma pictures”” (Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013).

Usually, the daily activities in the computer followed the crowd effect. What one chose to do, all others would also wanted to do. The Roma children's daily computer activities were in sum to search for videos on YouTube (usually about Roma music and weddings), to search for pictures and to play games (e.g. Friv<sup>99</sup>). Other Roma children (same age and older) attending

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<sup>99</sup> Friv “offers dozens of free games – which are generally fine for kids to play – without tons of pop-up ads or commercials. Site content is sparse; game names appear when you scroll over each image on the homepage, but there isn't much else to help guide you through the site.



the institution also followed these routines. Online games are unequivocally the main activity held on the internet and, ultimately, they represent a significant part of the online activities shared by all the participants of each group.

Initially, it was intriguing to notice how, like the boys, Roma girls enjoyed so much playing car-racing games or bull-fighting games and seemed to ignore the games typically designed to appeal to girls. This observation, initially erroneously pointed to the hypothesis that gender could be a key concept in digital inequality revealing contemporary versions of femininity and girl power, as suggested for example, by Nayak and Kehily (2008). But, weeks later, Pocahontas (aged 10) solves the mystery and proves that girls preference for racing car games was related with a lack of digital skills, confirming the EU Kids Online findings in which it is suggested that boys are slightly more skilled than girls (Livingstone et al., 2011a).

“Today when Pocahontas was playing a racing car game, I asked her why did she prefer those games instead of playing more girly games (in order to assess if was there any gender issue involved). She answered that she played those games because the other games (the so-called girly games) required her to use the mouse and she couldn't 'drag' things to the right place, while the car games just required her to use the keyboard (the arrow keys).”

(Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013).

In the course of time it was interesting to observe how the group's digital competence evolved attaining a more enhanced and diversified use of the computer and the internet. The girls began to challenge themselves to use mouse-based games. To overcome some difficulties they count on the peer group or adults (institution technicians and researcher) to help them achieve their goals. They began using the virtual school more frequently, as well as drawing software and using YouTube to watch animated movies. However, the great achievement was getting a

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The games come from other providers, so quality and instructions can be inconsistent. However, Friv appears to have disabled any links to additional games or other items on each offering, so kids shouldn't end up accessing something totally inappropriate after playing.

Quality (4 in 5 stars):

The most information you'll find about FRIV is a search engine description that says it's "a safe place to play the very best free games." The site itself contains almost no text - the homepage is comprised of dozens of tiny images that link to games users can play. The lack of written information may initially seem suspect, particularly because game sites, due to violent or otherwise inappropriate content, can often be a concern. However, Friv's selections are mostly safe. Some games can be a little confusing to figure out; clearer instructions would help. It'd also be great to see more games that encourage kids to use logic and reasoning to solve puzzles and advance levels - offering a bonus bit of education when kids are getting their game fix." (Information retrieved from: <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/website-reviews/friv>)

Gmail account. Pocahontas was the first one to have a Gmail account. Confirming the reflexive and dynamic construction of the self claimed by Giddens (1991), through which individuals build their biographies, and reflecting the lack of trust, corollary of risk society contended in Beck's analysis (1992), during the configuration of the Gmail account, Pocahontas headed safety decisions by herself and revealed some concerns with security issues. For example, she intended to add her picture to the profile, but suddenly,

“[...] she said that she wanted to use Pucca picture and not hers after all. I asked her why she changed her mind. She told me that “they could...” and she made a gesture with her hand that means ‘stealing’. [...] She keeps her password on a piece of paper, because she says she cannot memorize it. Then, she asked for my email. She wanted to write me an email. She did so. As I was told, after receiving her email I showed it to her. Then, she asked me to answer the email. So I did. After a while she asked me to teach her how to delete emails from the inbox. She deleted all the emails except two, one from the ‘Choices’ institution and the one I sent her. When Pocahontas wrote me the email, I found it curious how she turned to me and asked: “They don’t read our conversation, right?” Unfortunately, I had no opportunity to ask her who ‘they’ are and what she was afraid of, because we were interrupted and afterwards she left.”

(Researcher’s Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013).

Pocahontas started using the email on a daily basis in an empowering fashion even to control the researcher’s punctuality.

“Today I arrived 15 minutes later. [...] Because I was late, Pocahontas had already sent me an email asking if was not coming that day. She told me about the email shortly after I arrived. I provoked her and said something like “now, you’re always on Gmail”. And it was really moving see her smile to agree with me as she answered “Yeah”, and very happy she states, “it’s similar to Facebook”.”

(Researcher’s Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_191113).

After Pocahontas got a Gmail account and the other participants realised the communication opportunities it provided, they asked in the institution for help to create one for themselves too and they, therefore, created their own network.

“They wanted a Gmail account to 'talk' to each other. When [name of the technician] was absent, they asked me to help them activating and experimenting the GTalk instant messaging service. It's stimulating to be able to witness how things as ordinary and taken for granted as having an email could be so extraordinary to them; a real treat and a novelty in their lives. The three girls were sitting next to each other and using the chat service for the first time. After writing in the chat window, they peeked on each other's chat box to see if or when what they wrote appeared in the other computer.”

(Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_261113)

It was not easy to create opportunities to talk privately with this group of participants. They arrived at 5:30 p.m. and the institution closed at 7:00 p.m. They were always overwhelmed with school homework and school quizzes. The room was always noisy and crowded. Nonetheless, an opportunity finally arose, and an unstructured individual conversation was conducted with Pocahontas. A clear, experienced and critical picture of her new digital opportunity emerged from her account revealing the pros and cons she finds in the use of Gmail in terms of social interaction and safety concerns.

Researcher: You have an email now.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: And you have had it for a while now.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Do you speak with people you know through email?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Of course. On it I have you, [the institution], Kitty, Narissa, and [name of a girl], [name of a girl] too, and Laverne.

Researcher: And you write emails to them, like you write to me?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Every day?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Not every day.

Researcher: Do you go to the email every day?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Hummm [emphasising]. When I can't, I don't go.

Researcher: And chat? Do you use it?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Chat?

Researcher: Yes.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes. But I can't. For example, you are available. When you are available you have that green polka dot. It hasn't. Not in mine.

Researcher: Ah. But I'm rarely available, because, otherwise, a lot of people would want to talk and I wouldn't have time to work, you see?

[...]

Researcher: How do you think email changed your life?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: How?

Researcher: Your life has become different because of email?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No. Why it would change?

Researcher: Before you had email it was different. For example, you didn't talk with me.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Ah. Yes.

Researcher: See? Changed your life. Has it changed other things too?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: [She laughs] Just chatting.

Researcher: Just chatting?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Do you feel that you chat more and that you are closer to people?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes. Because I did nothing. I was always playing games, etcetera.

[...]

Researcher: A question I want to ask you: last week, I don't know if you remember, when it was almost 7 p.m., we were closing the computers, but first, we tried to enter your email. And then the computer shut down and you became very worried because the email was open.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yesssss [emphasising].

[...]

Researcher: Why were you so worried?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Because I don't like that it's open.

Researcher: Because you're afraid that people may see?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes. The conversations.

Researcher: But have you got something that you don't want people to see?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No. Nothing.

Researcher: Why the concern?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Because I don't like people entering in my email.

Researcher: All right.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I don't like it, because it has my date of birth, and where I live, in there.

Researcher: In the email?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No. I'll explain<sup>60</sup>. For example, when you [create] an email you have to put the date of birth and that. And the teachers put it. And I didn't want to. They put it.

[...]

Researcher: Since you have email and you use the internet, have you had a situation that scared you or left you nervous?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No.

Researcher: You only use the computer in here [institution]? Or at home as well?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Here. My brother-in-law has [computer]. Sometimes I play games. I don't like to be on the email, because there's no one there.

Researcher: That's right.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: So I'm alone there.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_210114)

Online digital technologies present unprecedented opportunities to those who can afford to grow up in technological-rich environments, as Helsper (2012) highlights. In this sense to consider the variables *access* and *use* to measure children's digital inclusion is, undoubtedly, a complex and difficult task.

Findings in this study confirm that not all the participants are *digital natives* (Prensky 2001); not all can use the internet freely or access it from home; there are differences and inequalities in the type of access to be considered (static or mobile; private or supervised); and, finally,

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<sup>60</sup> In Portuguese: "Não. É assim."

empowering, meaningful and wise use of the internet or digital devices cannot be taken for granted. A zemiological approach focusing on the harmful impacts would encourage actions to counteract these problems by opening a democratic discussion about the role of educational institutions and children's educational and social development by involving local stakeholders. Considering the articles 4, 17, 28, and 29 enclosed in the UNCRC, governments are responsible for making sure children's access, needs and rights are fulfilled in terms of creating an educational environment that enables them to reach their highest level of education, develop their potential and abilities. In line with this, and to support a competitive knowledge economy in which children are included, governments and other educational, social and economic forces have to address children as an investment, instead of a cost (Oslo Challenge, 1999)<sup>61</sup> and support and encourage the development of their full potential and skills (Livingstone & O'Neill, 2014). This, however, entails a continuous acquisition and update of schools' technological, educational and human resources (software, hardware and education), hearing and respecting children's perspectives, needs feedback and the challenges they face in the everyday context, and involving them in dialogical and cooperative decision-making processes in order to appropriately support children's digital empowerment and effective inclusion.

### **'My mother thinks she knows how to use the computer'**

As previously stated, one research meeting was devoted to talking about the theme 'parents and the internet' (it did not exclusively focus on the internet but, included the use of computers, tablets and mobile phones). The following verbatim transcripts mainly depict the girls' critical perspectives about *digital competence* illustrated with vivid examples. Children's sovereignty over parents in terms of digital competencies has largely been documented in research (e.g. Ponte et al., 2008; Prensky 2001; Schaffar et al., 2004). Yet, findings in this research suggest, from the participants' own words, that this is a much more 'complicated situation'.

The discussions exemplified in the following extracts illustrate the flow of the conversations around parents' digital skills. The excerpts demonstrate the heterogeneity among the participants, including how they elaborate from the given subject and explore their personal experiences on the subject.

Researcher: What do you think about your parents using the internet?

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<sup>61</sup> See <http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/oslo.html>

Kiara [aged 10]: They don't have the slightest idea of what they are doing.

[Participants laugh]

Researcher: Or do you think they know and you learn from them?

Eudora [aged 11]: It depends on whether we're talking about siblings or parents.

Brother. I didn't know how to install Counter Strike. He installed it for me. Father.

Does not know how to turn on the computer.

Jenny [aged 10]: And your grandmother? How about your grandmother?

Eudora [aged 11]: Eh, oh Teresa, pretend that this is a computer [the table top],

and here the keyboard. I say: 'Grandmother press here'. And she: 'Here?'

[Making a thin voice sound] And she pressed on the screen instead of clicking in the keyboard.

[Participants laugh]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: My brother, you know, he is taking a computer course.

Researcher: So, he must know a lot.

Eudora [aged 11]: My sister is working on information systems.

[...]

Research: And you Mary? How is it at your home?

Mary [aged 12]: Everyone knows how to use the computer except for my mother.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Mothers never know how to work with computers. But my mother knows how to handle it. But she begins to click. Rather than clicking once and wait a bit to open. [Imitates her mother with fingers repeatedly hitting on the table top] Then I tell her: 'Oh mother don't you see that it jams and then doesn't work?' And then she: 'I've been here for half an hour now. It does not open.'

[Participants laugh]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: 'Oh mother because you're pressing too hard.' And it has a little button on the computer to remove the mouse. And she was there trying to work [in the computer] and pushed the little button. [Mother says] 'Look. Now the mouse is broken.'

[Participants laugh]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: 'Oh mother, how is it broken? You clicked here, now, now the mouse doesn't move.' And she said, 'Right. Now one notices that. The computer doesn't work.'

Researcher: The computer doesn't work?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: She says it doesn't. [She laughs]

Eudora [aged 11]: It's like my sister's old computer. Once my father was there. I removed the mouse and he said: 'The mouse is broken.'

[Participants laugh]

[...]

Mary [aged 12]: Only my mother doesn't go to [use] the computer.

Researcher: Does everyone else use it [the computer]?

Mary [aged 12]: Yes.

Researcher: And you think they all know more than you? Or you know more than them?

Mary [aged 12]: No. My brother knows more than me.

Researcher: And your father?

Mary [aged 12]: He knows. [Pause, she hesitates] More or less.

Researcher: How is it at your home Jenny?

Jenny [aged 10]: My mother knows how to handle it. My father knows how to handle it.

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: My mother thinks she knows how to use the computer.

[Participants laugh]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: My mother also thinks that.

[Participants laugh]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: That's the problem.

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: My father doesn't know how to turn on the computer.

Researcher: No? He's not interested in it?

Kiara [aged 10]: No. He hardly knows how to turn on the television.

[Participants laugh]

Researcher: And who does that at your home? You?



Kiara [aged 10]: My father has his mobile phone, right? I mean it is not so bad.

[Rating the device] And he asks, 'How do I put sound?'

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: My mother is 48. The thing is she worked in a shop, which is called [name of the store deleted] and she thinks she knows everything because she worked in an electric appliances store. She's always like this. Gets on my nerves.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

This dialogue elucidates how the group reflexively construct their understanding around parents' digital competencies. Kiara opens the discussion and establishes her position immediately by firmly stating that parents "don't have the slightest idea what they are doing". Eudora is more analytical and specifies. According to her, it *depends*, while she adds a new element to the discussion. She compares siblings' and grandmother's digital competences, providing the generational digital divide setting. In turn, Tinker Bell obscures the generational gap assumption, by observing that she learns from her father. According to her, her father *knows* and *teaches* her (e.g. using the Word editing software).

Nevertheless, drawing from the girls' stories, the generational divide gives space to a more generational-gendered divide. The girls' accounts become more descriptive and sometimes sarcastic, regarding mothers' digital competencies. In Kiara and Tinker Bell's words mothers' *think* they know how to use the computer and the internet. Their impersonations amuse the group and suggest a mixture of truth and exaggeration. However, they also allow an access without filter or inhibition to how participants internalize and (re)construct reality. Ultimately, how participants depict parents' digital competence provides a general representation of the digital family hierarchy that echoes in Tinker Bell's words, "My mother doesn't know how to use. My father knows. My brother too. Me too".

The same topic was introduced in all the groups to provoke discussion. The next excerpt captures one more time girls' voices about the topic.

Hera [aged 10]: Hey, I know more than my father and my mother.

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: Oh Teresa, my father knows more than me, he went to internet courses and so on to learn it all. My mother, I know mmmmmuuuuuch [emphasising] more than her. She doesn't realize any of this.

Wendy [aged 10]: The same. [Agreeing with Hera]

Researcher: Is it?

Alice [aged 10]: The same. [Agreeing with Hera]

Researcher: But they use email or... [interrupted]

Hera [aged 10]: She doesn't even know how to put a profile picture on Facebook.

Researcher: No? And you teach her?

Hera [aged 10]: I teach [her]. I teach stuff.

Researcher: And your father, you also need to teach him or he teaches you a few things?

Hera [aged 10]: No. He teaches [me].

Wendy [aged 10]: I can't put photos because I don't have Facebook.

Researcher: Give me an example of things he teaches you.

Ariel [aged 10]: If I don't know someone, I don't accept them (friendship requests).

Hera [aged 10]: Before, when I was little, I didn't know, uh... how it did work to go to games. How's it like. He told me.

Alice [aged 10]: Mine is like hers [Hera father], but my father sometimes doesn't know how to do little things.

[...]

Alice [aged 10]: For instance, my father doesn't know how to put pictures. The profile picture.

Researcher: Facebook?

Alice [aged 10]: Put photos. And my mother doesn't know either.

Researcher: And you teach?

Alice [aged 10]: I teach.

Researcher: ah. And you Esmeralda?

Alice [aged 10]: But first, Ariel teaches me.

Researcher: Ariel teaches you and you teach your parents. Is that it?

Alice [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Good. About your parents, do you think that you know more about the internet than them, or they know more than you?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: I think it's a lie. My sister knows more.

Researcher: Than everyone else?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: Yes.

[...]

Researcher: Ah. And you teach your parents, Esmeralda?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: Not me.

Researcher: Your sister teaches them?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: And she also teaches you?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: Yes. She also teaches me.

Researcher: And she also alerts you for internet risks?

Esmeralda [aged 10]: No, because I don't have Facebook or email. So, nothing gets done<sup>62</sup>.

[...]

Researcher: About your mother, do you think that you know more about the internet than she does, or she knows more than you? [Ariel lives only with her mother. She doesn't talk much about her father.]

Ariel [aged 10]: I know more.

[...]

Researcher: And you Wendy?

Wendy [aged 10]: My father knows more than me, and he even had email. He still has and all that, but my mother doesn't know about it.

Researcher: Doesn't know?

Alice [aged 10]: Mothers are stupid<sup>63</sup>.

[Participants laugh]

Researcher: Do you think that fathers know more? Is that it? Than mothers?

Alice [aged 10]: I think so.

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<sup>62</sup> In Portuguese: "Por isso, não se faz nada."

<sup>63</sup> In Portuguese: "As mães são burrinhas."

Ariel [aged 10]: No. I know more than my father. Maybe.

Alice [aged 10]: It's a complicated situation.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

When compared with the previous dialogue, this passage adds new elements to the discussion. On the one hand, it reinforces how children enhance siblings' digital competence above all the other family members (themselves included). It additionally points out the *social support* they get from the peer group to develop and reinforce their digital competence ("But first Ariel teaches me", Alice, aged 10) allied to the siblings ("My sister knows more", Esmeralda, aged 10) and father figure ("He teaches [me]", Hera, aged 10), but not from the mother ("My mother, I know mmmmuuuuuch [emphasising] more than she.", Hera, aged 10). Once more, mothers' digital competence is devalued and challenged in a harmful fashion by the participants. Regarding digital matters, Alice's words are rather strong: "Mothers are stupid". But later, after validating that fathers are digitally more competent than mothers, she unexpectedly and peremptorily adds, "It's a complicated situation".

The following group includes one boy's perspective and reveals additional examples to illustrate parents digital (in)competence to the children's eyes in the following terms,

Jane [aged 11]: My mother doesn't know how to get out of the [inter]net.<sup>64</sup>

'Mother: x.'

Melinda [aged 11]: My mother doesn't how to go to the calculator.

Roger [aged 12]: My father, when he is on the [inter]net, asks to go to see videos on the YouTube and so he's there like [he imitates his father using the keyboard and the mouse very slowly and mechanically].

Researcher: Do you teach your parents?

Roger [aged 12]: I teach.

Jane [aged 11]: I teach [her], but she forgets.

Roger [aged 12]: That's right<sup>65</sup>.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_280214)

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<sup>64</sup> In Portuguese: "A minha mãe não sabe tirar da net."

<sup>65</sup> In Portuguese: "Pois."

The last discussion highlights relevant information as it includes cues from a culturally situated point of view.

Geppetto [aged 10]: I know [more than my parents].

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I know more. So, my dad went [to school] up to the 4<sup>th</sup> year. My mother just went [to school] up to the 1<sup>st</sup> year. They know nothing.

Geppetto [aged 10]: They failed [at school]. They don't know a thing. I know more than my father.

Researcher: And your mother?

Geppetto [aged 10]: My brother [pause].

Researcher: They don't know much?

Geppetto [aged 10]: Uh?

Researcher: Your brother knows more than you do?

Geppetto [aged 10]: Uh? [He was playing a game on the internet during the interview] Both the same. [Him and his brother]

Researcher: Kitty, how is it at your home?

Kitty [aged 9]: I, I, I. [Shouting]

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Of course it is. [Agreeing with Kitty]

Researcher: And how do you know you know more than your parents about the internet?

Kitty [aged 9]: Because they don't know how to use it.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: So, I have a tablet.

Researcher: Yes.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: And I was playing. And my father asked to let him play. One simple game. Just to [pause] normal [pause] and I let him, a bit. But look, he lost shortly.

Researcher: And you didn't teach him?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: 'Oh father it's like this, then like that, then when you catch the 'Pugas' (an expression used by her), you have to get them to grab the stuff. Ok. Good.' What I taught was a great deal.

Researcher: And you Geppetto? Have you got an example?

Geppetto [aged 10]: The games, stuff in Facebook.

Researcher: They don't know about that, is that it?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: That's right.

Geppetto [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: This is what you think about your parents?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I think so.

Geppetto [aged 10]: My father, he even says it, he doesn't know much.

Researcher: And why don't you teach your parents?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: So, he goes to the computer.

Geppetto [aged 10]: It's my father who doesn't want to.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My father is going to buy a computer to know more.

Researcher: Yes.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My neighbour, me, and my brother-in-law, we will work with him. That's it, and we'll teach him.

Researcher: Yes.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: That's it.

Researcher: Very well, yes sir.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My dad wants to learn.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_180214)

From Pocahontas' and Geppetto's perspectives, parents' lack of digital competence is related with their poor educational accomplishments, an assumption reinforced by Helsper's (2012) argument that links adults' digital exclusion to education and socioeconomic inequalities. To Geppetto, this is the reason why "They don't know a thing". Drawing from Casa-Nova's (2009) research with the Roma communities in Portugal, it is important to highlight that this population has very low levels of education (compared to the overall Portuguese population), with a greater emphasis among women to whom school access is more denied. During the interview, Pocahontas decides that she, a neighbour and her brother-in-law are going to teach her father to work with the computer, echoing the intra-ethnic cohesion and solidarity which is also a characteristic of this ethnic Roma group (Casa-Nova, 2009).

Like the previous groups, these participants seem to corroborate that they are digitally more skilled than their parents. The major focus in fathers' competence in this case may be related with the fact that they belong to a patriarchal community, in which women are a minority in terms of power (Casa-Nova, 2009). Additionally, Geppetto reasons that he and his brother have

the same level of digital knowledge (“Both the same”). It is noteworthy that this statement differs from the previous participants (in the case, girls). In the scope of this research it was not possible to deepen if this is just a coincidence or a gender characteristic, like is suggested by Castro (2011) findings, in which boys tend to be seen as more digitally fluent when compared to girls.

Besides access and use, also inequality based on *digital competence* is portrayed in children’s accounts, who claim to be more skilled to use technologies, in general, and the internet, in particular, when compared to older generations. However, more than a generational gap, through their talks children frame a generational-gender divide, where older generations are portrayed by the children as *digital immigrants* and the mothers are subjected to severe and discriminative descriptions that account for their digital ineptness and lack of knowledge. The children’s lack of empathy disclosed in their talks towards older generations, and mothers in particular, can additionally pose bigger problems in the adult-child relationship where adults (e.g. parents, teachers, caregivers) can be increasingly marginalized, excluded from children’s digital lives and their help or advice considered undervalued in digital matters. It is important to highlight how children can take an active role in inflicting harm, as they become the offenders (the more powerful) and the adults the victims (less powerful) of an imbalanced relationship, based on digital knowledge (Lanier & Henry, 2001) that contrasts with the innocent representation of the child (Tomás & Soares, 2004). To avoid greater social problems, parents need to be supported by positive initiatives that foster generations to work and learn collaboratively in order to balance power differences in terms of technological literacy.

#### **4.2. Controlling parental control**

Parents’ restrictive and monitoring (Dürager & Sonck, 2014) approaches to children’s digital and online activities arise as a twofold response to traditional and universalised conceptions of childhood (James & Jenks, 1996; Wyness, 2012a) and to a culture of mixed messages (James & Jenks, 1996), fear and paranoia (Furedi, 1997) that is expanding through alarmist discourses shaped around risk and its management – “key construct in understanding contemporary social life” (Hoffman, 2010, p. 385). Acting in response to fears magnified by the public discourse and to social expectations of parenting (Furedi, 2001; James & Jenks, 1996), parents understandably activate hyper-protective strategies, without considering the costs and the real risks of their actions (boyd, 2014). Nevertheless, such risk-averse and safety

culture instil in parents the sense of being a good parent (boyd & Hargittai, 2013) and the illusion of control (Piper et al., 2006; Stokes, 2009; Wong, 2010).

To complicate matters, the rapidly changing landscape of online digital technologies and the creative ways in which children actively engage with these communication-based tools (Buckingham, 2000, 2006), pose new challenges that undermine stabilised, but vulnerable, restrictions imposed by adults based in old medias and still attached to a romantic vision of childhood (Clarke, 2010). On the one hand, children's digital movements are becoming increasingly difficult to supervise (Duerager & Livingstone, 2014), as digital consumption can happen in a more private (Haddon, 2013), fluid and 'on the move'<sup>66</sup> fashion. On the other hand, parental strategies are just partly effective, since whenever children feel their online freedom and participatory rights threatened, they tend to exercise their agency (Oswell, 2013) through protective and reactance strategies to *get around* parent control and balance the power differential in the adult-child relationship, as Byrne and Lee's (2011) research upholds. In line with this matrix, the following section, under the key theme 'controlling parental control', draws on participants' narratives to provide the context for understanding the challenges posed by digital online technologies to families in the late modernity, the aspects of ANT enclosed in the clash between protection and participation privileges, and the harmful impact some panoptical strategies may have in parent-child relationships and children's development.

### **'Oh. They don't explain. [They say] 'Because'. 'You're a child''**

Parental mediation is a challenging topic when considering children's digital and online participation and protection. Parents fear for their children "because terrible things do happen" (boyd, 2014, p. 102). The disturbing thought of children having harmful experiences, as a result of their digital activities, may be a sufficient reason to activate parents' (over)protective and legitimate responses. To complicate matters further, with the massification and dissemination of broadband and increasingly mobile access, children "may now meet anyone and go anywhere online" (Livingstone & O'Neill, 2014).

In participants' own words, parents preconceptions about the internet interfere in their online participation rights and freedom because, according to them, parental concerns are intimately related and are reflected in media coverage, which confirms the effective power media has in

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<sup>66</sup> By the use of 'on the move' one refers to the fact that children not only are using more handheld devices, but they also going online from different access points – home, school, library, activity centre, friends' devices.



the construction of social problems and anxieties in risk society (Beck, 1992), as discussed by Anderson (2006), and resonated in Jenny and Kiara's critical accounts.

Excerpt A:

Jenny [aged 10]: When they [parents] see those news [...] when it is something about the internet, they tell me to be careful to whom I speak on the internet.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

Excerpt B:

Kiara [aged 10]: [...] my mother every day [...] bothers me about all the internet dangers [with a theatrical suffering voice] to make things worse, she reads on computer about Facebook.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214).

When asked to detail which concerns were more often reported by the parents, the participants disclosed the following, contacts with strangers (Mary, Tinker Bell, Kitty, Geppetto, Roger, Kiara, Maggie), access to pornography (Ariel, Jane, Roger, Geppetto), watching violence (Esmeralda), computer viruses (Giselle), playing games (Roger; Jane), computer addiction (Kitty), and Facebook (Pocahontas) (see Table 6). The data suggest that, in general, parental concerns echo the narrow and probabilistic scope of risk (Green, 2009) and remain stable when compared with results obtained by Ponte and colleagues (2008), which analogously place contact with strangers and pornography at the top of Portuguese parents' concerns.

In order to assess whether the concerns of parents and children coincide, in another session children were requested to write in a piece of paper what truly worries them within the digital landscape. They reported being concerned about: being cyber-bullied (Alana, Flora, Jessica, Ariel, Melinda, Rapunzel), strangers accessing their personal information (Alana, Alice, Giselle, Rapunzel), being tracked by localization software (Giselle, Kiara, Jenny), someone guessing their password (Wendy, Tinker Bell, Jane), being victims of webcam hacking (Tinker Bell, Grace), being contacted by strangers (Maggie, Melinda), anonymous voice calls (Alana, Wendy), finding pornography (Grace, Jane), abduction (Penny), identity theft (Hera), online impersonation (Kiara), and being blackmailed over a photo (Jane) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Parents and children digital concerns

Parents concerns reported by the participants	Participants concerns
Contacts with strangers Access to pornography Watching violence Computer viruses Playing games Computer addiction Facebook	Being cyber bullied Strangers accessing their personal information Being tracked by localization software Someone guessing their password Being victim of webcam hacking Contacted by strangers Anonymous voice calls Finding pornography Abduction Identity theft Online impersonation Being blackmailed over a photo

It is interesting to note how parents (through participants' perspective) and children's concerns echo the contemporary construction of childhood as synonym of innocence, vulnerability and in need of protection (Harden, 2000). Nevertheless, the participants' narratives, in the course of the meetings, seem to be more consistent with Prout's (2005) and James and Jenk's (1996) claims that the contemporary and westernized notion of childhood no longer seems to apply. The analysis of the data further demonstrate that participants' answers differ from EU Kids Online findings (which put pornographic and violent contents as children's main online concerns, see Livingstone et al., 2013), and moreover, diverge from what they claim to be parents' anxieties. While parents' online concerns seem to be influenced by public discourse and reflect the lack of digital and online experience, as boyd and Hargittai (2013) highlight in their research and this study confirms; instead, children's concerns are more wide-ranging, detailed and complex mirroring how fluidly they move between different activities in their daily-mediated lives, as is portrayed in the narratives of the participants.

Finally, evidence suggests a gap between adults' and children's perceptions in terms of expectations and digital knowledge, which may offer a bigger divide when/if conducive to inadequate and harmful responses on the part of the parents, where safety as control (Boudia & Jas, 2007) undermines children's lives (Stokes, 2009) and childhood (Gill, 2007) and promotes the idea of society as dangerous place (Best & Bogle, 2014).

For instance, Pocahontas is ten years old. As almost every child of her age, her daily activities are intertwined with the use of the internet. For the first time she has a Gmail account that she uses on a daily basis to contact people she knows through the synchronous and asynchronous messaging features. But, still, what she really desires the most is to have a social networking profile on Facebook.

As she enlightens in the conversation below, Gmail enables her to talk to people and, in this sense, is similar to the Facebook, but most of the time “there’s no one there” (GM\_ET\_PG3\_210114) and this discovery makes her realize the differences between the two platforms in terms of technological affordances. Pocahontas does not have a SNS profile because her parents do not allow her. Despite being a recurrent theme in the meetings, in one particular session, when asked about parents’ internet rules, Pocahontas talks critically and reflexively about being forbidden to have a Facebook profile. The long but revealing dialogue develops in three distinct moments.

In the first moment Pocahontas shares her frustration and resentment regarding her parents’ ban, which, in her reasoning, is not understandable considering that a 6-year-old boy – and ultimately “many people” – is (are) allowed to have a Facebook, whilst she is not. Her talk reveals the dynamics of conflict and control arising in the context of family relationships, in which the autonomy of the child clashes with parents’ authority, as suggested by Cardoso et al. (2008).

When she is challenged with an inquiry that in some way follows her parents’ lead, she demonstrates dissatisfaction and disinterest in continuing the conversation. In this excerpt also a sense of feeling excluded is implied in her arguments. She puts an end to the first moment of the dialogue with an expressive choice of words: “Forget it”, denouncing how, once again, she feels misunderstood by an adult. She uses her agency to fight the power differential by putting an end to the conversation.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My rules are, I don’t have Facebook, because I’m a child.

That’s it.

Researcher: You can only have Gmail, is that it?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: That’s right.

[...]

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Oh teacher, why can’t we have Facebook?

Researcher: Huh?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Why don't we have Facebook?

Researcher: But didn't you tell me that your parents do not allow you?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes. But why?

[...]

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Oh teacher, teacher. Look, a 6 year old boy. 6, 6, 6. Has Facebook. And a 10-year-old girl hasn't. I've never seen such a thing. I swear.

Researcher: But why is so important for you to be on Facebook?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: So I could talk to everyone.

Researcher: Everyone?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: That's right. Look, for example, with Kitty, [girl name].

Researcher: With everyone you know, then. Maybe your parents think you're too young to be on Facebook.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Ouch. For God's sake. Nothing. Forget it.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_180214)

In the second moment the need arose to engage with her and empathise with her situation. The conversation gets more intense and another hurdle is pointed as a reinforcement of parents' position, the fact that her brother plays the role of gatekeeper (siblings acting as gatekeepers is also referred by Mary and Kitty during the meetings).

Researcher: Because maybe they are afraid that you accept friend requests from people you don't know.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Ouch. Do you think so? [Acting surprised]

Researcher: I don't know. Have you ever asked them why they don't let you have a Facebook account?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No.

Researcher: So why don't you ask them?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I don't know. Oh. They don't explain. [They say] 'Because'. 'You're a child'. This and that, and whatever<sup>67</sup>. That's it<sup>68</sup>. Answer given. It's answered<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> In Portuguese: "E não sei quê, não sei que mais."

<sup>68</sup> In Portuguese: "Pronto, já está."

<sup>69</sup> In Portuguese: "Resposta dada. Está respondido"

Researcher: Do they have Facebook accounts?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No. They know nothing about Facebook, or any of these things.

Researcher: Have you already tried to show Facebook to them? Maybe they'll give you another answer. I don't know.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: No. I don't know. Don't know.

Researcher: Are other members in your family on Facebook?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Who?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My brother.

Researcher: Your brother.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Many people.

Researcher: What does your brother say about this?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: He says no.

Researcher: He also says you're too young?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: That's right.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_180214)

The third moment begins when new information is included in the conversation, the Facebook minimum age policy, of which Pocahontas and Kitty are unaware. When this piece of information is disclosed, Pocahontas smoothly begins to look at the problem from another angle and it is thought-provoking to observe how she begins to change her arguments and how the age policy explanation, made her acquire a more empathetic attitude towards her parents' restrictive measures.

When talking to children involves parent-child dynamics, this can pose a tricky situation, because it is not the goal of the researcher to create familial conflicts, judge parents' decisions or manipulate the participants. But, as a result of the time spent on the field, one cannot avoid doing rapport or ignoring when children open up, trust their concerns and invite to engage in the same level of openness and commitment they do.

Researcher: You know that you can only be on Facebook if you're 13, right?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Is that right?<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In Portuguese: "É?"

Researcher: That's right.

[...]

Kitty [aged 9]: 13?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Kitty [aged 9]: But, I have. I have. But I'm not 13.

Researcher: Because you lied to have a Facebook account.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Is that right?<sup>71</sup>

Researcher: Sure.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Oh yeah. If he was my son, I wouldn't let him.

Researcher: You also wouldn't let him? Ah. Then, explain it to me.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: [She laughs] No [pause] I would [pause] let [him] [pause] now [pause] that he is 10 [years old].

Researcher: You would let him [have Facebook] with 10 [years old]?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: And you would not let him with what age?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: With [pause] Wait a minute [pause].

Researcher: And what is the difference?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: But [pause]. No [pause] I would let if he was 11 years. 12, then. But not with 10.

Researcher: And why is that?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I'm almost 11.

Researcher: But why wouldn't you let him, if he was 10?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Because I would be afraid.

Researcher: Right. You see, that's the answer you would want to hear from your parents.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Is that right?

Researcher: Yes. Your parents are afraid that something bad happens to you because of Facebook.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Is that right?

Researcher: Sure.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: Ahhh [emphasising].

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<sup>71</sup> In Portuguese: "Ai é?"

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_180214)

In the next transcript Tinker Bell and Mary reveal their negotiation strategies with parents, and sometimes siblings, illustrating how children's agency within the family dynamics and that adults are not totally in charge and they have a say about their online participation, and that children are not mere passive recipients but active constructors of their autobiographies (Bond, 2014; Oswell, 2013). Their talks, contrasting with the previous one, illustrate the differences between the girls in terms of agency/passivity (Bond, 2014) and the more open and democratic character of post-industrial families as claimed by Prout (2005) and Oswell (2013).

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I pressured<sup>72</sup> my parents so they let me have a Facebook, account and their condition was that I couldn't accept people I don't know [as friends].

Researcher: And you Mary?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Of course sometimes I receive requests sent by people from the school and I accept them. But I see [who they are] and so.

Mary [aged 12]: I promised my brother I wouldn't accept strangers' requests.

Researcher: Your brother? He's the one who supervises what you do?

Mary [aged 12]: Yes.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114)

The previous two dialogues demonstrate how growing industries are seductive and powerful, resonating in a double-edged sword logic (Giddens, 1990), the attractiveness of the world-culture, proclaimed by Lipovetsky and Serroy (2014) and illustrated in Miller's (2011) exposition of the Facebook phenomenon, and, simultaneously, impelling individuals to decide in a context of uncertainty, non-knowledge and insurable outcomes (Beck, 1992, 2000). In other words, technological industries perversely shield themselves behind paternalistic age policies that exempt them from being targeted by critics related to the commodification and corruption of childhood. Nevertheless, the growing popularity of the services they offer seduces and affects children, by moulding their needs and interests (Buckingham, 2009). Without an effective control of the age policy, these industries leave the responsibility of choice in the consumer's hand, in this case, children and parents, freeing themselves from unwanted

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<sup>72</sup> In Portuguese: "Fiz uma fita para".

responsibilities, as the following talk portrays. In the meanwhile, they also have an active role in exacerbating digital exclusion and inequality in provision, as they do not offer compatible services designed for the younger consumer. In this sense, technological industries could benefit from involving parents, children and educational agents in the design and development of suitable and empowering tools that support children's well-being, rights and development, in line what is proposed with the Zemiology approach.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Teresa, my mother didn't let me create a Facebook profile. And I was asking her for nearly a year. Then, a few days before my birthday my mother turned (to me): Have you already chosen your birthday present? And I: To create a Facebook account. And she: No. That is not a birthday gift. You have to choose a birthday gift, one you can give use to. (Replying to her mother): I can give use to Facebook. And she: A birthday gift that is useful. (Replying to her mother): Facebook is useful. (The mother): You can't take it (Facebook) to school or whatever. (Replying to her mother): I can, I can. And then, she didn't let me. Then, I went to my cousin's home. She (the cousin) created my Facebook. I said my mother approved. She created the Facebook and, then, I came to my father: Father, I am on Facebook. He: Oh, don't be funny. And I: I am on Facebook. And I showed him. And he said: Oh, ok.

Researcher: And how did your mother react to that?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: 'Ok.' So much trouble to create it, then I showed, (and she said) 'Ok, be careful.'

Researcher: Be careful with what?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Careful with the [friend] requests I accept.  
(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

### **'And since then, I never accepted [friend requests] of people I don't know'**

As mentioned previously, the anxieties and concerns about children's online participation, exacerbated by the media and the safety industry (Furedi, 1997) and a western social construction of childhood (James & Jenks, 1996; James, 2010), influence parents' responses based on policing and surveillance schemes that resonate with Foucault's concept of governmentality (1979) and, from a zemiological perspective, address harm with more harm (Hope, 2013). European evidence corroborates that Portuguese are amongst the most concerned parents, worrying about potentially harmful contents and contacts, situated in the



risk narrative, that may arise in the intertwining of children's digital interactions (see Francisco & Brites, 2010). Existing literature additionally highlights the tendency among Portuguese parents to mediate through restriction (Duerager & Livingstone, 2014; Simões, 2012; Vandoninck et al., 2013) and with covert or overt monitoring strategies (Mathiesen, 2013). The findings of these studies (referenced above) are also reflected in the data from the research undertaken for this thesis.

To understand contemporary mediation habits within their families, participants were asked if they had shared digital activities in the family. One group talked about the entertaining activities involving family members, in particular, fathers and brothers (no examples with mothers were reported), such as playing games and video chatting.

Kiara [aged 10]: I play 'chickens' with my father, at night.

Researcher: You play 'chickens' with your father?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Is something 'chicken'. 'Space chicken' something.

Researcher: And you Tinker Bell?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: When I was little, I had two identical computers, and forced my father to make a video call to me.

Researcher: Good.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I found it amusing<sup>73</sup>, because it had many faces and so I used them and we made faces to each other. And then, I forced my father to turn on the computer.

Researcher: And you Mary?

Mary [aged 12]: I play with my brother.

Researcher: Your brother?

Mary [aged 12]: Yes.

Researcher: He goes to the computer with you, is that it?

Mary [aged 12]: [She shakes her head affirmatively]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I play monopoly with my father.

Giselle [aged 10]: I play Counter-strike against my brother. In the tablet: 'Who wants to be rich', against my father.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

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<sup>73</sup> In Portuguese: "Achei piada".

Two girls mentioned that 'going to Facebook' (Ariel and Alice, both aged 10) is the activity they share with parents. According to Ariel (aged 10), "when I'm on Facebook my mother is always with me" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_211013). When asked if this was the only activity she shared with her parent, she replied affirmatively. Although she is under-aged, she is allowed to have a Facebook profile under her mother's supervision. Through children's talks it became clear that most activities shared with parents reveals a protectionist experience (James & Jenks, 1996) that conceals surveillance and monitoring purposes.

When asked about whether their parents go through the computer and mobile phone to check their activities, Tinker Bell mentioned that, from time to time, her mother checks her Facebook account. Yet, she is allowed to use it on a daily basis without supervision (GM\_AP\_PG2\_280214).

Jessica also has her own Facebook account, but her mother has a say in the friend requests she accepts.

Jessica [aged 10]: When someone makes a friendship request, my mother sees it [the friend request], to see if she knows [the person]. If she doesn't know, she removes the friendship [...] and if I know I say, 'Oh I know.' And she goes, 'I have to know.' And I [say]: 'Ok'.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_111113)

As suggested in the previous section, some parents allowed their child to use the adult's Facebook account. The findings suggest that parents take that initiative so they can supervise and limit what personal information is disclosed on the part of the child.

Researcher: Your Facebook is your mother's too?

Kiara [aged 10]: Yes, but my mother never goes there.

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: Because she doesn't want me to have my name on Facebook.

And doesn't want me to put photos [of me] or anything.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_140114)

With the invasion of online digital technologies in children's quotidian reality, the idea of home as a token of safety and security (Giddens et al., 1995) became debatable as boundaries imposed by adults to control and limit children's participation became blurred (Bond, 2010).

Alice's story, presented below, illustrates how her father took action when faced with the eminence of a frightening potential risk arising from a stranger male contact, one of the top concerns of Portuguese parents and a key concept in children's personal safety education (Pain, 2006; Stokes, 2009). Alice's father protective behaviour is doubly harmful, on the one hand, reveals a lack of trust in the child and her competency in making wise decisions, and on the other hand he embodies a lack of trust in human bonds as highlighted by Bauman (2006). The way he handles the event, moreover resonates a pessimistic attitude imbued by the risk society bringing harm to the adult-children relationship favouring suspicion, vulnerability and individualization as claimed by Beck (1992).

Researcher: And they [parents] give you advice about the internet?

[...]

Alice [aged 10]: Yes, my father gives me some.

Researcher: What does your father tell you, Alice?

Alice [aged 10]: He tells me [undifferentiated noise]

Researcher: What?

Alice [aged 10]: That sometimes. Imagine. I had a [pause] Someone sent me a friendship request.

Researcher: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: And I accepted it, but I didn't know this person and then, one day, when I was on Facebook, the person was always sending messages.

Researcher: Messages?

Alice [aged 10]: No. The [pause].

Researcher: Chat?

Alice [aged 10]: No.

Researcher: What then?

Alice [aged 10]: When we answer [pause]. The camera.

Researcher: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: I did not answer, but he [father] just said: 'Answer'. But I didn't answer. Then my dad said: 'Alice I'm going to ground you'. Uhhh And I went there and he [father] saw what I was doing. And [undifferentiated noise] and told me to delete it, but then [pause].

Researcher: Yes. It was a boy or a girl?

Alice [aged 10]: A boy. But then, 'Alice you're grounded, you shouldn't have accepted<sup>74</sup> friend requests from people you don't know.

Researcher: Hum.

Alice [aged 10]: And since then, I never accepted [friend requests] of people I don't know.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

Alice's father's reaction, illustrated above, reproduces the lack of trust in the *other*, as representing the evil, upheld in Kaspersson's (2014) argument, which is presumably exacerbated by the fact that the stranger is, furthermore, an male adult. Nevertheless Tynes (2007) findings suggest that most of sexual online solicitations come from people that children know (e.g. peers, family, family friends).

Alice's narrative is central to understand how the father makes his decisions guided by a potential risk instead of an actual harm, confirming Giddens' (2002) *precautionary principle*. Although the educational capital portrayed in this event can be either, understandable if one considers the fear principle that guides the father's action, it is also debatable in the impact that the lesson learned may have in Alice's assessment of people and opportunities/risks. This is also symptomatic of the distorted and obscure messages that characterize the social imaginary of the internet that, in line with a Zemiology approach, is the rhizome for other social problems to emerge that affect children's rights, relationships and liberties, such as surveillance strategies, a lack of trust in parents, dissemination of rumours, construction and replication of stereotypes, anti-social behaviours, and are discussed in this and the next section.

Nevertheless, at least in the short term, as a result of her father's restrictive strategy, Alice asserts that since that episode, she does not accept friend requests from strangers, confirming Livingstone and Helsper's (2008) argument that restricting may keep teenagers safer but that it also has a cost in terms of reducing opportunities. This and other narratives depicted in this section illustrate how parents' escort measures are arguably contaminated and guided by the narrow and increasingly intoxicating and negative narrative of the risk society and safety industry, analysed by Beck (1992) and Furedi (2001). From a Zemiology perspective, these

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<sup>74</sup> In Portuguese: "não tinhas nada que".

behaviours only perpetuate more surveillance and control (Gill, 2007) that create more social problems (Stokes, 2009).

**'I'm friends' with them [parents]. But I sometimes don't post things because of them'**

"A new boy arrived at T3tris. He is more proficient than the others in using the computer. [...] When his mother arrived she told me that she knew he wasn't studying, because his father noticed he was online. He said: '[name of the boy] is already on the internet'. I found this episode very revealing as it demonstrates how the boy's parents seem to take advantage of Facebook for their own benefit. Facebook is on one hand a source of problems for parents, but in this case is used as a tool to control the child."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_031213)

This observation registered in the field report highlights how parents seem to have developed a paradoxical relationship with the Facebook. The Facebook is a sort of 'plague' as resonated through the disciplinary processes discussed by Foucault (1979) and a source of concerns that parents feel the need to control. However, instead of preventing children contact with Facebook, some parents take advantage of the SNS architecture functioning as a peripheric environment that enables a panoptical surveillance based in a "permanent visibility [...] [that] assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1979, p. 201), as the following two conversations reinforce.

Excerpt A:

Ariel [aged 10]: Once, on a Sunday, I sometimes go to the computer. I am on the [inter]net, and my mother is on the [inter]net on my tablet. [She] goes to the coffee shop where she works, so she sees I'm on Facebook. She doesn't let me go [alone]. Only when she is with me. [...] And then she starts saying, 'Oh you wanted to stay at home so you can go to the [inter]net.'

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_251113)

Excerpt B:

Grace [aged 12]: I'm friends' with them [parents]. But I sometimes don't post things because of them. But I'm friends' with them on Facebook. And you know why? My mother is so annoying.

Rapunzel [aged 11]: My father is like... [interrupted]

Grace [aged 12]: Pretend Rosa sends me a friend request and I accept. She is already my friend. And on Facebook it shows that Grace and Rosa are now friends. And my mother [says]: 'You've accepted? Do you know [the person]?' And I say: 'Oh mother, yes [pause] I know'. And she goes: 'But I don't, but do you know the person?' Look, she really is annoying. With the mobile phone it's the same. A friend called me. She's not quite a friend. She called me and I didn't answer. She [mother] goes like this: 'Answer the phone call.' [I say] 'I don't feel like it.' [Mother says] 'Go answer the phone to see who it is.' And I go like this: 'I don't want to.' And she goes to my phone. And she sees [who called]: 'Oh, who is this?' And I say: 'Put the phone down.' Because my mother always wants to know everything.

Rapunzel [aged 11]: I would accept, and already accepted. Only that my father is annoying... [interrupted]

Grace [aged 12]: Because people are more comfortable without parents snooping.

Rapunzel [aged 11]: My father is at work. He is logged on Facebook. My father is on Facebook while he works. And I sent him: 'You're not working? Are you on Face[book]?' And he [says]: 'No. I'm eating. And you, shouldn't you be studying?' And that annoys me, because I'm on the computer a bit and he starts bugging me right away.

The second transcript is a clear example that illustrates the complicated network or interdependent human and technical entities, explained by ANT theory, and the tensions that may arise when parents' monitoring strategies challenge children to use their agency to protect their own freedom and online participation. Through her testimonial, Grace shares a very critical understanding of her mother's behaviour and describes, from her own experience, how she manages to balance the power differential arising from the parent-child relationship so she can preserve a certain level of control in the situation (as observed by Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic',

2000). The analysis of her account resonates the western symptom of individualization, claimed by Beck (1992), the *reflexivity* discussed by Giddens (1990), and the need to stay in control of the situation argued by boyd (2014). The sum of all aspects is significant to understand how Grace examines everyday practices, alters and reforms her decisions to avoid conflicts with her parents and because of the panoptical effect (Foucault, 1979) of Facebook ('I sometimes don't post things because of them'); how she scrutinizes what she may or may not publish online based not in an invisible audience (boyd, 2014), but motivated by the certainty of the parents snooping in; and how she resists mother's control by not answering the voice call, denoting the lack of trust, a corollary of late modern society, as a result of how she expects her parents' reaction to be.

### **'And now he sees the things we do, me and my sister'**

To understand children's intertwined relationship with online digital technologies implies the recognition that children have an active role in the way they perceive, experience and respond to parents' mediation practices. Despite parents' choice for a more overt or covert approach, empirical findings demonstrate that children are knowledgeable of *when* and *how* their parents are monitoring them. However, when parents' efforts to protect children go through restricting their online freedom, participation and self-expression rights, children actively engage in counter-measures to escape to such control, confirming Byrne and Lee (2011) and Mathiesen (2013) findings.

Parents controlling habits tend to limit children's online freedom by inflicting restrictions to their rights of privacy, self-expression and association. As the lack of trust undermines the relationship between parents and children, evidence insinuates that children may be impelled to migrate between digital spaces like a (digital) nomad to escape adults' supervision and the self-contained world shaped by parents' concerns (boyd & Hargittai, 2013) in order to construct their own life biographies and social development.

Researcher: You have the computer in the living room?

Morgana [aged 10]: [Nods her head in agreement]

Researcher: And when you go to the internet, you usually go alone or...

[interrupted]

Morgana [aged 10]: I go alone.

Researcher: Your parents never go with you to the internet?

Morgana [aged 10]: [Nods her head in disagreement]

Researcher: Would you like them to?

Morgana [aged 10]: Since my father created Facebook, on Sundays, now, he always stands by my side.

Researcher: You already have a Facebook account?

Morgana [aged 10]: I have had it for a long time now.

Researcher: And your father is always by your side when you're on Facebook?

Morgana [aged 10]: My father created [a profile]. Since my father created his Facebook [pause].

Researcher: Ah.

Morgana [aged 10]: And now he sees the things we do. Me and my sister.

Giselle [aged 10]: He, he. I wouldn't accept him as friend.

Mary [aged 12]: Me neither.

Morgana [aged 10]: I don't do anything interesting there. I only play games.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

The picture that emerges from Morgana's account is far from simplistic and her talk may be more revealing than it appears at first sight. What is clear from the conversation is that the monitoring strategies adopted in her household are identifiable. The supervision role appears to be dependent on her father and the monitoring strategies used include having the computer in a common place of the house, the living room (Morgana does not have handheld devices with internet connection). Morgana does not have shared digital activities with her father, but she states that he created a Facebook profile and sits by her side to see "the things we do. Me and my sister".

When she shares this information with the group, her situation gains social significance. Giselle and Mary show empathy with Morgana's situation and they talk about how they would respond/resist to that intrusion in their privacy, by claiming their agency and right to decide not to be Facebook friends with their parents. Morgana's final observation is, however, challenging, "I don't do anything interesting there. I only play games". "There" is the important word as it suggests that like Grace (in the previous dialogue), she actively and reflexively manages her online *self* so she can avoid problems with her parent; and that like other participants, she uses strategies to "make their lives more opaque to parental scrutiny" (see Garcia-Montes, 2006, p. 69), indicating that she and other children can be truly expressing



their selves in a “more independent and private fashion” (Garcia-Montes, 2006, p. 69), and making use of their digital freedom and control in a more hidden manner elsewhere, as the following example ascertains.

During the research sessions, as a consequence of having a group of children in the same space, parallel conversations among participants occurred. In one of the transcribing moments, a muffled conversation involving Morgana draws the researcher’s attention.

Morgana [aged 10]: Because she posted a picture there [Undifferentiated noise] and she began telling him: ‘Let me alone’ and he didn’t leave her alone and then she [Undifferentiated noise] when he began sending her other photos. And then my sister said: ‘Paedophile’ and he PUM [mimicking the noise] turned off the computer.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

This extract is particularly noteworthy as it confirms that the children were actively and autonomously managing their online lives and facing potential/real threats illustrating that it is difficult for parents to supervise their activities on a 24/7 basis. Parents seem to focus their attention on the Facebook, but children are migrating between more problematic platforms besides Facebook, including the ones Morgana mentioned using, including Habbo Hotel and Ask.fm. However, the fact that children feel they are in control most of the time or that they are more digitally wise than their parents, as explored in the previous section, makes room for an unprecedented vulnerability that will be further explored in the next section.

### **‘When you come to see my Facebook it’s cleaning day’**

Reactance strategies to mitigate power differential within a parent-child relationships and to circumvent parents’ control, were reported by the participants. Only one girl declared deleting the internet browser history (Mary). Some shared information about using codes in their text messages when talking about boys and intimacy (Tinker Bell, Kiara), using password in their handheld devices to avoid parents’ from snooping in (Ariel, Alice, Tinker Bell, Kiara, Pocahontas, Roger, Melinda), and deleting compromising text messages (Wendy, Ariel, Alice, Esmeralda, Hera). Children shared other resourceful schemes that they engineer and employ to circumvent parents’ strategies, including deceiving and taking advantage of parents’ lower digital competence, deleting chat messages on the Facebook, and controlling parents’ control strategies. The following excerpts depict the child as a self-determining agent (Wyness, 2012a),

engaged in the construction of their own biography and life decisions (Prout & James, 2005) and also reveal a facet of childhood that challenges perceptions of passivity and dependency as established western hallmarks.

Excerpt A:

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: My mother. It happened to me. I was with my mobile phone and [then] left it at home with my mother. And we [she and Kiara] were talking [by text messages] something about money we spent on gum that I paid for and something about she giving me something back. Then, my mother picked up my mobile phone [she simulates with her mobile] and saw all the text messages between me and Kiara in my mobile phone, and she [said]: 'Look, what are you guys talking about spending ten euros on gum?' And it was not ten euros. Kiara was telling me that she put ten euros in her phone balance<sup>75</sup> and she had almost no money for gum. And I [asked]: 'How do you know that, mother?' And she [replied]: 'Nothing.' And I [said]: 'Oh mother why are my messages opened?' And she [said]: 'Because I read your messages.' And she saw all the messages. Only I had some bad words and so, but I used abbreviations. My mother sort of understood some of them.

Researcher: Like what?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Shi[t]...<sup>76</sup> that's it. [Mother said] 'Look, and you guys are talking I don't know about what'. And she was a little upset. [In her defence Tinker Bell says]: 'Oh mother all these messages weren't sent by me. They are all from Kiara. She sent them to me.'

[The two girls laugh]

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_280214)

Excerpt B:

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Every two months my mother checks my Facebook.

Researcher: Why every two months?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: More or less.

Researcher: And has she discovered anything?

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<sup>75</sup> In Portuguese: "tinha carregado 10 euros no cartão".

<sup>76</sup> In Portuguese: "Mer..."

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No [pause]. Before she checks it, I delete the messages.

Researcher: You have already developed a strategy.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No [pause]. I delete those [messages] from Kiara and Giselle.

Researcher: And doesn't she find that weird, the fact you don't have messages exchanged with Kiara and Giselle?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No. I told her: 'Oh mother, from month to month I do a cleaning. And you, by chance, you have bad luck. When you come to see my Facebook, it's cleaning day.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

Excerpt C:

Researcher: Do your parents go through your mobile phones to see your things?

Ariel [aged 10]: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: Yes.

[They get excited and talk at the same time]

Ariel [aged 10]: My mother does it to see my text messages.

Researcher: One at a time. Hera, tell us.

Hera [aged 10]: My father, for example, he pretends that he's going to copy games, of cars and so, but his phone is one with keyboard, the black ones that cost twenty-five euros, you know?

[She means his mobile is old and doesn't support those games]

Researcher: Yes, I know.

Ariel [aged 10]: He can't copy.

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: And when he copies the games instead of copying the games, he reads my messages. The other day he said: 'Who is this from [Boy name]? 'Hello you retarded'<sup>77</sup>. And I: 'Oh, it was him who sent me.' [She laughs] And it was me who sent it.

Researcher: And how do you feel when he goes through you mobile?

Hera [aged 10]: Because he doesn't understand.

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<sup>77</sup> In Portuguese: "Olá deficiente".

Researcher: When your father looks in your mobile?

Hera [aged 10]: I get my heart beating so fast.

Ariel [aged 10]: Me too. [Heart beating so fast]

Hera [aged 10]: Oh Teresa, like when someone calls me.

Ariel [aged 10]: I have messages that she [mother] can't read.

Researcher: And what do you say to him? Are you upset?

Alice [aged 10]: I am.

Hera [aged 10]: My father, oh Teresa, you can't imagine. I was in the living room.

Researcher: Yes.

Hera [aged 10]: Lying on the couch, with the computer on the top of me.

Researcher: Yes.

Hera [aged 10]: And then, my father, unbeknownst to me, was right behind me and I was there writing to people. And he was just right behind me reading stuff. Others' stuff.

Researcher: And you were talking with people where? On Facebook?

Hera [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: And you got anxious?

Hera [aged 10]: No. Because I was not doing anything interesting, I was talking with some kids.

Ariel [aged 10]: Hum hum.

Researcher: And you Alice?

Alice [aged 10]: My father, he loves to play the [undifferentiated noise] something Surf [a game].

Researcher: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: With trains. And he says that he's going to play [using her mobile phone], and puts it [the mobile phone] charging. But he [pause]. He has the habit of playing at night. But he goes to check my text messages. But I never [pause] fall asleep that early. Because I always wait for my mother to come home. And my mother comes at midnight. And we decided to wait for her. And then, my father's playing, and I'm watching TV. I'm distracted, I receive a text messages, and he reads the message I received.

Researcher: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: When I think he's playing and that, I receive a text [message] noise.

Ariel [aged 10]: Like this: Ding du du du.

Researcher: Yes.

Alice [aged 10]: And my father takes the sound off. Then, he reads the message.

Researcher: Ah, he is clever.

Alice [aged 10]: For sure. [She laughs] He reads my messages.

Researcher: And what do you tell him? Do you get upset?

Alice [aged 10]: I do. Yesterday I told him two things. The same thing twice. That I don't like when he does that. I get sad with him. He sometimes reads my text messages and I go there afterwards and they are open.

Ariel [aged 10]: That's right.

Alice [aged 10]: [Father says] 'I'm playing, look, but this is working slowly.' And I [say]: 'Right, it's working slowly.' But then, I go check what he was doing.

Ariel [aged 10]: That's right.

Researcher: Hum.

Alice [aged 10]: And I see the text messages.

Researcher: Ah, right.

Alice [aged 10]: And he doesn't know.

Researcher: He doesn't know you are controlling him?

Alice [aged 10]: Of course. He sees here [shows using the mobile phone]. Oh you were reading my text messages?

Researcher: So, your father controls you and you control you father.

Alice [aged 10]: Of course.

Ariel [aged 10]: Oh Teresa, I always delete what I did that day, every evening. Right here, just to explain to you.

Researcher: And why do you delete it?

Ariel [aged 10]: And clean up everything.

Alice [aged 10]: We delete so we can save battery.

Ariel [aged 10]: But not only. I delete because so I can see the pawns my mother does.

Researcher: Ah.

Ariel [aged 10]: At night. And in the morning I can see.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

### **'I think they should worry if someone bothers us'**

As a provocation, by the end of the group interview, during which children critically shared their own perceptions and experiences about how online digital technologies impact on family dynamics and relationships, they were invited, in a first moment, to share advices and suggestions they would give to their parents.

#### Excerpt A:

Alice [aged 10]: Not to see ridiculous sites. It's only viruses.

Ariel [aged 10]: I would tell my Mum to play less [games] on the computer.

Alice [aged 10]: They are still tiny little children. I wouldn't say anything to my father.

Esmeralda [aged 10]: I don't know.

Hera [aged 10]: Nothing.

Esmeralda [aged 10]: They already know how to behave.

Wendy [aged 10]: I wouldn't give any. It was my father who taught me.

Alice [aged 10]: I would talk to my mum not to spend so much time on the computer.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

#### Excerpt B:

Kiara [aged 10]: I wouldn't give any.

Giselle [aged 10]: Father, don't spend the computer's battery or lose the cable.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

#### Excerpt C:

Roger [aged 12]: Not to click on things and open virus. Not to snoop my mobile phone.

Melinda [aged 11]: Not to snoop my photos or my text messages.

Roger [aged 12]: Yes, that too. The same.

Jane [aged 11]: I don't have messages or photos 'of those', but I wouldn't like she [mother] snooping in.  
(GM\_EL\_PG4\_280114)

The children's accounts reflect heterogeneity in their perspectives. The advices and suggestions the participants would give to their parents vary between "I don't know" to specific advices about viruses or not snooping in their mobile devices.

Finally, and concluding the group interview, children were asked if they agreed whether parents' should monitor their digital experiences. They took the opportunity to comment and articulate some more suggestions they would offer to their parents.

Excerpt A:

Ariel [aged 10]: Yes, yes, yes.

Esmeralda [aged 10]: No sir.

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: Teresa, sometimes.

Some participants in unison: Yes.

Hera [aged 10]: Sometimes.

Alice [aged 10]: Yes, sometimes. Because they are very demanding sometimes.

Researcher: And what do you think Hera?

Hera [aged 10]: Sometimes.

Researcher: Why, sometimes?

Hera [aged 10]: Because sometimes they give pointless advice.

Alice [aged 10]: Yes, like [pause].

Researcher: Like for example?

Hera [aged 10]: For example, don't go on Facebook. Because in a while, like this and like that.<sup>78</sup>

[Girls laugh]

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: To take pictures on Facebook [referring to publish personal photos on Facebook]. This is a law.

Alice [aged 10]: Right.

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<sup>78</sup> In Portuguese: "Senão daqui a um bocado, não sei quê, não sei quê, não sei que mais".

Researcher: And why is that you don't need that kind of advice?

Hera [aged 10]: I know they can steal the identity, only [pause].

Alice [aged 10]: Yes.

Hera [aged 10]: Only I will not trust anyone.

[...]

Alice [aged 10]: I won't either. It's the same

Researcher: And what do you girls think about this?

Ariel [aged 10]: I already said yes.

Wendy [aged 10]: I am not on Facebook.

Alice [aged 10]: My mother does not like me sharing photos, but I say: 'Oh mother, you don't like to share' and she sometimes starts to grumble [...] I told her: 'Oh mother you don't like to share, but I like to share photos of my dog.'

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

#### Excerpt B:

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yes.

Mary [aged 12]: Yes.

Jenny [aged 10]: It depends. If I'm talking to her (Giselle), no.

Kiara [aged 10]: Yes.

Researcher: Why Kiara?

Kiara [aged 10]: Because there may be things that upset us and that we don't have confidence, not quite trust, we fear that our parents do something. But they can find out.

Giselle [aged 10]: No. They don't have anything to do with what I'm doing. If they ask I'll tell them.

Jenny [aged 10]: As long as they are not annoying.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

#### Excerpt C:

Roger [aged 12]: Of course.

Melinda [aged 11]: Yes.

Jane [aged 11]: My mother doesn't care. I don't do anything wrong.



Melinda [aged 11]: I think they should worry if someone bothers us.

Jane [aged 11]: I tell them.

Roger [aged 12]: Yes.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_280114)

Notwithstanding their *getting around* parents' restricting and monitoring strategies, the majority of the participants approve of parental supervision and monitoring of their digital and online activities. Some, however, were more reluctant when answering the question posed. Only two participants replied negatively, without hesitation. The participants' answers provide a diverse picture of the degree to which they are willing to accept parents' tightening the net of control on their digital and online lives (James & James, 2001).

Supporting Duerager and Livingstone's claim, despite how such approaches may be limiting children from exploring digital opportunities in more depth, it is important to support the positive reception of the children to their parents' involvement, as the digital and online environment "becomes more complex and more embedded in everyday life" (2014, p. 4). In order to take advantage of children's willingness to include adults as part of their digital lives and allowing them to monitor their online activities, as long as they do not feel their autonomy constrained, a zemiological approach would enable engagement of both children and adults in an open dialogue to seek dynamic and positive solutions that fit into everyday real problems, putting aside pessimistic and over-protective actions that inhibit children's agency, rights and opportunities in harmful ways.

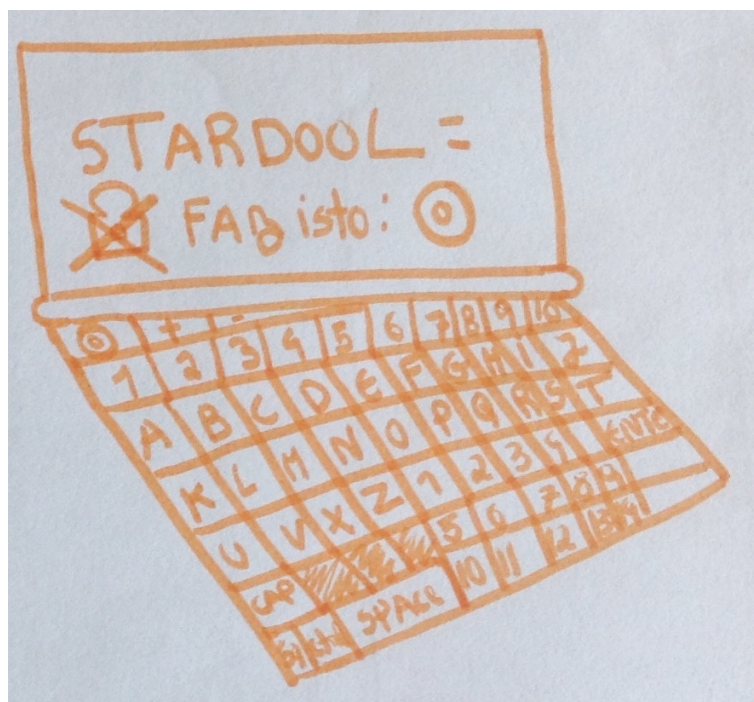
### **'Because I'm addicted'**

As a consequence of the double-edged sword of modernity (Bond, 2014), it is not only parents but also children who experience contradictory feelings regarding the interrelatedness of online digital technologies in their daily lives, as they simultaneously provide security/insecurity and reassurance/anxiety. Returning to the topic that opened this section – the gap found between parents and children's concerns about the internet, the following narratives portray real situations that concern children in their everyday lives and how they reflexively (see Giddens, 1990) relate social processes, actions and structures to technology (MacKay & Gillespie, 1992) and cope with ambivalent feelings.

During a group session, paper and markers were offered to children so they could express themselves in a pictorial manner about the internet. The next extract reproduces a dialogue

held between Jenny and Tinker Bell about a drawing one of the girls made about Stardoll.

Figure 6. Drawing made by Tinker Bell, aged 11



Jenny [aged 10]: What is this? Stardoll, equal to 'does this'? I don't understand.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Stardoll is equal to [pause]. Is not a closed padlock, is an open padlock. So it's not closed [pause] and it disconnects, because Stardoll is dangerous.

Jenny [aged 10]: No. Stardoll is not dangerous. You have to be careful, though.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's a little [dangerous] [pause]. But it's cool for annoying [pause]. But it's so cool to annoy people.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

During the meetings this group revealed some concerns about Stardoll accounts and suspicions that someone could be using them, as sometimes they appeared online, when they were offline, detected changes in purchased items, and sometimes money (Stardollars) disappeared from their accounts without explanation.

Jenny [aged 10]: I sometimes on Stardoll, on the computer, and there is a person online [in her account]. But this is not happening now<sup>79</sup>. But sometimes there is a person online. And I sent a message, isn't that right Giselle? To see if she would answer and she didn't answer.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

Despite the concerns, when faced with the hypothesis of reporting and creating a new account Tinker Bell's response was to do nothing, because it would imply losing benefits conquered as her talk below illustrates. Given that the games have a significant weight and impact on their online activities and allow children to contact with other people, Tinker Bell's answer gives rise to a new question that needs further research that is, how would she decide if a more serious threat was presented to her.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't want to make another doll, because my doll is already at level 30 and something. And it takes a lot to pass levels.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214)

The games are also a source of concern for Geppetto. Yet, he presents a different angle to analyse the problem. In his perspective the games, in particular the Grand Theft Auto V (GTA-V), which can have a bad influence on people, instilling them to do bad things, like stealing. For that motive, he feels games should be banned from the internet. The game Geppetto mentions in his account is the GTA-V, with a Pan European Game Information (PEGI) rating of 18+, an action-adventure multiplayer game where players accomplish criminal missions that involve shooting and driving.

Geppetto [aged 10]: The games shouldn't exist. They shouldn't exist.

Researcher: But you like them.

Geppetto [aged 10]: Ah, I like them? But not those games. The GTA-V. Do you know why?

Researcher: No.

Geppetto [aged 10]: I have it. But it's something that many, many people do. They pretend they are GTA-V.

Researcher: What is the GTA-V?

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<sup>79</sup> In Portuguese: "mas agora já não tem estado"

Geppetto [aged 10]: It's a game about stealing cars, stealing cars. Uh.

Researcher: Oh. And you think that people who have the game can do that, is that it?

Geppetto [aged 10]: They do.

Researcher: They do? Do you know some situation?

Geppetto [aged 10]: It appeared in the newspaper. And I used to go to that school.

Researcher: Ah.

Geppetto [aged 10]: A boy took two knives. Stole a car, went with the car in the school, ran over people, and killed them all.

Researcher: Where was that?

Geppetto [aged 10]: It was [pause]. I saw it on Facebook. And then I also saw it on the news. A policeman came behind him. He took the knife and put it in the policeman's head.

[...]

Researcher: And you think that such things should disappear from the internet?

Geppetto [aged 10]: That's right.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214)

The time spent online, in particular on Facebook is a topic that worries Tinker Bell. The following episode illustrates how Tinker Bell reasons about her conflicting feelings around her *addiction* to Facebook.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Oh Teresa, I'm going to do an experiment. I've made a promise to myself that [pause] I don't know if I will endure it. I will turn off Facebook for a week.

Researcher: Yes?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Damn it. Because I'm addicted.

Researcher: Don't go there.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No, but I want to inactivate it, because otherwise there's always that temptation. And because otherwise, we're all addicted to Facebook. I cannot stay without going there even for one day.

Researcher: You cannot stay without going there even for one day?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Oh, two for example.

Researcher: I sometimes feel relief when I unplug.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't. I get sick of the computer for half an hour. And then I go to the living room and then: 'What did I come here to do?' [Telling to herself] and then I go again to the computer and feel happy again.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

The last examples are drawn from concerns children shared about (in)security enhanced by the technologies they use on a daily basis and corroborate the dark side of technological progress which according to Beck (1992; 2002) is the cornerstone of the risk society. The evidence proves children are aware of the risks that may arise from vulnerabilities enclosed in the architecture of technology and how they take action to protect themselves from unforeseen situations and uphold the control over their safety online in line with the process of present-awareness in which individuals take charge of their self-trajectories in late modernity (Giddens, 1991).

Excerpt A:

Jenny [aged 10]: I downloaded an application on which I can save here the email password, Facebook password. I have only one password to enter [in the application].

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: And if someone steels your 'thing' [iPod]?

Jenny [aged 10]: I have an application that saves the email password, email and all that. I only have a password to enter [she repeats].

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Have you thought about it, it's an application. What if someone has access to it? [Someone] May have.

Jenny [aged 10]: Hum. Leave. Leave. Leave.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Don't delete. [She laughs].

Jenny [aged 10]: Already deleted.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_210114)

Excerpt B:

Jenny [aged 10]: In Viber<sup>80</sup>, one time I had the location on. It was yesterday. I was watching the recorded videos. Then, I clicked on something that was there and saw the street where she was. It was right, the zip code and all.

Giselle [aged 10]: Hey, I was talking to [Boy name] with the location on.

Jenny [aged 10]: And you can. He's no criminal, girl.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Ah. Now you know how to turn the location off?

Giselle [aged 10]: That's right.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I was about to tell my friend the other day. She is always talking with people, and she often speaks with people she doesn't know. She likes to know them. They are from the school but she doesn't know them. And she likes to know them, only that she is always connected with the location on.

[...]

Researcher: What do you tell her?

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't give her any advise. The only thing I tell her is that she can talk. It's all right. But at least to turn the location off. [...] I've tried to help her in a lot of things but she got pissed with a friend and called her false. From that moment on I never worried about her again.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114)

#### Excerpt C:

Grace [aged 12]: Oh teacher, I can't explain. Can I tell you? Look, the other day I saw it on the soap opera that the girl was on the computer, right? So she was in front of the computer and he could see her without her knowing.

Jane [aged 11]: Do you know what is that? There's a website now for that.

Grace [aged 12]: Really. What can I do?

[...]

Rapunzel [aged 11]: That's why I cover my camera.

[...]

Maggie [aged 12]: I always cover it. I always cover it.

Rapunzel [aged 11]: Mine turned one by itself [the camera].

---

<sup>80</sup> Viber is an instant messaging and voice over IP application for smartphone.

Melinda [aged 11]: Who does that? Boys?

Rapunzel [aged 11]: I don't know. My camera at night in the room turned one by itself.

Maggie [aged 12]: I use a rag to cover it. No one can see.

Rapunzel [aged 11]: I use my cap.

[...]

Maggie [aged 12]: One time that [camera] was twinkling. And a boy asked: 'Go online on Facebook, let's talk' [pause].

Researcher: Webcam?

Maggie [aged 12]: And I [said]: 'No.' And I covered it. It was a guy that I didn't know and blocked [him]. And I start to cover it always.

(GM\_EL\_PG3\_070214)

The accounts reproduced in this section illustrate how the desire to keep children safe online sometimes results in good intentions education and restricting solutions that, in line with a Zemiology viewpoint, compromise children's protection, autonomy and opportunities, weakening children's rights to participation, as well as parent-children relationships in potentially harmful ways. Parents (and adults involved in the care and education of children) tend to exercise their power under paternalistic discourses and the child's best interests, justifying panoptical strategies, such as monitoring and controlling, as a response to late modernity conceptions of child and childhood (Bond, 2010) and to a society perceived as an hostile and dangerous place (Best & Bogle, 2014; Furedi, 2001; Roche, 1999). Parents' concerns and responses to potential threats are built from stabilized notions of risk that no longer fit children's anxieties, enclosed in the portable possibilities of their digital worlds and, ultimately in the digital citizenship context. In line with this, while parents are concerned with protecting children from potential harms, children's narratives depict their concern in protecting themselves from adults control and surveillance that result in an ambiguous relationship they develop with online digital technologies (discussed further in the next section). The selected transcripts also imply that more social problems may arise from the mismatch between the needs and expectations of adults and children driving both groups apart. In order to avoid the potential colonisation of children's digital lives, adults involved in the care and education of the child need to make vital decisions. Firstly, consideration needs to be

given to whether the decision to govern children and their own lives is based on potential fears instead of real opportunities. Secondly, parents need to recognise that despite their efforts and vigilance, threats do exist and children do have access to Facebook and other SNSs, pornography and strangers and they make questionable decisions, and sometimes they behave in a morally problematic way. And thirdly, adults involved in the care and education of the child have to decide if they want to participate in or remain excluded from children's digital lives. The findings presented here reveal that the children were open to including adults in their technologized lives, but that they also value freedom of choice and movements. Furthermore the experience gained in the research field suggests that both adults and children could positively benefit from a dialogic partnership, where children could benefit from adults' life experience and adults could benefit from children's access to a different way of experiencing life than they themselves experienced when they were growing up.

Adults' supervision of children is not a new behaviour; neither is children grouping together in areas hidden away from adults' supervision (Sutterby, 2009), but yet none seems to benefit from it. To respond to late modern technologized demands both generational groups are required to pursue collective approaches to overcome real problems in order to reach positive and enriching transformations. Of course, this approach is difficult to implement in practice since adults try to balance care and control and children try to achieve recognition and autonomy (Tomanovic'-Mihajlovic', 2000), both groups can resist sharing power. An inclusive and holistic approach would give visibility to hidden problems segregated from public discourse, but not less harmful. It would also privilege negotiation and empowerment instead of control, punishment and exclusion (Muncie, 2008), achieve harm reduction, focus on real and everyday problems and point to solutions.

#### **4.3. Online participation**

Children's relationship *to, with* and *through* technology (Heidegger, 1977; Matthewman, 2011), *how they use* and *what they use it for* (Buckingham, 2006), is changing and challenging both adults' expectations about childhood, as well as children's everyday experiences (Bond, 2014). New forms of sociality (Matthewman, 2011), the dynamic construction of the self (Giddens, 1991), and new meanings and cultures of use (du Gay et al., 1997) are outcomes that nourish and are nourished by post-modernity corollaries – anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty and ambivalence (Ekberg, 2007) and are heightened by complex and



complicated relationships and interdependencies where children, family, society, and digital online technologies are network-effects exerting agency within a complex actor-network structure (Latour, 1996; Matthewman, 2011; Prout, 2005).

Taking as a starting point children's accounts and stories, this section draws from children's digital embedded experiences to explore the key theme of 'online participation' in terms of *uses, meanings, and relationships*, which ultimately, reveals the tensions enclosed in adulthood versus childhood, public versus private and security versus insecurity boundaries.

Due to the changes and challenges that ubiquitous communication technologies brought to social dynamics, the boundaries between positive and negative experiences are often blurred, so one has to rely more on ambiguity and than on certainty. In accordance with this matrix, data analysis demonstrates how a complex network of human and technical agents is challenging children's meaningful use of their participation rights online, reconfiguring the landscape of childhood, contributing to the magnification of old problems and the creation of new forms of vulnerability (Yar, 2012).

#### **'They told me to put XXX, I didn't know what it was'**

Digital and online technologies represent a complex arena and a challenging medium where children, at increasingly younger ages (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014; cf. Holloway et al., 2013), exercise their agency actively and interactively and make their own decisions, express themselves (Buckingham, 2011; Goggin, 2006; MacKay & Gillespie, 1992), negotiate their identity (Buckingham, 2008; Bragg et al., 2011), and explore their sexual self (Best & Bogle, 2014; Bond, 2014; Brownlie, 2001; Buckingham, 2014; Monteiro, 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010).

Undoubtedly, technological changes and the growth of the pornographic industry (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014) provide children nowadays with a much easier, wider and freer access to sexually explicit material than ever before (Buckingham, 2014; Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Despite being one of the parents' top concerns (Ponte et al., 2008) and one of the topics that tend to dominate the public discourse (boyd and Hargittai, 2013; Livingstone et al., 2013), children are effectively and actively encountering material that is intended for adults – pornography – as a result of peer pressure, curiosity or accidentally come across it while doing something else, as the participants reported. Considering the data collected with the children on their perspectives and experiences, within the scope of this research, *pornography* refers to content depicting sexual activities or human being's genitals.

Through this section the selected transcripts collected from children's voices depict children's sexual expressions based on gender and age.

Children report that there seem to be several ways (un)intentionally leading them to find pornography online, for example: while searching for poems, as reported by Figaro (aged 12; GM\_AP\_PG1\_100214); using platforms like Stardoll, Habbo Hotel, Facebook and Ask.fm as mentioned by Kiara (aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214), Ariel, Alice (both aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG1\_041113), Roger (aged 11, GM\_EL\_PG4\_140214) and Rapunzel (aged 11, GM\_EL\_PG4\_140214); playing non specified online games, as observed by Jessica (aged 10; GM\_AP\_PG1\_041113), Penny (aged 12 GM\_AP\_PG1\_041113), and Kiara (aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214); whether in a more static or 'on the move' fashion, when using their personal devices or the school computers inside the educational institutions or during classes, as the narratives depicted in this section prove.

The unprecedented access to pornography (Peter & Valkenburg, 2010) and the *forbidden* character of such contents (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011) not only reflect ambivalence about childhood sexuality and children's sexual agency, but also seem to have aroused children's curiosity for sex and pornography (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014), as the following episode involving three Roma girls depicts.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: What is XXX?

Researcher: It's a letter. In this case repeated three times.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: What happens if I write XXX on the internet?

Researcher: Why would you write that?

[Meanwhile, Pocahontas and Bianca aged 9 looked at each other]

Narissa [aged 10]: I'm going to write to see what happens.

Pocahontas [aged 10]: My uncle wrote XXX in my cousin's tablet.

Researcher: And then what happened?

Pocahontas [aged 10]: I don't know because the internet went down. That's why I wanted to know.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013)

"The event Pocahontas was talking about occurred during the weekend, at a wedding party (the older ones were talking about it). Observing the girls' behaviour I got the impression that they were in this together (by the looks

exchanged between them). As I'm behind them I notice their body language and their faces turning to each other. I also wonder why they are asking these questions. Are they testing me? But suddenly, the CID@NET technician intervenes. She has more experience with them so I step aside and do not interfere. Meanwhile Narissa writes XXX on the internet and when the results show previews of porn videos, she instantaneously exclaims: 'Yuck.' and closes the browser.

The technician speaks with the girls and tells them that XXX means sex and pornography and that they want to look at it because it is not suitable for their age. But, that sex is a natural thing between a man and a woman and they exist because their parents had sex (intercourse). The girls calmed down."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_ET\_PG3\_241013).

Corroborating Peter and Valkenburg's (2006; 2010; 2011) argument, girls' testimonials confirm how the peer group affects their sexual socialization and development in some sort of rite of passage as claimed by van Gennep (1960) and Jenks (2003) to which the sexuality is a key dimension in the distinction between children's and adults' worlds (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014). Jessica, for instance, shares in a meeting how, incited by her peers, she had her first contact with pornography on the internet.

Jessica [aged 10]: They told me to put XXX, I didn't know what it was, because I was little. I put XXX and appeared [pause] and I kept on seeing what it was about.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214)

During a meeting, one group tests the researcher's sexual knowledge while, simultaneously, submitting the adult to a rite of passage and acceptance by the group, where Tinker Bell and Giselle critically undertake the expert's role.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Oh Teresa, do you think this is normal? Our friend, in the companies that we are creating in the Visual Education class, wanted to create the company '69'.

[Girls laugh]

Researcher: And what is the problem with '69'? Isn't it equal to 70? Or 68?

Mary [aged 12]: No. [She laughs]

Girls in unison: No.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Put 69 on the [inter]net [addressing the researcher].

Giselle [aged 10]: Oh Teresa don't go searching on the internet. Seriously. Don't go.

Researcher: Why? Have you've already searched it on the internet?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yeah.

Giselle [aged 10]: Yes. And I regret it. I thought it was a good thing, but it isn't.

Jenny [aged 10]: What?

Giselle [aged 10]: 69.

Researcher: Why did you search for it on the internet?

Giselle [aged 10] Because Tinker Bell told me to go see what it was.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: She was saying: 'What is it? What was is it?' I didn't want to explain to her and so I told her to go see on the [inter]net.

Researcher: I don't know what that is either. I expect you'll explain to me.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: You don't know what a 69 is?

Giselle [aged 10]: Teresa, it will appear here. [Giselle is searching on the internet]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No. You have to click on images.

[Giselle closes her eyes, but nothing appeared on the internet]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Get out of there Giselle. It's going to go in the history, you'll see.

Giselle [aged 10]: The phone is not mine.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: On top of it all.

Researcher: What are you doing? Are you cleaning the history?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I will. I'd better. My father often goes to my phone.

Researcher: But you had never heard of it before, right?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Last year, I learned about it last year.

[...]

Researcher: But she [Giselle] didn't know, right?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yes.

Giselle [aged 10]: I mean, someone had already explained to me, but I didn't quite understand it. These are things that aren't for my age.

Researcher: Yes. But is it normal to talk about these things in school?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's not very normal, Teresa. Also because... [interrupted]

Giselle [aged 10]: There are people who aren't normal and only ruin friendships.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: My teacher says that the older girls in my class, those who were retained twice already. That is almost all. [She] says that they only think about other stuff instead of thinking about studying.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114)

Through the interaction transcribed above it could be argued that the girls were testing the researcher with the purpose of acknowledging if the adult was trustworthy, reason why, more complex subjects seem to be introduced via third person examples. Children are aware of the difference in power between adults and children. Thus, to mitigate the imbalance of power, the researcher assumed an inferior position in terms of sexual knowledge. It is interesting to observe how this decision prompts a greater openness in the girls and their testimonies become more personal and reported in the first person, enabling the access to convincing and natural everyday interactions.

Tinkers Bell's concern about her internet history and how she takes action to avoid her father finding out she was searching for pornography is noteworthy, in line with what was discussed in the previous section of this chapter, as well as Giselle's awareness that pornography is not appropriate for her age, hypothetically reproducing internalized messages transmitted by close adults in care of her education.

In the course of the group interview under the theme 'that happened to me', children were invited to share their personal digital and online experiences. Several topics, including pornography, were introduced in the semi-structured group discussions. This session occurred in an advanced stage of research in which bonds of trust and openness between the participants and the researcher were already solidified (as explained previously in the methodology chapter).

The following transcript depicts a girl-centred perspective on these issues that challenges the a-sexual, innocent and romantic representation of childhood in western societies (Kehily & Montgomery, 2009) described by Firestone (1970) and in Foucault's (1978) History of

Sexuality. In line with a social harm perspective, girls' critical and judgemental talks provide a complex picture of children's values and conduct about pornography and how boys and girls handle their experiences (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014).

Grace [aged 12]: Oh teacher, last time, we were eating, a girl, the one I told you [directing her speech to Melinda] that kissed another girl. I said: 'Oh, [Boy 1]'. He is new in our class, but he is already there for some time now, but he didn't know who were the lesbian girls that me and [name of the girl] were talking about. Look, I... [interrupted]

Melinda [aged 11]: From school?

Grace [aged 12]: Yes. That one is a lesbian, the other one is bi[sexual]. And he said: 'Oh, okay' and then: 'Oh what's the harm in them being lesbians?' 'Oh [Boy 1], no. Imagine if it was two men?' And then [he said]: 'Oh, and what about it? I see the Redtube videos where two women have lollipops and tuck them inside each other's little things [vaginas] and then eat it'. And the [Boy 2] said he saw videos using whipped cream in their thing [vagina] and licking. And I [said] 'Hey. Disgusting'. And I [said]: 'Oh [Boy 2], you're going to see women on the Redtube?'

Melinda [aged 11]: What is Redtube?

Jane [aged 11]: It is porn.

Grace [aged 12]: I said: 'Lol. You're going to see men. And I said: 'I'm a girl. Talk about that with [Boy 3]'. We're still eating, but I didn't feel like eating any more.

Jane [aged 11]: [Boy 4] just told [Boy 5] to put [on the browser] XXX women [she laughs] and [Boy 5] was very happy. And I [said]: 'Oh [Boy 5], you and [Boy 4] are such pigs, you just want to see naked women.' [...]

Maggie [aged 12]: You want to hear this? This is worse.

Grace [aged 12]: In the first term we were in ICT class. It was me, then [Boy 6] and [Boy 7]. And [Boy 7] [said]: 'Look, oh [Boy 6] want to see a brand of cars?' And [Boy 6] [said], 'Hey, no, I'm tired of seeing that.' 'Look, go see this site' and [Boy 6], 'What?' And he said, 'Go see the XXX.' And he answered, 'Hey no, I have no courage, oh [Boy 7]'. [...] Suddenly, I and [Boy 6] and I turned to the side, and [Boy 7] was writing XXX. There was a woman with a dick lying on top of her. [She laughs] Scary.

Melinda [aged 11]: Can I say something now?

Grace [aged 12]: [Boy 7] was like, 'Oh, so good'. And I [said]: '[Boy 7] get out of there. Look, the teacher. The teacher, look.

Maggie [aged 12]: Look this is worse, oh teacher. There was a thing [vagina] wide open, the bottom thing we have to pee. It was full of hair. My brother was always seeing that stuff. [...] Do you know who was watching it? Roger was watching it. [...]

Researcher: But he viewed it here on the computers?

Maggie [aged 12]: Yes.

Melinda [aged 11]: Oh teacher, there was this time that Rose downloaded a porn picture and sent it to Tarzan and told him to put on his Face[book].

Maggie [aged 12]: That's right.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214)

Drawing from this passage it is important to highlight how the girls seem to ignore the fact that the researcher is an adult, and comfortably perform a sexual mature self that one is inclined to believe they would not disclose in front of other adults, including parents and maybe teachers. They also narrow the adult-children barrier by stressing their pornographic knowledge when they mention, for instance, the pornographic website Redtube. Redtube ([www.redtube.com](http://www.redtube.com)) is a popular pornographic video sharing website that hosts a plethora of diversified free pornographic videos, invites the user to upload user-generated videos, offers radio, community and forum services and linkages to other pornographic as well as sex-thematic websites.

This passage also illustrates how the girls' understandings challenge the dominant hetero normative discourses and can be judgemental with regard to boys and, predominantly, girls' sexual identity and sexual exploration, when it conflicts with the sexual realities transmitted in family and school environments, as discussed by Peter and Valkenburg (2008). To illustrate this argument, the following conversations with the girls provide vivid and condemnatory examples about a girl that masturbates online, and girls that yield to requests to flash, which according to Alana (aged 12) "people who undress for the camera is a call for attention" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_100214) and in Grace's own words, the girls who do it are "schmuck" (GM\_EL\_PG4\_111013).

Maggie [aged 12]: Oh teacher you know what? There are people on the internet, this happened to a friend. The guy was saying, 'I love you'. And she said: '[Me] too'. Then [she] began to put her hand on the fanny [masturbating]. What a slut. What a slut.

Grace [aged 12]: Look, you have not seen the news on television? A 19-year old pretended to be a woman and asked people who were there [on the internet] with him to undress, take pictures. And they, and they took.

Maggie [aged 12]: The girls are guiltier than the boys.<sup>81</sup>

Grace [aged 12]: They were 16 year old girls and boys.

[...]

Grace [aged 12]: [Name of a girl] said: 'This world is now getting worse day by day'. And she had a link and I wanted to see what it was. So I followed the link and a chick was saying: 'Who wants to have sex with me? If you say something hot in the chat, maybe it could happen'. Pay attention, teacher.

Maggie [aged 12]: What a slut.

Grace [aged 12]: I saw her Face[book]. What a slut.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214)

Another example depicted from a conversation between girls from another group reinforces the argument that girls' perceptions are arguably influenced by social constructions of sexuality. The dialogue follows the moment the girls were freely exploring the Facebook and saw a photo of a girl they know from school kissing her best girl friend in the mouth.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: How disgusting.

Jenny [aged 10]: Show. What? Let me see.

Kiara [aged 10]: Oh Tinker Bell.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: What horror.

Giselle [aged 10]: Oh, it's [name of the girl].

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They say it's normal, but I don't think it is.

kiara [aged 10]: I don't. At all.

[...]

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<sup>81</sup> In Portuguese: "Elas são piores que eles."



Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They are very friendly. That's all right, but now...  
[interrupted]

Giselle [aged 10]: I wouldn't do that with Jenny.

Jenny [aged 10]: What happened?

Mary [aged 12]: Kissing on the lips.

Jenny [aged 10]: Ah, best friends. To show that I'm best friend, I would give a hug, take a picture.

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: Uhhh [emphasising], again.

Tinker Bell [aged 11] But here they are not giving [a kiss]. Here they are only pretending. People say: 'What beautiful lesbians'. She has a boyfriend. They have boyfriend. Do they also do this with their best boy friend?

Researcher: What does lesbian mean, Tinker Bell?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They are people. Girls who date [girls]. Here it says. The comment says: 'What beautiful lesbians'.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_140114)

Pornography and sex-based narratives collected from children's accounts confirm that children can and do influence their own and peers lives (Waller, 2012) through socializing processes that no longer can be detached from a complex network of human and technical artefacts. Children's accounts also reveal the contradictions enclosed in a society that concedes children an unprecedented agency, much enhanced by portable devices and ubiquitous access to the internet, and on the other hand, expect from them to be a kind of bibelot child, near the eighteenth century romantic representation of the child as pure, innocent and spiritual (Kehily, 2013c; James & Jenks, 1996).

Sexuality is the key dimension that in adults' perspective separates the adult-child worlds and threatens adults' "sense of what children should be" (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014, p. 3). Adults' attempts to restrain children's sexual agency is historical, however, research is not completely conclusive that pornography is harming children's development (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014). Arguably, in terms of harm, other variables could be problematized in future investigations to deepen the impact of the internet in children's contemporary sexuality, by

including aspects such as recurrence to pornography, if preferences are thematically orientated, representations of intimate relationships and so forth.

**'[She] puts the photos [visible] only to friends, but then accepts everyone'**

Upholding boyd's argument (2014), the way social media are designed challenges private/public and security/insecurity boundaries and encourages certain practices that on the one hand, challenge children's control when "balancing privacy and safety" (2014, p. 47) and, on the other hand, afford children's online participation to reach a broader, (un)known and (in)visible audience while, simultaneously, by default make them more easily searchable by such audience – often inaccurate with the one imagined by the children. During the fieldwork some participants reported concerning about their privacy and safety online, as mentioned in the previous section. However, field impressions suggest that does not mean they are actually taking advantage of private settings, because they simply "don't know how to do that" (Grace, aged 12, GM\_EL\_PG4\_251013) and, to complicate matters, at least in the case of the Facebook, privacy settings are complex and constantly changing (boyd, 2014). When asked if they would publish a picture of themselves in a public space, all participants responded with a peremptory "no" as an interesting excerpt, depicted from one of the groups, reveals.

All participants in unison: No.

Grace [aged 12]: Everyone would see us.

Researcher: Would you feel good about it?

All participants in unison: No.

Grace [aged 12]: Everyone would talk to us. Hey, look it's the girl from the [brand] poster. And I [would feel], 'Hey how embarrassing.' [She laughs]

[GM\_EL\_PG4\_251013]

In line with their concern, some participants took real interest in making their social profiles more private and protected. In a meeting, Figaro (aged 12) and Jessica (aged 10) (GM\_AP\_PG1\_111113) from one group and Maggie (aged 12) from another group asked for assistance to manage their private settings on the Facebook, "Oh teacher and how do we put it so that it isn't public?" (GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113). In the meantime, Giselle adopts a highly critical perspective about more careless online behaviours.

Giselle [aged 10]: My cousin [name] is not very smart. [She] makes her photos only [visible] to friends, but then accepts everyone.

Research: Accepts everyone?

Giselle [aged 10]: Friends [friend requests].

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_121113)

Participants seem to also be aware that a wider public can observe what they publish on the social networks. As Figaro explains Facebook is “always public” and “everyone can see” (GM\_AP\_PG1\_270114) and “all the world can know” as Tinker Bell clarifies (GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114). Nonetheless, and despite parents’ anxieties, some participants reported accepting friend requests from strangers, which according to them does not concern them as long as they do not talk to them.

Alana [aged 12]: I add [strangers], but I don’t... [Interrupted]

Figaro [aged 12]: [Finishes Alana’s sentence] But she never chats with them<sup>82</sup>

[...]

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_111113)

Tinker Bell argues that being friends with people she does not know only incites risk “if I answer” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_210114). Not talking to strangers is a strategy also used by Giselle (aged 10) who accepts all friend requests she receives on Facebook.

Giselle [aged 10]: I accept everything. [Friend requests]

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Do you talk to these people, Giselle?

Giselle [aged 10]: No.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114)

In both situations, strictly speaking, the participants apparently seem to follow parents’ advice not to talk to strangers. As Figaro adds, “It’s just to have friends on Facebook” (GM\_AP\_PG1\_211013). However, having many *friends* on Facebook may entice them to overlook some precautions, like for instance the privacy settings of personal pictures they upload to their SNS profile making them public for everyone, disregarding, for instance, that the photographs can be downloaded and distributed. Somehow, children seem to adopt the ‘nothing happens to me’ attitude that confers them an illusory sense of control. Following a

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<sup>82</sup> In Portuguese: “nunca dá à língua”

zemiological approach, in a prospective manner, overlooking some safety measures can be a self-harming behaviour (Hope, 2013; Parker, 2014) in the sense that it can bring them damaging consequences in the future. Nevertheless, ambiguous behaviour is not limited to children if one considers the active role also played by adults in general, and (grand)parents, in particular, contributing to children's digital footprints even before they are born (Holloway et al., 2013).

During an ice-breaking activity, participants were invited to play a game. A ball was randomly thrown to the participants and whoever caught it had to complete a sentence. Sometimes their contributions triggered exploratory talks, like the one transcribed below, where participants seem to agree that they can trust in the *friends* they accept and add to the social network profile.

Researcher: How many friends do you have on Facebook?

Maggie [aged 12]: 200 and something.

Grace [aged 12]: 200. 256.

Rose [aged 11]: 370 and something.

Researcher: Can you trust all these people?

Tarzan [aged 11]: I guess I can.

Rose [aged 11]: They are people we already know.

Grace [aged 12]: I accept family and friends. And if it asks: 'Want to publish?' I publish.

Maggie [aged 12]: But it's for everybody.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_251013)

In this scenario, participants seem to devalue or ignore the rapidity with which online access to them and to their information is spread (boyd, 2014) also to undesirable audiences (Goffman, 1959). Concerns about what to share online seems to be limited to parents snooping in, as suggested by Grace and Morgana's accounts in the previous section, which may explain why some children may incur in some potentially harmful behaviours that involve, for instance, sending intimate personal pictures without a serious consideration of the action as the following vivid narrative describes.

Nala [aged 13]: He asked her to send a photo of her in bra and panties, and she stood like this [she did the provocative pose for the group] on my bed. I asked

her: 'Are you sure you want me to take this picture?' And she [said]: 'I am'. And I [said] 'Looks like you'll get in, apologizing the expression, deep shit.' And she [said] 'I won't. He's cool' [...] and she poses like this in my bed. Legs opened and thong. [...] And I took the photo. [Then, she asked her friend] 'Is this Okay?' [...] [and the friend answered]: 'It doesn't favour my tits'.

[The girl sends the picture to the boy's mobile phone and Nala talks about what happened next]

Nala [aged 13]: [Simulating the speech of the boy]: 'I wanted a picture of you, dressed, not in bra and panties. You are perverse.' [...] and she [her friend said]: 'Ok, then. So, please erase the pictures. Bye.'

[Meanwhile, the boy sends another message and Nala opens it]

Nala [aged 13]: 'Uhhh [emphasising]. Disgusting. It was his 'thing' [the boy's sexual organ]. He was lying in the bed and his 'thing' [penis] was standing up, and he took the picture. [...] and she [asked]: 'Why is this standing up?' and he [answered]: 'I saw your picture and got excited.'

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_111013)

This sexting event was reported during the activity 'what would you do?' where some hypothetical situations were given to the participants for them to decide what to do. In line with this, Nala offered a descriptive and detailed account about how her girl friend (known to some of the participants), that was sleeping over at her house, after simulating several sensual poses to the mobile phone camera accepts a boy's request to send an intimate picture. Noteworthy is the important role Nala embodies, acting as a gatekeeper when she asks her girl friend if she was sure that she wanted to send the intimate picture by text message. According to Nala, afterwards, the girl asked the boy to erase the picture because she got scared that he might forward the picture. In Nala's perspective girls send that kind of pictures "because maybe they like the person" and to get the boys to date them, which upholds Lippman and Campbell's (2014) argument that the occurrence of sexting is more prevalent among girls, who are more likely to suffer more pressures to engage in sexting practices in the context of flirting, romance and sex. For instance, Penny reports that she was asked to send a video naked (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214) and Tinker Bell mentions receiving naughty questions and requests for sending a video using short clothes.

Researcher: Who uses Ask here?

Jenny [aged 10]: Giselle.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I use it.

Giselle [aged 10]: I also use it.

Researcher: And do you use it a lot?

Jenny [aged 10]: In Tinker Bell's someone is asking her naughty questions.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: [I use it] sometimes. Now they're making me questions too. Disgusting ones.

Kiara [aged 10]: I don't use it.

Researcher: Yes? People you know?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Naughty. You understand, don't you, Teresa?

Researcher: How come?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: In another sense.

Researcher: In what sense? Give me an example.

Jenny [aged 10]: What we talk about in citizenship class. [They mean sex]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: For example there is a colleague of ours that says 'Do it. Do it. Make a video. Preferably with really short clothes', and so many questions. These and other questions that are not videos and so.

Researcher: And have you done it?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_210114)

Besides Nala, during the meetings, other older girls shared details about sexting events with more negative endings with pictures being disseminated to a wider audience. When asked if they knew the person, they reported hearing about the stories on television (Alana, aged 12; Grace, aged 12), via word of mouth (Grace, age 12), and on the internet (Maggie, aged 12).

### **'There are many abductions and it's because of that'**

As stated previously in this thesis technology is not neutral (Heidegger, 1977) in the sense that designed or adapted affordances may magnify some social problems, often publicly discussed through the lens of the risk society. Building from boyd's argument, online environments can be seen as places linked to processes of harm where children can either harm or be harmed (Hope, 2013; Parker, 2004). In other words, children (in particular, girls) can be coerced and

harassed by *deviant others* using anonymous or false identities, or “indulge their darkest and wildest impulses” (2014, p. 103). In this sense adults’ pervasive discourse around the *stranger danger* topic seems very vivid in children’s accounts, reinventing the *bogeyman* allusion in the digital age. During the research meetings, topics such as meeting face-to-face online contacts and talk with strangers were subjected to children’s scrutiny using different participatory techniques (e.g., hypothetical situations, storytelling, role playing, mini films or group interview). All the groups (boys and girls) reproduced adults’ fears (e.g. abduction, rape, molestation) (boyd, 2014) and media stereotypes (e.g. the older man paedophile) (Kaspersson, 2014) as the selected verbatim excerpts below prove.

Excerpt A:

Grace [aged 12]: There are many abductions and it's because of that [talking to strangers online].

Rose [aged 11]: That's right.

Grace [aged 12]: They meet. They think it's one person and in the end it's another.

Nala [aged 13]: Yesterday they showed that on the soap opera.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_111013)

Excerpt B:

Jane [aged 11]: And they [strangers] can rape us.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_280214)

Excerpt C:

Nala [aged 13]: They are paedophiles [men that initiate contact on the internet with children].

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_111013)

Excerpt D:

Geppetto [aged 10]: I can be kidnapped. I can be blackmailed by someone. [...] I only talk [on the internet] with people I know.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214)

Excerpt E:

Maggie [aged 12]: Then recently she [mother] told me: 'Look, never speak on Facebook with people you don't know, because there are many abductions because of that'. [She replies]: 'Oh mother, I know'. And now it happened recently. A man was friends with a girl on Facebook and then he asked for her number (phone). She gave. [...]

Maggie [aged 12]: The he said: 'Do you want to meet me?' and she [said], 'Where?' And they agreed on a place to meet. And they met. He tried to rape her, but she ran away and then the police was after the guy. So, he made another [profile] [...] The chick was also crazy. She accepted it.

Researcher: Again?

Maggie [aged 12]: She accepted it, but it was different.

Researcher: But he was looking for her then?

Maggie [aged 12]: Yes, because he was obsessed with her. And then she set another meeting with him. And gave her phone number. And no one ever saw her again, because she was kidnapped.

Researcher: Do you know this girl?

Maggie [aged 12]: No, but I saw it on the internet.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113)

Contacts initiated by strangers were reported by the participants to be happening in online platforms they use on a daily basis, such as social networking sites, and online games. Most of the events reported had no further development and there were never certainties about the age of the unknown contacts. In particular the girls mentioned being contacted by strangers – men and women – who sent them friend requests, asked them personal questions or made sexual advances. Knowledge of risk is a way of managing risk and risky situations (Beck, 1992) and in this sense their knowledge of risk actually keeps them safe. To circumvent strangers' approaches they reported using strategies, such as lying, blocking or reporting the user, as the selected transcripts portray. Interestingly, no participant mentioned reporting the event to an adult, which may be linked with the lack of trust instilled by adults' panoptical strategies discussed in the previous section.



When contacted by a stranger on the Facebook, Morgana deceived the contact by giving false information about her and blocking him afterwards. Other girls contacted by strangers on Facebook also reported having blocked the user, including Tinker Bell (aged 11), Grace (aged 12) and Nala (aged 13).

Morgana [aged 10]: It happened on my Facebook. A man asked me for my address and I did not tell him and then he started asking me things and I gave invented answers. But he wanted to know more about me, so I blocked him [...]  
(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

Confirming the reflexive modernity theory (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990) and children's agency, the following conversation describes how contacted by a stranger in a fashion online game, Giselle made strategic decisions to deceive the stranger. Giselle's narrative is identical to others described by Tinker Bell (aged 11) and Kiara (aged 10) from the same group, as well as and Grace (aged 12), Rose (aged 11) and Maggie (aged 12) from another group.

From the talk presented below it is noteworthy how Tinker Bell assumes the role of gatekeeper interested in the story told by Giselle and gives her advice on how to avoid complications. Despite not being sure of the stranger's age or sex, Giselle assumes that the stranger is a man (not a boy), reflecting the stereotypes constructed and reproduced in the public discourse in the context of the risk society (Beck, 1992). It is also important to highlight how the girls' accounts demonstrate they are aware of the implications of revealing personal information and that they are conscious of the liquid boundaries of these networked services and how identities and participation can be fluid in such platforms. This episode moreover describes a picture that is far from simple as it reveals a grey area in which it is not possible to determine in a harm perspective, without any further research, if these episodes should (or not) be considered more carefully. If they represent harmless interactions – a child's play, or, whether in fact, they need to be considered as malicious and potentially harmful approaches.

Giselle [aged 10]: In a fashion game for everyone, a man began asking me where I live. I said: 'I live in [locality]'. 'Me too' [answered the stranger].

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: In [locality]? Why did you say [locality] Giselle?

Giselle [aged 10]: To deceive [him].

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Oh, that's very close.

Giselle [aged 10]: [She said to the stranger]: 'I live in [locality].' [The stranger asked]: 'On what side?' 'At the corner near a café with a red sunblind, called' and I said a name. He said: 'Me too'.

Researcher: But you invent it?

Giselle [aged 10]: Yes.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: It wasn't on Stardoll, it was in a fashion game, another one. I'll show it to you later. [Talking to Tinker Bell]

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: Then came a time he asked me: 'What's your building? You live in a building don't you?' [She answers]: 'Yes, I live in the building number 11' He said: 'I live in 12'.

Researcher: Who was fooling who?

Giselle [aged 10]: Me and him.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: And then he said: 'Do you want to meet?' [She answered] 'Yes. Then we'll see. I'll give you my [phone] number.' And I invented one.

Researcher: But can he find you again in the game?

Giselle [aged 10]: He might. But I haven't played it for centuries.

Researcher: Good.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Was it a boy or a girl?

Giselle [aged 10]: I don't know. In the game he was a boy.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: But it depends. I also say I'm a boy and I'm a girl.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

In another research meeting,

"Kiara told me that on Stardoll people sometimes ask her for her address. Giselle commented that she does not answer those questions. I agreed with her choice. However, Kiara said it sometimes was not enough, because there are people who don't give up. Tinker Bell said that sometimes she logs off from the game in those situations. And Kiara said that she does the same. They explained to me that sometimes, on Stardoll, they receive gifts from strangers for them to

accept their friend request and even when they do not know the person they accept the friend request so they can keep the gift (the gift is an item of the game, such as, clothing), this, however, does not mean they will talk to the person, according to them.”

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG2\_221013)

Maybe as a result of the subliminal messages children internalise from the media and their parents' advice, these contacts trigger in the girls the fear of being raped, stalked, kidnapped, or assaulted by strangers as a result of their participation online (boyd, 2014), as the conversation below demonstrates. It is interesting to note that when they feel their identity threatened they block the user, but when they supposedly feel their real identity apparently protected (for example, in online games) they tend to keep the conversation suggesting they feel less threatened in this situation. On the subject of 'contacts initiated by strangers', Giselle suggested that the researcher should create a false Facebook profile to investigate “these situations” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113), suggesting concern and as well an open attitude to include adults in the role of protectors.

Contrastingly, a more adventurous and sensation-seeking girl, Penny (aged 12), claims that: “What I like most in Stardoll is to meet boys”, proving how diverse children's perspectives and stimuli for action can be.

Maggie [aged 12]: That's frightening.

Rose [aged 11]: It can be a man.

Maggie [aged 12]: They take advantage that children play those games. And they do it also.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113)

Penny is a girl that took part in the meetings in the very last part of the research. She was accepted following a particular situation that is explained next.

“Today, when I arrived, the director called me to talk to me about a story that happened the previous week at school with one of the girls of the institution. Apparently, the girl received a call on her mobile phone from a man saying he was going to kidnap her. The mother and the police were called to the school. When at the school the girl's mother called that number and insulted the person

who answered. The police apprehended the girl's mobile phone. She showed me who the girl was. She was walking around with her mobile phone. The director wondered if it was the same (returned by the police), or a new one.

I always get the feeling that the children who most need to be part of the research are those that show no interest in participating. [...]

Afterwards, about the incident, Figaro, aged 12, commented that the girl got involved with some people and that she received a call saying that someone was going to kidnap her mother and kill her (offering a different version of the incident). Wendy, aged 10, thinks that this is "all is very strange". Both agreed that the story is poorly told. They also were aware that the police took her mobile phone for inspection."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG1\_270114)

"When the audio recorder was already turned off and we were just passing time, talking about songs and singers, the girl of last week's incident (Penny) opens the door and asks if she can attend the group sessions. [...]

She opened the door again and asked me for permission to enter. She began talking about her boyfriend and said that she is breaking her dating time records with that boy. She used to date for a maximum of one to two weeks. I felt curious about the girl and wanted to understand her better. She is different. She dresses more like a young adult and has Californian (blond) highlights in her hair. When she entered the room in the second time, she began firing information not just about boyfriends and dating; she also said there was a boy who suffered from bullying at the school and that she just wanted to talk to someone. [...]

I asked the girls if they agreed to accept the girl in the group; they told me that they were friends with her and that they like her. According to them, "everybody does"."

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG2\_280114)

Penny's account corroborates the information gathered in the field from other informants, but is not conclusive. She is a very restless girl and despite Tinker Bell's help during the

conversation held with Penny, in the end her account was not as productive as it was expected.

Penny [aged 12]: He told me he was going to kidnap me, told me little things like that.

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't know why, but about two people told me that he, the man, said he spoke to your mother.

M: Yes, it's true.

[...]

Penny [aged 12]: He said he spoke with my mother. But my mother says she doesn't him.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Do you believe it?

Penny [aged 12]: I do. A bit.

Researcher: And since then what did you feel?

Penny [aged 12]: I felt afraid of going home alone. But now I'm not afraid anymore.

[GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214]

There was not enough time to build trust with Penny and she only appeared in one meeting. Nevertheless, talking with her cousin Ariel, the idea that it was a prank cannot be disregarded. It is important to add that at the time the next conversation took place the researcher did not know that Ariel and Penny were cousins. The conversation occurred during a group interview 'that happened to me' where children were invited to talk about their personal digital and online experiences.

Ariel [age 10]: They threatened that they would kidnap her and said they knew her mother and my cousin.

Researcher: And you believe they would do that?

Ariel [age 10]: I think not.

Researcher: Could it be a prank?

Ariel [age 10]: Yeah. Or it could be a friend of my cousin's.

[...]

Ariel [age 10]: She told me that the voice was not strange.

Contact initiated by strangers is a hot topic in the public discourse amplified by the penetration of online technologies in children's contemporary lives (e.g. Furedi, 1997; Stokes, 2009). Despite parents' controlling schemes and the cultural constructions that children denote to have internalised through their accounts, children are a click away from a stranger despite parents' efforts. As Furedi argues "[t]he image of a child at risk is the product of current adult sensibilities and imagination" (2001, 100). The data confirms that children are in close contact with strangers online. Some were contacted by strangers through several platforms. Evidence also provides examples of strategies they use to cope with the advances and that adults are not being involved in their everyday problems.

Considering this topic from a Zemiology perspective, there are some aspects that need further intergenerational and child-centred debate in terms of harm and children's development. Questions that arise from these findings include: What message are children receiving from society if deceiving and lying are used as strategies for solving problems? What is the impact that stigmatizing social constructions may have in children's interpersonal development? How can adults positively participate in children's digital lives without corroding adult-child relationship or undermining their development and freedom of exploring?

### **'I like to call Kiara bad names. Silly, stupid, fool, sucker'**

The following accounts portray everyday stories enclosed in the complex and networked process of growing up in the context of late modernity where social relationships are heterogeneous and made up of human and non-human material (Prout, 2005). Reflecting Giddens' (1991) reflexive project of the self, children experiment and negotiate identities, behaviours (boyd, 2014) and friendships (Ito et al., 2010) through digital and online arenas of social behaviour (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012) where they can escape adults' control (Buckingham, 2008), exercise their own control, and rewrite social norms (Ito et al., 2010).

Digital devices and online platforms, such as Ask.fm, Facebook and Stardoll were often part of children's narratives, the scenario where gossip, rumours, rudeness, pranks, abusive requests and abuse of trust may occur in the fluidity of their on/offline interactions. Taking advantage of its main feature – anonymity, Ask.fm enables users to sometimes interact in a harmful/abusive fashion as the participants' accounts in this section depict. In line with this, Tinker Bell talks about a girl friend who published a comment saying that she cut herself (not

on purpose) and how “everybody sent messages saying: ‘kill yourself’, ‘cut yourself’ ‘die’” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214). In another group Grace, Rose and Maggie address the case of a young and well known Portuguese actress who was targeted by rude comments on Ask.fm. In this particular case, it is noteworthy how Maggie censures people’s character and Grace blames social software affordances, exemplifying the double-sword of modernity (Giddens, 1990). Maggie and Grace empathise with the girl’s situation, because when it happens with them they feel sad, because “everyone sees” (GM\_EL\_PG4\_251013).

Rose [aged 11]: She took a picture. And a boy said: ‘If I were you, I would take forty pills and die’.

Grace [aged 12]: Ah, you know why? She has little breasts and people tease with her: ‘Hey, when will your boobs grow?’ She is 16 years old. ‘And your boobs? Are they hidden in your ass?’ People always say that, on Ask. That thing you ask questions.

Researcher: Yes.

[...]

Researcher: Do you think that people would have the courage to say that in people's faces?

Maggie [aged 12]: They are cowards.

Grace [aged 12]: Oh teacher, do you know why that is? Because they can say it in private.

[GM\_EL\_PG4\_251013]

Ask.fm and Facebook are similar platforms where rumours and gossip start and spread among the peer group as the girls’ accounts below demonstrate. Giselle sent hearts to Kiara using a boy’s Facebook profile to which Kiara responded. The plot was set for what was to follow. Despite not having an account on Ask.fm, Kiara was subject of gossip and questions on the social network through Tinker Bell’s account, validating Star’s (1991) argument that even the ones outside the network are constrained by its effects.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Two people from the school and two people on Ask came to me to tell me that I gave a kiss to [name of the boy]. And I gave no kiss. Then, they said that. Oh Teresa I’m going to say the word. They said that [name of the boy] had S-E-X with Kiara.

Researcher: Hum.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Why is it that [name of the boy] no longer has S-E-X with Kiara, as he did the other four times? [She laughs]

Researcher: Kiara, do you want to give me your version of the story?

Kiara [aged 10]: Ok. [Interrupted]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: And the questions appear on my Ask. [Name of a girl] also received it.

Kiara [aged 10]: And [name of another girl].

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They told they were a couple because Giselle sent little hearts to Kiara from [name of the boy]'s Facebook. And she replied: 'You're always in my heart.' And someone must have read it in the Library and came to ask questions, to Ask.fm, 'How long are they are sweethearts?' And so.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

Taking advantage of SNS audiences, rumours published and republished on the Facebook can circulate largely to the point where no one can trace the source of the story (Best & Bogle, 2014). Nevertheless, these stories circulate as real, and to authenticate the evidence they tend to be localized in terms of space (nearby) and time (recently) while they also carry the message that the world is a dangerous place (Best & Bogle, 2014). During a meeting, participants were talking about a paedophile that was supposedly acting 'nearby'. According to Tinker Bell, a friend of hers published the story on the Facebook and shared it on Tinker Bell's wall.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't know if I told you that this girl posted twice on Facebook saying that a paedophile was in the neighbourhood.

Researcher: Yes.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It could be bad, because if the paedophile sees that, he could go after her.

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It was not me who publish that. It was a friend of mine that posted it. She asked me for permission to put it on my Facebook too. I told her 'Yes'. There's nothing wrong about that.



Giselle [aged 10]: Have they already caught the paedophile of [locality]?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I don't know. I never heard of him again.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113)

When the researcher asked her if the story was true, she replied: "But it's not only her who says that" (GM\_AP\_PG2\_191113), proving that she believes the story as something that really happened because the story is corroborated by several others. Weeks later, during a meeting, Tinker Bell announces that the paedophile was caught by the police. When asked if she saw it in the news, once again the story develops untraceable.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They [police] already caught the paedophiles of [locality].

Researcher: Yes?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: They caught one. It was in the newspaper.

Researcher: But have you seen the newspaper?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: No, a friend of mine told me. Her godmother lives there too.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_140114)

As stated previously in this thesis, children regard digital and online worlds as just another setting where they manage their daily lives and relationships surpassing the dichotomy off/online, because they are not different or separate, but constitutive (Valentine & Holloway, 2002; 2003). In this sense, children's everyday social relationships and activities are embedded within an off/online *continuum* as the following excerpts illustrate.

As highlighted through the examples portrayed in this chapter, online social communities are popular among the participants, and many of their pleasurable daily personal interactions happen with these platforms in the background. However, they are sometimes used to play pranks or stimulate more uncivil behaviours. Pranks are common practice among children. In a research meeting, during the activities, the girls' behaviour captures the researcher's attention. Tinker Bell found a boy's Facebook account logged on when using Jenny's iPod and instigated by Giselle and Jenny, she wrote in the boy's Facebook wall "I'm dumb" (GP\_AP\_PG2\_261113). This boy is known among the participants for bullying his peers. In this situation, Tinker Bell's behaviour may imply retribution and arguably suggests an inversion

of roles that is enhanced by online digital technologies suggested by Vandebosch and Cleemput (2008), where the offline offender is victimised online.

Figaro, for instance, likes to play pranks on his peers by sending anonymous text messages or making phone calls hiding the ID caller (GM\_AP\_PG1\_041113; GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214). And Giselle uses Stardoll undercover to tease Kiara, "Want to date? You are very cute." (GM\_AP\_PG2\_261113). Tinker Bell and Kiara, in turn, have fun calling each other bad names or using Stardoll to harass other players.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Ah in Stardoll I'm always blocking people, but that's also because I want to.

Researcher: Because you are playful?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: But not with my doll, I do it with another one I only created to annoy people.

Researcher: But on Stardoll, you can block and unblock [people]?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yes.

[...]

Kiara [aged 10]: That is to make fun of people, you know? Because she...  
[interrupted]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Because she [talking about Giselle] creates dolls to tease Kiara.

Researcher: Who?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Giselle. She creates guys who are always nagging Kiara like this: 'Do you want to date me? Do you want to date me? Do you want to date me?'

Kiara [aged 10]: 'Do you want to date me, you crooked teeth?'

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: 'You are ugly with crooked teeth, but I want to date you.' It's so cool to irritate people. It is better not to say this but [pause]. I like to call Kiara bad names. Silly, stupid, fool, sucker. Kiara talks to me: 'Hello stupid.' and I say: 'Hello.' And she says: 'Shut up stupid.' And I say, 'I have not even talked', and then she begins: 'Shut up stupid.'

Researcher: Do you get sad when she says that? Never ever? In any day, any time?

[She nods to me negatively]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Ah. When she calls me bad names very [pause]. As once she called to [name of a girl], unintentionally. She called her a bitch. And [name of a girl] got very upset with her.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

About harassing others on the Stardoll, Tinker Bell explains her strategies to have fun harassing strangers while avoiding being banned from the game.

“Tinker Bell tells me she has several dolls (Stardoll). One of them has her name, and when people ask for her name she doesn't lie, because, ultimately, they 'don't know if it's my true name or not'. And then she adds, 'I have three dolls. One of them is 'Evilllllllll', with eight L's'. She uses this doll with 'ugly hair' when she wants to mistreat someone, because in her own words, it's 'fun'. She says: 'I call someone ugly, but I don't know if the person is really ugly, it's just for fun'. After explaining that 'when someone mistreats you, you can block and report' (or when people ask 'where are you from'), she also explains that she has 'fake' dolls, because if someone reports her, she is banned from the game. Having more than one doll is a strategy to do bad things without running the risk of being banned with the dolls they use to effectively play the game. And she adds, 'when I see someone mistreating a person, I stay quiet in a corner'. I got curious and asked her why she did that. She answered it was to avoid being banned. Tinker Bell and Kiara often play the game and mingle together in the game, where they sometimes simulate to mistreat each other just for fun.”

(Researcher's Field report GM\_AP\_PG2\_221013)

The conversations above uphold Vandebosch and van Cleemput's (2008) argument that these practices are not intended to cause negative feelings or hurt someone. As Tinker Bell reinforces at the end of the first transcript it is *unintentional*. In their own words it is meant to be *fun*, “a sign of common understanding, or a kind of playful interaction between friends” (Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2008, p. 501), nevertheless, despite common – Rose, Roger and Maggie claim doing it too (GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113) – such practices may be interpreted differently by adults moral values, in particular, parents. In one exchange of text messages between the two girls, Kiara by accident sent the text messages to her mother and got

punished because of the content (GM\_AP\_GP2\_040214), which illustrates how children and adults have different perceptions of what is acceptable or not acceptable.

Taking advantage of mobile phone tariffs affording free voice and text communications, as well as anonymity, participants sometimes use this medium to insult their peers. In the following situation Giselle is a victim of name-calling by a girl via text message and, afterwards, by voice call. In the episode is noteworthy how the group got involved and how the situation loses significance when Giselle realizes that the stranger is not a stranger, instead it is a girl with special educational needs from her class. This episode, despite being an isolated case, may indicate a new direction in research on bullying involving children with special educational needs and the use of online digital technologies that needs to be addressed and further investigated. The following event portrayed below reveals how online digital technologies empowered the girl with special needs to take an active and hostile role that challenges the taken for granted image of this group depicted as victims (e.g. Abilitypath.org., n.d.; Carter & Spencer, 2006; Holzbauer, 2008; Marini et al., 2001).

Kiara [aged 10]: Call her.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: Ya. I'll call her to see if I know the voice.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's free to call her.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: No one makes a sound. I'll put it on the speaker so Teresa can listen.

[...]

[The phone rings]

Giselle [aged 10]: Hello.

Girl X: Hello.

Giselle [aged 10]: Who is this?

Girl X: Clown.

Giselle [aged 10]: Who is this?

Girl X: [laughs] Stupid.

Giselle [aged 10]: Tell me your first name.

Girl X: [laughs] Geek.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's [name of a girl] [whispering].

Giselle [aged 10]: I have her phone number [whispering].

Jenny [aged 10]: Call ended [whispering].

Giselle [aged 10]: Call terminated? I'll insist again.

Kiara [aged 10]: What were you talking about? What were you trying to say?

Jenny?

Jenny [aged 10]: Uh? Let's hear.

Kiara [aged 10]: Who do you think it was?

Jenny [aged 10]: Girl X in our class.

[Girl X answers the phone again]

Girl X: What do you want, clown?

Giselle [aged 10]: Is that you Girl X?

Girl X: Clown.

Giselle [aged 10]: Piiiiiiii.

Girl X: [laughs] Geek.

Giselle [aged 10]: Do you know me?

Giselle [aged 10] and Mary [aged 12] in unison: Call ended. [Both girls Laugh]

Mary [aged 12]: Try again.

[...]

[Girl X rejects the call]

[...]

Researcher: Will you tell your parents?

Giselle [aged 10]: Yes.

[...]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It may be someone teasing you. It must be someone teasing you, for sure.

Giselle [aged 10]: I'm going to ask, 'Is that you, Girl X?'

Kiara [aged 10]: It must be a friend of yours teasing you, because [pause].

Researcher: But this is not a pleasant joke, is it?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I also do this with Kiara.

Kiara [aged 10]: That's right. And I do with her.

Giselle [aged 10]: Dumb.

Researcher: This?

Tinker Bell [aged 11] and Kiara [aged 10] in unison: Yes.

Researcher: Seriously?

Kiara [aged 10]: Hum hum.

Researcher: Why?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Unknown number. I call her and pretend I'm someone else.

Kiara [aged 10]: Ya.

Researcher: Why?

Kiara [aged 10]: Or even so I send Piii type messages. Piii. Piii.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's funny.

Researcher: It's funny?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Yes.

Kiara [aged 10]: Hum hum.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: But when we send messages, it has her name and has my name.

[Both girls laugh]

[...]

Researcher: What are you going to do?

Giselle [aged 10]: I don't know. If it's a friend of mine, I'll do nothing.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: If it's Girl X, I'll say nothing [to parents].

Researcher: And if it's not Girl X?

Giselle [aged 10]: If not, I'll tell my father and my mother.

[...]

Giselle [aged 10]: It must be Girl X. She called me a few days ago. [She goes through the voice call history] It's Girl X.

Researcher: Yes?

Kiara [aged 10]: Did she say who she was?

Giselle [aged 10]: No, but I went to the day she gave me a ring and I gave her a ring to record her number.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Call her again and say: 'Look, I already know who you are.' Are you going to get upset with her Giselle?

Researcher: Are you good friends?

Giselle [aged 10]: No. It's okay.

[Giselle call Girl X again, but she rejects the call again]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Tell her: 'Pick up the call, seriously, please.' Don't tell her that you already know who she is.

[Giselle call Girl X again]

Girl X: Shit.

Giselle [aged 10]: Is that you Girl X?

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: I know it's you.

Jenny [aged 10]: Call ended.

Giselle [aged 10]: She hung up.

[...]

[Giselle call Girl X again]

Giselle [aged 10]: Is that you Girl X? Where are you?

Girl X: Shit.

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: What did she say?

Giselle [aged 10]: Is that you or not?

Girl X: [Undifferentiated noise]

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: It's you.

Mary [aged 12]: Call ended.

Kiara [aged 10]: She has very serious problems hasn't she?

Giselle [aged 10]: Special Education.

(GM\_AP\_GP2\_140214)

Considering participants' accounts, interpersonal relationships can indeed become sour when the technology is misinterpreted, as the previous conversation demonstrated or when heterogeneous and complex networks influence human action and relationships.

In the following account Hera (aged 10) complains about her cousin deleting pictures from Hera's Facebook wall and afterward sharing them in her profile.

Hera [aged 10]: She went [on my Facebook wall] and deleted [the picture]. And now she always shares photos of her. She only eliminated that picture, so I don't have a cool cover photo.

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_170214)

In another occasion, Figaro does not accept a friend request from Hera after an exchange of unfriendly words between the two. In this situation, not accepting the friend request suggests a punishing intention.

Figaro [aged 12]: Wait a minute dude, do you think I'm dumb or what?

Hera [aged 10]: I do think that.

Figaro [aged 12]: Look, that's the reason why I didn't accept your friend request, you see?

(GM\_AP\_PG1\_270114)

Sometimes sharing devices, passwords and accounts can pose further complications. For instance Roger (aged 12) lets a girl friend use his Facebook account. According to him, she "takes good care" (GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113) of his SNS account. However, the opinion is not unanimous among Maggie (aged 12), Jane and Rapunzel (both aged 11). The girls do not support Roger's decision of sharing his password, because the girl uses Roger's Facebook instant messaging service and the girls sometimes think they are talking to Roger, but instead they are talking with the girl (GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113; GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214).

In another situation Alice (aged 10) was playing with Hera's (aged 10) mobile phone and blocked her device after entering a wrong PIN code three times, "Alice was [playing] with my phone and saying she was going to break the code" (GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214). Unable to unlock it, because, only her father knows the mobile phone's PIN code, Hera breaks down in tears.

Technological convergence and do-it-yourself affordances can pose complex challenges in cases where content sharing is not consented, for instance when private pictures are taken without approval. The following story illustrates how complex children's on-offline interactions mediated through technology can be and how blurred the line is between security and insecurity. It is interesting to note how from that given situation the girls morally evaluate the overall conduct of the girl that took the pictures without permission.

Tinker bell [aged 11]: She [Girl Y] came to my house once. We had group work for school, and then we did it. And she just said, playful: 'Oh, I'm going to sleep', and I said, joking: 'Go.' And I stayed in the living room, while she went to my bedroom and began taking pictures.



Researcher: And how do you know she was taking pictures?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: Because today a friend of mine told me. She saw the photos of a room and asked her: 'Whose is this room?' And she said it was mine.

Researcher: But she saw it on the mobile phone or she disclosed them elsewhere?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: On her mobile phone. I dunno. [Girl Z] says this girl usually transfers the photos to the computer to put them on Facebook.

Researcher: What if she puts them on Facebook, will you be upset about it?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: Of course. And I'll report it. I have to get them out of the internet.

Kiara [aged 10]: Oh Teresa, for example, do you think this is normal? She has a throat ache today and she missed the morning classes and comes strolling to the mall. It's an expression.

Tinker bell [aged 11]: It's strolling, because she came here in the afternoon, after classes.

Researcher: Is she your age?

Kiara [aged 10]: She's in our class.

Tinker bell [aged 11]: Yesterday I talked with her, about 10 p.m. No, it was something past 9, because I left the computer earlier than 10 p.m. So we were talking, she was feeling very well. She even asked me why I missed school yesterday. I went to a funeral. And she asked me if it went well.

Kiara [aged 10]: And [she] asked if the funeral went well.

Tinker bell [aged 11]: 'Look, the funeral went well?' How does a funeral go well?

Researcher: Tinker Bell, why don't you go talk to her?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: Because I didn't know that. How can I know for sure if they are not already on Facebook?

Researcher: You have to ask her.

[...]

Tinker bell [aged 11]: People may have already downloaded them [photos]. I will not report her, but I'll delete the picture. I will report the picture to take it out of the social networks.

[...]

Tinker bell [aged 11]: She took photographs of a friend of ours shirtless in the dressing room and put them on Facebook.

Giselle [aged 10]: Girl Y?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: [Girl Y] took pictures from [Girl Z] shirtless. She was in bra and panties.

[...]

Tinker bell [aged 11]: [Girl Z] was very angry with her.

[...]

Researcher: And then what happened?

Tinker bell [aged 11]: Oh they got angry. But the next day they were already friends.

[...]

Tinker bell [aged 11]: I was told that someone sent her to do that in exchange of jelly gums.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_180214)

### **‘Before getting in serious trouble and the police finding out’**

Given the ongoing development of the technological landscape (Yar, 2012) that enabled people to easily access and consume large collections of copyrighted files (Cheung, 2013), data collected from the participants’ accounts suggests that children’s online activities are shifting (Yar, 2012) and fracturing the traditional western perceptions of the child-victim in need of protection and childhood, as they become actively interested and engaged in harmful criminal practices, such as hacking and the illegal content download (for example, music, games, films). In this reconfiguration of the internet, one has to reconsider old and new vectors of victimisation, vulnerability and harm where the child can become, simultaneously, perpetrator and victim of *harms of repression* and *reduction* (Burke, 2005; Lanier & Henry, 2001) and the adult can, on the other hand, undertake the victim condition, for example when their author’s rights are not respected (Yar, 2012).

The participants enrolled in this research grew up surrounded by interactive and social technological language in which they are proficiently more experienced (but not inherently wiser) than many adults who are socially responsible for their protection and education. Robin Hood wants to be a computer engineer when he gets older. Breaking into someone else’s computer does not present major complications for him and by the age of 12 we had already

hacked a peer's computer in an act of revenge, as he describes in an individual interview he offered in a one-time contribution to the study. Robin Hood was victim of repeated humiliation from a boy at his school because of a girl the both boys liked. He "knows much about computers", so he masterminded a retribution plan using internet resources "because [that way] nobody catches me". Using online software he hacked the bully's Facebook. He wiped IP's, formatted the computer and put it in private mode, and then he sent insulting messages to the bully's friends using the boy's Facebook account. In his own words, although at the time, revenge seemed "very powerful", currently he does not think the same way anymore. According to him, he presently understands that hacking can harm oneself and the others. Hence, "before getting in serious trouble and the police finding out" he stopped doing it.

Robin Hood [aged 15]: To get back at him, I used Facebook, a social network. I got my revenge. I used internet hackers to get back at him. I used his password and, then, called his friends names [...] and his friends were all furious with him. [...] Well, now that I'm more grown up, I know that I shouldn't have done that. But yeah, it was good, he regretted it, because he felt [the same] on his own skin. [...] So, in the end, I did a good deed. On the internet there is this website, you can go there if you want. facebook/hacking.br [...] put the email and [...] it shows the password below. You pay €2 per phone and you get the code [...] Revenge is very powerful.

(GM\_EL\_PG4\_081113)

Illegal and deviant practices on the internet (Staksrud, 2009) or less-approved activities (Livingstone & Bober, 2005) like hacking or illegal downloading are still scarcely addressed in research and across European awareness initiatives, in particular addressing children actively involved (Cheung 2013, Staksrud, 2009). In 2005, a UK survey, involving 1,511 9-19 year old respondents reports that 8% claimed having hacked someone's website or email (Livingstone & Bober, 2005). In Geppetto's case, hacking activities concern modifying his computer (Staksrud, 2009). He has a Magalhães, a low cost laptop designed for children under the nationwide program e-escolinha discussed in chapter 2, section 2.4. With the help of his uncle, who "opened the computer" and bought "better bits" for the laptop, Geppetto can use his computer to play more hardware demanding games, such as Counter-Strike, Need For Speed and other popular multiplayer online games (GM\_ET\_PG3\_280114). Geppetto is aware of

hacking programs, because his school friends use them to find out mobile phones passwords or to enter any other place.

Geppetto [aged 10]: I don't have that video, but I know there are programs for that. Mainly my school friends, they find mobile phones and take them home. Then take the chips, take the wires, and connect. I don't know the website, but I know it exists. Because they talk about it. They connect, and go to the computer.

Researcher: And discover the PIN?

Geppetto [aged 10]: That's it.

Researcher: And enter in the mobile phones?

Geppetto [aged 10]: In any place.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_280114)

In another group, Tinker Bell was worried about "a very bad thing about Facebook" (GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113). She ran into a video on "how to hack a Facebook account" on YouTube when she was listening to a Rihanna song. The link to the video is [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNZCWiz\\_Khs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNZCWiz_Khs), but, in the meantime, it has been removed under the disclaimer "This video has been removed for violation of YouTube's policy on presentation of harmful activities".

Tinker Bell [aged 11]: Imagine I know the e-mail you use on Facebook. That's no problem, right? But if I get your Facebook email and click on some stuff there, in your personal settings it appears something down there that has your password written. From there we can go to everyone's Facebook if we know the person's email. I got to try. I was on YouTube listening to a Rihanna song, the new one, some time ago and some videos showed up like 'how to hack Facebook'. I loaded and saw some of the videos, because I'm a bit nosy. I saw it and then tried. I put my email and as I had not entered the password, I was trying to find it. I did what the man said and got into my email, my Facebook.

(GM\_AP\_PG2\_121113)

Related with hacking but with less technical knowledge demands, the download of content protected by copyright laws is a morally acceptable ability (Staksrud, 2009) among the participants and an activity reported without fearing any kind of punishment because some are

not very sure what is *pirating* (Lazarinis, 2010), others are not aware they are doing something wrong, and even parents seem to do it (“My friend [name of a boy] does it. He has all the movies from America. His father does it and he keeps the movies”, Grace, aged 12, GM\_EL\_GP4\_070214).

During the research meetings a game was proposed to the groups with tasks to be accomplished, including drawing, mimicry, and multiple-choice questions. In one of the multiple-choices questions, participants had to decide which was the right answer to the following situation, according to them:

When I want to get a music/movie:

- a. I search for it on the internet to download it
- b. I go to a virtual store to buy the music/movie
- c. I ask a friend to pass it to me/send me a copy

The participants were not sure what to answer, but “I ask a friend to pass it to me/send me a copy”, was the most prevalent response as the transcript below depicts. With some helping clues, they finally chose the answer “I go to a virtual store to buy the music/movie”. During the activity at some point Hera realizes that answer B is the “less dangerous” and Alice claims that her father does pirating.

Figaro [aged 12]: I go to C.

Ariel [aged 10]: I think it's A.

Hera [aged 10]: I think it's C.

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: I think it's B, because it's less dangerous.

Wendy [aged 10]: No, I think it's C.

[...]

Hera [aged 10]: I think it's C.

Ariel [aged 10]: C. I think is C.

Hera [aged 10]: It's B or C.

Wendy [aged 10]: I think it's C.

Hera [aged 10]: I think it's B

[...]

Ariel [aged 10]: It's A. Search to do download.

Alice [aged 10]: My father does that. My father always does that [download].

[...]

Research: Why isn't C?

Figaro [aged 12]: Because it's just the same thing. He's taking the copyright and that person is doing the same.

[GM\_AP\_PG1\_200114]

During the meetings the participants defined *pirating* as “withdrawing movies from the [inter]net” (Hera, aged 10, GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214); “see a movie that has not yet come out in theatres” (Tinker Bell, aged 11, GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214; Grace, aged 12, GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214); “steal movies [from the internet]” (Rapunzel, aged 11, GM\_EL\_PG4\_070214). Less sure of what pirating means is Kiara (aged 10) who claims that “is like withdrawing from the internet, but that's not quite piracy” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214). To complicate matters, Jenny (aged 10) reveals in her conviction that “downloading one or another from time to time” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_210114) is all right and Kiara states that to be considered more or less piracy “you have to sell” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214) the downloaded content.

Several participants claimed they had downloaded media files from the internet except for Figaro (aged 12) but maybe this is related with the fact that, unlike many of his peers, he has scarce access to the internet as mentioned earlier. Figaro does not possess a smartphone, nor does he have internet connection at home. He accesses the internet from the school computers, but the connection is very slow and he cannot take meaningful advantage of the school's digital resources. In this sense Figaro is digitally marginalised even from children's more deviant behaviours. Reinforcing this suggestion, in Kiara's words “everybody does pirating” (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214), including Flora, aged 13; Hera and Jessica, aged 10; Alana, aged 12 (GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214), Jenny, Giselle, Kiara, aged 10, Tinker Bell, aged 11 (GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214), Geppetto, aged 10 (GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214), and they mention how they do it. Some use the website *Piratuga* (Hera, GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214), unspecified programs (Jessica, GM\_AP\_PG1\_030214; Geppetto, GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214), and online resources, including *MusicTube*, *OX7* (Jenny GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214), *Turcation* (Tinker Bell, GM\_AP\_PG2\_040214), and *MP3* (Geppetto, GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214).

Additionally they act as competent experts when talking about the resources they use to illegally download copyright protected contents.

Geppetto [aged 10]: I already did [piracy] with games, music.

Research: For yourself?

Geppetto [aged 10]: Yes, for me.

Research: And movies too?

Geppetto [aged 10]: I have done it. The Mercenaries 2. Fast and Furious 6.

Research: Where do you go to do this?

Geppetto [aged 10]: Google. I have a proper program. My uncle has. I don't know the name.

Research: And you use it to download?

Geppetto [aged 10]: Yes. I download the movies and I have one for music, which is the MP3. There, you can download the music faster. And then pulls out to faster music. It's proper for the songs.

(GM\_ET\_PG3\_040214)

With the support of handheld devices, pirating activities reach a new level, as they can download contents in an anytime, anyplace context. During a research meeting Giselle asks the researcher if she knows the singer Anselmo Ralph and asks her to name a favourite song. As the meeting evolves she discretely downloads the music and suddenly she states, "the download stopped. Is it this one, Teresa?" (GM\_AP\_PG2\_210114).

The varied and heterogeneous stories portrayed in this final section are part of children's everyday lives. They represent everyday relationships and everyday challenges, complexities and contradictions. The narratives depicted in this section, however, do not represent the innocent, vulnerable and pure child in need of protection nor do they represent the problematic or evil child. The situations portrayed in this section characterise the ordinary child (Buckingham, 2009) involved in his/her own everyday life embedded within an off/online *continuum*. Nevertheless, children's accounts may present a complex challenge to the moral values and legal norms society uses to scrutinize what may be considered normal or deviant (see James & Jenks, 1996).

Unable to predict the long-term impact that ambiguous experiences may have on children's wellbeing, development and life choices, parents, educational and political agents have to

make the effort to envision children's technologized experiences through children's own eyes and voices, with caution and without pre-conceived ideas of what is good or bad, avoiding misinterpreting meanings, norms and values attached to it: in other words, avoiding addressing harm with more harm. Children's own accounts, powerfully exemplified in the sections of the chapter, illustrate how online technologies are embedded in children's lives, needs, decisions, judgements and relationships. Nevertheless, they also offer clues that suggest that granting access and use does not *per se* support children to pursue a wise and empowering participation online and meaningful use of online digital technologies. Children are not innately digitally wise as their accounts here illustrated through an ambiguous experienced mixture of fun, power, powerlessness, anxiety, illegality and risk. In their relationship with and through technology the line between harmless and harmful is very tenuous.

An enhanced and positive use of online digital technologies presupposes providing children with opportunities and competencies that enable them to navigate the sophisticated and complex technologized world wisely (Prensky, 2009) and responsibly. To facilitate children's effective and meaningful e-inclusion community efforts are vital to achieve a positive transformation. Instead of debating, preventing or managing uncertainty, parents and political and educational actors must compromise and engage in community-level, dialogic and empowering responses to real problems that are harmfully constraining children's rights to have a responsible and critical participation in a converging digital and online citizenship process. Above all, all would benefit from a society that orientates the child towards interdependence rather than independence (Wells, 2010).

#### **4.4. Synthesis**

This chapter offers a profound and detailed understanding of real and everyday problems and challenges of the three key themes identified in the interpretative process of the qualitative data including digital inequalities, controlling parental control, and online participation.

The complexity and subjectivities of children's everyday lives are very much influenced by a 'society of risk' that is portrayed and discussed taking into account on the one hand, the children as critical and reflexive subjects actively engaged in building their autobiographies and on the other hand, the complicated network of *actants* embedded in the relationship between children and online digital technologies.



The problems highlighted in this chapter portray a picture far from simple that resonates structural problems and social constructions that from a zemiological angle, are harmfully constraining children's rights, well-being and balanced development.

In the first section children's perspectives and experiences are central to understanding the unequal and constraining landscape that emerges in terms of digital consumption, access and competence. The participants' narratives enlighten the discussion around the taken-for-grantedness of access and autonomy in the use of digital and online services and devices and the harmful and complicated dynamics which arise from the seductive demands of growing industries. The data confirms that digital consumption is central in children's social and identity development and socializing processes despite their socio-economical background, making the difference between being accepted or excluded from the peer group. In line with this, the data suggests that school and other educational institutions play a decisive role aggravating or ameliorating digital inequalities, in particular among children from socio-economical vulnerable families. Finally, an inequality based in digital competence emerges giving space to a more generational-gendered gap, where mothers' digital competence is satirized and challenged in a negative fashion by the participants.

The second section of the chapter centres on the participants' critical insights about parents' preconceptions about the internet and how they compromise children's protection, autonomy and opportunities, weakening children's rights to participation, as well as parent-child relationships in a harmful fashion. The Empirical findings presented here reveal a gap between adults and children in terms of digital concerns, aggravated by dynamics of surveillance and control arising in the context of family relationships, in which the agency of the child conflicts with parents' authority. The strategies that children adopt to resist, negotiate and balance the power differentials arising from the parent-child relationship so they can preserve a certain level of control about their online freedom, participation and self-expression rights are also considered in the section.

The third section places digital devices and online platforms as the scenario where ambiguous experiences, including sexual socialization, gossip, rumours, rudeness, abusive requests and abuse of trust may occur in the fluid context of children's digital and online participation. As a consequence of the double-edged sword of modernity, the picture that emerges from children's narratives evidences the contradictory feelings and behaviours children experience in their mediated lives as a reflex of internalized cultural messages and the misinterpretation of

technological affordances. Evidence related with criminal practices, such as hacking and the illegal download of copyright protected contents reflect a more complicated picture of children's agency and online participation proving that new vectors of victimisation, vulnerability and harm are emerging and challenging the western perception of the child-victim in need of protection. To complicate matters further the participants' accounts suggest that a worrying lack of knowledge and impunity govern such practices that with the help of handheld devices can occur in an anytime, anyplace context.



## 5. Final considerations

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*In this final chapter an evaluation is made of this long and enlightening process. The first section begins by highlighting limitations of the study, followed by pointing to future directions that need urgent discussion and further investigation. The final section summarizes the main research conclusions.*

*The chapter progresses through the following sections:*

*5.1. Limitations of the study;*

*5.2. Suggestions for future research;*

*5.3. Conclusion.*

---

### 5.1. Limitations of the study

In this qualitative study social, collaborative and unavoidable interactions between the researcher and the participants arguably influenced the production and interpretation of the data (Pezalla et al., 2012). These effects were cautiously minimized through triangulation processes, as discussed in chapter 3. However, considering reflexivity as a consequence of modernity (Giddens, 1991) and a fundamental exercise to respond to the complex nature of qualitative inquiry (Doyle, 2013), it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. In theoretical terms, the contributions coming from a multi-lens and data-driven approach that includes theories from sociology of risk, childhood studies, socio-technical studies and Zemiology enabled a wider perception of the phenomenon that helped to facilitate a glimpse of the complexities and challenges. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the data and the understanding of children's active role in the digital context would benefit from further explanations drawing from sociology of family, childhood geographies, and from a deeper consideration of the concepts 'vulnerability' and 'peer culture', which are important to understand the interwoven relationship that exists between children and online digital technologies in contemporary society.

Some constraints were also identified in the methodological design of the study. The lack of qualitative research experience did not allow the researcher to take advantage of a fuller involvement and engagement of children as active co-researchers (see Bucknall, 2012; Kellet, 2005) in all the phases of the empirical research, from inception to dissemination and conducting the research to "issues they themselves identify as significant to their lives" (Bucknall, 2010, p.2), giving true meaning to a truly empowering participation (Hart, 1992).

Other methodological issues include the selection of the host institutions marked by convenience constraints or opportunity criteria, the predominance of girls in the study, the exclusive use of gender mixed sessions (it might have been useful to use activities conducted only with boys and only with girls to mitigate the prevalence of gender), and the absence of parents' voices in the research.

## **5.2. Suggestions for future research**

According to Kuhn (1962), new theories replace existing theories. Sometimes looking in new places or using new instruments solves a problem. At other times, one can solve the puzzle by using familiar instruments or looking at familiar things under a different light. With the purpose of inspiring new problems in search of solutions, some suggestions are offered to guide future research paths. Other aspects for further consideration were outlined in the presentation and discussion of the results and in the previous section.

In her Master's dissertation Castro (2008) highlighted the fact that children were developing written codes to communicate via text messages. Those social media communication styles seem to have evolved to more sophisticated styles, such as emoticons sequences, universalised abbreviations (for example, LOL) or voice messages that may be worth studying.

Roma people have a secular presence in Portugal. However, since the Portuguese constitution expressly forbids ethnic specifications for its citizens, there are no official data about this group (Gomes, 2013). Nonetheless, it would be of major importance to study this group and other minority and vulnerable groups digitally invisible in statistical data and assess the state of the art of their digital inclusion, for instance in collaboration with organisations focused on immigration, interculturality and inclusion.

In line with UNICEF's (Third et al., 2014) concerns about listening to children, the promotion of children's rights and the empowerment of children's as digital citizens, a major investment must be made to effectively involve children in all the research processes and take advantage of their perspectives and competence, as outlined in the previous section, for example to assess the technological equipment in the schools in terms of meaningful access and use.

Also demanding further attention and discussion in the research arena are online platforms such as Ask.fm and multiplayer games including Stardoll and Habbo (very popular currently) since their digital architecture encapsulates paradoxical possibilities of interaction/contact.

In terms of harm, other groups must be problematized in future investigation to deepen traditional assumptions of victimization (for example, children with special needs and disabilities).

Finally, special consideration must be paid to illegal and deviant practices on the internet (Staksrud, 2009) addressing the children actively involved in such activities (Cheung 2013, Staksrud, 2009).

### **5.3. Conclusion**

This study offers a small fragment of knowledge, centred on specific problems and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 cited in Aires, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) arising from the interwoven relationship of school-aged children and online digital technologies, in the context of the risk society (Beck, 1992), from the understandings and the voices of children themselves, as competent experts of their own lives and in their own right to be heard, seen and researched (Sarmiento, 2005a). Through participants' narratives generated in participatory fashion, uses, values and meanings were expressed when experiencing, describing and interpreting their everyday technologized lives. From children's own words a complex picture challenges and destabilizes conventional and paternalistic western perceptions about the institution of childhood, placing the child between two polarised viewpoints (innocent *versus* evil) (Sarmiento, 2004; 2011; Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997; Tomás et al., 2011). The paradoxical condition of childhood (Sarmiento, 2004; Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997) is heavily influenced by social, economical and technological changes and challenges (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Prout, 2005) and social constructions that reinforce adults' anxieties and controlling responses (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

As previously stated, the varied and heterogeneous narratives that weave the empirical framework of this study mirror children's networked lives and relationships within their everyday challenges, complexities, subjectivities and contradictions, and, ultimately, they represent the ordinary child (Buckingham, 2009) and the experience of childhood in late modernity, which according to Prout is "active, aware, judgemental and complex" (2005, p. 12) and, in line with Latour (1996), reflects an entangled networked agency that influences and is influenced by relationships with other children and adults and things (Oswell, 2013), as this research confirms.

Across the group of participants diverse understandings were registered, situating the embodied and ambivalent experience of their digital and online lives. The scrutiny of such rich, qualitative, critical and diverse views and perspectives implied treating data as constructions that resulted from a dependent interplay between the children's and the researcher's values, meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), voices (Creswell, 1998) and reading of those meanings (Schwandt, 1998). In this regard, empirical results represent a fabric of children's narratives and understandings (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2003) intersected with the researcher's interpretation and organization of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) using thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 2012; Riessman, 1993).

During this process participants' digital and online experiences were reflected in light with explanations arising from studying risk, childhood, technology and harm. The social harm theory offered by the Zemiology approach, in line with the other theoretical and contextualising approaches, served to highlight real and everyday problems that would otherwise be disregarded and neglected, despite negatively affecting children's agency, needs, relationships, development and rights in a different sort of aspects in the everyday context.

The three key themes identified in the interpretive process of the qualitative data, i) digital inequalities, ii) controlling parental control, and iii) online participation, reflect different aspects of children's digital and online lives that are "far from homogeneous or uniform" (Almeida et al., 2012, p. 222) and, ultimately, a representation of childhood as "mobile and shifting" (Waller, 2012, p. 28), that invite society to think differently about childhood, from the standpoint of children themselves. On the basis of the foregoing considerations, some main findings that guide this conclusive section will be briefly summarized.

In the key theme 'digital inequalities' children's accounts highlight the centrality of digital consumption to liberate/oppress children's family and peer group dynamics as well as their educational, cognitive and social development. Harm arises i) within social consumption and development processes; ii) when children's digital expectations and needs are not met, and collide with adults and other children's digital assumptions taken for granted that may render them digitally invisible; iii) from the lack of investment in terms of effective and meaningful access and use, which altogether exclude more vulnerable children to a major and protuberant micro (peer group) and major (society) digital exclusion and marginalization. Nevertheless, the narratives do not exclusively depict the child-victim; in fact they confront the traditional notion

of victim. The children's narratives, offered in the first section of this thesis, portray the child who uses competent and active strategies to negotiate and engender creative solutions to preserve or attain digital dignity and superiority; and the child who performs less empathic and ostracizing behaviours towards other children and parents (in particular the mother), based on the judgement of the lack of digital consumption and digital competence.

In the second key theme 'controlling parental control', children's narratives i) problematize power and control as aspects of paramount significance in the parent-child relationship; ii) parental restrictive and monitoring strategies reflect a paternalistic approach, the recognition of children as less competent than adults (Holloway & Valentine, 2000), and the underestimation of the resilience of children (Furedi, 2001); iii) demonstrate that adults are not totally in charge of children's online participation (reactance strategies) and protection (mobility hinders surveillance); and iv) that children are aware of parental panoptical strategies (when and how). The second section displays varied samples of children's agency reflected through reactance strategies that resemble the cat-mouse game that participants apply to evade control, recover the digital autonomy (online visibility) and counteract parent's authority (online invisibility). Harmful consequences result in a bidirectional lack of trust that intoxicates the adult-child relationship, undermines the protection of children online, increase of control that compromises the agency and the overall rights of children online (James & James, 2001). The attempt to protect children grounded on the idea that children are vulnerable and incapable of coping with adverse experiences, inhibits children's development in harmful ways, where children become victims of 'helicopter parents' (King, 2007) and best intentions education (Furedi, 2001). Harmful responses from the children arise from the narratives and confirm that children are excluding adults from their digital lives. Firstly, they perceive parents' digital competence as inferior. And secondly, children are reflexively and strategically preserving some control of the situation by structuring their online participation in order to give parents an illusion of control and avoid more surveillance and interference.

The key theme 'online participation' underlines the ambiguity arising from the interdependencies where human and technical actants are network-effects exerting agency through relations of power in which entities change and are changed by each other (Crawford, 2004; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Matthewman, 2011). The social dynamics described in children's talks arguably rely more in ambiguity than certainty in the way they often collide with preconceived, romanticized and traditional ideas of childhood – the idea of how adults would



like children to be (Kehily, 2009); and with an expected responsible and meaningful use of online digital technologies. The easier, freer and wider access to diverse and polemic contents and people, is amplified by children's digital consumption in a more privately (Haddon, 2013), fluid and 'on the move' fashion that effortlessly avoids parental supervision and criminal complications. Curiosity, intention and experimenting stimulate children's agency and overconfidence and lack of life knowledge guides them to overlook some precautions online. The peer group is a key factor in children's online experiences triggering socializing rites of passage or acting as gatekeepers shielding from undesired situations. Children "inhabit a world of meaning of themselves [...] where children's social action is structured through a system that is unfamiliar to adults" (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 765-766), which explains why adults and children have different parameters when assessing what can be uncivil/deviant behaviour. Parents privilege moral values and children privilege the context. The power differential between adulthood and childhood is mitigated by the expert role performed by the participants when talking about pornography, hacking or pirating. In this last section harm is addressed considering the child as the perpetrator of harm and other children and adults as victims of that harm. Harm is reflected in children's deceiving strategies, prejudices and one-side judgemental understandings, influenced by a 'good intentions' education and social constructions of reality, which affect children's decisions, social development, human bonds (Bauman, 2006), promoting a negative imagery of internet and the perception of the world as a dangerous place (Best & Bogle, 2014). Harm may arise from technological vulnerable architectures and misinterpreted affordances when encouraging new venues of victimization and crime, abusive practices and behaviours, including pranks, gossip, anonym investees or overlooking privacy and safety online. Lastly, harmful social, economic and material consequences arise from children's engagement in criminal practices such as hacking and the illegal download of copyrighted contents.

Control and agency are key aspects that cut-cross each key theme and destabilise traditional expectations of childhood by simultaneously plotting the "emergence of new forms of childhood" (Prout, 2005, p. 114) "that novel intersections of 'social', 'biological' and 'technological' networks create" (Prout, 2005, p. 114). Children's accounts reflect the heterogeneity, the complexities and the context of late modernity and life itself with "new capacities to act and hence new fields of power" (Prout, 2005, p. 115) that create new possibilities and problems in need of ongoing research. Indeed the rapid pace of technological

advances and global processes (Holloway & Valentine, 2000) strongly suggest that the shaping and reshaping of childhood may never stabilize.

This study was built on multi-lens work and inter-related ways of thinking about the intertwined relationship between children and online digital technologies in the everyday context, and offers a significant contribution to ongoing methodological/theoretical discussion on contexts of informal use of digital and online technologies and their role in contemporary childhood in the social studies of childhood, socio-technical studies and Zemiology.

The thesis covers information relevant and important to society in general and to families and other agents in charge of the care and education of the child, in particular. As stated previously, at the crossroads of second modernity, societal and technological challenges offer the context that undermines traditional assumptions of childhood and, consequently, the complexities enclosed in children's use of their agency and in the adult-child relationship, strongly corroborated in the study. To counter this fragmenting gap, the inclusive rationale that guided the interpretation of children's understandings offers a starting point towards a new way of thinking and approaching the complexities and contradictions that pervade children's technologized lives. 'Being at risk' is a modern invention thriving in an industry that, instead of offering solutions, weakens human and community bonds by nurturing and amplifying fear, anxiety and distrust, creating a sense of ubiquitous insecurity. The methods and strategies used to reach children's understandings and the findings enclosed in the previous chapter highlight that children are receptive to adults' involvement in their digital lives if freedom and autonomy requirements are respected. In agreement with this, inclusive and democratic dialogic and cooperative approaches focused on children's voices and real problems/needs need to be pursued. Creative and participatory strategies would enable to find solutions adjusted to the field, enhance children's digital wisdom, engage generations, strengthen bonds of solidarity, reintegrate adults in children's lives and encourage children's to exercise their agency and individuality within the broader societal framework (James & James, 2001).



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## 7. Appendixes



## Appendix 1 – Written proposal sent to the host institutions





Universidade do Minho  
Instituto de Educação



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## Apresentação de projeto de investigação e pedido de colaboração

Na qualidade de doutoranda na Universidade do Minho – Instituto da Educação, com a orientação do Professor Doutor António José Osório, no curso de em Ciências da Educação – Tecnologia Educativa, venho por este meio apresentar a V<sup>as</sup> Ex.cias o meu projecto de investigação para o qual solicitava a colaboração da associação de pais na realização de atividades e recolha de dados no âmbito da investigação que estou a realizar, intitulada: “Violência Online em idade escolar: realidades, problemas e soluções”.

Na expectativa do melhor acolhimento e anuência para o assunto, apresento, desde já, a minha disponibilidade para qualquer esclarecimento adicional e subscrevo-me apresentando melhores cumprimentos,

Deste dossiê consta:

- Contextualização teórica do projeto de investigação
- Indicação de nº de sessões/horas a realizar
- Número de jovens a envolver e respetivas faixas etárias

*Teresa Sofia Costeira*

## Enquadramento da investigação

A motivação para estudar em profundidade o lado mais complexo da Internet, nomeadamente interações negativas online envolvendo crianças e jovens, surge na sequência de pistas lançadas desde a elaboração da dissertação de Mestrado (“Quando as teclas falam, as palavras calam: estudo sobre a utilização do telemóvel e do Messenger por crianças do 5º e 6º ano do distrito de Braga”) e, posteriormente, com a dinamização de seminários sobre redes sociais, segurança e bem-estar na rede e a colaboração no Projeto Europeu SimSafety – Flight Simulator for Internet Safety.

### Enquadramento Pedagógico

Tendo em conta que as crianças e os jovens são agentes de mudança elaborámos um roteiro de atividades com dinâmicas diversificadas, cujas estratégias pedagógicas visam: i) recriar situações do quotidiano online; ii) descortinar vivências online; iii) favorecer a expressão individual e grupal; iv) refletir sobre emoções e comportamentos; v) promover mudanças de atitude e assimilação de valores; vi) promover o relacionamento humano positivo e a empatia pelo outro.

As atividades preparadas, umas são de autoria própria e outras são inspiradas num manual europeu sobre violência de rua entre pares, tendo sido adaptadas ao contexto desta investigação.

### Consentimento informado e orientação ética

A investigação é um processo do qual resultam produtos de interesse civil e académico, deste modo, serão tidos em conta os direitos e a integridade da criança na investigação através de i) consentimento informado assinado pelos pais das crianças e jovens envolvidos na investigação; ii) assentimento das crianças para participar nas atividades; iii) confidencialidade e preservação da identidade das crianças.

## +info

### Número de jovens por grupo e faixa etária

As atividades propostas visam a participação de crianças e jovens entre os 6 e os 17 anos, até 10 participantes por grupo.

Pretende-se desenvolver atividades com 2 grupos de participantes:

Grupo 1 – com jovens dos 6 aos 11 anos;

Grupo 2 – com jovens dos 12 anos aos 17 anos de idade.

*Não é no silêncio que os homens se fazem, mas na palavra, no trabalho, na ação-reflexão.*

Paulo Freire

## Sessões

Número de sessões preparadas por grupo:

Grupo 1. (6-11 anos) 7 sessões com duração mínima de 35 minutos e duração máxima de 90 minutos\*.

Grupo 2. (12-17 anos) 10 sessões com duração mínima de 30 minutos e duração máxima de 120 minutos\*.

\*A duração das sessões é apenas uma estimativa, podendo variar dependendo do tamanho do grupo.

**Calendarização das sessões**

A calendarização seria ajustada de acordo com as disponibilidades das partes envolvidas.

### Algumas sinopses das sessões propostas

Organizar os participantes em grupo. Dar textos seleccionados (um conto breve, uma notícia, etc.) e pedir a cada grupo para resumir o texto em 140 caracteres. No final, cada grupo apresentará a sua proposta aos/as restantes participantes. A mensagem será discutida e contrastada com a versão original. ¶

Os/as participantes sentam-se em círculo. A animadora atira a bola para alguém e diz "Quando estou na internet gosto/não gosto/incomoda-me que...". Depois, o/a participante atira novamente a bola para outro elemento do grupo. Todos têm que participar. O exercício repete-se até ao momento em que a animadora considerar o tema esgotado ou detectado aborrecimento nos/as participantes. A animadora regista alguns casos úteis para a investigação para serem abordados posteriormente e analisados pelo grupo. Sugestão: Alguém disse que não gosta que publiquem fotografias suas sem autorização. O que acham desta situação? ¶

A animadora organiza os participantes em grupos. Em seguida, convida-os, à exceção de um grupo, a sair da sala. A esse grupo é mostrada uma imagem/vídeo (sem som) e é-lhes pedido que imaginem uma história à volta daquela imagem/vídeo. De seguida, um segundo grupo que saiu da sala volta a entrar para ouvir a história que o primeiro grupo tem para contar. O segundo grupo tenta memorizar a história para contar a sua versão ao terceiro grupo que tenta memorizá-la (e assim sucessivamente). Por fim, todos os participantes vêem a foto/assistem ao vídeo (com som) que deu origem à história. São comparadas a foto/vídeo e a primeira e seguintes versões da história. Espera-se que no final todos sejam surpreendidos/as com os resultados. ¶

Colocam-se os nomes de todos os/as participantes num saco e cada elemento tira um nome. Cada participante é convidado a pesquisar na internet a pessoa que lhe saiu em sorteio. No final, todos partilham com o grupo o que descobriram na sua missão. Com base na 1ª tarefa, os/as participantes irão trabalhar em grupo no sentido de avaliarem os benefícios e malefícios associados à partilha online (com base no que descobriram) e propor *slogans* criativos para combater a partilha de informação pessoal em excesso na *web*. ¶



Projeto de investigação financiado pela FCT - SFRH / BD / 68288 / 2010

Investigadora | Teresa Sofia Castro

teresa.sofia.castro@gmail.com

91 425 15 04

Orientador científico | António J. Osório

ajosorio@ie.uminho.pt

253 601 203

**FCT**  
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia



## Sobre o projeto de investigação

### Enquadramento Teórico

No espaço socializante, dinâmico e fluido da web as fronteiras esbatidas entre oportunidades e riscos potenciam a ocorrência de fenómenos complexos de violência online protagonizados por crianças e jovens em idade escolar. Conteúdos perigosos, condutas de risco ou o contacto com terceiros na Internet podem desencadear experiências com proporções e desfechos mais ou menos imprevisíveis e/ou trágicos, como foi o caso de Amanda Todd, a menina canadiana, que pôs termo à sua vida na sequência de ter sido perseguida e importunada durante 3 anos, por causa de uma fotografia que deixou cair nas mãos de um estranho quando tinha 12 anos.

Assim, se por um lado, poucos duvidam que as tecnologias digitais online trouxeram oportunidades muito positivas e benéficas para as crianças e jovens no domínio da educação, comunicação, socialização, informação e entretenimento. Por outro lado, o poder transformador e influente que as tecnologias digitais online imprimem às interações sociais, pode ter

um grande impacto na segurança, no desenvolvimento e no bem-estar das crianças e jovens. Há um número cada vez maior de crianças e jovens conectados que consomem, distribuem e produzem conteúdos; assim como, conteúdos potencialmente inapropriados e/ou nocivos, que estão facilmente acessíveis a crianças e jovens. À medida que cresce o número de crianças e jovens conectados online, cresce inevitavelmente o risco de as crianças usarem as tecnologias digitais online para práticas menos saudáveis e/ou agressivas.

Tal como uma caixa de Pandora, a rápida e diversificada evolução das tecnologias digitais online abriu portas a um universo de reais oportunidades e potenciais riscos.

No que toca às crianças e aos jovens tudo se torna mais complexo quando conjugamos vulnerabilidade com agencialidade. Alguns autores sugerem que esta potencial falta de empatia, agressividade e alteração de códigos morais que se manifesta nas interações online é um problema crescente de saúde pública que será cada vez mais comum e, como tal, recomendam que seja empreendidos esforços adicionais na

4



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### Enquadramento metodológico

A investigação com crianças e sobre crianças é um desafio complexo em que “os significados e valores aí presentes terão sempre uma dupla interpretação: a dos adultos e a das crianças” (Soares, 2006, p. 29) o que explica porque muitos dos estudos negligenciam as crianças (Livingstone e Bober, 2003).

A linha de ação desta investigação de pendor qualitativo assentará na adoção de uma investigação “child-centered focus” (Livingstone e Bober, 2003). No entanto, cientes que a realidade do terreno nem sempre encontra respostas precisas nos manuais de metodologias, assumimos esta pesquisa como um processo de investigação flexível e reflexiva de cariz participativo, cuja complexidade e imprevisibilidade são factores marcantes na investigação. Assim, optar-se-à por combinar estratégias e técnicas de entre os diversos meios disponíveis nas metodologias qualitativas para a recolha de informação que privilegiem o dar voz às crianças.



## Appendix 2 – Informed consent



## Consentimento Informado

**Tema do estudo:** Violência *online* em idade escolar: realidades, problemas e soluções  
**Investigadora Responsável:** Teresa Sofia Castro  
**Contactos:** teresa.sofia.castro@gmail.com | telemóvel: 914251504)  
**Instituição/Departamento:** Universidade do Minho, Instituto de Educação  
**Local das atividades:** Centro de Atividades de Tempos Livres(CATL) da Associação de Pais do Agrupamento de Escolas de Palmeira

**Objectivo do estudo:** Compreender como as crianças e jovens vivenciam e descrevem as experiências de convívio na Internet.

**Procedimentos.** A participação neste estudo consistirá na participação num conjunto de atividades colaborativas ao longo de dez sessões. As sessões serão gravadas (áudio e/ou vídeo) e terão a duração média de 60/90 minutos.

**Sigilo.** Os participantes do estudo nunca serão identificados, mesmo quando os resultados deste estudo forem divulgados, e os dados não serão utilizados para outros fins que não investigação científica.

O estudo acima mencionado está integrado no meu projecto de Doutoramento, sob a orientação do Prof. Doutor António José Osório, e é neste sentido que solicito colaboração para autorizar a participação do seu encarregado de educação nas atividades a realizar.

Declaro que me comprometo a respeitar todas as diretrizes éticas para que esta investigação seja realizada em condições de segurança e respeito pelas partes envolvidas.

1/10/2013 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Assinatura da investigadora)

Após ter sido devidamente informado/a de todos os aspectos deste estudo e ter esclarecido as minhas dúvidas, autorizo a participação do meu encarregado de educação neste estudo.

\_\_\_/10/2013 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Assinatura do/a encarregado/a de educação)

Aceito participar neste estudo.

\_\_\_/10/2013 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Assinatura do/a jovem)