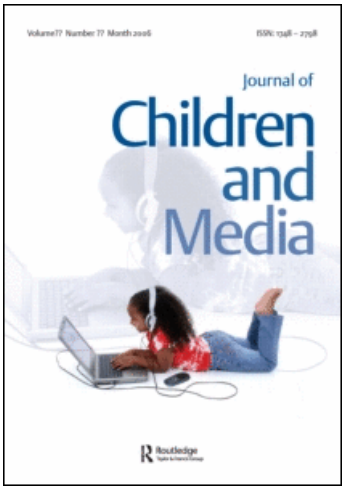

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Review and Commentary

David Cooper Moore; Renee Hobbs; Julie Fefferman; Kjerstin Andersson; Jeff Hearn; Suruchi Thapar-Björkert

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Review And Commentary

COMMENTARY

LEARNING ADVERTISING LITERACY THROUGH GAMING
A review of Admongo.gov

David Cooper Moore and **Renee Hobbs**

The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has had a long and complicated relationship with advertising targeted at children in the United States. In the 1970s, when the FTC first explored regulating advertising of products targeted to young children, their work was stymied by pressure from the business community. Congress then revised the commission's mandate in ways that limited their ability to regulate advertising to children (Jordan, 2008). But the FTC is now taking steps to promote media literacy in the classroom with Admongo (http://www.admongo.gov), an online multimedia edutainment game and curriculum designed in collaboration with Scholastic.

The program is designed to teach children aged 8 to 12 basic principles of media literacy, including increasing awareness of types of advertising, understanding ad techniques, and examining methods of targeting audiences. The program consists of an interactive online game for children and a set of classroom lesson plans for teachers. To reflect the changing media systems that young people are growing up with, Admongo helps children recognize online advertising, viral marketing, text message ads, product placement, and advergaming. Many types of advertising are subtle and easily confused with entertainment and information. Recognizing the varieties of forms of advertising in the contemporary mediasphere is an important part of media literacy and the game play experience may increase children's ability to recognize many new types of advertising that are now part of children's lives.

The centerpiece of the Admongo program is an online edutainment game, visually resembling the online multiplayer game, Poptropica (www.poptropica.com). Children create an avatar and then begin their journey by finding advertisements hidden throughout the game. Along the way, they collect coins in a search for ads in the outside world and in the home. The game component of Admongo is designed to help children see that advertising is everywhere: in their homes, in their schools, in the neighborhood, and on all the many screens in their lives. Game activities encourage children to recognize store coupons, catalogs, logos, and promotional posters as advertising. Activities help children distinguish between claims that are accurate and those that are inaccurate. In one level of the game, users are encouraged to identify how "calls to action" are made to increase people's sense of urgency in responding to ads encountered via cell phone marketing, e-mail newsletters, and billboards. Children are also introduced to the concept of ad placement, learning to see the strategic decisions made to position ads where target

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Routledge
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FIGURE 1
Admongo.gov home page.

audiences are most likely to respond. During game play, an attentive reader will encounter information about the media industry, like the idea that ads support "free" broadcast television and radio programming.

The program also offers three complementary lesson plans designed for use in school: (1) Ad Awareness, where children find many different types of advertising in their home and community, including catalogs and ads on busses; (2) Ad Targeting and Techniques, where children learn strategies that are used to attract and hold attention; and (3) Ad Creation, where children discover how specific strategies are matched to meet the interests of certain demographic groups. To conclude the learning experience, there is a final reflection activity and quiz.

Among the most helpful resources for teachers are a set of short videos that introduce basic media literacy concepts explored in the program, including videos that introduce the three focus questions of the program: "Who's Responsible for the Ad?," "What's the Message of the Ad?," and "What Does the Ad Want Me to Do?" Family handouts to send home include scavenger hunt activities where children look for advertising in the home and a coviewing experience where children watch a TV show and keep track of all the ads, identifying the target audience for each one.

But questions of representation-reality, values, ethics, and the real-world impact of marketing are unavoidable when exploring advertising (NAMLE, 2007). Eight- to 12-year-olds can understand how advertising can be deceptive, flattering, and overpromising in ways that promote greed and materialism. They can recognize that ads may conflate products with deeper human needs, making products seem more important than other social values to the detriment of the individual and the society. Unfortunately, the Admongo curriculum steers away from these deeper issues.

Admongo doesn't make use of Starburst, T-Mobile, Cheetos, Snickers, or Coke ads in the online game or in the curriculum materials. Instead, it uses a variety of "fake" advertisements for soft drinks, movies, videogames, deodorant, and cereal, which are approximations of popular advertising genres. These seem familiar yet are abstracted from children's lived experiences. Children are intimately familiar with specific brands, and can often identify brand logos before they have developed basic print literacy skills (Young, 1990). Strong brand associations present both a powerful learning opportunity and a potential setback to promoting media literacy competencies. The use of real ads could provide an opportunity to make a real-world connection that may help children investigate their direct relationships with existing brands and link abstract concepts of targeting an audience and persuasion techniques to the way that they actually desire and consume these products.

Real ads pose a disadvantage, however, that Admongo creators may have considered in making their decision to use artificial ads for nonexistent products. Like other forms of popular media, children form strong personal bonds to their favored brands. Brand loyalty, when explicitly challenged, may result in disengaged behavior, such as that which occurs when critiquing a favorite television show, film, or piece of music. Children may experience outright disengagement and resentment or mere parroting of the teacher's desired responses (Buckingham, 2003). In addition, if the Admongo program used real ads, children's advocacy groups might complain that it was promoting products while teaching media literacy.

However, a robust media literacy program should engage directly with children's actual experiences with ads in order to help with the transfer of skills from the classroom to the realm of private consumption. This process is difficult even when children are taught to be more conscious and critical of advertising effects (Buckingham, 2003; van Evra, 2004). Admongo's creators strike a middle ground, suggesting that teachers bring in outside ad material from real newspapers and magazines.

The Admongo online game and curriculum address the concept of message production by inviting children to create their own ads. Children are asked to market various products to different demographic groups, including children and family members. But the curriculum offers little exploration of how print advertisements are created in the real world, through careful design planning, digital photo manipulation, casting, photo shoots, etc. One of the reasons why the 1990s "Buy me That" videos from Consumer Reports were so popular among educators is the "behind-the-scenes" framing that helps children see the strategic creative decisions at work in constructing advertising.

It's important that the FTC is supporting meaningful discussion and reflection about advertising in our society by asking children to actively transfer their knowledge back outside of the classroom. The Admongo program explicitly encourages students to apply their own world knowledge and everyday experiences to game play. An elementary teacher using the Admongo curriculum should ask students to participate in individual and group reflection, applying concepts learned to their real-world experiences with advertisements, then sharing this information with a class to see how different students were able to use these skills differently, depending on the advertising media they encountered.

Readers may wonder about the FTC's own motivations for developing a media literacy curriculum focused on advertising. Admongo is framed around an empowerment perspective toward advertising. The essential paradox of the Admongo curriculum is that while public health professionals and others view advertising to be a potentially pernicious

influence on children, nothing in the curriculum offers the opportunity for this perspective to ever manifest itself in the classroom. One of the most obvious omissions is advertising's impact on childhood nutrition. Advertising targeted at children aged 8 to 12 typically encourages the consumption of grossly unhealthy food products. Though citizen activist groups have successfully lobbied to end the most egregious junk food and programming crossovers on television, such as cartoon shows starring junk food mascots (Nestle, 2007), such efforts have done little to put a dent in the industry of junk food advertising. The FTC's framing of media literacy as a form of consumer empowerment is perhaps a response to this specific issue, and some educators and parents will be disappointed by its failure to introduce some of the complexity and controversy surrounding advertising and children.

Finally, a key question that remains after exploring the Admongo curriculum is what the FTC feels is its purpose in promoting media literacy about advertising, especially in relation to the commission's more recent efforts in regulating food and alcohol advertising as well as advertising for violent videogames and movies. The FTC makes the claim to teachers and parents that the FTC "protects consumers by educating them about advertising and how it works" (US Federal Trade Commission, 2010). But teachers who are invited to use the curriculum receive no explanation of the *context* of this work. No information is provided to explain the FTC's history with children's advertising regulation, nor is there any real discussion of *why* the FTC feels it is important to build children's understanding of advertising. Enrolling educators in the larger political, economic, social, and cultural context of the issue of advertising to children would seem to be a natural way not just to get teacher "buy-in," but to demonstrate respect for teachers' own motivations and values in making the decision to teach advertising literacy to students in elementary and middle school.

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David Cooper Moore is the program director of Powerful Voices for Kids, a university-school collaboration supported by Temple University's Media Education Lab that advances media literacy education in elementary education. E-mail: dcoopermoore@temple.edu

Renee Hobbs is a professor in the Department of Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Mass Media at Temple University in Philadelphia where she founded the Media

Education Lab (www.mediaeducationlab.com), which advances media literacy education through scholarship and community service. She is the author of *Copyright Clarity: How Fair Use Supports Digital Learning* (2010) and *Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English* (2007). E-mail: reneeh@temple.edu

COLLABORATIVE COMPUTER-BASED LEARNING
Del MUNdo, a program exploration

Julie Fefferman

Instant messaging, New York to Israel:

3:25 PM **JP (age 15)**: Why is Israel not willing to get aid from other countries? Pride?
3:26 PM **Kevin (age 14)**: Israel wants to be independent, right now they would have to be borrowing or trading with Turkey for water, their afraid turkey would leverage political moves for water

Introduction to Del MUNdo

While current technology makes information widely accessible, opportunities to build learning communities of meaningful communication are still lacking. Within the high school curriculum, social studies remain subjectively interpretive and two-dimensional under the confines of solely textual resources. Cultural and political studies would be much more effective if learning experiences were immersive and dialectic. Without costly field trips, students should utilize Internet and multimedia to collaborate in global explorations for interactive and meaningful learning experiences.

Del MUNdo (meaning *of the world*) is an after-school pilot program that leverages technology and guided discussion between two global Model United Nations (MUN) chapters to teach world issues like Sustainable Water Management and facilitate the exploration of solutions to the water conflict in the Jordan River Basin. The Model United Nations (MUN) offers an established worldwide network for secondary education as well as a robust curriculum on which to build global, guided discussions. As a part of the United Nations' education efforts, the MUN is a simulation-based program in which students learn about international relations; after focused research on a particular country and UN issue, students play the role of diplomats and engage in problem-solving discussion and debate. Through rhetoric activity, high school students develop solutions to global issues such as cultural tolerance, conflict resolution, human rights, environment, and economic development (Ki-Moon, 2008).

Del MUNdo bolsters the Model United Nations curriculum by providing a digital platform for long-distance and synchronous communication and by establishing an environment for students to engage more directly and efficiently than at formal and costly in-person MUN conferences. Digital communication tools like chat, videochat, and

discussion boards are age- and lesson-appropriate technology for high school students to discuss UN-related issues and explore solutions (Benjamin, 2002; Miller & Sessions, 2005; Navarro & Shoemaker, 2000).

Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning as Theoretical Framework

Peer interactions and facilitated discussions establish a collaborative learning environment in which students can express opinions, develop ideas together, and form personal connections (Salomon, Perkins, & Globerson, 1991). Instructional partnership, as lended by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Rogoff, 1990), via computer-assisted communication encourages an academic interdependency; students symbiotically serve both expert and novice roles and thereby establish a collaborative learning environment. By adopting the MUN curriculum, it is hoped that students and teachers can have a strong academic foundation from which to build meaningful discussions in a collaborative learning environment. The curriculum is age-appropriately designed for informed students to play the roles of UN diplomats in debate: to share knowledge, challenge as well as defend statements, and seek solutions to global conflicts (Spring, 2009; Weiss & Daws, 2007).

A concept that guides technology to conduce peer-cooperative learning is that of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning Theory (CSCL), adapted from Salomon and colleagues (1991). Other instructional strategies, such as cognitive apprenticeship, scaffolding, and question-based and intellectual conflict-based learning, create the cognitive and instructional foundation that contribute to Salomon et al.'s CSCL framework.

Instructional elements of daily assigned questions, advisor facilitation, and encouraged debate support the idea that students require questions and delegated tasks to ensure engagement. Questions also facilitate debate, or *intellectual conflict*, as well as simply dialogue and discussion (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). This question-based and intellectual conflict-based learning method guides learners toward the instructional objectives.

Learning Goals and Objectives

Del MUNdo applies the Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning Theory to teach UN curricula to high school students about Sustainable Water Management and related issues in the Jordan River Basin—its causes, effects, resulting conflicts, and solutions (United Nations Association, 2008). Over the course of 1 week, two high school Model UN chapters—one in Israel and one in New York City—collaboratively research and discuss solutions for the freshwater shortage in Lebanon and Israel. And in addition to these academic goals, the instructive design attempts to guide students to demonstrate positive attitudes and increase their critical thinking skills toward global issues and perspectives.

Del MUNdo takes place over the course of 4 days of one school week. On each of the 4 days, students log into their password-protected Gmail account and GoogleGroups home page (googlegroups.com/delmundo), serving as the discussion board, where an advisor posts a new question of the day. Some questions include: "What is 'water management' and what are the major causes for freshwater shortage?" "How can lack of freshwater affect a country's economy, health, politics, vegetation and wildlife?" "How can conflict arise from multiple states sharing a single water source?" "How can these conflicts be resolved?"

Students are assigned a partner in the other location; and advisors, both in New York and Israel, facilitate conversations, offer discussion-generating questions, and suggest points of research to keep the dialogue moving toward the educational goal.

The Del MUNdo Program Experience

For the first day, students posted their initial thoughts, questions, and any information they may already know on the discussion board, in response to the daily assigned question. For example, some students searched for text-based information using GoogleSearch and one student used GoogleMaps to find the Jordan River Basin's geographic location.

On GoogleGroups, Simon (Israel) posted on November 2, 2009, at 4:13pm EST:

> Water management is management of water resources such as sewage, drinking water, rainwater as well as flood protection and management of irrigation canals . . . For example in Israel, the water from the Sea of Galilee is really low and . . . it provides Israel with 1/3 of the water Israel uses. Thus the government had to make laws . . .

For the second and third days, student partners collaboratively researched and discussed the assigned question of the day through Gchat, Google's text- and video-based messaging software. For example, Sholom (New York) shared with his partner a video from the TED conference[1] in which engineer Michael Pritchard talked about his invention, the portable Lifesaver water filter, a device that can purify the dirtiest, deadliest water into drinking water in seconds. Students in both New York and Israel were simultaneously able to view the video and the device's capabilities that could potentially solve the freshwater shortage.

Text-based messages between JP (New York) and Kevin (Israel) on November 5, 2009:

> 3:21 PM **JP**: Since we both are using the river to supply both our countries, I would like both Israel and Lebanon to work out a system each year that can meet our demands.

FIGURE 1
Victoria reading the first discussion board posting (November 2, 2009).

FIGURE 2
Astou and Jing videochatting with Clay in Israel (November 4, 2009).

The limitations on the amount of water requires us to look elsewhere and that means spending money to buy from other countries

3:23 PM **Kevin**: From what I know, Israel doesn't want to depend on any other country for water . . .

3:25 PM **JP**: Why is Israel not willing to get aid from other countries? Pride?

3:26 PM **Kevin**: Israel wants to be independent, right now they would have to be borrowing or trading with Turkey for water, their afraid turkey would leverage political moves for water

On the fourth and final day, as a collective group, students drew conclusions and discussed solutions through a videoconference. Milana (Israel) explained that in Israel the government highly taxes excessive use of water so that Israelis are taught to use water sparingly by handwashing dishes and taking quick showers. The New York group suggests that this would be a good solution to Lebanon's water problem as well.

The New York advisor asked, "What measures can be made to ensure that Israel and Lebanon work together toward a resolution?" Rasheem (New York) answered that Israel and Lebanon should both fairly adhere to the same laws and restrictions; Milana (Israel) suggested that a committee can be formed to address the fair and communal use of water. Both classes agreed this would be valuable progress in resolution to the conflict.

The Potential of Del MUNdo

Based on initial assessments, the Del MUNdo program seems to have the potential to foster constructive, collaborative dialogue (and learning) for its participants. To measure program outcomes, all sixteen participating students completed online surveys with multiple choice and open-response questions, and advisors provided feedback and performance analysis. Unanimously, students felt more knowledgeable on the topic of

Sustainable Water Management in having participated, and fifteen out of sixteen students indicated that the daily assigned questions helped them learn about this topic. Three-quarters of students liked using the discussion board, videochat, chat, and videoconferencing; and fourteen out of sixteen indicated that they felt comfortable using GoogleGroups for an MUN program and would encourage teachers to organize another similar project.

> I really enjoyed the experience, talking to people on the other side ... and learning a bit more about our represented country and neighbors. The students from Israel are very knowledgeable and helped give us a better understanding of the situation in the civilian's point of view. (Victoria, New York student)

> The critical thinking and abstract reasoning is on a par with general MUN discussion. The kids felt like they could make their points and experience the exchange of MUN just as if they were in the committee room with the NYC students. (Michael, Israel teacher)

Based on these initial results of Del MUNdo's pilot program, we see that classmates in different locations and cultural contexts are able to engage in meaningful, educational discussions through digital platforms. Over the course of the project, students listened respectfully, performed valuable research, acquired practical knowledge in Sustainable Water Management, and explored viable solutions to the conflict in the Jordan River Basin.

Despite this initial success of Del MUNdo, there are certainly ways to improve the program. A more thorough Google tutorial at the beginning would have helped those students who are less technology-savvy. In addition, private booths or even multiuser headsets would have lessened the noisy distractions of peer conversations. Moreover, more formal evaluation of the educational impacts of the program would be useful in order to highlights areas where the curriculum or program could be improved.

According to the student and instructor feedback, Del MUNdo successfully imparted educational value and a "better understanding" of the international issues at hand. Students enjoyed the experience, which was notably beyond school hours, leveraging technology toward academic goals. As a computer-supported, collaborative learning environment, Del MUNdo engaged students in question- and conflict-based learning, encouraging students to seek and share knowledge, challenge as well as defend statements, and together explore solutions to global conflicts. As technology becomes more accessible and familiar in educational environments, academically guided and digital supported discussions create the possibility to better inform and shape a new generation of learners.

NOTE

1. TED (Technology Entertainment and Design) is a global set of conferences curated by the American private nonprofit Sapling Foundation, formed to disseminate "ideas worth spreading."

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Julie Fefferman (BA Film, Boston University, and MA Educational Communications and Technology, NYU) currently works at WebMD, the most recognized brand and the market leader in online health information. Previously, she has worked in Business Development for Sesame Workshop, interviewed Albert Maysles for *Filmmaker Magazine*, and worked on the PBS documentary, *Andy Warhol*. She is also a blogger for the *Huffington Post*. E-mail: jfefferman@gmail.com

MEDIATED COMMUNICATIONS OF VIOLENCE
The example of "happy slapping"

Kjerstin Andersson, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert and **Jeff Hearn**

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) afford new possibilities for complex interactions among young people. An Internet user can be both a consumer (receiver) and a producer (sender) of mediated communication, asynchronously or simultaneously—such as someone who both uploads and watches video clips on YouTube (von Feilitzen, 2009). "And between these two extremes—the reception and sender roles—the user can be interacting or participating to different extents, for example, in games and in communities owned, maintained and copywrited by someone else" (von Feilitzen, 2009, p. 36). Communication and socializing in virtual online and real offline life through ICTs

provides new dimensions to young peoples' "identity experiments and identity formation" (p. 38). As discussed by Wellman (2001), the "social affordances of computerized communication networks" provide youth with many possibilities for new forms of production and consumption of violence in and through media technology. In this Commentary we aim to outline some important, yet relatively underdeveloped, aspects of research that connect new media, violence, and young people.

Young People, New Media, and Violence

Researching young people's use of new media in consuming and producing violence (including cyberbullying and online harassment) connects with broad questions of the impact of ICTs on power and citizenship (see Denning, 2001, for more on these topics). In a survey by the UK children's charity National Children's Homes, 14% of 11- to 19-year-olds said they had been threatened and harassed using text messages and images taken with mobile phone cameras (Burn & Cranmer, 2007). Increasingly, children's and young people's use of new interactive media technology frequently and actively structure their social lives and everyday practices (cf. Aarsand, 2007; Anderson et al., 2003; Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Lin, 2007; Brady, 2007; Dunkels, 2005; Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finklehor, 2007). Thus, their offline and online practices, and their intersections, are shaped by the intertextual and rapidly changing character of new media. Young people's interactions using new technology have also been characterized as "perpetual linkages" (Brown & Cantor, 2000), indicating near-constant interaction by way of Internet and mobile phones (Dimmick, Ramirez, Wang, & Lin, 2007). Moreover, a multiscreen, multitasking relationship has developed between mobile phones, the television, and the computer (von Feilitzen, 2009). Interestingly for our concerns, it has been suggested that electronic communication awards little affective feedback, and that users have the possibility to remain more emotionally unattached than in face-to-face situations (Poole, 2007). Moreover, specific to young people's use of mobile phones is the possibility of superseding parental control and supervision even more so than with the use of fixed Internet connections (von Feilitzen, 2009).

In the remainder of this commentary, we will hone in on a specific case study of the interplay of producing and consuming media with interpersonal violence, and its potential impacts on young people. Although primarily a case of consumption, new technology allows young people to more easily and actively distribute or even produce such texts, if only through forwarding or recommending links through social networking.

The Case of "Happy Slapping"

"Happy slapping" is a term coined for describing a type of homemade film of nonfictional violence. A search on Google for "happy slapping" in June 2010 generated over 160,000 video links, many with hundreds of thousands of viewings. "Happy slapping" movies can roughly be categorized into two main groups. One group comprises films of violent events, not specifically staged for the purpose of recording, such as street fights, conflicts between young people and the police. The other group builds on the long established comic tradition of slapstick. There are a number of clips from the famous US comedy group "The Three Stooges," showing collections of slaps to the face. A video called "Three Stooges Most Violent Sequence Ever" is one of the most popular videos of this nature, currently with over 480,000 viewings.

Short homemade films, such as the "Greatest Happy Slap Ever" draw on the same narrative as the Three Stooges clips. This clip shows two men facing each other, slapping each other with an open palm on the cheek, using the same techniques as the Three Stooges. In the clip, the men are standing in a kitchen, with several friends present. The first man slaps the second man in the face, whereby the bystanders are laughing and "aowing" (making verbal recognition of their impressions of the slap). Then the second man prepares to slap the first man back. In doing this he knocks over things in the kitchen as he is reaching back as far as he can in preparing for the slap. When receiving the slap the first man falls over into a pile of boxes, unconscious, whereby his friends are leaning over him, trying to get him to stand up. At this point the sequence with the second man hitting the first is rapidly repeated over and over again, generating the same type of fast slaps as in the Three Stooges clips.

This example raises several points of discussion. The nonfictional violence is performed in front of onsite participants, but is also made public to a wide general and unspecified audience, through YouTube postings. The violence in the clip is interpreted as comic by the participants (who are laughing), and the editing of the clip (rapid repetition of the second slapping) also suggests that it should be interpreted as such by the YouTube consumers. Moreover, the specific setting, i.e. the domestic kitchen, normalizes and projects the violence as a feature of the "everyday." The participants are themselves young people or young adults, and the most active consumers of YouTube are also children and young people, thus demonstrating that this genre of clips is both produced and consumed by young people. We would also like to highlight that the representation of young people in violent video clips not only signals the use of violence as a form of social control, power, and abuse, but also that its coverage through available technologies is used as what might seem to be a subtle way of enforcing the message.

A Call for Research and Discourse

This discussion is an attempt to raise questions and begin a dialogue concerning the production and consumption of nonfictional violence, and how it has become a commodity for communication, valuation, and circulation in young people's everyday social activities. New media content has an impact on and influences how young people construct their friendships, social networks, and everyday lives in public and private domains. There is a need to study how new media and violence production/consumption shapes and negotiates social relations and identities.

An approach based on the understanding of identity as socially constructed (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and where young people are seen as active agents in creating their social lives (cf. James & James, 2004) would facilitate such research. Importantly, though, attitudes toward violence are informed by gender, generation, and ethnicity (Andersson, 2008; Hearn, 1998, 2006; Thapar-Björkert, Morgan, & Yuval-Davis, 2006; Tufte, 2007). It is important to note that both young men and young women are exposed to violence via new media. Many young people are becoming socialized more through online sources, and in some cases as much through online peer practices as through traditional institutions such as the home, family, and schools. It is pertinent to investigate the social implications of new forms of media violence in order to understand young people's understandings of their identities, and raise consciousness about young people as consumers and producers of violence.

Moreover, it is increasingly imperative for research projects to explore the intersections between children and young people as consumers of violence (viewing strangulation movies, happy slapping movies) and as producers of violence (uploading homemade videos of violence). Young people's changing relations with technology and violence also connect with broad questions concerning the impact of ICTs on power, order, control, governance, citizenship, public/private domains, and ethical conduct. Consequently, these areas of research would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of: (1) how young people themselves construct "violence," and what is included and excluded in the concept; and (2) how violence at a metalevel is theorized as multiple social process(es) of violation and harm (physical, sexual, material, social, psychological, and representational) and are liable to be changed and indeed often expanded through new media. Thus, some important questions for future investigations are:

- What forms of mediatized violence are present in young people's everyday lives (including harassment, threats, bullying, physical violence, sexual violence, etc.)?
- How are these forms of violence produced, consumed, and distributed?
- How are young people's identities negotiated in relation to new patterns of consumption and production of mediatized violence in and around the use of ICTs?

We hope that the community of scholars of children, adolescents, and media will join us in investigating these issues and creating space for their discussion in our more traditional mediated violence conversations.

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Kjerstin Andersson is an assistant professor in the Department of Thematic Studies (Child Studies), Linköping University, Sweden. E-mail: kjerstin.andersson@liu.se

Jeff Hearn is Professor of Gender Studies (Critical Studies on Men), Department of Thematic Studies (Gender Studies), Linköping University, Sweden, and Professor at Hanken School of Economics, Finland, and University of Huddersfield, UK. E-mail: hearn@hanken.fi

Suruchi Thapar-Björkert is Senior Lecturer in Development Studies at the Department of Government at Uppsala University, Sweden. E-mail: suruchi.thapar-bjorkert@statsvet.uu.se