



PARENTS' MORAL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES FOR MONITORING CHILDREN'S MEDIA EXPOSURE

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Abstract: Media technology is part of a rich interplay of socio-cultural artifacts and practices. Parents greet each new medium with a mixture of fear and hope, and they increasingly acknowledge that media present new challenges for their roles as parents. Through ethnographically-informed discourse analysis of interviews with parents in dual-earner families, this paper investigates parents' discourse on children's media use in the home. Analysis reveals that media use is a sensitive arena, one in which parents struggle to present themselves as moral agents when discussing how they attempt to control their children's media exposure. Parents employ multiple strategies, such as contrasting one's own practice with others, to portray themselves as "doing the right thing", adhering to an ideal moral image of parenthood. A particular focus is put on how the collective voice of culture with its practices, preferences, and ideologies seems to permeate the individual's articulation of accountability vis-à-vis media.

Keywords: Media Technology, Parenthood, Family Interaction, Discourse, Morality

Özet: Medya teknolojisi sosyo-kültürel yapıların ve uygulamaların zengin sunumunun bir parçasıdır. Ebeveynler her yeni aracı korku ve umut karışımı bir duygu ile karşılamaktadırlar ve kendi rollerine medyanın yeni zorluklar sunduğunu giderek artan bir şekilde kabul etmektedirler. Bu çalışma, çift maaşlı ailelerdeki ebeveynlerle yapılan görüşmelerin budunbetimsel söylem çözümlemesi yoluyla, evde çocukların medya kullanımları ile ilgili ebeveynlerin söylemlerini incelemektedir. Analiz medya kullanımının hassas bir alan olduğunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Çocuklarının medyaya maruz kalmalarını nasıl kontrol etmeye çalıştıklarını tartışırken, ebeveynler ahlak temsilcileri kesilmektedirler. Ebeveynler kendi uygulamalarını diğerlerinininkilerle karşılaştırma, kendilerini "doğru olanı yapan" olarak tasvir etme ve ebeveynliğin ideal ahlak timsaline bağlı kalma gibi çeşitli stratejiler kullanmaktadırlar. Medya ile karşılaştırıldığında, kültürün uygulamaları, tercihleri ve ideolojileri ile birlikte bireylerin sorumluluklarına nasıl nüfuz ettiği konusuna özellikle ağırlık verilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Medya Teknolojisi, Ebeveynlik, Aile Etkileşimi, Söylem, Etik

Introduction

The emergence of media technology a few decades ago has impacted irreversibly the social landscape of America. Homes are now filled with endless screen, interactive, audio, and print media artifacts. There is increasing recognition that one of the most pressing problems when raising children nowadays is to handle their use of ubiquitous media technology (Rideout et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2005; Schmitt, 2000).

As parents have a strong sense of obligation to protect and nurture their children, they greet each new communication medium with a mixture of fear and hope. Many worry that children may be seduced by technology into abandoning more valuable pursuits, such as reading or playing with friends. They fear that media encourage passivity, stifle creativity, reduce interpersonal and physical activity, and introduce inappropriate content (Bryant and Bryant, 2001; Wartella et al.,

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2004). Yet, not all parents perceive media as monolithically bad. Some see great potential for expanding young people's educational horizons and creativity, enhancing social learning, facilitating communication, and developing competence in a world where being media literate has become necessary (Machin, 2002; Roberts et al., 2005). This paper seeks to discuss parents' talk about children's media use and monitoring, as it emerges during semi-structured interviews about family matters.

Television hasn't changed us. Television holds you together. Before we had TV, it was very difficult to keep my husband contented. I only wish we had had TV sooner. My children eat up more now because they sit and watch television and don't notice how much they eat... before they used to run away. There's more to converse about, with you having TV. Television doesn't command our life. It gives us a lot of pleasure, by the fireside with the children. Television keeps husbands at home. Young men don't go to the pubs so much. My children behave better now that we have TV. You can kind of bribe them with TV. If they want to see a program, they'll behave. (Himmelweit et al., 1958: 380)

The quote above from a mother's interview about fifty years ago illustrates the multi-faceted enthusiasm that many expressed when home television use was still in its infancy. Nowadays, most parents, teachers, and caregivers' discourse stand in striking contrast with this mother's words. There is a collective cultural consensus about the notion that the ubiquity of media is not healthy for individuals and for families (Hughes and Hans, 2001; Kubey and Donovan, 2001; Roberts et al., 2005). Our media lives are then embedded within various socio-historical and socio-cultural frameworks which provide the background for our moral beliefs and reasoning. Those frameworks serve as a subjective gauge in the evaluation of behavior; they encapsulate cultural notions about correct and incorrect ways of doing things; and they include explicit canons of behavior and implicit norms for acting, thinking, and feeling (Braybrooke, 1996; Copp, 1995; Kornhauser, 1996). Most parents believe in the existence of this objective moral standard, and concurrently seek moral appropriateness as they raise children in a world where media artifacts are omnipresent.

Parents often engage in moral discourse, which tends to portray them as good parents who are 'doing the right thing' (Kremer-Sadlik et al., 2008). They may see their individuality as defined in part by some moral commitment to strongly valued matters in society. In their quest to exercise 'good' parenting around media use, parents follow the Aristotelian principle according to which 'the good' is the goal that we all constantly strive to achieve (Kurtines and Gewirtz, 1984). As Taylor (1989) explains, selfhood, the pursuit of the 'good', and the quest for morality have always been interwoven matters. During the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the individual moral agent was conceived of as sovereign in his moral authority (MacIntyre, 1981). Now, contemporary moral discourse has added an essential and paradoxical feature: the gap between the meaning of moral expressions and the ways in which they are put to use. Indeed, parents seem to struggle with the discrepancy between their ideal and actual version of parenthood, as the ideologies surrounding media practices are called forth as a benchmark against which parents assess their own parenting style.

In this discussion of parents' talk about media use during interviews, it is essential to recognize that in general people have a 'self-image' which matters to them. This is linked to Taylor's idea (1989) that a self can only be described with reference to those who surround it. Selves owe their existence to "webs of interlocation" (p.36). We constantly struggle to appear in a good light in the eyes of those with whom we interact as well as in our own eyes. Our behaviors are constant carriers of our dignity. How we walk, move about, gesture, talk (our verbal, non-verbal, and non-vocal communication) is intricately and continuously shaped by our understanding that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of deference or scorn, of pride or humiliation. Therefore, during interviews, parents do care that they portray an image of themselves that will match up to the socially accepted standards of 'media parenting'.

Goffman (1959) also discussed self-presentation and moral conduct in public spheres. He stated that when we present ourselves before others, our 'performance' tends to integrate, epitomize, and represent the formally accredited principles and ethics of the society we live in. He believes that being in some objective sense 'moral' is less important than success in 'seeming to be moral'. In his view, the interpretation of a given action is both problematic for the audience and for the 'performing actors' as well, since they are aware that their actions will be interpreted. Therefore, it is impossible to disconnect parents' statements of family media rules and control from the fact that parents are conscious that such statements say something about them *as* parents: such statements are always related both to *how you want to be* and *how you want to be perceived* as a parent (Weinreich-Haste and Locke, 1983).

Briggs (1986) wrote extensively on the idiosyncrasies linked to analyzing interview data from interactional research perspectives. He asserted that the interview moves the roles that each interactant normally occupies in life into the background and constructs the encounter with respect to the roles of interviewer and interviewee. The social situation created by the interview does not only constitute an obstacle to respondents' expression of their beliefs and values; like speech events in general, it shapes the form and content of the interaction, as well as the meaning of each utterance. It is important to note that, in the present regulated setting in which the data for this paper were recorded, interviewers prompted talk, sought specific information, and may have embedded sensitivity to the topic of media use into the formulation of their questions. As such, the interviewer's constructions as carriers of moral implications for parents may have influenced parents' responses to questions, as evidenced in a study by Kremer-Sadlik et al. (2008).

This paper proposes that within the American culture, media use and monitoring have now become moral arenas in which the overarching notion that 'media is not good for you' prevails. The focus is on some of the common portrayals and strategies that parents employ to sustain good impressions in the eyes of the interviewer and with some of the common contingencies associated with the employment of these techniques in the context of the monitoring of their children's media use. In this study, the individual parents represent a collective voice of a culture

with its practices and preferences toward media use, and moral beliefs about how to maintain a healthy media landscape within the home.

Methodology

This study draws upon data on media in the home from the UCLA Sloan Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELFL). The corpus is comprised of 1,540 hours of videorecorded family life, interviews, and home-tours by family members; almost 21,000 photographs of homes and their artifacts, and ethno-archeological timed observations of family members, locations, and activities across 32 middle-class dual-earner families in the Los Angeles area. Each family was selected according to a set of specific criteria: both parents work at least 30 hours each outside the home; they have two or three children (one of them 8-10 years old), and they own and pay mortgage on their home. The families are of ethnically, racially, linguistically, and sexually diverse backgrounds (same-sex and hetero-normative parents).

This paper focuses on a corpus of about 200 hours of semi-structured interviews with parents from thirty-two dual-earner families in the Southern California area. Each parent, both individually and together with their spouse, participated in in-depth ethnographic interviews, videotaped or audiotaped. The interviews addressed family health habits and well-being concerns, daily routines, and educational goals. Media use was a topic that parents systematically initiated in each interview, even though it was not part of the interviewers' questions. Their verbatim transcripts were coded for key terms relating to media, such as "computer", "Internet", "TV", "television", "media", "video", "game", and "tape". When one of these terms appeared, the topical excerpt in which it was embedded was extracted to create a preliminary repertoire of parental talk on and attitudes about media use. A few exchanges that were representative of others' moral discourses were selected for the present analysis.

Parents' constructions of moral selves regarding their children's media use are examined through inductive discourse analytic methods focusing on a micro-level turn-by-turn analysis of language interaction. Across a variety of interactional contexts, including interviews, interlocutors continually reveal their orientations to the unfolding interaction; in turn, these orientations reveal notions about distinctive social actions, identities, and/or roles (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992; Heritage, 1984). Bourdieu's work on social practices (1990, 1993) is also important to this project. He asserted that people tend to interact in "fields" related to socially valued spheres of life. He stated that acquired dispositions, or "habitus", are adopted through upbringing and education, largely occurring within the family framework. Agents incorporate into their habitus the practical schemes and dispositions to be able to construct the world. This paper integrates the role of family and societal ideologies in parental control and monitoring of children's media use. A particular focus is put on how these ideologies underlie parents' attitudes toward the media, how agency comes into play in their practical enforcement, and how parents portray moral appropriateness in relation to accountability and responsibility of children's media utilization.

Analysis of the next few exchanges extracted from parents' interviews attempt to display the moral struggles and negotiations that occur during talk about children's media practices. In order to elevate themselves as moral, parents resort to different strategies which are revealed in details

throughout the analyses, such as criticizing other families' media habits, saying that their own families typically engage in a healthy media-free lifestyle, blaming someone else for the purchase of their children's technological artifacts, or stating that they have strict media rules at home. The interactional and reflexive constructions of morality and identity are discussed, as well as how notions of agency in control and monitoring are articulated.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the next few excerpts extracted from parents' health, education, and daily routine interviews will attempt to display the moral struggles and negotiations that occur during talk about children's media practices. In order to elevate themselves as moral, parents resort to different strategies. The interactional and reflexive constructions of morality and identity will be discussed, as well as how notions of agency in control and monitoring are articulated.

1. Contrasting One's Own Practices with Others'

The following exchange illustrates how parents sometimes resort to critiquing other families' media habits, to employing what I call "false negatives" (which corresponds to uttering a self-critique to paradoxically appear more virtuous in the eyes of the interlocutor in a certain moral context), and to utilizing negatively connotated imagery to highlight their own healthy media practices.

The first family is composed of two homosexual fathers, Rich and Frederick, and two children, ten-year-old Amy and seven-year-old Andrew. During the first part of their health interview, both fathers have tackled such topics as physical and mental health. Rich comes out as more physically active and outdoorsy than Frederick. Immediately prior to this exchange, the interviewer just asked if both fathers think they lead a "very healthy", "fairly healthy", or "not so healthy" life. Frederick has replied "moderately healthy", but that if they were to fit the exercise in, it would be "higher on the scale".

Excerpt 1:

- 1 Rich I think mo:stly healthy because we are so a:ctive. I mean we're just
2 not- .hh *((smiling voice))* >although I was watching the Laker
3 game.< We're not a kind of family that sits around and watches TV a
4 lot. .pt .hh Hu::m. Kids have even accused of us of *((laughs))*
5 overplanning their li:ves and doing you know too much. But hum (.)
6 .pt so I j- I think, you know, part of being healthy is to be a:ctive and
7 pre:sent and (.) you know I think of unhealthy as a la-z-boy chai::r a
8 remote contro::l and, you know (0.5) bee:r and soda and chips a:nd
9 you know all [that sort=
10 Interviewer [Mm hm
11 Rich =of imagery that we just don't (.) do. .hh U:m. You know we were
12 at the museum a couple weeks ago we were in Las Vegas last
13 weekend and- .hh and you know, there's no Gameboy:: I mean
14 Ninte:ndo stuff that we:-
15 Frederick °Right°
16 Rich Ya know the kids really during the week don't watch TV. U::m so

17 I feel like in that sense?- (.) and and we engage our mi:nds and
 18 we- we- you know go to museums .hh so in that sense we're- we're
 19 living a- >a moderately healthy-<

Within a few turns, Rich goes from saying that his family leads a “mostly healthy” to a “moderately healthy” life. Between lines 1 and 19, Rich develops a family scenario demonstrating the importance of being both physically and mentally active as a family, an ideology which does not leave any room for media use.

A. Using Contradictory Assertion / Counter-Assertion

When Rich is asked to describe his family’s health, he starts by sharing his thoughts on why his family is mostly healthy: “because we are so a:ctive”. With the subsequent “I mean”, he prefaces an elaboration of his opinion. He proceeds to give an explanation of what they are not like, so as to contrast his family’s practice with others. However, he interrupts his sentence on line 2 as he finds himself caught in a contradiction, and utters with a smiling voice: “Although I was watching the Laker game.<”

This side sequence demonstrates his slight embarrassment at being caught talking about ideally moral media practices which he himself just failed to engage in. He wants to present himself to the interviewer as someone who carefully controls the television-viewing habits of himself and his family, yet smiles as he admits that he has just watched the Laker game before the interviewer arrived. Goffman (1959) talked about people’s practices of “idealization”, which corresponds to the fact that “if an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards” (p.41). Here, Rich does not attempt to mask his prior action since he was ‘on record’ and v|deotaped while watching the Lakers Game.

As Hoover et al. (2004) stated, having a good sense of humor helps as parents negotiate the challenges of consistent and effective parenting. The contradiction between statements and practices about media use are especially remarkable because they inadvertently give expression to parents’ goals about and self-perceptions regarding parenting. MacIntyre (1981) argues that sometimes we are reduced quickly to assertion and counter-assertion because of the arguments we may have within ourselves. Those arguments may stem from the fact that the collective voice of culture in America highlights an ambivalent balance between the need for parents to protect children from dangerous media uses, and the need to nurture in children the ability to lead their own media choices with perspicacity and sensitivity. Therefore, this type of contradictory expressions such as Rich’s line 2 occurs in a context shaped by overarching cultural expectations of parental responsibilities.

B. Employing “False Negatives”

Parents were frequently found uttering “false negatives”, which corresponds to self-critiques paradoxically leading the speaker to appear more virtuous in the eyes of the interlocutor in a certain moral context. In this exchange, possibly in order to give more weight to his argument on his family’s good health, Rich utters with laughter on lines 4-5: “Kids have even accused of us of overplanning their li:ves and doing you know too much.” A similar construction will be found

later in Excerpt 4 when a father talks about his being very involved in his daughter's Internet usage. Rich mentions a third party's accusation (his children), which should be heard as a critique of overly busy parenting, overloading children with activities. However, this utterance is heard and received as a false critique. The twist consists of the topic being heavily morally loaded, in a society where media technology is badly apprehended. Therefore, by bringing in the children's accusation, Rich actually makes himself look better, demonstrating to the interviewer his positive involvement as a parent who wants to keep his children busy and away from media.

C. Embedding Critique in the Comparison of Families' Media Practices

Immediately after his initial contradiction on line 2, Rich restarts his statement about his family identity, by expanding on what they are not: "We're not a kind of family that sits around and watches TV a lot". The question asked by the interviewer did not trigger a response involving media scenarios in any particular way. It was open ended, and fathers did not have to introduce issues about media use. Here, interestingly, it is clear that the level of media engagement is one way by which Rich thinks of his family image. In a similar way to what Hoover et al. (2004) have discussed, Rich defines his family's health and identity by its relationship to media use and practices.

At the same time and despite his negative depiction of an unhealthy family scenario ("la-z-boy chair, remote control, beer, soda, chips"), Rich is not particularly judgmental about other people's media habits. Apparently, his family does not live their media lives trying to impress anyone or to make a statement. Both parents and children are included in the personal pronoun "we", and according to him, as a whole, they just do not see the benefit in doing that. In a way, Rich is saying that they do not allow their children to have the same media practices that they think other families have. In that sense, he says that they see themselves as not fitting into mainstream culture.

Contrasting one's own practice with others' is also a strategy employed by parents to further present themselves as parents who acknowledge and appreciate, unlike many others, the importance of being active, expanding one's horizons, traveling, and engaging children's minds in a way that differs from passive media-viewing. This strategy was studied by Kremer-Sadlik et al. (2008) in a discussion about a mother's preference regarding family time. The mother singled out her family as one of the few who "do it right". Here, Rich compares his family to other families' media practices that they "just don't (.) do" (line 11). Through his evaluation of others, he is able to elevate his family's moral righteousness and his own as a parent.

D. Opposing Imageries to Emphasize One's Own Healthy Practices

Throughout the entire exchange, Rich chooses to develop his opinion on what it means to be healthy. He incorporates various imageries into his speech, mainly opposing "us" to "them": what they do (right) versus what others do (wrong). He immediately embeds a healthy imagery into his discourse, which is one that they supposedly follow as a family. He starts by declaring that they are "so active" (line 1), the importance of which he repeats line 6: "part of being healthy is to be active and present". On lines 11-18, Rich's choice of words indexes positivism and growth: he mentions the value of going to museums (both on lines 12 and 18), traveling to

Las Vegas, and engaging their minds as successful ways of avoiding laziness, passivity, and therefore poor health.

In a contrasting fashion, Rich equates being unhealthy to “sitting around”, “watching TV a lot” (lines 3-4). Then, he proceeds to depict ‘unhealthy’ as a “la-z-boy chair, a remote control, beer, soda, and chips” (lines 7-8), which, interestingly, corresponds to a heterosexual masculine archetype. He combines both passive negative media imagery and poor diet practices, which is a close amalgamation that a father in Excerpt 3 (examined later) also utilizes. As a way to elevate their health status, Rich finally states that “there’s no Gameboy or Nintendo stuff” in his family, a fact which is confirmed by Frederick on line 15, and that the children “don’t watch TV” (lines 13-16). Hence, here, being involved in media activities is indirectly associated with a state where the brain is in an inert stage, inactivity takes over, and poor health ensues. This view seems to be shared by the family in the upcoming excerpt.

2. What it Means to Be a Well-Rounded Individual

We turn now to another family, composed of Karita and Derrick, and three children: twelve-year-old Pamela, nine-year-old Alan, and seven-year-old Jeremy. The following interview was also conducted with both parents about their family’s general health practices. Both Karita and Derrick are sitting in front of the researcher on the living-room couch. Prior to this exchange, they have talked about family diseases, work and money, and what constitutes happiness. The importance of playing sports is key in this specific household, as well as being socially active, as shown in the following exchange.

Excerpt 2:

- | | | |
|----|-------------|--|
| 1 | Derrick | So: (0.2) >I mean< you wanna see them do well and have fun and |
| 2 | | have friends and be active and |
| 3 | Interviewer | Mm hm |
| 4 | Derrick | You know I <u>hate</u> it when we come home and see them laying |
| 5 | | around here just you know watching <u>TV</u> : all the time |
| 6 | Interviewer | Hm: |
| 7 | Derrick | Be out and more ac[tive= |
| 8 | Interviewer | [mhm |
| 9 | Derrick | =more social then just to s:::it around |
| 10 | Interviewer | And what does that mean to you? Like what’s the importance of |
| 11 | | being active and social? |
| 12 | Derrick | Well I think just that it makes for a better <u>pe:rson</u> |
| 13 | Interviewer | Uh huh? |
| 14 | Derrick | Just the activities and the (0.4) <u>kn</u> owledge and the <u>expe</u> riences that |
| 15 | | they get being able to participate in other things beside just sitting |
| 16 | | here watching TV. |
| 17 | Interviewer | Mm hm. Hm mm |

In a similar fashion to Excerpt 1, both parents (and here specifically Derrick) display the importance of being active in order to be and remain healthy.

Derrick voices the collective cultural consensus about what it means to be a good parent, using the second person impersonal pronoun “you”, on line 1 and 2: “you wanna see them do well and have fun and have friends and be active”. This is a four-part list which summarizes what is expected from children in order for them to be healthy.

While the imagery in Excerpt 1 pertained to the domain of stereotypes (la-z-boy chair, etc), here Derrick moves into a reality that he knows, that he is used to witnessing “all the time”, and that negatively affects him (see lines 4-5). The inertia he “hates” is of various kinds, as expressed on lines 7 and 9: *physical*, that is, remaining immobile indoors for hours at a time; *mental*, that is, not exercising one’s inactive brain; *social*, that is, not making friends.

His worries about children spending too much time in front of the TV set are well-founded, since a study conducted by Beck and Arnold (2007) based on tracking data of CELF videotaped material revealed that TV-watching represented 7.6% of all the time the 32 families spent at home, which corresponded to 50% of all leisure time. Additionally, Roberts et al. (2005) reported that kids under 6 years old watch up to two hours of TV on a typical day, which is of concern to parents.

On lines 10-11, the interviewer seeks more information about what it means by and large to be active and social, to which Derrick replies that “it makes for a better person”. This moral statement is embedded within common societal expectations of what it means to be a well-rounded individual. Derrick displays his awareness of a common cultural ideology: ‘active + social = better person’, and elaborates on it from line 14 to 16. According to him, if children “participate in other things”, then they will get “activities” and acquire “knowledge” and “experiences” from them, which will eventually make them better people/adults.

In this exchange, the father displays his frustration toward witnessing his children “laying around here just watching TV” (lines 4-5), “just sitting around” (line 9), and “just sitting here watching TV” (lines 15-16). He is not voicing any particular plan to avoid this occurrence, nor blaming anybody for his children’s inactivity. However, he displays a sense of irritation, which the father in the upcoming excerpt also shares.

3. Blaming Someone Else as the Negative Moral Agent

Many parents resorted to accusing outsiders of being responsible for their children’s media use. Because children’s heavy engagement with media is a morally loaded issue and because parents as caregivers could be easily blamed for it, parents tend to alleviate their own responsibility by pointing the finger at other people. Those “detrimental third parties”, or negative moral agents, are said to buy media artifacts and introduce unhealthy food to children, which are phenomena that parents claim refusing to endorse.

To examine this dynamic, we turn to another family: Travis, Alice, eight-year-old Jonah, and two-year-old Dylan. During Travis’ solo education interview, he has been tackling such topics as his children’s schools, parental involvement in homework, their nanny’s involvement, and the importance of reading, which led to the use of media in the home. The interviewer asks Travis to

explain how he monitors his son Jonah's media use, and what his attitude toward media is in general, leading to the following exchange:

Excerpt 3:

- 1 Travis I think Cartoon Network is essentially p(h)oi(hh)[so(h)n.
 2 Interviewer [Huh uh huh
 3 Travis The- it- it's, you know, i:- it teaches passivity I'm su:re. (0.5) U::m
 4 (1.0)
 5 Interviewer But media would be beyond TV right? >It would be the Gameboy,
 6 it would be< compute:r (0.8) right? Wh- what would be:: [()]?
 7 Travis [Yeah. I
 8 would never buy him a Gameboy. His uncle came over a:nd
 9 bought him a Gameboy. (0.5) You know? For his birthday. He as-
 10 as he asked him. (1.1) A:nd (0.5) that's tha:t. He g- he got- I- >I'm
 11 okay with that, it's not like you ca:n't ha:ve one. I'm just not gonna
 12 buy: you one.< That's my-=
 13 Interviewer =Yeah.
 14 Travis A::nd, you know, like, we never fed Jonah- I don't think he even
 15 kne:w what a (.) c- piece of ca:ndy was til he was about two-and-a-
 16 ha::lf. Until he started going to other kids' birthday parties and
 17 rea:lly (0.2) you know, got into it.

In response to the interviewer's question about his attitude toward media, Travis sequentially exposes two short and distinct media narratives: the first one about the Gameboy (lines 7-12), and the second one about candy (lines 14-17), which are analyzed in greater details in the two upcoming sections.

A. Denying Responsibility in Child's Possession of Media Artifact

Travis has expressed the fact that he thinks media technology has a very negative influence (lines 1 and 3, further examined). On lines 5-6, the interviewer brings up the Gameboy in her question about what artifacts media encompass. Travis recycles the "Gameboy" topic and right away denies any responsibility for the fact that his son possesses one: "I would never buy him a Gameboy". He stresses the personal pronoun "I" to emphasize that he is not to be made accountable, and uses "modal 'would' + 'never'" to highlight the impossibility of his buying a hand-held game. The explanation comes immediately after: "His uncle came over a:nd bought him a Gameboy" (lines 8-9). Operating within a moral framework in which media is negatively valenced, Travis blames Jonah's uncle as the 'immoral' (or negative moral) agent, which positions him as the 'not liable' outsider. The fact that he uses "his uncle" instead of "my brother" or "my brother-in-law" (depending on the family member) accentuates the distance he has already created between himself and Jonah's possession of a Gameboy.

After a brief (0.5) pause, Travis solicits the interviewer's alignment: "You know?" which does not get verbally receipted by the interviewer. The lack of interviewer's continuers or acknowledgement tokens may be what leads Travis to disclose more information about that

event. He pursues with a specific occasion: “For his birthday. He as- as he asked him.”, maybe to alleviate the blame: it was a special event, not just a trivial time, and it was something that Jonah had explicitly voiced that he wanted. Since the interviewer keeps on withholding any kind of verbal validation, after a (1.1) pause, Travis concludes with falling intonation “A:nd (0.5) that’s tha:t” (line 10), and further stumbles and halts through “He g- he got- I-”.

Travis then produces the entire next utterance noticeably faster than his usual pace: “>I’m okay with that, it’s not like you ca:n’t ha:ve one. I’m just not gonna buy: you one.<” (lines 10-12). He may wish to convey that he does practice a stern and authoritarian parenting style, and positions the Gameboy at the center of a moral issue. He is actively working to “do the right thing” despite the ambivalent nature of Gameboy: *entertaining* (therefore who would prevent a child from owning one?), but *detrimental* nonetheless (and as a parent, he has to try and nurture children’s well-being and health). Therefore, he is publicly claiming that despite his views toward media artifacts, he will not prevent his child from owning one. The use of the second impersonal pronoun “you” draws the interviewer into Travis’ moral lifeworld. Next, he initiates a summary, “That’s my-=” that gets interrupted by the interviewer’s alignment: “=Yeah.”, which leads to a re-orientation of the topic, then shifting to his child’s candy consumption.

B. Correlating Media with Unhealthy Food

Travis’ initial reaction to media on line 1 is “I think Cartoon Network is essentially p(h)oi(hh)[so(h)n.” (a lethal form of ‘food’), which is uttered with laughter, ambiguously and implicitly denoting the underlying seriousness of the issue. The interviewer reciprocates the laughter and rhythmically aligns with Travis.

A few turns later, from line 14 on, Travis proceeds to narrate another story stemming from talk about media. This narrative takes the shape of a correlated comparison between media and unhealthy food practices, in a similar manner as previously examined with Rich in Excerpt 1. Media seem to be deeply connected with unhealthy habits in people’s minds, due to widespread negative cultural perspectives: it then gets categorized the same way that poor diet does, in a country where obesity is on the rise. The amalgamation is frequently observable.

On line 14, Travis declares “we never fed Jonah-”. He uses the adverb “never” once again, and the pronoun “we” this time, in order to invoke his partnership with his wife in this moral quest for the family ‘good’: for raising children the proper way. He then interrupts himself and reformulates what he just stated from another angle: “I don’t think he even kne:w what a (.) c-piece of ca:ndy was til he was about two-and-a-ha::lf” (lines 14-15). This time, his formulation makes a stronger impact: the verb “kne:w” powerfully reveals that Jonah was nicely sheltered by his parents from any kind of bad outside influence, and thus, that they were ‘doing the right thing’. He then broadens “Until he started going to other kids’ birthday parties and rea:lly (0.2) you know, got into it” (lines 16-17). Travis may thereby implicitly evoke the fact that they were ‘doing good’ until Jonah was old enough to spend time outside the family home and interacted with other individuals, at school and during other activities such as birthday parties. The parallel established between media use and eating unhealthy candy is clear: one ‘gets into’ poor eating habits as much as one ‘gets into’ bad media practices.

4. Accounts of Tough and Inflexible Authority

In light of the negativity commonly associated with children's heavy media involvement, parents tend to voluntarily voice their parenting intransigence to that regard. In addition, they resort to "false negatives", a concept analyzed earlier in Excerpt 1. To illustrate this dynamic, we now turn to another family, composed of Tanner, Delphina, and two children: eight-year-old Aurora and five-year-old Weston. During the education interview, Tanner has been talking extensively about his children's school situations, their respective personalities, and how he encourages his children to go on the computer to play videogames to enhance their eye-hand coordination, and expand their horizons, as some educational games are extremely well-done. He gives them the ability to be computer-savvy in a world in which it has become an indispensable quality (Marsh, 2005).

Excerpt 4:

- 1 Interviewer And do they go on the Internet?
 2 (4.2)
 3 Tanner Very very closely monitored Aurora's allowed [to go on the Internet.
 4 Interviewer [mm hm
 5 Tanner She's [gone-
 6 Interviewer [mm hm
 7 Tanner She's gone a couple times this week without a:sking me and I was no:t
 8 happy.
 9 Interviewer Mm hm, mm hm? [Wh-
 10 Tanner [One wrong turn could be a disa::ster.
 11 Interviewer Mm hm, mm hm, [mm hm
 12 Tanner [Sohhoh we try and be very very very very careful.
 13 Almost- ninety nine per cent of the time, one- one of us, I'm there, I
 14 usually do all that monitoring.
 15 Interviewer Right right. [Okay.
 16 Tanner [I'm monitoring the television sho::ws and, doing research
 17 sometimes >I'm on the net< doing research about something they're
 18 watching.
 19 (0.5)
 20 Interviewer Right. Ri[ght. Right.
 21 Tanner [((Smiling voice)) Maybe a little too involved some people
 22 would say I, but hu:m (.) yeah, she's allowed to go to certain sites as
 23 Yahoooligans at Yahoo which has a lot of- she likes to um read jokes?

As Vandewater et al. (2005) pointed out, parents are often viewed as children's first line of defense against inappropriate media consumption. Therefore, the job of parenting involves regulation and control of children's behavior and activities. In Excerpt 4, Tanner claims out loud his intransigence regarding media rules in the home.

A. Exercising Inflexibility; Displaying Tough Parenting

As soon as the interviewer asks about the Internet, Tanner's tone switches, revealing common tensions between negative feelings about a certain type of media (the Internet is dangerous –“One wrong turn could be a disa:ster”, line 10) and the desire to fit in within society by learning to be competent media users. Public scripts about the potential dangers of the Internet, as well as the lay theories about negative media effects definitely influence parental rules, as evidenced in this exchange. Parental attitudes toward media are important predictors of parental regulation of children's viewing and use (Vandewater et al., 2005).

Tanner's frequent use of intensifiers such as “very” uttered twice on line 3 and four times in a row on line 12 conveys a sense of deep concern toward media. The presence of strict rules and rigorous control is also emphasized from lines 13 to 18. Tanner indeed talks about the fact that most of the time he is present with his daughter controlling her Internet use. He reiterates the word “monitoring” three times (lines 3, 14, and 16), and portrays himself as a competent and ‘media-aware’ father when he mentions researching programs that his children watch on television. He also initiates the story about what happened that week: “She's gone a couple times this week witho:ut a:sking me” (lines 7), touching briefly on what happens when rules are broken: “and I was no:t happy” (lines 7-8).

All of these lexical choices position the father in a good light in the eyes of the interviewer: he is doing his job as a moral parent preserving his children's integrity and ingenuity. His words lay bare the challenges of raising children in a media world, and of grasping the right balance between children's access to entertainment and educational information, while not having to face inappropriate material.

B. Employing “False Negatives”

Similarly to Rich in Excerpt 1, Tanner in Excerpt 4 uses what I called “false negatives”, which corresponds to a false critique of one's own practices by an absent third party. On lines 21-22, he says with a smiling voice “Maybe a little too involved some people would say”. On a literal level, it sounds like people may have the right to critique him for being a bit too strict (he uses a euphemism “a little” diminishing his involvement) with his children's media usage. Nevertheless, this utterance should not be heard as a critique, in light of the topic at hand. Since media viewing and handling are such sensitive and moral arenas in parenting, Tanner should not be seen as “too involved”: is there such a thing as being “too involved” when you deal with your children's well-being? Therefore, embedded in a particularly negatively-valenced media ideology, Tanner's “false negative” makes him appear as a parent who has successfully found morality through his “supermonitoring”.

Conclusion

No family is suffused. Everyone has at least some form of a self-conscious relationship to media. (...) The stories they [people] tell are their expressed identities. It is only when we have listened carefully to their talk, including their ‘accounts of the media’, that we can

imagine the fullest possibilities of what that identity might look like. Today, media play a significant role in who we are. (Weinreich-Haste and Locke, 1983: 169)

Morality is prevalent in family life: educating morally upright children, as well as creating a moral family unit, are ubiquitous social expectations (Coles, 1997; Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik, 2007; Walker and Taylor, 1991). The fulfillment of these socio-cultural expectations and duties are connected to parents' moral roles (MacIntyre, 1981). When dealing with the realm of family media use, parents draw upon a collective public script that warns against the dangers of media, stipulating potentially harmful consequences on children's physical, mental, and social development (Hoover et al., 2004). Successful and morally appropriate media involvement then emerges from an understanding of how to be reflective in dealing with the potential threats and negotiations that modern life carries. As such, raising a child whose use of media is in accordance with the public consensus has become one of parents' priorities.

Children's media use in the home is a sensitive arena, one in which parents frequently struggle to present themselves as moral agents who attempt to control and monitor their children's media exposure. Analyses of exchanges representative of parents' interviews from a sub-corpus of the UCLA Sloan Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELFL) data archive have revealed that parents do position themselves strategically in relation to media and to the broader culture. Parents' accounts of media may not directly refer to socio-historical and socio-cultural frameworks, but they are lodged within a larger cultural frame of reference and moral assessment. This paper has broadened the notion of parents' positioning toward the principle of moral appropriateness to include the realm of family media use.

Through analyses of interviews, this paper has presented different ideologies and preferred strategies that parents portray as relevant to their children's media use. This paper argues that family health and identity is defined in part in terms of media practices. Most parents strove to appear in a virtuous light in the eyes of the interviewer, in a society where children's heavy media use is profoundly morally loaded. Some parents compared their own family practices to those of others to make themselves look better. Other parents blamed others as negative moral agents who introduced immoral media use into their family by buying their children media technology that the parents disapproved of. Some parents said that they use tough and inflexible authority. Furthermore, some parents expressed their view that the overall well-rounded individual does not overly engage in media use but rather is active. Parents frequently used "false negatives" or false critiques to appear irreproachable.

Interviews with parents did not provide an abstract hierarchy of preferred media behaviors but accounts of media use, constructed in a way that was coherent with ideologies of a family's collective life and practices, in a similar way to what Hoover et al. (2004) described. Complex stories and narratives embedded within parents' discourse were indicative of deeper struggles of parents' meaning-making in modern life. Talk about media worlds serves as a significant and tangible expression of a contemporary self-aware parenting in a world defined by risk and change.

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Transcription Conventions

Adapted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998)

- :: Colon(s): Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word. The number of colons shows the length of the extension.
- Underlining: Vocalic emphasis of the underlined portion of the word.
- (1.6) Timed Pause: Intervals occurring within and between same or different speaker's utterance. The number represents the number of seconds of duration of the pause, to one decimal place.
- (.) Micropause: Brief pause of less than (0.2).
- (()) Double Parentheses: Italicized information within double parentheses provides non verbal behavior and scenic details visible on the video.
- () Single Parentheses: Transcription doubt. When a word appears in parentheses, it indicates that the transcriber has guessed as to what was said, because it was indecipherable on the tape. If the transcriber was unable to guess as to what was said, nothing appears within the parentheses.
- . Period: Falling vocal pitch.
- , Comma: Continuation of tone.
- ? Question Marks: Rising vocal pitch.
- ↓ ↑ Arrows: Pitch resets; marked sharp rising or falling shifts in intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.
- ° ° Degree Signs: A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding talk. This symbol appears at the beginning and at the end of the utterance.
- = Equal Signs: Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap between the portions connected by the equal signs. This is used where a second speaker begins their utterance just at the moment when the first speaker finishes.
- [] Brackets: Indicates beginnings and endings of speech overlap between two speakers.
- ! Exclamation Points: Animated speech tone.
- Hyphens: Halting, abrupt cut off of sound or word, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly.

- > < Less Than/Greater Than Signs: Portions of an utterance delivered at a pace noticeably quicker (> <) or slower (< >) than surrounding talk.
- OK Caps: Extreme loudness compared with surrounding talk during the capitalized portion of the utterance.
- hhh H's: Onomatopoeic representations of audible exhalation of air, for example, as laughter (hah).
- .hh .H's: Audible inhalation of air, for example, as a gasp. The more h's, the longer the in-breath.
- pt Lip Smack: Often preceding an inbreath.
- \$yes\$ Dollar signs: Smiley or jokey voice.
-