7 Constructions of Violence and Masculinity in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This chapter examines a specific aspect of digital media use, namely the viewing of violent content amongst a male adolescent cohort aged 15-17 years. It is a qualitative study that examines the online practices of fourteen male adolescents, with particular emphasis placed on their understanding of violence. The participants offer the researcher two examples of extreme violence for discussion; one is set in the fantasy world of online gaming and the other footage of a murder that occurred in 2007. The example of 'real life' violence was accessed by the participants via a video clip uploaded to *YouTube*. It is through the participants' subsequent reflection upon these examples, that we gain some insights into their ongoing construction of violence, and the corresponding underlying theme of masculinity. By determining the participants' understanding of violence, it becomes apparent how this shared meaning may act as a benchmark against which they measure all other portrayals of violence. Thus explaining how participants were more comfortable with what they view as 'acceptable' levels of violence evident in the *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto* series.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade alone, society has witnessed unprecedented changes that have enabled more and more aspects of our lives to be coordinated through electronic flows of information (New Scientist, 2012). In essence these changes have become more personal, and as a result more intimate, creating an almost osmotic effect between two realms, that in previous generations were treated as though they were distinctly separate – the 'technical' and the 'social' (Stalder, 2006). To communicate via a mobile phone, a gaming console, a laptop or personal computer is no longer considered a fad, it has now become the norm. The rationale for this study emerges from this context of change, and the resounding concerns this generates within educational institutions. The present study is a direct response to a specific secondary school who wanted to understand the digital existence of their male pupils, and it endeavours to address some of those concerns surrounding their online preferences.

2. Assessing identity, gender, media and violence in adolescence

Growing up in our technology rich society is a collection of young people, a generation of digital pioneers undertaking a journey that is inherently luminal; theirs is a world that traverses both the on and offline realms; a world that offers the liberty of adult-free spaces with the security of family life. Such liberty or what the postmodern theorist Bauman (2000) refers to as 'fluidity' brings with it responsibility that is also inherently problematic by the absence of a definable structure or stability. The previously restrictive boundaries of time or space are no longer a concern within this newly constructed 'Internet Galaxy' (Castells, 2001). The technologist Prensky (2001) favoured the term 'digital natives' to describe these pioneers and categorising them as those born after 1980 and who are ""native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (p. 1, emphasis in original). Not only are they becoming competent native speakers of this new digital language, they are also fostering competency in their endless networked connections to each other (boyd, 2007). It is through

these networked connections that new avenues for identity creation and visual outlets of self-presentation are been cultivated. The work of psychologist Erikson (1986) isolated identity as one of the key challenges in adolescent development. Concepts such as identity and gender are social constructions that are intricately entwined and difficult to separate. In today's modern world, identity and gender are neither fixed nor passive static constructs; instead they are subject to continual change, reworking and reaffirmation through various social institutions and practices. A continuous process that enables us to create what may be referred to as a "reflexive biography" (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Giddens, 1991, p. 54).

Of significant importance to adolescent identity are the patterns of power relations between masculinity and femininity that are widespread in society, as Connell (2005) states "[o]ne of the most important circumstances of young people's lives is the gender order they live in" (p. 13). By his rejection of the notion that biology plays a dominant role in determining gender, Connell (2005) endorses masculinity as a construct particular to a certain period of time and place. He is not alone in this endorsement, numerous theorists also stress the importance of recognising that "gender is a matter of learning and continuous "work" rather than a simple expression of biologically given gender difference" (Butler, 1990; Elliott & Urry, 2010; Giddens, 1991, p. 63; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Secondary schools in particular as one of the formal institutions unconsciously involved with the active construction of masculinity, follow strict gender regimes noticeable to their pupils (Connell, 2005). Salisbury and Jackson (1996) suggested in their work that schools are both influenced and reflective of the macho values of the social world outside them, as well as being "a place where masculinities are actively made, negotiated, regulated and renegotiated" (p. 10). The authors posit that it is through three interrelated levels that this influence of macho values may transpire in the school environment; the institutional level, hidden curriculum level and the official curriculum level. In the institutional level gendered values may be conveyed through styles of leadership or management and also through the threat or absence of appropriate discipline and authority. In the hidden curriculum macho values may be shared through whispers, ritual insults, sexist jokes and bullying, amounting to what Salisbury and Jackson (1996) considered the unofficial curriculum. The official

curriculum on the other hand is often considered to be blind to the personal and social forces that may help shape male student's lives.

Lynch and Lodge (2002) examined the practice of gender socialisation in the Irish education system. Their study contrasted the control and surveillance of dress and appearance in girl's schools in comparison to boys. The findings pointed towards secondary schools as sites for determining patterns of gender inequality. This resonated through a form of control exerted over uniforms, make-up and jewellery in the segregated girl's schools, whereas in the boy's school this pervasive level of monitoring and surveillance was not evident. Connell (2005) focused on social practices like organised, competitive sport, specifically football, as an important site of masculinity formation. The popular practice of football is presented to adolescent males as "a site of camaraderie, source of identity, an arena of competition for prestige and a possible career" (Connell, 2005, p. 15). In this manner, football reinforces the ideals society holds for the embodiment of masculine traits. Ging (2005) examined how mass media functions as a 'manual on masculinity' for secondary school boys, providing them with sources of reference for constructing a catalogue of acceptable male behaviour. Her empirical study found that throughout the boys' accounts of masculinity, contradictions existed between being tough or rejecting violence and also between the ability to express emotions or to remain stoic. The participants in her study were very conscious of the performative nature of masculinity and how it was controlled in their daily lives. Ging (2005) also noted that much of the appeal of video gaming for adolescent males was its connection to the manner in which it may affirm their masculinity to others.

De Róiste and Dinneen's (2005) study highlighted that boys were most likely to refer to computer-related activities and girls to watching TV and listening to music as their favourite forms of leisure activity. Sixty per cent of the boys reported frequent gaming, either daily or most days, as opposed to only 13 per cent of girls. In a similar vein, Goldstein (1998) suggests that the social purpose of violent media is to show one's peers "that they are man enough to take it" (p. 215). Another Irish study that examined gender identity in Irish school children, Lodge and Flynn (2001) noted that their participants tended to

define themselves "in ways which reflected traditional gendered expectations of behaviour, attitudes and characteristics" (p. 190). O'Connor (2009) in his analysis of Irish young people's narratives concluded that adolescents were still holding strong onto "a rather stereotypical gendered framework underlying their friendships and aspects of their lifestyles" (p. 110).

Every new medium introduced into the communication process has been included in a long running debate regarding its influence on the behaviour of young people (Kaplan, 2012; Wartella & Jennings, 2000). For Critcher (2008) what mattered most was the content, if the content "is seen as criminal or violent or horrific. It constitutes a danger to children who cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy" (p. 65). The belief that exposure to harmful content can influence the unknowing masses can be traced back to Plato's era (Heins, 2001). Since then academic debates have been rife with claims that media acts as an external social force possessing the ability to influence or shape peoples identity by providing them with a new perspective through which to view life (McQuail, 2005; Potter, 2011; Potter & Riddle, 2007).

Many media critics assessed the viewing nature of television audiences as one of passivity, suggesting it dulled the senses and created a sedentary culture of non-participation surrounding its viewers (Putnam, 2000). Indeed Putnam (2000) posited that the advent of television into American life had directly contributed to the downturn in social capital and civic participation within communities. Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) were the original authors of the 'media effects' argument claiming that media is a powerful force shaping the consciousness of the public. Some advocates of the 'media effects' argument support the idea that it is through the media that people learn behavioural scripts (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Rosenberg and Santa Barbara (2002) inform us that the narratives found in media violence often contain a number of commonalities: "These include (1) polarisation of conflict by dividing the world into good and evil, (2) dehumanisation of the enemy characters, and (3) conflict resolution through violence" (cited in Nevins, 2004, p. 9). To apply this argument to adolescents suggests that those presented with conflict in their own lives may select an aggressive behavioural script to guide their behaviour in resolving the situation.

Several media theorists have however opposed this argument, stressing that it was the audience that holds the power over the media (Fiske, 1987; Gassner, 2007; Wilson, 2009). For instance cartoons are considered four times more violent than other types of programmes, yet Gunter and Wober (1988) found that viewers did not perceive them in that way. Morrison (1999) discussed violent films with British viewers and found that they did not rate the film *Pulp Fiction* as violent even though it had been given an 'adult only' rating by the film censor. Instead the viewers saw the film as less violent and less threatening because the violence was surrounded by humour. The core of Fiske's (1987) 'active audience' theory is immersed in the social experiences and cultural knowledge that audiences use to interpret and respond to the media. Gender is also as an important social factor in determining how audiences will respond to certain media as a study by Koukounas and McCabe (2001) confirmed. Their examination of gender differences in emotional response to violent film used the eye blink startle response; male participants reported more positive feelings, curiosity, and entertainment in response to the violent film, whereas women reported more disgust, anger, boredom, and greater startle reaction to the violent material.

Following the findings of these previous studies, this chapter will now examine how constructions of violence could influence male adolescent engagement with media content, and in turn their interpretation of that content.

3.   Method and analysis

The researcher was initially approached by the Guidance Counsellor of a boys school in the Waterford area. The school in question was seeking to gain an understanding of their pupils' online habits and, for that reason, a qualitative design was adopted as it would provide the flexibility necessary to probe deeper into participants' thoughts and opinions on various topics. The methodology consisted of three semi-structured focus group discussions with a sampling framework that utilised purposive sampling, gathering fourteen participants ranging from 15-17 years. Focus groups were chosen as they are deemed less

intimidating for adolescents, and facilitate better discussion than one-to-one interviews (Heary & Hennessy, 2002; Hoppe, Wells, Morrison, Gillmore, & Wilsdon, 1995; Mauthner, 1997).

The discipline of social psychology instructs us that group discussions often make explicit what is considered (in)appropriate interview interaction. That it is only through interrupting, correcting, or disagreeing with one another, that participants shed more light upon what is considered to be normative (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006). Using focus groups to gain insight into the group dynamics of participant's subcultures in action is deemed of particular value by Hyde, Howlett, Brady, and Drennen (2005). However, the authors also forewarn of a fundamental issue the researcher may struggle with when immersed in focus group research "trying to distinguish when reports should be taken as truthful or untruthful" (Hyde et al., 2005, p. 2592). It is often the case that a certain degree of 'performance' may occur in group discussions, especially with young males interacting with a female researcher, when they may use the group environment to assert their individual masculinity. However, rather than discount their contributions outright as acting or performing, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) suggest the researcher understands this behaviour as a revelation of the differing facets of identity construction (p. 32). Thus, it is better to consider this issue as a mode of gendered work in action rather than an authentic expression of gender identity.

All focus groups were conducted within the school itself and access to participants was arranged via a school gatekeeper. The focus group discussions were structured around the following areas: online activity, video gaming, bullying, schoolwork and digital media. Conducting discussion groups with adolescent males is often considered somewhat unproductive, especially given the "stereotype of grunting adolescent boy" (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002, p. 23). Many concerns are raised with conducting unstructured or semi structured style interviews with boys, ranging from a general lack of engagement with the research process, to managing disruptive participants who have been temporarily liberated from the disciplinary constraints of their teachers (Frosh et al., 2002). However, in the present study the participants

were found to interact enthusiastically and contribute in a coherent and constructive manner.

This study was granted ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Waterford Institute of Technology. Prior to the study, informed consent was obtained from both the participants and their parents and all three focus groups were recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions amassed a wealth of raw data, which was then analysed using a social constructivist approach to uncover thematic content that highlighted key experiences and issues important to participants. Analysis involved the repeated reading of interview transcripts and coding the text data by hand in order to reduce it and generate findings. The scope of this chapter will limit the discussion to one of the main study findings that emerged, constructions of violence, and to a brief examination of its corresponding underlying theme of masculinity. Findings are accompanied by illustrative quotes from the participants who were allocated pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

3.1. Constructing violence in fantasy and reality

Certain terms are ambiguous in meaning, and also subjective; the word 'violence' falls into this category. What one person understands as violence may vastly contradict the understanding of another. This may explain why many studies will postulate a positive link between violent games and aggression (Anderson, 2004; Barlett, Harris, & Bruey, 2008; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006; Engelhardt, Bartholow, Kerr, & Bushman, 2011) and yet a corresponding number will find no definitive link (Collwell & Payne, 2000; Durkin & Barber, 2002; Ferguson et al., 2008; Williams & Skoric, 2005). In order to construct a shared understanding of the concept of violence, participants were asked to offer the researcher an example of what they considered to be an extreme act of violence. While the researcher initially posed an open ended question designed to elicit data on the theme of violence, the participants themselves determined the remaining direction of the discussion. Across the three focus groups, participants disclosed the same examples, one located amidst the fantasy world of video gaming, the other a violent video clip uploaded onto *YouTube*.

3.2.   Massive multiplayer online gaming (MMOG)

Online gaming has become the newest chronicle in the gaming narrative uniting players from across the world into a private sphere of collective experiences. It is a realm that operates outside the boundaries of physical space and time, and one which is indifferent to individual traits or physical characteristics. Players can engage in their game of choice with numerous others, opening new levels of interaction to the overall playability of the game. Kerr, Kücklich, and Brereton (2006) refer to these playability options as "intra-personal play" – competing against the computer and themselves, and "inter-personal play" – competing against other people (p. 20). Participants in this study shared a significant preference for inter-personal game playing, following time spent immersed in intra-personal play.

> **Graeme**: Play it through… but then it gets repetitive… story doesn't change… so then you just go online.

> **Ian**: You play single player until you get the hang of the controls and then… like a team death match.

> **Interviewer**: So you prefer to play with multi-players than single player then?

> [Chorus of yeahs]

> **Niall**: Yeah cos you can play along with your mates or whatever like… people from around the world.

MMOG's such as *Call of Duty* (CoD) have been noted as a prominent feature of adolescent male gaming habits (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004). The majority of participants in this study also followed this trend with top preference going to the *Call of Duty* series; *Modern Warfare* (2, 3 and 4), *Black Ops*, *Zombies* and *World at War*. Their second preference was the *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) series, GTA (1 and 3) and *San Andreas*. Games such as *Halo*,

Gran-turismo, *Tiger Woods Golf* and *FIFA* also received a mention but not to the same extent as CoD or GTA. Participants told how the majority of players they encountered within the online gaming arena were male, with the only the occasional female player. They also reported a mixed age range amongst fellow players, not solely adolescent boys. Considering that the participants only interaction with fellow gamers was in an online context, there was no way of knowing for sure the true identity of these gamers. However, research conducted by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) would appear to confirm the participants' initial observations. According to the ESA the average game player was found to be male and aged thirty years (ESA, 2012). The research also detailed a further demographic breakdown of gamers, finding that 32% of gamers were under 18 years, 31% of gamers were aged between 18-35 years and 37% of gamers were in fact 36+ years.

CoD is a first-person shooter game set during World War 2 and is played through the perspective of a serving army soldier. GTA on the other hand is set in modern fictional cities where players take on the role of a criminal who attempts to rise up the ranks of organisational crime by completing tasks. When discussing with participants the particular attributes they sought from a game, the following were mentioned: challenging plot, competitive element, options for game-play such as solo games or playing online and overall entertainment appeal. Yet violent content was completely omitted, the following discussion explores the rationale behind this:

> **Keith**: I never played the ManHunt games but they're supposed to be really, really bad now.

> **Interviewer**: In what way?

> **Keith**: You can see everything that's going on, like if you cut your man's head off you can see the blood going everywhere.

> **Interviewer**: Ok, but does that not normally happen in games when you cut people's heads off?

Keith: It does, but it's not that bad.

John: It's a bit over the top.

Interviewer: Is it the detail then?

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Niall: And there's no sense to it your just going around killing people.

John: There's no plot or anything.

Interviewer: So random killing for the sake of killing?

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

The *ManHunter* games are notorious within the gaming world for violent content. For this reason they have been banned in several countries worldwide, sometimes causing moral panics: in the UK in 2004, a copycat *ManHunter* style murder was preliminarily identified as the cause for a 17 year old fan to murder his 14 year old friend with a claw hammer (BBC News, 2004a). However, police later confirmed that the motive for the attack was robbery and a copy of the game was found in the victim's home and not the assailants (BBC News, 2004b). It is noteworthy that participants in this study did not appreciate the credible detail of the bloodshed, or the randomness of the kills. Suggesting that random violence isn't the primary draw, the game must include a level of competitiveness or progression through levels as previously mentioned.

3.3.   Three men and a hammer

The second example of excessive violence the participants referred to was in a video they had accessed via *YouTube*. The video contained footage of a murder committed in the Ukraine, which they informed the researcher was entitled

Three men and a hammer. Media coverage referred to it as the *Dnepropetrovsk Maniacs*, a real life horror story that broke in 2007 after the video was leaked onto the internet from one of the perpetrators' mobile phones. Many of this studies participants had viewed the video, which has since been removed, and spoke of the sheer brutality of it. They stated concerns for the level of violence, leading to most of them to discontinue viewing.

> **Evan**: It was this video that was put up on the Internet about these three Russian men in a forest and they bagged this guy and then beat him to death with a hammer.

> **Graeme**: And they used a screwdriver, was so bad.

> **Niall**: I turned on the thing [video clip] and turned it off after a few minutes, it was sick.

> **Graeme**: That would be the kind of violence we would see something wrong with.

The video is effectively a 'snuff movie' showing scenes of a murder committed by three 19 year old Ukrainian teenagers. News reports at the time claimed that the youths had committed at least 19 murders in a one month period (Unian, 2007). The video itself was filmed by one of the offenders and shows the murder of one victim who, after been kidnapped and covered with a hood, was taken to an isolated wooded area and killed with a hammer. All study participants were fully aware of this video, some had attempted to watch it, but all agreed it was an example of extreme violence to which none of the participants could watch in full.

This would appear to contradict the desensitisation theory, that heavy viewing of violent content over time conditions individuals to accept violence as normal, dulling their sensitivity to aggressive behaviour in real life. Exploring the argument that young people have become increasingly desensitised to media violence seemed to be a natural direction to follow. On a very basic level many participants felt that they had become desensitised to gaming/media violence

but that this degree of desensitisation did not necessarily correlate with real life violence.

> **Evan**: We don't play Modern Warfare thinking this would be fun to do on a Saturday afternoon in real life.

The disturbing nature of the video, coupled with witnessing a real life murder, is by most standards cause for concern. Bearing in mind that these murders occurred in 2007 indicating that participants were aged between 11 and 12 years when they initially viewed it. Several years on and they were still able to share some very vivid memories with the researcher, memories that had stayed with them since that initial viewing.

4. Discussing violence and gendered frameworks in the digital world

In developing a sense of identity, individuals will draw upon the culturally available references within their immediate environment. Media such as games or videos help to act as such reference points (Ging, 2005). The participants in this study revealed how they had a collective preference for male-orientated genres of gaming. Close examination of their favourite games uncovers a strong sense of masculinity established in the symbolic display of action, guns and violence within these games. Gender representation within video games often appears blatantly stereotypical, male characters predominate in the role of 'brutal gangster' or 'grunting soldier' whereas female characters are seen as more helpless and 'sexually provocative' as is the case with the *Tomb Raider* character Lara Croft and the prostitutes in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 68). It is the mass consumption of these games that acts an agent for reproducing a normative gender divide (Connell, 2005).

Kirkland (2009) states that the gaming environment provides a traditional masculine space for the rehearsal of predominantly male activities such as

navigating complex spaces, the destruction of enemies, overcoming obstacles, which he claims replicate male drives to kill, conquer and colonise. Whereas, Kline, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2005) use the term "militarised masculinity" (p. 247) to describe the gaming industry's tendency to construct game play around gender-coded violence and combat appealing to young male players. These ideas resonate with Connell's (2005) ideal type of masculinity, entitled 'hegemonic masculinity', which can now be delivered through the global culture of video gaming (Giddens, 2006, p. 463). It appears then that online gaming could play a strong role as an instrument of gender socialisation.

In contrast to the world of online gaming, Gauntlett's (2008) analysis of gender representations online examined the popularity of *YouTube* clips and concluded that online outlets for personal representations such as the aforementioned site allow for a level of diversity not encountered through other forms of media. He adds that "representations of women and men on YouTube are less glossy and stereotypical, and are correspondingly more real, varied and imaginative" (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 73). *YouTube* is now one of the predominant websites that participants stated they 'hang out' in, although they encountered the *Three Men and a Hammer* video through this site, the overt themes of dominance and control that were evident in the video repulsed study participants. Their inability to view the video in its entirety was an outward display of their repulsion, rejection and condemnation of such extreme acts of violence.

One of the objectives of this study was to address concerns stemming from the use of violent media, as violent, criminal or horrific content that cannot be distinguished from reality is seen to constitute a danger to children and adolescents (Critcher, 2008). There is no question that the participants in this study could differentiate between reality and fantasy, and were able to police their own viewing in terms of violent content. The participants could easily have pretended to have seen the *Three Men* video, after all they were well aware of the contents of the video by that stage, but instead they did not feel the need to do so. They also could have 'performed' or embellished the facts of the examples they provided, however the consensus that emerged

across the three groups did not support this. There is a strong possibility that a level of 'performance' could transpire within one group, but the chances of it occurring across all three groups would have been unlikely. Therefore, the researcher accepted the details the participant's provided as factual based on that deduction, thus contradicting Goldstein's (1998) finding on the social purpose of violent media as a means of conveying an outward display of hardness to one's peers.

In this study participants shared examples of real and virtual acts of violence that they deemed offensive, signifying a genuine disdain for extreme violent acts in both realms. This generated an understanding of how this group of adolescent males collectively constructs a meaning for violence. Through establishing this meaning, it becomes clear how it can act as a benchmark against which to measure all other portrayals of violence, thus explaining how participants were more comfortable with what they view as more 'acceptable' levels of violence, evident in CoD or GTA. Decoding the meanings that young people apply to culturally available references, such as digital media, should enable a deeper knowledge of their online preferences and practices to emerge.

5.   Conclusion

As was demonstrated in this chapter, gender socialisation and the acquisition of macho values occur through a variety of means. These may be directed through participation in the education system (Lodge & Flynn, 2001; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; O'Connor, 2009; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996), via a sporting activity like football (Connell, 2005) or through the consumption of popular media (De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Ging, 2005). Not ignoring how these individual strata may overlap in the lives of adolescents, the 'unofficial curriculum' of the school environment undoubtedly contains many lessons on online gaming tactics or tales of football victories. These agents of socialisation exist in part to instil and shape the values and beliefs that assist in guiding our individual biography.

It was the key undertaking of this chapter to examine if violent media possessed the ability to function as a valid script for masculinity. In terms of the meaning making process, participants displayed an awareness that lived experiences of violence differ vastly from media portrayals. They rejected the idea that a correlation existed between media violence and real life violence. As we discovered, immersion within the digital environments of online gaming has lead to the creation of an informal arena for a collective masculine consciousness. As participants are willing to partake in online activities it is likely they are more open and passive to the reception of this inconspicuous form of gender socialisation. The author is not inferring that this could influence their behaviour directly as the 'media effects' argument suggests, rather that it directs their socialisation increasingly towards more stereotyped masculine scripts. When it came to raising concerns over violent content, it is worth bearing in mind that these adolescent males were not easily brainwashed by the pseudo-macho values that certain media contain. In fact considering their many interactions with masculine media scripts, the participants appeared to endorse the 'active audience' theory. They openly rejected the themes of dominance and control they witnessed in the snuff movie and rebuffed the senseless violence of the *ManHunter* game. While it is true that media may contain a certain power by imprinting their values upon their audience, as this study has demonstrated, that relationship is a two way process. Audiences also possess the power to reject such blatant overtures. While young adolescent males may regularly interact with digital media containing violent narratives, this study evidenced that some of that content does disturb them.

In truth, we are only starting to understand how adolescents make sense of the many electronic flows of information that surround them. The exponential growth in unregulated daily video uploads to the internet, and *YouTube* in particular, brings the risk of accidental exposure to unsuitable content. There is an overriding concern for many adult observers of adolescent online activity that there exists a risk that young people may stumble across unsuitable content. Therefore it is envisaged that this research may contribute some useful knowledge to addressing that concern.

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