

The dilemmas of parental mediation: Continuities from parenting in general

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Abstract

This article examines how much parent-child interactions around the online world reflect broader, more long-standing parent-child relations and parenting dilemmas. It does so through exploring the meanings that parents give to their parenting practices and the beliefs that underlie parental mediation of their children's online activities as well as the reasons for any differences between their broader normative approach to parental mediation and their actual practices. Qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with 26 Spanish parents of children aged 9 to 16-years-old found that many parents favoured the managed progression of children towards more autonomy and gave reasons why it was important to trust older children. However, the analysis explores a range of dilemmas parents experience when trying to implement these ideals, where issues of privacy, trust and managing that progression all proved to be problematic.

Keywords: Parental mediation; Ethnotheories; Privacy; Trust; Internet.

Introduction

How do parents' ideas concerning how to parent more generally influence how they intervene in their children's experience of the digital world? And what are the subsequent dilemmas involved in trying to implement these ideals, including adapting them as children grow older? This Spanish qualitative study aims to explore these questions, especially in relation to issues of children's privacy, parents developing trust in their children and managing their children's transition to greater autonomy.

Parental approaches to mediating the digital world

The parental mediation literature focuses on how parents respond to the particular challenges that media pose for their children. That body of work must be seen against a backdrop of a long history of concerns about different media (Cricher, 2008), which nowadays is most clearly manifest in the contemporary risk agenda associated with the internet (Mascheroni & Haddon, 2015). This agenda covers fears about children's excessive use, the content children may access, whom they might come into contact with and how they might behave (their conduct online) (Livingstone, Haddon, & Görzig, 2012). Although, this list highlights how parents confront the possible negative influences of the digital, Clarke (2011) points out that this reflects parental mediation analysis' links with the media effects tradition, noting in contrast that some writers have pointed out how parents see benefits in children's experience of media. In fact, nowadays more academic attention has been given to the opportunities for children when engaging in the digital world (Livingstone, Ólafsson, Helsper, Lupiáñez-Villanueva, Veltri & Folkvord, 2017; Zaman, Nouwen, Vanattenhoven, de Ferrer, & Van Looy, 2016).

Originally, typologies of parental mediation strategies were developed in relation to how parents managed their children's experience of television (e.g. Austin, 1993). These typologies were then adapted to cover how they intervene in children's experience of the digital world more generally (e.g. Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreier, Chaudron, & Lagae, 2015; Mesch, 2009). They now include such strategies as talking about with children about the digital world, or engaging in it with children (active mediation), making and policing rules about such aspects as 'screen time' (restrictive mediation) and parental surveillance of their children's internet use (monitoring) (Livingstone et al, 2012)

Empirical research has shown how parental mediation changes with the age of the child. Some studies have noted that parents specifically use less intrusive strategies, such as restrictive mediation and online monitoring, as children grow older, instead asking their children to tell them about their use and mediating through being near-by (Glatz, Crowe, & Buchanan, 2018; Lee, 2012; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Dyer, & Yorgason, 2012; Sonck, Nikken, & Haan, 2013). Yet other research points to how parents prefer to communicate with their children and get involved in their online activities (Symons, Ponnet, Walrave, & Heirman, 2017). Hence, the details of the evidence are a little mixed, but overall some change in how parents approach their role as children age is evident.

If parental mediation assumes media pose special questions, and parental responses must to some extent be particular to media, different writings about parenting in effect play down that specialness. For example, writings about parental styles such as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful parenting, explore different ways in which parents 'parent' more generally, which might in turn have a bearing on how they approach media (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006). Other work that also implies a continuity of parenting from other aspects of children's lives takes into account how parental responses change as children grow older. The aspects that are the focus in this article relate to changes in parental trust as children age, children's demands for rights to privacy as they get older, and parental management of children's transition to adulthood.

As regards trust, Erickson, Wisniewski, Xu, Carrol, and Rosson (2016) found that one of the reasons why mediation may change with age is that parents have more trust in an older adolescents' knowledge and ability to confront problematic situations, feeling they are savvy enough to avoid any type of danger. Reflecting this, Padilla-Walker et al. (2012) even suggest deference as a parenting strategy, referring to parents decision not to intervene and instead give autonomy to their children because they trust them and expect them to act more responsibly as they grow up. Retaining that trust is also important because it is related to greater adolescent self-disclosure (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999; Tilton-Weaver, 2014), which is of particular interest where this is the main source of knowledge that parents have about the activities of their children online.

In the case of privacy, various studies show how children expect and sometimes claim more rights to privacy as they grow older, as part of the very process of becoming more autonomous. Adolescence is a transitory stage in which children start defending their own spaces of intimacy, which, according to Finkenauer, Engels, and Meeus's (2002) analysis, changes the balance of relations within the family, and can generate tensions and clashes with parents, manifest also in tensions around ICT use (Haddon, 2015). For example, perceived excessive control of ICTs that entails violations of privacy could provoke conflicts with parents and a loss of trust (Haddon, 2015)). In fact, quantitative research on broader adolescent-parent relationships support this

as Hawk, Keijsers, Hale, and Meeus (2009) found an association between intrusive supervision and negative relationships between parents and their adolescent children.

Thirdly, any change in parental interventions can also reflect parents' expectations of their own role in managing, even encouraging, their children's passage towards greater independence as they get older. For example, Maccoby (as cited in Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997) proposed that parental monitoring of autonomous action is part of the regulatory strategies that support the gradual transition from parental mediation to autonomy and self-regulation. The parental deference strategy suggested by Padilla-Walker et al. (2012) is also consistent with the proposal of negotiating with their children, giving them more leeway and having confidence in their judgement as part of that process (see also Baumrind, 2005; Nafus & Tracey, 2002).

In fact, the above examples relating to changing parental trust, children's privacy and managing children's autonomy may refer to general principles but they are all taken from research specifically on mediation of the digital world. They can be seen as parental ideals concerning 'good parenting', as part of their ethnotheories (Harkness and Super (1992) about parenting - sometimes implicit general beliefs, that are intimately linked to behavioural practices but which often go unnoticed - including parents' expectations of what should change as children grow older (Parra & Oliva, 2006). While these may draw upon broader discourses about 'good parenting' (Clarke, 2011), part of the social construction of parenthood, the notion of ethnotheories recognises parents nevertheless have some agency in this process.

If the above captures some parenting ideals, there is still the question of why parents' ethnotheories in general can become out of line with their particular practices. For example, in the case of television, Nuñez-Ladeveze and Pérez Ornia (2002) described how some parents said that their children should watch television only when an adult was present, but then the parents put a television in their children's room. In other words, they were concerned about their children seeing certain content, but they did nothing to avoid this. These authors used the term 'pragmatic dissonance' to refer to inconsistencies between normative criteria (what parent say they as parents should do) and the actual behaviour of parents when mediating television use. This concept has its roots in the notion of cognitive dissonance developed by Festinger (1957) regarding the discomfort that occurs in the individual when faced with the discrepancy between pre-existing knowledge and opinions and new situations and information received that contradicts them. Hence, the main aim of this article is to understand the issues that can arise when parents actually try to implement their general parental ideals in the case of media, taking into account how children respond to this.

Objectives of the present study

Drawing on the themes of managed transition to adulthood, trust and privacy, the first part of the article aims too establish what role, ideally, parents think that they should assume as the adults responsible for children in order to protect and empower them. This is a starting point for understanding how parents think they should teach their children to cope more specifically with online risks and how (and why) parent-child relations in this respect change as children age.

The objective is then to explore what difficulties parents perceive when carrying out their parenting role in order to explain some of the contradictions between parents' stated normative criteria and their actual behaviour.

Method

Research on parental mediation in the digital sphere has increased significantly in recent years, and while the majority of this work has been quantitative there have been more and more qualitative studies (e.g. Mesch, 2009; Haddon & Vincent, 2015; Shin, 2015; Zaman et al., 2016; Symons et al., 2017) including ones in Spain (López. & Haddon, 2018; Bertau-Rojas, Aierbe-Randiaran, & Oregui-González, 2018; Torrecillas-Lacave, Vázquez-Barrio, & Monteagudo-Barandalla, 2017). However, these have not specifically focused on how parental interventions reflect ethnotheories from beyond the digital sphere. Hence, this study uses a qualitative approach to explore parents' approaches to parenting and the problems they face, while specifically paying attention to the continuities from more general parenting.

Alonso (1998) points out that in-depth interviews enable researchers to explore the 'ideal behaviour of the concrete individual', made possible because 'the process of signification is produced by the fact that the speech is likely to be updated in a corresponding practice' (p.71). Since the interviewees provide an interpretation of their experience beyond the systematic description of behaviour, the in-depth interview allows us to extract information about the representations associated with situations experienced by the interviewees. Consequently, this method was used to examine the attitudes, beliefs, desires and also experiences that lay behind parents mediating strategies in relation to mobile devices.

Participants

In the research reported here, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 26 parents of 33 children aged between 9 and 16-years-old. All the children had access to smartphones, even if they did not own them. Families with different sociodemographic characteristics (as regards the socio-economic and educational level of the parents, and age and sex of parents and children) were selected to enable analytical representation. All participants lived in the municipalities of Madrid's metropolitan area (capital of Spain), and they had been contacted through the snowball sampling technique, using the social networks of the researchers. Since families with children tend to interact each other, relations or direct acquaintances of the research staff provided contact with families who had similar characteristics and this personal link helped to ensure their collaboration.

The ages of the interviewees ranged from 33 to 52 years old and their level of education included primary education, General Certificate of Education, vocational education and training, high school degree, university studies and postgraduate certificates. All of them were employed except one father and two mothers. The families' monthly income ranged from less than 600 to more than 6,000 euros. Regarding the family structure, nuclear families predominated, but single-parent (2) and step families (2) were also present.

Table 1: Description of the sample interviewed

	Name	Family Type	Parent age	Educational level	Work	Sex: age of children	Nationality	Earning range (€)
F1	Carmen	Nuclear	F: 45 M: 45	F: GCE M: VET	F: Unemployed M: School canteen assistant	Boy: 12/17	Spanish	< 600
F2	Antonio Cristina	Nuclear	F: 47 M: 45	F: VET M: University degree	F: Graphic Operator M: Housewife (Unemployed)	Boy: 13	Spanish	900-1200
F3	Mercedes	Nuclear	F:44 M: 44	F: University degree. M: VET	F: Vet M: Administrative clerk (unemployed)	Girls: 10/12	Colombian	1200-1800
F4	Roberto Isabel	Nuclear	F: 50 M:48	F: VET M: Primary education	F: Machine Operator M: Cleaner (housekeeper)	Girls: 9/14	Spanish	1800-2400
F5	Fernando Gloria	Nuclear	F: 47 M: 47	F: Primary education M: GCE	F: Mechanic M: Cleaner (housekeeper)	Girl: 13	Spanish	1800-2400
F6	María	Nuclear	F: 43 M: 46	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Computing M: Library assistant	Girl: 8 Boy: 11	Spanish	2400-3000
F7	Hugo Pilar	Nuclear	F: 44 M: 41	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Computing F: Special education teacher	Boy:11 Girls:13/7	Spanish	2400-3000
F8	Carlos Rosa	Step family	F: 33 M: 35	F: Secondary education M: Primary education	P: Logistic manager M: Store manager	Boy: 14	Spanish	3000-4500
F9	José	Nuclear	F: 42 M: 35	F: University degree M: University degree	P: Banking M: Computing	Boys: 15/8/1 Girls:13/7	Spanish Italian	>6000
F10	Juan Lucía	Step family	F: 39 M: 44	F: Engineer's degree M: VET	P: Service technician M: Stewardess	Boys:13/8 Girl: 10	Spanish	1800-2400
F11	Esther	Nuclear	F: 50 M: 46	F: Post Grade certificate M: Post Grade cert.	P: Banking M: Computing	Boy:14 Girl:16	Spanish	2400-3000
F12	Beatriz	Single-parent	M: 40	M: Post Grade certificate	M:Translator	Girl: 12 Boy:10	Spanish	1200-1800
F13	Clara	Nuclear	F:52 M: 52	F: HNC M: HNC	F: Shopping center manager M: Administrative clerk	Boys: 11/14/19	Spanish	2400-3000
F14	Irene	Single-parent	M:46	M: Post Grade certificate	M:Musician	Boys twins:13	Spanish	2400-3000

						Girl: 15/		
F15	Laura	Nuclear	F: 44 M: 42	F: Post Grade certificate M: University degree	F: University Professor M: Arts & craft	Boys: 7/10/13	Spanish	3000-4500
F16	Teresa	Nuclear	F: 42 M: 44	F: Doctorate M: University degree	F: Creative Manager M: Financial Manager	Girls:16/10 Boy: 15	Spanish	>6000
F17	Josefa	Nuclear	F: 45 M: 45	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Economist M: Librarian	Girls:10/14	Spanish	1200-1800
F18	Sofía	Nuclear	F: 40 M: 38	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Operator M: Teacher primary school	Girls: 3/8/12	Spanish	1200-1800
F19	Manuel	Nuclear	F:47 M:52	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Journalist M: Sociologist	Girl:15	Spanish	4500-6000
F20	Miguel	Nuclear	F:46 M:46	F: University degree M: University degree	F: Journalist M: Secretary	Boy:10	Spanish	3000-4500

*GCE: General Certificate of education

VET: Vocational Education and Training

HNC: Certificate of Higher Education

By the age of 12, which is when secondary education begins in Spain, most of the children in the sample possessed smartphones, as did some younger children. The children younger than 12 could access the internet to play or use WhatsApp on their parents' smartphones, mainly the mother's, or on the tablet.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted by the Spanish authors of this article. They were carried out between June and September 2017 in the interviewees' homes. When possible, both parents were interviewed together (6), but in most cases only the father (4) or mother (10) was interviewed. The interviews lasted between 33 and 78 minutes.

Parents were asked to refer to the children who were within the range of ages being studied but they inevitably made some comparisons with younger and older siblings if they had them.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the goals of the study, the participants' rights, and the confidentiality of the information. The interviews were semi-structured, using an interview schedule with broad guiding questions. The interviews were recorded and the data were transcribed (268 pages). Thematic analysis was then applied to the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which was labelled, organised, and analysed according to the different topics and categories derived from the research questions.

Only, but all of, the Spanish authors participated in the early stages of reviewing and categorising the data since the transcriptions were in Spanish. This involved first reading the transcripts several times and taking notes and discussing some general ideas related to the topic mentioned by the participants were collected. Next, a file with the thematic criteria and related categories of comments that were derived from the research questions and literature review was established. Pertinent segments of the transcripts were coded into each category or else generated a new category. The process required returning on several occasions

to the original transcripts to verify that the interpretation of a segment of significance was being properly interpreted. The categories were refined as the analysis of the data progressed. The first drafts of the analysis were translated into English and reviewed by the second author of the article (a native English-speaking researcher), who as an 'outsider' could provide feedback on this process, e.g. identifying problems of interpretation, asking if certain types of data were available.

When exemplifying points with excerpts from interviews participants have been given false names in order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

Results

Online benefits, risks and age

As a baseline for the subsequent discussion, it is first important to know about these particular parents' evaluation of the internet and perceptions of how age makes a difference to children's experience of the online world. This allows us to appreciate the extent to which this group of Spanish parents has perceptions similar to those described in the broader literature and specifically how children's maturity is important in relation to this digital domain.

Certainly, parents think that the internet had benefits in terms of allowing children access to information and in terms of developing technological skills through engagement with the online world. But they also cite the same range of concerns as has been found in many other qualitative studies – for example, about online dangers, disclosing personal information, inappropriate content and excessive use. This may well be a testimony to the combination of media panics and awareness raising that is shared across European countries and beyond. In that sense, this sample is 'representative' of the other studies in this field – it is difficult to identify any element that is specific to Spain.

The parents in this study provide a number of explanations about why children's age makes a difference to engagement in the digital world. In their eyes, younger children who have just gained access to the smartphone make more uncontrolled use of smartphones, their parents attributing this to the children's general lack of self-control at this stage in their lives. Young children are also perceived to be more vulnerable because they are naïve and might be tricked by others. At the same time, their online activities are more limited and they acquiesce more easily when faced with parental interventions. In contrast, older children can be involved in more risky situations, but the parents understand this noting '*they are more receptive, they are forming their personality and they are starting to question things*' (José), and '*they inquire, it is the curiosity*' (Gloria) and '*they begin to discover*' (Juan). Hence, age is clearly a reference point for setting rules about online access, with more rules and more enforcement for younger children. That said, simple age does not in itself determine how children could cope at different points in their lives and so the parents have to constantly assess the maturity of their children.

Since these parents' feel it is their duty is to oversee their children's online use until the latter prove that they are mature enough to manage the online world responsibly, many parents make an effort to find about the technologies and their children's use. They feel that they must supervise their children '*because it's a way to prove we care about them*' (Mercedes).

Parents' overall approach carried over into the digital world

Illustrating the managed progression to autonomy noted in earlier studies, many of the Spanish parents also believe that adolescents generally, but in the offline world as well, have to begin to face situations and make decision for themselves, hopefully applying the values their parents transmit to them when they are younger.

Parents should educate children from (when they are) young children so that they know how to do things when they grow up, so that they know what they are doing well and what they are doing wrong. When they are 16 or 17 years old, they will learn little from you. They will learn, but only when they go wrong. You will not guide them anymore. (Lucia, mother of a 13-year-old boy and 10-year-old girl)

Again, acknowledging the limits of parental guidance as children get older:

I try to steer them along the right course, but ultimately you have to let them go their own way. (Rosa, mother of a 14-year-old boy)

That more general parenting philosophy is then applied to the mediation of ICTs:

As a father, you give him some guidelines and then he will follow them or not. Then I can talk to him about how not sleeping enough hours or using the phone too much can affect him. But in the end, it is his decision and I don't think removing the devices works. (Esther, father of a 14-year-old boy)

The continuity between general parenting and managing children's ICTs is also shown in the case of risk-taking. Taking risks in general is often seen by many of these parents as being an integral part of life, and taking risks online simply reflects that. Therefore, despite concerns about the dangers noted early, many of these parents think that it is necessary for their children to engage with this online world: *'you shouldn't be scared all day long'* (Irene). They take it for granted that their children will learn through trial and error, deriving good lessons from bad experiences to become *'responsible for the consequences'* (Mercedes). This also applies to the internet. And the theme of increasing trust as children mature also applies in relation to the digital world, captured in the claim made by parents that they have trust in adolescents' competence to cope with their online use as exemplified by *'she already knows'* (Isabel) and *'they manage it much better than we expect'* (Teresa).

However, within this overview of appropriate parental interventions many parents also have an expectation that children should play a specific role: that their children should consult them when something online is seen as problematic. In the case of the online world, this translates into reporting encounters with what might be inappropriate content or if the children have doubts about something they see online. To this end, these parents, more clearly mothers, try to encourage and promote such a communicative climate, and in the case of the online world try not to betray such trust, at least in the obvious way of very close monitoring.

In fact, children's voluntary and honest self-disclosure of online activities is itself taken to be a sign that their children are not behaving inappropriately on the internet.

A detail that is significant to me is that he shows us what he is doing spontaneously. In the end, when you see that he has that freedom of action ... a kid who tells you (these things) spontaneously means that there is no danger. It is my opinion, but I can also be wrong.

(Clara, mother of a 14-year-old boy)

I have a relationship of trust with my daughter that has worked very well until now. And I think it is very worthy in itself. It's working because every time she's had a problem, she has told me ... It seems to me that if you have this type of relationship with your child, you should not put your nose in her life. In fact, she teaches me things, conversations. (Beatriz, mother of a 12-year-old girl)

As this last observation shows, parents are also willing to concede privacy to their children if the arrangement appears to be working.

The difficulties of implementing parenting ideals

If the previous section presents a very positive, harmonious picture of parents' ideal interactions within these families, the greater complexity is revealed once there are discussions of the details, specifically those relating to parental monitoring, a dimension parents often do not initially stress in their account of their parenting more generally.

Sometimes the obstacle lies not in technology but in the sheer difficulty of overseeing children, best illustrated in the case of Rosa, a single-parent family who has very long work shifts. Specific features of the technologies can contribute to this problem as in the case of the mobile phone: '*They can be connected at anytime, anywhere. Then, checking is more difficult.*' (José). Meanwhile, even when they make an effort to know what their children are doing online, in accordance with previous studies, parents' knowledge of technologies, the digital world in general and specific areas such as social networking sites is often limited and less than their children's.

But apart from such practicalities one more general challenge is that of respecting adolescents' privacy, for instance, in their use of the smartphone. This can be at odds with the social pressures on 'responsible' parents, part of broader societal discourses demanding that they pay attention to their children's online activities. Parents sometimes themselves articulate this dilemma between their obligation to monitor children and, at the same time, to respect their privacy.

It is very dangerous to give them that freedom and not to watch over them, and not check on them. It is not to checking like the police. I do not pick up the phone and check it. She has enough confidence to tell me: 'Look what (my friend) she has put me here (on my profile), what this message is, look at what picture is, do not you see it?' (Pilar, mother of a 13-year-old girl)

Moreover, what type of privacy is considered can itself vary and can be at odds with other things that parents evaluate as their duty. To illustrate this variation, parents Fernando and Gloria do not read the private messages of their daughter, but they do not consider it an intrusion of her privacy if they check her location with GPS. The complexity of privacy in terms of conflicts with other parental duties is shown in the case of access to content generated by others. Laura discovered that her son had received inappropriate sexual content through WhatsApp and tried to report it to the school and to the parents of the child who had uploaded the material. However, her teenage son had a different perspective and responded by saying that his privacy had been invaded. Parents and children can clearly sometimes have different views of the balance between privacy and responsible parenthood.

Trust also turns out to be more problematic than in the statements that parents made in the previous section. Although parents say that, in general, they trust their adolescent children, sometimes they also express reservations: *'I stick my neck out for him, but how many times have we been taken by surprise?'* (Josefa). At times parents' hesitations about trust have to do with the lack of oversight of some areas of adolescent life: *'We do not know if his behaviour changes at school'* (Rosa). And their own limited technological skills play a part in parents' decisions about whether they can trust their children as the older children especially can control what their parents see by deleting their WhatsApp history or hiding their profiles on social networking sites (Mercedes; Cristina). Even when things appear to be going well, doubts about trust lasting in the future can remain:

She does not deceive me and she is always showing me things because she has that confidence. Let's see. I want to fully trust my daughter. Because she has not given me any reason to distrust her. The day I distrust her...because maybe she keeps hiding herself or things like this...or I do not know, I may become a little more distrustful. Anyway, if they wanted, they would remove it automatically. I know. (Isabel, mother of a 14-year-old girl)

Lastly, while most of children, even adolescents, accept parental rules about internet use, some, as identified in the literature review, dispute paternal authority: *'They argue with me, deceive and question me'* and *'they break the rules'* (Mercedes). As the children age they sometimes assert themselves in ways that do not fit in with parents' ideals about how the child should behave in relation to the ideal managed transition arrangements described in the previous section. Meanwhile, parents also feel that increasingly that they lose some authority not only compared to the influence of older children's peers – which would also have been true of past generations – but also compared to that of the internet in general and influential YouTubers in particular.

Parents respond to this challenge in different ways. Mercedes seeks to re-strengthen her authority by using emotional blackmail (*'I won't trust you anymore'*), punishment, and other 'tricks' in order to overcome the resistance of her daughters. In contrast, Carmen, who is overwhelmed by conflicts, adopts an erratic response, characterised by inconsistency in the maintenance of time norms about when technologies can be used. Other parents refrain from punishing their children because teens *'have a more developed personality'* (Rosa), which can lead to tensions and conflicts: *'I'm afraid he faces up to me'* (Rosa).

Although the above observations are in the context of parents attempting to intervene in children's experience of the digital world, they clearly reflect more general problems relating to privacy and trust as

well as conflicts and parental responses as older children assert their independence generally. In other words, these dilemmas would apply to other aspects of children's lives

Discussion

Parents' general ethnotheories about their role provides some insight into why their parental interventions change with age. They reflect broader parenting ideals as these Spanish parents consider themselves to be responsible for their children's online activities and in this sense do not differentiate between the mediation of digital media's use and parenting in general. In many ways, their statements about their overall approach to parental mediation reflects the themes identified in the literature about the managed move to autonomy as children grow older, and the increasing importance of trust. As noted by Collins et al. (1997), parents in principle often want adolescents to confront and learn from conflict situations, taking responsibility for their own online behaviour and making decisions. Consistent with the above, and in line with the results of Erickson et al. (2016), these parents say that in general and in relation to the digital world they have more trust in an older adolescents' knowledge, feeling that they are smart enough to avoid any kind of danger. Within this overall understanding of parent-child relations, parents ideally also expect children to play a specific role in this process – disclosing potential problems. In the case of the digital world, and matching the findings of Symons et al. (2017), the children in this Spanish study are expected to reveal their online behaviour and experiences, so that parents acquire a greater knowledge of life online in order to identify children's involvement in problematic situations.

However, when looking at the problems of implementing their parenting ideals, a slightly different picture can emerge. There can be a discrepancy, noted in the literature review, between what parents ideally would like to do and what can happen in practice. These dilemmas are now explored in more depth in relation to the key themes of this article: privacy, trust and managed transition to autonomy

Privacy, of more exactly privacy from parents, raised a fundamental dilemma noted by some parents that it contradicts pressure to monitor children. This study shows there is scope for exploring how parents try to reconcile these demands and how that involves a changing calculation as children age. More specifically, there is the question of 'privacy in relation to what', as shown in the case of the parents who did not monitor their child's messages but checked her location. The case of the parent responding to received inappropriate content illustrates how privacy is often not judged in isolation from other parental imperatives – another hypothetical example, might be the pressure to intervene if cyberbullying had been discovered. This tension between different parental duties also underlined how parents and children could prioritise the competing demands differently. Reflecting on the section discussing parental ideals, privacy could be granted if things appeared to be going well. But this raises questions about children meeting conditions for privacy. This may involve an assessment of their maturity more generally but also perhaps more specifically poses the question of what children may have to do to earn privacy, in this particular case by exhibiting self-disclosure. Finally, the case of children questioning parental authority underlines how it may not be a case of parents 'granting' privacy, but the latter have no choice if children resist parental interventions and demand a right to personal space.

Trust proved to be equally problematic. When discussed by parents as an ideal, it was framed as whether or not they trusted their children. But their later hesitations suggested that this is not a binary choice. There may be degrees of trust and one parent's comments about the future (*'The day I distrust her...'*) indicate that trust may not be given once and for all: it may involve an ongoing calculation on the part of the parent (and maybe ongoing 'work' on the part of the child to retain that trust). Like the question of 'privacy in relation to what', there may be the equivalent different types of trust. In the section on ideals some parents referred to trusting their children's competence (i.e. trust in children's evaluation of what encounter in the digital world, and ability to manage it). But those same discussions of ideals indicate we also have trusting children in follow (i.e. internalise) parental guidance. Or even if their children disagree with that guidance and *'go their own way'* (captured also by *'it's his decision'*), making different choices from what parents advise, there may still be a type of parental trust in children's ability to learn, to be reflexive and to cope. As in the case of privacy, there are questions to explore about the conditions for trust or lack of it: as when parents expressed disappointment with children's past actions. In particular, there was the failure of some children to meet parental expectations of self-disclosure as when parents think that their children may lie, cheat, behave in a more reserved fashion or hide something - which itself can be taken as a sign that leads parents to believe something has happened and that they have to intervene more directly¹. Finally, the example of perceiving children to have greater technical competence means that, like privacy, parents sometimes feel they have little choice but to trust their children.

Lastly, we have the element of managing independence. Certainly, there were signs of this intention, when parents talked of encouraging children to try out the digital world, not to be scared, where part of growing up involved learning from experience. Perhaps 'manage' is the key word here, stressing parents' views of their own role, their agency, in this process. When discussing parental ideals, these Spanish parents made limited reference to negotiation with children, what happens when the children try to assert their agency, despite claims that nowadays there is more negotiation because of the de-traditionalization of the family (Giddens, 1991; Williams and Williams, 2005). If anything, in this study when the children had different ideas there were examples of conflict, parents trying to re-assert authority, or giving up engagement with their children. There is, therefore, scope for further work on the extent to which in their parenting ideals parents think about the role of negotiation (within limits) as being part of the way to enable children to become more independent.

Conclusion

Although this qualitative study was conducted in only one country, Spain, given some overlapping observations in other studies, the parental perceptions, comments and actions documented in this sample are probably not country specific. Admittedly, this study is limited in that it was conducted with parents only, given it was trying to understand their perspective. However, the children's interpretations might have added

¹ Some research supports this viewpoint to the extent that adolescents who engage in problematic behaviour also keep more secrets from their mothers (Villalobos-Solís, Smetana, & Corner, 2015). However, that interpretation of non-disclosure has been questioned by Byrne, Kardefelt-Winther, Livingstone, and Stoilova (2016), who show that one reason why children turn first to their peers before their parents is for fear of disappointing the latter or being punished by them.

some further insights (Clark 2011), for example, in term of how they feel about their parents' general approach to parenting (exemplified in a Clark, 2009), as well as how they see issues like parents' expectations of self-disclosure. Meanwhile, when parents were asked about their ethnotheories in particular there is the possibility of social desirability biases, given the very positive overtones of that first part of the findings section on parental ideals. Lastly, there is always scope for future research to address these issues and explore a range of factors – e.g. socio-demographics of parents and children – that may have a bearing on the details of the process described here. With those caveats, these findings are taken to contribute to that more general understanding of the motivations behind and dilemmas relating to parental interventions in the digital lives of their children as the latter age.

Rather than focusing on strategies of parental interventions that are specific to media, as documented in much of the parental mediation literature, the starting point for this article is more general parental ethnotheories about parenting, about their own role, their expectations, their ideals, and how plan to handle the fact of children ageing. This also informs parents' approach to their children's experience of the digital world. Against this backdrop, which stresses the continuities from parenting in other domains of children's live, the focus has been on elaborating the nature of the dilemmas parents face when trying to implement their ideals, dilemmas which themselves are also to be found in other aspects of parent-child relationships. The themes of privacy, trust and a managed transition to autonomy have been addressed at some length in the literature reviewed, but in this analysis the emphasis, illustrated by the empirical material, is on what further questions might be asked, what dimensions considered.

Acknowledgements

This article arose from the project *Social networks, adolescents and young people: Media convergence and digital culture*, funded by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness, Spain [CSO2016-74980-C2-2-R]

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Submitted: 15th January 2020

Accepted: 20th July 2020

How to quote this article:

López de Ayala López, M. C.; Haddon, L.; Catalina-García, B.; Martínez-Pastor, E. (2020). The dilemmas of parental mediation: Continuities from parenting in general. *Observatorio*, *14*(4), 119-134.