



## **Pedophilia discourses in Denmark**

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Title

# **Paedophilia discourses in Denmark. Towards a mixed method digital discourse approach**

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**Abstract**

This study contributes novel digital mixed methods and findings on how fear of pedophilia affects parents and children's bodily relations. We explore how norms for appropriate behavior between parents and children are constructed in the public debate on a specific case, where a mom has playful contact with her son's genitals. The case triggered a public debate with both negative and positive reactions. A Laclau and Mouffe-inspired analytical framework and Internet-specific tools for data collection as well as processing contribute to the development of a new form of discourse analysis. This new discourse analysis is based on a combination of the digital tools word cloud and topic models, and a qualitative in-depth reading. By exploring discursive constructions and articulations of right and wrong, the study supports earlier findings that the online public unanimously agrees to the dictum of child innocence. However, we find openness within the discourses on how to define respectively healthy and damaging parental behavior towards children.

**Keywords:** pedophilia, digital methods, mixed method, discourse analysis, norm construction, digital research, sexuality, digital discourse analysis, moral panic, morality, topic modelling, scraping, crawling

## Introduction

*“Villads and I laugh when we play 'serpent and the blackbird' – where my hand is a flying, hungry blackbird that confuses his small penis with a delicious, small earthworm. Yum.”*

This small notice was written by an editor of the Danish children's magazine *Vores Børn* [Our Children] in the September 2014 issue. The description of an amusing game where a mother has playful contact with her son's genitals created a widely covered debate among the Danish public, where comments containing words such as “sick,” “pedophile,” and “sexual assault” rose steadily in the days after the release. The debate escalated, especially on online media platforms where commentators expressed condemnation towards the editor. Several expressed that she had damaged the child's innocence. Egmont, the publisher of *Vores Børn*, decided to withdraw the notice, arguing that the debate had been derailed.

The Danish Blackbird case is the focal point for this research study. We examine how norms for appropriate parental behavior are constructed on online debate platforms in light of a general rise of fear of pedophilia. Within the paper, no differentiation is made between pedophilia (a diagnosis) and sexual molestation (a criminal offense), as the empirical material of online discussion does not allow doing so. In the analysis of online norm construction, this article develops a novel mixed method discourse analysis that combines the digital quantitative analytical tools word cloud and topic models with a qualitative in-depth analysis, inspired by Laclau and Mouffe's terminology.

The Danish Blackbird case inscribes itself in an international context, where people react with pedophilia accusations and condemnation when it comes to bodily contact or nudity between parents and children. Judgmental and hateful reactions similar to the Blackbird case erupted when an Australian photographer, Bill Henson, issued an invitation to his upcoming exhibition, which featured a photo of a naked 13-year-old girl. The opinion that the pictures were controversial and had pedophilic undertones gained sizable support in the debate. As a result, the exhibition closed down and the police seized the images, but a fierce media campaign about art, children, censorship and pedophilia followed (Simpson, 2011). A similar reaction occurred last year when American photographer Wyatt Neumann took his two-year-old daughter Stella on a road trip across the country, documenting their travels by taking pictures of beautiful landscapes and his naked daughter. The images attracted criticism from people around the world who called them “perverse,”

“sick,” and “pornographic” (Frank, 2014). In January 2015, the pop singer Sia was accused of child pornography by online debaters when she released a music video for her new track “Elastic Heart.” The music video shows an adult man and a girl dancing intensely in nude-colored underwear. Many found the video inappropriate, repulsive, and of having pedophilic connotations (Ellen, 2015). Most recently, a new American computer game named “Shower With Your Dad Simulator” attracted a lot of attention. The game is designed with a pixelated ‘80s look, and it revolves around a little boy who showers with his father in a public bath. Many Twitter users responded with tweets calling the computer game “disgusting” or “nasty” (Ditlevsen, 2015). The condemnatory comments toward the computer game are observed to be similar to the reactions on the Danish Blackbird case. The award-winning Danish movie *Jagten* (The Hunt) could be seen as a response to the scapegoating of men who are suspected of having sexual relations with children. The movie is told through the perspective of a man who becomes the target of moral judgments after being wrongly accused of sexually abusing a child. The movie can be seen as a critical comment on public condemnatory reactions towards people who are suspected of sexual assault.

Most studies on fear of pedophilia have roots in an Australian context based on qualitative methods and literature reviews (Baird, 2013; Davies, 2012; Hawkes & Dune, 2013; Robinson, 2012; Simpson, 2011). These studies have successfully established a focus on the multifaceted field of children, sexuality, and fear of pedophilia. However, very few international empirical studies examine how fear of pedophilia influences society and norm constructions for appropriate parental behavior. These matters are primarily discussed by experts and researchers who, to a lesser degree, base their statements on empirical, peer-reviewed research. To understand how societal fear of pedophilia affects relationships between adults and children, a more fundamental knowledge of the norms designed for parental behavior towards children is needed. Thus presents the relevance of this study.

### **Increased fear of pedophilia**

Research has pointed toward an increased focus on pedophilia in public debate over the last 15-20 years (Bech, 2005; Hawkes & Dune, 2013; Jewkes & Wykes, 2012; Leander et al., 2012; Marsh, 2009; Marsh & Melville, 2011). This focus has led to a corresponding increase in a public fear of pedophilia branching into all parts of society. A widespread fear of pedophilia is particularly interesting in a Danish context, as Denmark traditionally has a reputation as a country with very

liberal understandings and practices of sexuality. This reputation has been given the special Danish term of “liberal sexual outlook” – or “frisind” in Danish wording (Edelberg, 2014).

Pedophilia became a major issue on the Western public agenda in the 1990s when a significant number of cases in England, Northern Ireland, United States, and Belgium took focus in the public debate. Cases such as missing children, priests’ exploitation of children, and abuse in orphanages were largely discussed and distributed in the media. Researchers Maggie Wykes and Yvonne Jewkes (2012) state that the extended focus on pedophilia in the media contributes to the construction of pedophiles as today's monsters in the global public consciousness. At the same time, children are constructed as the ultimate symbol of good and innocence in society (Angelides, 2004). Bech (2005) stresses that discussions about sexual matters are characterized by anxiety, worry, and a fear of pedophilia. Jewkes and Wykes (2012) support this argument and they argue that the fear can draw parallels to societal panic. According to Hawkes and Dune (2013), the fear has resulted in an excessive and inappropriate control and monitoring of parents’ intimate interactions with children.

The Danish research group Paradox has shed light on the extent and influence of fear of pedophilia in society. Based on a survey (n=1177) from 2012, Paradox found that the fear of being accused of pedophilia among child care workers and the population, in general, has affected their behavior towards children. The research shows that 30 percent of men who do not work professionally with children fear pedophilia accusations. This figure suggests that men, in general, have a fear of being accused of pedophilia, for example, from behavior with their own children. This is further emphasized by the fact that nearly 17 percent of the general population of men state that they have changed their behavior toward children as a direct consequence of the increased societal fear of pedophilia (Leander et al., 2012). These findings underpin that the fear of pedophilia accusations is not only experienced by professional child care workers, but it is now also found within the private sphere.

## **Methods – the need for new approaches**

In Western societies, social media use is a fully integrated part of contemporary everyday life (Domingo, 2015; Ruppert, Law, & Savage, 2013). As online presence becomes more dominant, the Internet becomes a powerful medium to construct and distribute social norms and discourses

(Graffigna, 2014). Well-known sociological empirical methods are no longer sufficient when examining online social media platforms (Savage & Burrows, 2007). In order to keep track of the vast amounts of social data that are constantly generated and archived online, social scientists need to rethink methodologies for data acquisition and analytical tools (Venturini & Latour, 2010). To accommodate the need for new online methodologies, this article contributes to a development of novel sociological methods.

The methods section consists of four parts. Part one relates to data collection and processing with web crawling and scraping, part two briefly introduces relevant concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis, and part three outlines the specific mixed-method approach that we put forward as a model for empirical studies on norm construction in the light of fear of pedophilia. Part four functions as an introduction to the specific digital and non-digital tools and their purpose in the analytical process.

### *Data collection and processing: web crawling and scraping*

In order to analyze norm constructions for appropriate behavior between parents and children, we need to gain access to comment threads debating the Blackbird case. This process is made possible by the Internet-specific tool referred to as "crawling" or "web-o-metrics." The technique systematically crawls the Internet and identifies URLs (websites) related to specific topics<sup>1</sup> – in our case, the topic of interest is the Blackbird case. More broadly, it can be described as "the quantitative study of Web-related phenomena" (Thelwall et al., 2005).

Assisted by initial exploratory engine searches (in this case, duckduckgo.com), different word combinations were found that are adequate for capturing all URLs containing comments in relation to the debate on the Blackbird case. This process can be compared to the explorative production of a relevant search strategy for literature searches. The URLs are the initial starting point for our search strategy where embedded links on the websites are pursued in order to identify previously

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<sup>1</sup> Crawling is often understood as an automated dissection of the Internet, carried out by software programs that systematically pursue links embedded in a given website (Rogers, 2013). Due to the fact that this study is tied to a specific case that was debated in a limited time period, this is possible with manual crawling. Manual crawling was accomplished by clicking through all websites with connections to the Blackbird case.

undiscovered URLs containing debates on the Blackbird case. Through this rigorous process, we identified 51 unique URLs containing 2,673 different posts commenting on the Blackbird case.

With help from the scraping technique, the 2,673 different posts were then processed into a dataset (sometimes referred to as a text corpus). Each of the 51 websites containing debate posts consists of raw HTML code. Scraping is a translation technique that involves a series of steps that extract and translate the HTML codes into an analyzable and readable dataset<sup>2</sup>. Scraping extracts essential snippets like usernames, comments, and names of discussion forums from each URL's HTML-body and ultimately forms the information bits into a dataset. This digital and carefully organized dataset is fundamental to the subsequent quantitative and qualitative analytical work.

### *A digital sequential discourse analysis*

In order to identify how norms for appropriate behavior between parents and children were constructed in the public debate on the Blackbird case, a discourse analysis inspired by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theoretical concepts is useful. Building on their understanding of language as relational, we can examine how social meaning is constructed, negotiated and reconstructed differently throughout the debate (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). With this approach, we gain insight into how words through articulations are put together in different ways and form discourses that define appropriate and inappropriate parental behavior.

### *Mixed-method approach*

Departing from a mixed-method perspective, we develop a discourse analysis – a digital sequential discourse analysis (DSDA) – that combines qualitative and quantitative digital analytical tools. This DSDA is enabled by the digital data collection and processing. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analytics provides in-depth insight and broader understanding of the discourses constructed in the debate. The DSDA is inspired by a sequential mixed-method design with iterative elements. In practice, this means that this analytical process is driven by a dynamic interplay between findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses respectively (Teddlie & Tashakkori,

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<sup>2</sup> This process is made possible by the software application Firebug. Firebug is a browser extension used for harvesting raw HTML codes directly. Each of the 51 URLs was identified via crawling.



2009). In this manner, the quantitative and qualitative tools inform and refine each other in an ongoing process (Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2010).

The combined use of qualitative and quantitative digital tools in a discourse analysis is a relatively new analytical approach within the social sciences. Little scientific research has studied discourse construction using mixed methods, integrating computer-assisted tools with qualitative readings (Kim, 2014; Levy & Franklin, 2014; Montiel, Salvador, See, & Leon, 2014), and an unexplored analytic potential lies in further development (Bennett, 2015; Mautner, 2005).

In this article, we bring an in-depth qualitative reading in dialogue with two novel digital analytical tools: word cloud and topic modeling. The computer-assisted methods of word cloud and topic modeling detect themes and patterns in the debates that are not necessarily identified during qualitative reading (Graffigna, 2014), whereas a qualitative analytical reading provides an in-depth understanding of discourse formations. With the qualitative approach, we can detect irony and understand a greater context that quantitative tools fail to take into account. A short introduction of the three tools and their interplay in the DSDA is described below.

The word cloud is a quantitative analytical tool that visualizes the most frequently used words in the debate on the Blackbird case. This tool contributes to an exploratory approach to the text material by providing an overview of the dominating (most likely) words in the debate. The word cloud is a basic descriptive but highly inductive framework providing analytical direction for further analysis.

The systematic, qualitative in-depth reading provides a deeper understanding of the debate and assists in identifying relationships in the text material within a meaningful whole (Tanggaard Pedersen, Brinkmann, Ole Thornye, & Tom Havemann, 2010). We locate key themes and discourses that are central to the debate based on our research questions, theoretical orientation, and the word cloud's initial findings.

Topic modeling is a quantitative analytical tool which can potentially reveal patterns and themes in textual material. Topic models have been used in a thematic analysis of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature (Jockers og Mimno 2013), a discourse analysis of news articles about art funding (DiMaggio, Nag, og Blei 2013), and an analysis of political discourse on encrypted internet markets (Munksgaard og

Demant 2016). Topic modeling presents textual themes through a variety of topics accompanied by a cluster of words created on the basis of words that statistically appear together in the text corpus – the debate on the Blackbird case. Such groups of words can be an indication of a thematic structure or discourse in the debate. This is also the case within qualitative analysis, but the ability to apply such a systematic to a very large data material is far more feasible with the digital analysis of the data (Blei, 2012; Levy & Franklin, 2014). The researcher defines no codes or categories beforehand. Instead, the model works inductively, deriving its solution from the data alone. This article makes use of the LDA-topic model introduced by David M. Blei (Blei, Ng, & Jordan, 2003). The LDA model identifies a number of topics across the same texts.

Topic models are generated on the basis of a collection of statistical algorithms that automatically scan a text corpus (see *Blei, Ng & Jordan, 2003*), unfazed by preconceptions and discourses that could influence the researcher during the qualitative coding work (Schmidt, 2013). However, researchers determine the number of topics that the model returns, and the researcher, therefore, cannot avoid influencing the outcome. Generally, it applies that the fewer topics chosen, the less specific and coherent the word cluster beneath each topic will be, and vice versa. Apart from providing quantifiable measures of the distribution of thematic content, the discovered topics can be used to navigate the original source material. Topic models, as such, enable a much-needed iterative alternation between the quantitative topics and specific text passages in the text material, making it possible to qualitatively explore the specific text passages constituting the models (Venturini and Latour 2010).

### **Initial findings**

On the basis of our first analytical step, the word cloud, we find that words like “children” [børn], “genitals” [kønsdel], “mom” [mor] and “dad” [far] are frequently used in the public debate of the Blackbird case.<sup>3</sup> The 100 visually-ranked words in the word cloud indicate that the perceptions of these words are negotiated in the debate. The word cloud thus serves as a first-hand explorative tool that provides advantageous insights prevailing the qualitative in-depth reading, where key concepts, meaningful words, and central discourses are identified.

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<sup>3</sup> The original Danish words appear in [ ].



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Console ~/Test/ ↵
> terms(dtm.prove2, 15)
  Topic 1  Topic 2  Topic 3  Topic 4  Topic 5  Topic 6  Topic 7  Topic 8  Topic 9  Topic 10  Topic 11  Topic 12
[1.] "små"      "selv"      "grænser"  "leg"     "sgu"     "børn"    "folk"    "helt"    "seksuelt" "tilbage"  "selv"    "solsorten"
[2.] "drenge"   "helt"     "leg"      "legen"   "hovedet" "ting"    "pædofili" "selv"    "børn"    "historien" "forkert"  "legen"
[3.] "piger"     "ble"      "upassende" "redaktøren" "syg"     "forældre" "pædofil"  "syntes"  "helt"    "historie" "gjort"    "maven"
[4.] "selvom"   "forældre" "forkert"   "seksuelt"  "godt"    "forskellige" "blevet"   "normalt"  "handler"  "redaktør"  "mand"    "tissemanden"
[5.] "anden"    "give"     "tale"     "børn"     "lad"     "engang"  "overgreb" "virkelig" "voksne"  "artiklen"  "ret"     "kilde"
[6.] "mit"      "finde"    "netop"    "heller"   "syge"    "langt"   "hold"     "bedre"    "godt"    "debat"     "moderen"  "ormen"
[7.] "moren"    "siden"    "samme"    "seksuelle" "leg"     "forskæl" "snart"    "orden"    "seksuelle" "bladet"    "sygt"     "regnorm"
[8.] "overgreb" "hende"    "folks"    "beskrevet" "legen"   "børnehaven" "slap"     "sikkert"  "anden"    "debatten"  "pædofil"  "tissemand"
[9.] "holde"    "enige"    "sag"      "køn"      "stakkels" "sag"     "ude"      "gang"     "selv"    "læse"     "giver"    "hops"
[10.] "problem"  "giver"    "bange"    "voksne"   "høre"    "tissemanden" "samfund"  "gjorde"   "lege"    "mennesker" "uanset"   "ham"
[11.] "uskyldigt" "godt"    "heller"   "samfund"  "incest"  "bestemt"  "hysteriske" "dele"     "barn"    "simpelthen" "menneske" "forveksler"
[12.] "side"     "skifter"  "lege"     "nej"      "sygt"    "stor"     "overreaktion" "ret"     "rart"    "slet"     "lyder"    "hånd"
[13.] "piller"   "altid"    "folk"     "opfatter" "under"   "søn"     "verden"   "frem"     "holdning" "trække"    "drejer"   "første"
[14.] "samfundet" "børnene" "forstår"  "forkert"  "morgen"  "barnets"  "kæft"     "galt"     "imo"     "artikel"   "tankegang" "kilder"
[15.] "skade"    "skifte"   "slet"     "ligesom"  "ret"     "grund"    "sexuelt"  "mødre"    "indgår"  "læste"    "vender"   "skrevet"

  Topic 13  Topic 14  Topic 15  Topic 16  Topic 17  Topic 18  Topic 19  Topic 20  Topic 21  Topic 22  Topic 23  Topic 24
[1.] "far"      "mor"     "mænd"    "mand"    "forkert"  "tissemand" "helt"     "lege"    "leg"     "vide"     "barn"     "barn"
[2.] "mor"     "faktisk" "kvinder"  "leg"     "lege"     "lille"     "skrev"    "kønsdele" "barnet"  "står"     "mor"     "leg"
[3.] "søn"     "sex"     "pædofile" "datter"  "helt"     "lege"     "legede"   "børns"   "sjovt"  "barn"     "sit"     "del"
[4.] "ham"     "burde"   "slags"    "far"     "nej"      "drenge"   "ting"     "leger"   "sjov"   "gød"     "barnet"  "børns"
[5.] "datter"  "alder"   "folk"     "okay"    "slet"     "om"       "far"      "kønsorganer" "uskyldig" "gud"     "leg"     "barn"
[6.] "samme"   "mine"    "kvinde"   "samme"   "folk"     "leg"      "kønsdele" "tænker"  "drenge" "huske"    "leg"     "udvikling"
[7.] "legen"    "rent"    "børn"     "legede"  "faktisk"  "drenge"   "anderledes" "voksne"  "leger"   "hellere"  "kønsdele" "naturlig"
[8.] "sønnen"  "børn"    "pædagoger" "legat"  "selv"     "aldrig"   "altid"    "mor"     "sikkert" "diller"   "barns"    "lære"
[9.] "under"    "verden"  "altid"    "lege"     "kønsorganer" "søns"     "datters"  "forældre" "legen"   "søn"     "overgreb" "mennesker"
[10.] "langt"   "forældre" "mandlige" "legen"   "kønsorganer" "solsort"  "sagde"    "uanset"  "grænsen" "forbindelse" "selv"    "pædofili"
[11.] "aldrig"  "grund"   "gjort"    "finger"  "bør"     "pige"     "folk"     "fortæller" "heller"  "holde"    "barnets"  "netop"
[12.] "finde"   "far"     "problem"  "kvinde"  "sikker"   "gerne"    "okay"     "tydeligvis" "længe"  "sagde"    "seksuelle" "gennem"
[13.] "faren"   "sker"    "godt"     "anden"   "forskel"  "upassende" "reelt"    "selvfølgelig" "moren"  "alder"    "voksen"  "unge"
[14.] "situationen" "pænt"   "legen"    "pædofil" "frem"     "virker"   "mand"     "børnehaven" "selv"   "aldrig"  "årige"    "viden"
[15.] "opfattelse" "ens"    "ligestilling" "ormen"  "burde"    "syntes"   "ærligt"   "artiklen"  "vurdere" "hjælp"    "voksne"  "skyld"

  Topic 25  Topic 26  Topic 27  Topic 28  Topic 29  Topic 30
[1.] "børn"    "tak"     "børn"    "børn"    "seksuelt" "helt"
[2.] "krop"    "håber"   "vores"   "forældre" "hende"    "enig"
[3.] "lære"    "kommentar" "fuldstændig" "bad"     "uden"     "godt"
[4.] "forhold" "indlæg"  "blevet"  "rundt"   "seksuel"  "skrevet"

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We selected 15 topic models whose word clusters appear to produce a coherent theme: 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28 and 29. The other 15 topics are invalid, as they present clusters of common curse words or likewise. The detection of valid and invalid topics is based on a qualitative assessment of the topic, and as such, is part of the iterative process between the statistical model and the qualitative analysis. A few of the coherent themes are presented below to illustrate how we analyzed the topic models. For example, we interpreted that topic 12, with a cluster of words like Blackbird-the play-belly-upennis-tickle-worm-earthworm-yum-confuses-him-hand-first-write, is referring specifically to the editor's description of the blackbird and earthworm play.

By using the topic model analysis, we find a key theme that we have not drawn special attention to in the previous analytical steps: contemporary society. Topic 7 consists of words like “overreaction,” “hysterical,” “pedophile,” “world,” and “community” in a cluster, and the topic indicates that voices in the debate on the Blackbird case believe that the debate (and society in general) is derailing. Topic 7 is constructed on the basis of 123 comments that we qualitatively looked through again.

We carried out an iterative analytical process between quantitative topics and specific text passages where we looked into how the theme of contemporary society is constructed in the debate.

Departing from the thematic insights of the 15 selected topics followed by a qualitative reading of the debate comments that constitute them, we challenged, supported and deepened the discourses found in the previous qualitative and quantitative analytical steps.

## **Findings**

In the initial analysis, we selected themes that we found central to the online debate on the Blackbird case, enabled by the DSDA. In this section, we further investigate how appropriate behavior between parents and children is constructed in the online debate on the Blackbird case. We do this by dissecting the debaters' articulations within the selected themes: children, appropriate parental behavior, and gender and contemporary society.

### *Children are innocent*

Children are a frequent matter of discussion throughout the debate. We find that children are constructed as innocent beings whose vulnerability and virtue ought to be protected by parents. This conceptualization of children as innocent is unfazed and assumes a hegemonic position across the public online debate. The *child innocence*-discourse is exemplified through the articulation shown below:

'My children should be allowed to enjoy their innocence and their experience of a natural body'  
(Moar, Fashionmom.dk)

This quote demonstrates that the *child innocence*-discourse is characterized by comments that emphasize the child and the child's body as pure. "Innocent", "natural" and "vulnerable" are words used to describe the child in the debate. The hegemonic position that the *child innocence*-discourse occupies in the debate indicates that the understanding of children as innocent simultaneously draws on and influences a contemporary sexual morality.

The construction of children as innocent is so paramount that the debate often turns from an underlining of child innocence into a widespread fear of the violation of this same innocence. This

fear of violation can be amplified by the fact that debaters tend to confer characteristics to children's sexuality that contrast characteristics of adult sexuality. Here, a child's sexuality is constructed as naïve, playful, and curious, whereas an adult sexuality has to do with procreation, pleasure, and titillating fantasies:

“Doesn't she have a man she can play with instead? In my opinion, she is crossing the line... and it's crossing the line, and not to mention nasty.” (Hanne Bagger, Dagens.dk)

This quote is one among many that sexualize bodily play between child and parent, as the debater juxtaposes the motives behind the play with a sexual play between adults. As a result, we find that the Blackbird-play is associated with characteristics belonging to an adult sexuality, and this can be seen as a part of the reason why a fear of violation of the child has a presence in the public debate.

### *“Appropriate” parental behavior*

Through discursive constructions and articulations of parental behavior, we identify two strong opposing positions in the debate, each offering a specific set of guidelines for parents to abide by. These positions relate strongly to rightful and wrongful parental behavior.

### *No touching*

On the one hand, the Blackbird-play is perceived negatively. This part of the public associates the Blackbird-play with pedophilia and abuse and condemns playful activities where children's genitals are included. As a result, a parental scope of action is offered where parents are urged to respect children's intimate boundaries. Parents drawing on this position equate appropriate behavior with limited contact with children's genitals, and genital touching is only accepted when having a hygienic purpose. The following quotes are examples of what we chose to call the *No Touching*-discourse:

“You don't play with children's genitals. It's sick, and it destroys a child's ability to navigate between right and wrong.” (Johan Tandrup, Reddit.dk)

“As a parent, you obviously wash or lotion your child's genitals, but it is a sterile practice and not a fun game.” (Christian Kier, Facebook.dk/VoresBorn)

The two quotes use phrases like “don’t play” and “sterile practice” when describing appropriate parent behavior. Through an in-depth reading of the text corpus, we expanded the *No Touching*-discourse with words such as “be careful,” “damaging,” “pedophile,” “genitals are no-go,” and a long list of similar phrases. Furthermore, the word clusters from the topic models guide us to identify quotes in the text corpus where phrases such as “brought for the court” and “forced removal” emphasize a need for defamation if a parent fails to exercise behavior in accordance with the *No Touching*-discourse. Within this discourse, the importance of limited contact with children’s genitals is unambiguously articulated, and it becomes clear that playful contact with children’s genitals is wrong, damaging and sick. The words we found via the supplementary topic model analysis suggest that the play is illegal and criminal and that parents who touch their child's genitals should be brought to court.

#### *Unconditional intimacy*

On the other hand, the Blackbird-play is also perceived positively. This part of the public sees the play as normal and appropriate and applies no sexual connotations to it. This position offers parents a scope of action where children's genitals, as well as other body parts, are included in play. The supporters of the *Unconditional intimacy*-discourse stressed that intimacy between child and parent should not be limited, as exemplified below:

“Parenting consists of an endless number of tasks related to the child's body. And it's not limited to a rational concern for nutrition or hygiene. A lot of pleasure between children and adults is associated with the body. Playing, touching, eating, dancing. If it tickles in the stomach, if it feels nice, is it forbidden? Of course not.” (Siri Amtoft, Information.dk)

This quote states that the Blackbird-play can be both pleasurable and acceptable. The debaters supporting this discourse use words like “sensory,” “enjoy,” and “relaxed” when describing appropriate parental behavior. The topic model analysis helps discover words and phrases such as “harmless” and “innocent play” that elaborate the discourse with words emphasizing that actions in which parents touch their children's genitals are asexual.

#### *Gender differences: Men are intimidating*

Gender has an effect on what kind of behavior is appropriate between parent and child. We identify a discourse where men's intimidating nature is being articulated. It is very interesting that this discourse relates to men, even though the case that is discussed is based on a female (mon) and her relation to her child. Men are being constructed as offensive if they have intimate contact with children. Debaters suggest that a man is perceived as having an offensive nature contrasted with that of a woman, whose caring and loving nature prevents her from violating children in times of bodily intimacy. This *Intimidating*-discourse is articulated in the following quote:

“We live in a society where men cannot give in to intimacy with children without potentially being labeled as intimidating. It's the opposite with women.” (Søren Thomsen, Information.dk)

The quote suggests that men's intimate contact with children is always under suspicion, whereas women are exempted from suspicion. That other norms apply to women than men is articulated multiple times in the debate. In the *Intimidating*-discourse, the male nature is described with words like “intimidating nature” and “pervert.” The topic model analysis leads us to add similar words like “offensive” and “insulting” to the male nature. Men who play with children's genitals in a similar fashion as the children's magazine editor are thus attributed negative characteristics.

### *New Puritanism*

The last presented finding centers on how contemporary society is addressed by the debaters. Commentators see a trend in contemporary society that they refer to as a presence of “new Puritanism.” The attention to this central theme in the debate is initially facilitated through the topic model analysis, meaning that it was an unnoticed topic during the thorough, qualitative in-depth reading. Topic model 7's word cluster referred to societal conditions in various ways. This led to further investigation of the topic and its corresponding text passages in the corpus. On this basis, we found that some debaters articulated a discourse that characterizes contemporary society with words such as “new Puritanism,” “changed times,” “increasing narrow-mindedness,” “Puritanistic Denmark,” or “sterile society,” as demonstrated in the quote below:

“I will certainly be the last one to take any step further away from the Danish liberalism and sexual liberal outlook. If we keep it up, we end up with American Puritanism.” (Warrior85, Reddit.dk)



The quote stresses that condemners of the Blackbird-play are frigid and out of proportion. Proponents of the *New Puritanism*-discourse articulate a societal presence of bodily fright and point out that intimate contact between parents and children has become increasingly restricted.

“Hide your kids, your neighbor is watching!” (Bellucci, Sol.dk)

This quote is a sarcastic debate post insinuating that parents must constantly be aware of other’s distrustful looks every time they have intimate and bodily contact with children. We interpret the *New Puritanism*-discourse as a desire for a showdown with suspicion and fear when it comes to interaction between children and parents. Within the discourse, it is articulated that standards for what you can do and say publicly have changed and become more restrictive. We identify a trend where it is dreaded that fears of pedophilia infiltrate parents’ behavior towards children—at least publicly.

## **Discussion**

In the following, we discuss and reflect on the empirical findings presented above. We address selected discourses and themes that we find particularly interesting in examining how norms for parental behavior are constructed in the debate. We reflect on how the concern for violating children’s innocence can have consequences for children’s scope of action. We further discuss whether the increased focus on pedophilia and fear of pedophilia affect parents’ behavior towards children. Finally, we discuss some ethical and methodological concerns.

### *Panicky tendencies*

In the debate on the Blackbird case, we see tendencies that the reactions and severe concerns can, at times, appear excessive. This article’s methodological approach allows us to identify disproportionality when looking at the content and extent of the comments held against the female editor’s small magazine notice about how fun play between parent and child can unfold. The notice gained tremendous attention and quickly drew over 2,600 comments, a lot of them spreading concern and harsh condemnation. This disproportion, combined with the verbally explicit comments using words like “sick,” “damaging,” and “spoils a child,” indicates that the fear expressed through some comments has panicky characteristics that can draw parallels to events where moral panic is present (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Thompson, 2005). We

suspect that debates on, for example, “children and bullying” or “children and traffic” do not attract such a strong-minded audience to the same extent as debates concerning “children, innocence and sexuality,” despite the fact that it is far more likely for children to get injured in traffic than sexually assaulted by an adult. This reflection is in line with several research articles that state that fear of pedophilia, as well as reactions towards cases that can be interpreted to have pedophilic undertones, tends to have panicky characteristics (Cricher, 2003; Jewkes & Wykes, 2012; Thompson, 2005).

The tremendous concerns and condemnations can also indicate that the aforementioned Danish Frisind is not present among many of the debaters, and maybe the idea of a prevalent Danish liberal sexual outlook could be challenged. The debate on the Blackbird case is an example of how notions about (child) sexuality and questions regarding nudity or intimacy between children and adults can be seen as a modern-day battlefield. Therefore, we argue that the Blackbird case could be a symptom of the existence in modern Danish society of an increased need to establish defined boundaries between accepted levels of intimacy and transgressions. A more or less unequivocally liberal sexual outlook has lost its toll in Danish society, and the narrative of Frisind that Danes pride themselves on could be questioned.

### *Children and sexuality*

Due to the verbal intensity of the debate on the Blackbird case, the findings of this article indicate that matters involving children and sexuality generate strong opinions when debated on social media. Debaters are seemingly not afraid to publicly express or identify with a strong position, in spite of the fact that most commentators are associated with both an avatar and civil name. This finding can indicate that specific sets of norms encourage explicit and unequivocal utterances when morality-positions concerning children and sexuality are discussed. Furthermore, the heated characteristics of the debate show how awareness rises quickly when concerns for child sexualisation and molestation arise. This concern underpins that a hegemonic understanding of children as innocent is present in the debate.

The findings in this article point to a tendency where a fear of adult sexuality contaminating children, stemming from a general lack of recognition of children as sexual beings, exists. One can argue that innocence is constructed and emphasized as the pure and good, whereas bodily

exploration and sexual desires are constructed as deviant and worrying. This finding is in line with earlier studies on children and sexuality, which stress that the public construction of children as innocent and non-sexual beings deprives them of their sexual flowering (Baird, 2013; Davies, 2012; Hawkes & Dune, 2013; Jewkes & Wykes, 2012; Robinson, 2012; Simpson, 2011). However, this contradictory relation between the innocent child and damaging sexuality is peculiar, as international and Danish researchers emphasize that children have both sexualities and sexual desires (Angelides, 2004; Graugaard, 2013).

Constructions of the child as innocent can contribute to a linguistic victimizing of the child. Children seen as victims can cause a monitoring and control of their sexuality. Research emphasizes the need for a societal distancing of innocence as criteria for child sexuality (Angelides, 2004; Egan & Hawkes, 2009). This point obviously contrasts the omnipresent opinion among debaters on the Blackbird case, as they associate child sexuality with innocence and curiosity and fail to regard children as knowledgeable and lustful sexual beings. Parents' control can deprive children from developing their own bodily self-control and prevent them from a healthy development of their own sexual identity, Angelides argues. Potentially, Angelides argues, the parental monitoring can make children more vulnerable to abuse (Angelides, 2004).

### *Parental behavior influenced by pedophilia fear*

In the debate, we identify antagonistic discourses struggling to define norms for appropriate parental behavior towards children. We interpret these articulations and norm constructions as expressions of different positions of sexual morality that provide rules and guidelines for appropriate parental behavior. We see indications that one side of the debate offers a parental position that condemns unnecessary intimate bodily contact with children, where on the other side a parental position is offered where intimacy between parents and children should be unconditional. Even though the discourses are antagonistic, and as such, hold very different ways of defining the behavior, it is important to specify that the norms represented within them are expressed as a scale from one end to the other. The medium and the expectations related to the way arguments should be posed may also cater towards a more oppositional nature of the discourses.

### *Suspicious glances and fear of condemnation*

Both parental positions appear with well-defined instructions of action, but in the analysis, we see indications that fears of suspicious glances can make it harder to occupy the more intimate parental role publicly because the other position has an immediate ascendancy, as it makes up a small majority of the debate.

With increased fear of pedophilia in society, it is reasonable to assume that some would find it more difficult to publicly support positions advocating for unconditional bodily intimacy between parents and children. According to our findings, fear of suspicion pushes the boundaries of what you do and say publicly. In a Foucauldian perspective, the spread of fear of pedophilia leads to a form of surveillance society where surveillance becomes self-surveillance. Thus, in this perspective, the parents that fear the suspicious gaze of another will eventually monitor themselves (Foucault, 1977). Thus, fear of pedophilia is not only directed toward external dangers, but it also affects bodily relationships between parents and children.

#### *Faceless molesters*

In the debate on the Blackbird case, we see indications that the growing fear of pedophilia influences the norm construction of appropriate parental behavior. The fear of pedophilia does not target a specific social group characterized by class, ethnicity or other demographic factors. Instead, we see a tendency that everyone in today's society can be exposed as a potential child molester. This finding is contrary to prior research that suggests certain social groups as subjects of suspicious glances (Warner, 2013), and that adults who violate the innocence of children generally have characteristics associated with the male sex, the man's behavior, and sexuality (Alldridge & Brants, 2001; Critcher, 2003). Even though men seem to be slightly more exposed as abusive and intimidating in the debate, the female gender of the editor bears witness to the fact that suspicion can strike anyone. This finding is interesting compared to the study conducted by Paradox in 2012. Their research showed that it is primarily men who fear the stigmatization of pedophilia and actively change their behavior towards children on that basis (Leander et al., 2012). In light of our empirical findings, it is interesting to consider whether more women have adjusted their behavior towards children due to the increased fear of pedophilia targeting women.

Furthermore, it is interesting that a potential child abuser is no longer restricted to dangerous acquaintances like "the teacher," "the football coach," or "the child molester" (Grubin, 1998).

Today, potential abusers can just as likely be parents. Our analysis suggests that the public today constructs the child abuser in broader terms than ever before. Today, all citizens can be thrown under suspicion or be accused. The person threatening children's innocence and ruining social order has become faceless.

### *Methodological and ethical reflections*

We have found that the combination of qualitative and quantitative tools into a DSDA enables a more inductive discourse analytical approach. With this combination, we thereby try to accommodate earlier criticisms that the method is too influenced by the researcher's subjective assessments and interests (Bredsdorff, 2002; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). By combining both qualitative and quantitative analytical tools, we argue that this discourse analysis, to a lesser extent, is based on subjective choices. On this basis, we encourage further exploration of the fertile combination of word clouds, topic models, and qualitative readings as a discourse analytical threesome.

### *Digital methods naïve without theoretical foundation*

The digital discourse analytical tools allow a different exploration of the text material than what is possible with a solely qualitative reading. However, it is clear that the digital quantitative tools cannot stand alone, but must be combined with the qualitative analytical readings, since the quantitative approach risks overlooking specific contexts in the debate and blurring the nuances of discourse formations. Additionally, we have found that a theoretical framework is necessary to make sense of the visualization of the word cloud and the word clusters from the topic models.

### *Ethical considerations concerning digital data on social media*

We use new tools for data collection, which is possible because the debates are largely available online. With the development of new tools and new platforms for social interaction, new and different ethical practices apply to our research because the lines between public and private become increasingly blurred (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013). Zimmer (2010) describes very clearly that researchers need to reflect upon how public data is represented, although some would argue that this is not necessary since “the data is already public.” A key ethical aspect of digital data collection is to reflect on the use of content that may be considered private to the participants in the debates. Although posts on online forums – e.g. newspapers' websites or social media – may

contain personally identifiable information, it is unclear whether the personal information actually has a sensitive nature (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). This issue raises a number of ethical questions that must be considered in relation to the particular research (Kozinets, Dolbec, & Earley, 2014). In this article, we argue that informed consent is not required as we are not interested in personal master data and because it is too extensive in relation to contacting almost 3,000 contributions to the debate. It is almost impossible to ensure full anonymity in researches on online data, as avatar names and quotes are easily tracked by search engines (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). We have accommodated anonymity by providing debaters with alternate user names as well as translating the debate comments from Danish into English. By doing so, we make sure that the quotes do not appear exactly as posted online.

## **Conclusion**

In order to understand how fear of pedophilia affects bodily intimacy between parents and children, insight into norm constructions in relation to children and sexuality is needed. We developed a digital sequential discourse analysis (DSDA), a novel mixed-methods analytical design combining Internet-specific quantitative tools and qualitative in-depth reading. The DSDA proves to reveal hidden textual themes and provides an analytical depth that expands insights into the discursive struggles that construct norms in the debate on the Blackbird case.

The DSDA points to a hegemonic understanding of children as innocent. Characteristics of child sexuality are interpreted by debaters as contrasting with adult sexuality. This notion can have the unintended consequence of depriving children of exercising bodily control and their ability to experience a healthy sexual maturation.

Two conflicting positions are identified in relation to adequate parental behavior. One side of the public debate articulates a discourse stressing the importance of limited genital contact with children, whereas the other side emphasizes a need for a more easy going approach to bodily intimacy. Parental behavioral adjustments towards children have a reinforcing nature, as behavioral change towards less physical intimacy is amplified due to double monitoring. Fear of accusations of pedophilia and double monitoring applies to both men and women – even though men are generally perceived as more intimidating than women - making the contemporary child abuser faceless. The analysis suggests that the prevailing fear of pedophilia within the debate appears disproportionate,

and the fear of abuse and pedophilia can have panicky characteristics at times. The extensive condemnation of the Blackbird-play is also addressed by numerous debaters articulating that frigid condemners of the play jeopardize traditional Danish liberal sexual views and promote puritanistic conditions.

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