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## Upcoming vacancy: PhD Scholarship

### How do children know media harm? an ethnographic study of the production and circulation of knowledge and media practices

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Mercator Research Group “Spaces of Anthropological Knowledge: Production and Transfer”

**AG4: Cultural Psychology and Anthropological Knowledge**

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#### **Knowing media harm: its production and circulation**

Knowledge about the harm to children through violent computer games (in short: media harm) is encountered in a variety of areas of society: in science, which produces knowledge about media harm; in industry, which designs games to appeal to specific costumers; in regulation agencies which classify games; and in children’s everyday practices, when they play, discuss and live with violent computer games. The AG4 of the Mercator Research Group “Spaces of Anthropological Knowledge: Production and Transfer” investigates the production and transfer of knowledge about media harm in and across the four field sites mentioned above.

#### **How do children know media harm?**

We are looking for a PhD student who will investigate the area of children’s everyday media practices and their encounters, experiences, discussions and management of harm in relation to violent computer games. The study does not investigate whether violent computer games are harmful to children. Instead, in focus in the overall study are the discourses and knowledges circulating through the press and in pedagogical and scientific contexts, through official, legal and industrial regulation of computer games as well as through regulations imposed by schools and parents, and through children’s bodily experiences, their reflections, and their discussions and interactions among peers. How children know media harm is shaped through the various knowledges and practices just mentioned. Thus,

it is the task of the successful candidate to inquire *how* this happens in practice and what comes to characterise their knowing of harm through violent computer games. That is: how children come to know media harm – as a bodily, interactive and reflexive practice.

Children’s use of computer games in Germany is well investigated. Research has documented that compared to girls boys play computer games that are more violent; that German children are aware of the age classification of the games they play; and that two thirds have played games classified above their age-group.. And we know that German parents report that their children have experienced harm more frequently than is reported by the children themselves. However, the practical specificities of when, where and how children in their everyday media practices come to know media harm has not yet been investigated. Neither has been documented how knowledge from ‘elsewhere’ is folded into their knowing media harm. In his or her PhD, the successful applicant will conduct an ethnographic study inquiring how a complexity of knowledges, regulations and practices in school, among peers and in families come together to form the way children come to know media harm.

Candidates should have theoretical ambitions along with empirical interests. Conceptual developments are expected as part of the empirical analyses. Among others, ‘the materiality of childhood’, ‘knowledge, practice and the body’, ‘the post-human child’, ‘concepts



of violence in childhood’, ‘the epistemological construction of violence’, ‘protection and care of the self’ could all be themes for the theoretical focus of the successful applicant..

### The Research Environment

The PhD candidate will independently investigate the practical reality of knowing media harm in children’s everyday lives. While this thematic frame is given, the focus of the research, as well as the project’s theoretical and methodological approaches are flexible.

The successful candidate will work in a rich research environment. He or she will collaborate with two other PhD students and Professor Estrid Sørensen to inquire how the knowledges of the harm of violent computer games, as well as the regulation and gaming practices identified in each of the four field sites circulate among them, and how they are translated from one specific local practice to the other. Together the four researchers map the circulation of harm to children through violent computer games in contemporary German society.

The research will be conducted as a multi-sited team-ethnography, inspired by and contributing to, among others: cultural psychology, science and technology studies and social anthropology.

### The Research Team

The research team will consist of 4 scholars each doing empirical research in one field.

**Science:** Estrid Sørensen investigates the scientific field. She studies the practical reality of scientific knowing, following how media harm is brought into science, and how it comes to be known by scientists. Furthermore, the knowledge of media harm is followed out of the laboratory, and is investigated as it translates and enters other practices.

**Game Industry (open):** The research group is looking for a PhD candidate to do ethnographic research on the reality of knowing media harm in practices of industrial design of computer

games, and on the circulation of the knowledge produced through these practices.

**Regulation practices:** PhD candidate Jan Schank investigates ethnographically how media harm comes to be known through the practical reality of classifying computer games and how the knowledge so produced circulates to other field sites.

**Children’s gaming practices (open):** The research group is looking for a PhD candidate to do ethnographic research on the reality of knowing media harm in children’s gaming practices, and of the circulation of the knowledge created in these practices.

Apart from close collaboration among the colleagues of the AG4 the research will be embedded in the larger project of “Spaces of Anthropological Knowledge: Production and Transfer”. The professors and PhD students of AG1-3 investigate various spaces of anthropological knowledge from the perspectives of the history of science, media studies and literature studies. The candidate will thus be embedded in a rich, inspiring and intense research community. Participation in colloquia and reading groups is required.

### The Candidate

We look for a person with an MA in the social sciences, anthropology, cultural psychology, science and technology studies, media studies or related areas. Empirical interest in childhood studies and a broad theoretical curiosity are required. Experience with ethnographic research is wanted, familiarity with qualitative methods is necessary. The applicant should have the ability to work independently as well as collaboratively. Proficiency in German is required in order for the candidate to be able to carry out qualitative research.

Interested candidates are invited to send an application including a CV, a short research proposal and the complete contact information of two references to [estrid.sorensen@rub.de](mailto:estrid.sorensen@rub.de). Informal inquiries are also welcome.