Beatriz Elena Inzunza-Acedo

Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico

Mexican Children Discussing "The Situation of Insecurity" in the City of Monterrey, Mexico

Introduction

During the presidency of Felipe Calderón in Mexico (2006-2012), the main issue in his political agenda was to start a 'Drug War' all over the country to remove the power of drug cartels. At the same time, the criminal organizations were fighting against each other to claim territories. The incapacity of the police and army to maintain order – strengthened by corruption in public institutions – triggered a crime wave, evidenced by the increase of robberies, frauds, extortions, kidnappings, murders and 'narco-blockings'[1] in several states. Monterrey, as one of the three most important cities in Mexico, was one of the populations that were most affected due to its proximity to the U.S.A. border.

It was because of this that many cities and towns became unsafe, and that this topic turned out to be popular not only in news, but also in soap operas, TV series, and films. The saturation in the media agenda inspired the research that will be partly presented in this article. The portrayal of both crimes and criminals defines stereotypes within Mexican society, which may create or strengthen stigmatization towards certain minorities and places in cities. The study focused on childhood; this was possible because even when media was not addressing this topic directly to them, children were exposed to this information (schools constantly practiced

---

[1]   Narco-blockings were events where cartels would organize road-blocks all over the city to provoke chaos in traffic.

security plans in case there was a shooting nearby), or they even played games taking the role of cartels (instead of cops or thieves).

The initial suppositions were that children's attitudes would be between two possible extreme scenarios: on the one hand, they could accept/admire/aspire criminal behavior since it was what soap operas, TV series, films and videogames depicted on delinquency (they mainly represented them as heroes in action adventures). On the other hand, they could have classist and racist attitudes, because they were highly promoted through news where only lower class and dark-skinned criminals appeared, as well as only some lower and middle class neighborhoods would frequently be shown as violent and unsafe.

Within the metropolitan area of Monterrey (population: 4+ million), San Pedro Garza Garcia was the municipality with least violence denounced according to the local leading newspaper *El Norte*.[2] It was also the second highest HDI rate in the country, highest income per capita in Mexico, and highest Gini index of the state.[3] The last one measures the social inequality in San Pedro, which is high because of the concentration of upper class families, which contrasts with the remaining lower class residents. The political preference is right wing, and the mayor at the time of the research – Mauricio Fernandez – was known for his ambition to "shield San Pedro from organized crime," which relatively speaking (compared to other municipalities of the metropolitan area) was more or less achieved successfully.

Considering these circumstances, the supposition was that children would be less influenced by experiences (since it was the safest municipality) and more by media on this topic, which allowed us to study media presence on their construction of social representations of insecurity.

Given this background, the questions that guided this research were how were children understanding crime under this context and creating attitudes; and what role played each source of information in

---

[2] "Mapa del crimen 2011." *El Norte*, online version, accessed November 2012, http://gruporeforma.elnorte.com/libre/offlines/mty/mapas/MapaDelCrimen2011.htm

[3] Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, *IDH* (2008), Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo México, accessed October 1st 2012, www.undp.org.mx/IMG/xls/Base_de_datos.xls

the construction of their social representations. This paper will analyze the participant's imaginaries on insecurity – which is associated with delinquency – and how they negotiated or appropriated their meanings with different sources of information.

Theoretical Background

Hall defines culture not as a set of things, but as a set of practices, that embodies the production and exchange of meanings within a society. This process implies the interaction between people who actively interpret what surrounds them, and thus, make sense of the world. Considering this, individuals will constantly look for information that explains or updates a phenomenon that is part of their reality.[4]

For Casey *et al*., this leads to the study of 'representation', which is central to media studies. Things become confusing when media presents information in a 'realistic' genre, like journalism or documentaries.[5] Realistic or not, there is always a process of representation involved. This means that every television program chooses how to create representations through their decisions in filming, framing, editing, etc. Therefore, Götz exhorts researchers in media studies to measure gaps between "reality" and "media representations," based on the idea that the representations of certain groups of people or events might be distorted, making way for stereotypes.[6]

> Stereotyping commonly involves the attribution of negative traits to persons who are different from us. This points to the operation of power in the process of stereotyping and to its role in the exclusion of others from the social, symbolic and moral order.[7]

---

[4] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage in Association with the Open University, 1997), 2.

[5] Bernadette Casey et al., *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[6] Maya Götz, Discussion on Doctoral Dissertation, Telephone interview by author, July 24, 2014.

[7] Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: SAGE Publications, 2008), 264.

The main assumption in this specific study is that if media is promoting determined representations – hence stereotypes – for crime, most probably the children will develop discriminating attitudes towards certain groups of people and neighborhoods. However, there are more optimistic perspectives that allow suppositions where audiences are considered 'active', meaning that they are not "cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context."[8]

In the same line of argument, Orozco reflects on the effects of mass media on so far it triggers identities and memories (collective and individual) of the audiences.[9] This is important because it means that these elements will play a role in the interaction of audiences with media contents and their constructions of meanings, which will allow them to have different interpretations (even with the limitations of their encoded framing).

Hall, in his work "Encoding, Decoding", was able to improve the linear process that media studies had been using (sender/message/receiver) by proposing the encoding/decoding cycle, in which the "sender" might determine some meanings within the boundaries set by the hegemonic interests, but their interpretation or *readings* will mainly depend on the audiences as individuals.[10] He identified three hypothetical positions for decoding readings:

- *Dominant-hegemonic position.* This is when the viewer takes the meaning from a program full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded.
- *Negotiated code.* While it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions, the individuals insert their own rules and operate with exceptions. They make a negotiated application to 'local conditions'.

---

8   Barker, *Cultural Studies,* 326.
9   Guillermo Orozco, "Los Estudios De Recepción: De Un Modo De Investigar, a Una Moda... Y De Ahí a Muchos Modos." In *¿Y La Recepción? Balance Crítico De Los Estudios Sobre El Público*, ed. Florencia Saintout and Natalia Ferrante (Buenos Aires: La Crujía, 2006), 15-30.
10 Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 507-17.

- *Oppositional code.* The individual decodes the message in the contrary way, and resignifies it within some alternative framework of reference.

Blackman and Walkerdine, throughout their studies of crime representation in media, have found that delinquents are commonly associated with risk, danger, psychological illnesses and death.[11] Also, women are not considered "evil enough" to be considered capable of becoming a criminal. Even in a different cultural context, this representation (or expectations) of women is sustained in Latin America, since they are not frequently shown as delinquents, but as caring mothers, who only commit violence when it is for a "greater good" or "out of love."

According to Brown, the marginal groups that are constantly depicted – especially in news – are young people, dark skinned, and syndical members.[12] However, it's not only news that informs people about crime. The same author poses the question of the reality-representation dichotomy because soap operas, films and TV series also represent the world of experts and scientists as fictions, and these are becoming more popular due the interest of the audiences in crime topics. For Brown, there's a strong hybrid between facts and fiction that threatens the credibility in information because it can be exaggerated and imprecise, and that most probably influence the audiences in perceiving reality in terms of Manichaeism and spectacle.

Lemish and Götz leaded a research project with the objective to understand children's perspective on Iraq's War.[13] This study was made in Germany, Austria, Israel, USA, and Netherlands. The diversity on methodologies used in their cases allowed the research of this paper to construct the one that seemed the most appropriate to the context, which were interviews with drawings. Götz reported in her results with German children that while boys portrayed the spectacular and action parts of the war (shootings, fights, weaponry…), girls talked more about

---

[11] Lisa Blackman and Valerie Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 140.

[12] Sheila Brown, *Crime and Law in Media Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 30-40.

[13] Dafna Lamish and Maya Götz, eds., *Children and Media in Times of Conflict and War* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007).

their feelings and fears.[14] Their main source of information was TV, especially news; but it was also a topic discussed at school and at home. Children were involved in the conversations, and they would have liked to see information and explanations with comprehensible words and pictures that were not frightening to them, as well as reports from the perspective of those involved, and alternatives to war. Their drawings were usually scenes of close combat, suffering and destruction, the victims and vulnerable people, Bush and Hussein, and Americans who like killing.

Based on this, it was possible to analyze results within a framework of Reception Studies as a branch from Cultural Studies. The main assumption was that children knew about crime and delinquency in Monterrey, and that they had actively looked for information in sources that they found accessible to make sense of their context of insecurity.

Methodology

The methodological approach chosen for this study was qualitative, through interviews complemented with the drawing technique. There were a total of 44 children interviewed: 22 of lower class families, and 22 of upper middle class, from which 23 were girls and 21 boys.[15] All of them attended educational institutions in San Pedro Garza Garcia municipality, which is part of the metropolitan area of the city of Monterrey, in Mexico; and they were either just finishing, just starting or doing 6th grade (depending at the time of the interview since some

---

[14] Maya Götz, "'I Know That It Is Bush's Fault How Children in Germany Perceived the War in Iraq." In *Children and Media in Times of War and Conflict*, eds. Dafna Lemish and Maya Götz (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007), 15-35.

[15] The criteria that defined their social class was based on the neighborhoods where the interviews were made. Under this context, the attendance to a private school relates directly with their social class, since they are considered within the most expensive ones in the metropolitan area of Monterrey. The neighborhood where the interviews with lower class children were made, is considered amongst the poorest of this municipality, as well as one of the most problematic because of the gangs that live and act there.

occurred during summer vacation and some other during school period), which means that ages went from 10 to 13 in the participants.

The questionnaire was designed so that the topic of insecurity was not going to be suggested by the interviewer, but brought up by the child participant him/herself. The questions that meant to trigger this topic were asked in this order:

- Imagine that you met someone who has never been in Mexico before, what would you tell him/her about your country?
- And if he/she asks you about Monterrey, what would you say?
- If he/she asks you about the situation in Monterrey, what would you tell?
- Do you usually see the news or read the newspapers? What do they usually talk about?
- Is there something that bothers or worries you about what you hear in the news or read in the newspapers? Why?

In the majority of the sessions, the third question would trigger the topic of "insecurity" since the word "situation" is highly associated with crime and unsafe neighborhoods. In the authorization letter given to the children's parents, it was stated that if the participant didn't mention anything about insecurity after these questions, the interview would be over. This never happened, which proved that the topic was present in their minds and easily brought up by a complete stranger to them.

The interview technique is categorized within the participative methodologies because part of the activity was that the children needed to draw two images, which would illustrate the concept of "insecurity" and another one of the "delinquent". This paper will only analyze the results of the first drawing.

The questions that guided the first drawing followed the triggering inquiries showed before. The children were instructed to draw whatever they imagine when they talk about insecurity, which was related to crime in all but one case (where he drew bullying at his schoolyard). We gave a blank paper, pencil and colors for the participants to use freely, although most of them preferred not to use colored pencils in their images. After a couple of minutes of drawing, the interviewers asked questions regarding the place (what neighborhood was it, what kind of

place was it, public/private), time, people involved in the situation, and then to narrate the full story of what happened before, during and after the scene of the picture they drew. Afterwards, they were questioned on why they think these situations happen, and about the sources of information (family, friends, witnesses, school or media).

The interviews were transcribed in Spanish (all quotes used in this paper were translated by the author), and later analyzed with the drawings through the software NVivo. The reference code used for participant's quotes is "(nickname, sex, social class)."[16] It's important to note that the children chose all nicknames themselves for confidentiality purposes.

Images of Insecurity

Most of the images were realistic in so far they narrated situations that could actually happen, except for one interview where Messi (male, LC) drew *La Santa Muerte* in the middle of a murder scene.[17] Other technical characteristics are that thirteen out of 44 used colored pencils, and six images have resemblance to comic strips since they use dialogue balloons to illustrate basic conversations. The drawings were similar to Gauntlett's experience regarding the use of drawing conventions such as a triangle to illustrate a women's skirt, since children try to simplify as much as possible (even when they sometimes drew many elements to explain the scene of their image).[18]

The results will be explained through three aspects of their stories: the types of crimes they drew, the places and time, and the characters involved in their stories.

---

[16] Lower class (LC) and Upper Middle class (UMC).
[17] *La Santa Muerte* is a Mexican cult mainly associated with delinquency, since they pray to this "saint" (rejected by the Catholic Church) to be protected when they go into a criminal mission.
[18] David Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

Types of Insecurity

There are four types of insecurity found in this research, which were determined based on the intention regarding to the victims: 1) minor crimes; 2) major crimes; 3) drug dealing related; and 4) other. Minor crimes are those which intention was not to hurt people or deprive them from their freedom or life, such as robberies to individuals or institutions and damage to property.

> I: Tell me about your drawing…
> C: Imagine that a man comes in, let's say a 7,[19] and the man has a cold weapon and the robber asks the cashier for the money, otherwise he'll hurt him.
> I: What kind of cold weapon does he have?
> C: Like a razor or a knife.
> I: Were there more people in the 7?
> C: No, because it was nighttime. I mean, they usually steal more during the nights than during the days.
> (Carlos, male, LC)

The example of Carlos is important since he was actually a witness during his night shift in a convenient store. It is not uncommon for children to work as *cerillitos* or *paqueteros* in supermarkets, packing client's goods for tips. It is interesting to note that he used the concept of "cold weapon" correctly, which might have been because of his personal experience. His story is precisely what he saw that happened during that robbery: A man came in to the convenient store at night with a knife and threatened the cashier to give him the money of the register. His social representation of insecurity is then based on his own true story.

The next example is of Karina (female, LC), who also narrated a minor crime but in a larger scale, as is a bank robbery:

> I: Tell me, what happened here?
> K: It's a shooting, and they were shooting, and here comes the Marine…
> I: Are they coming down from a helicopter?

---

[19] "7" is a reference to a convenient store called "7-Eleven".

K: Yes.

I: Who is shooting? Who are they?

K: They are bad guys, the guns are pointing to them [the Marine].

I: Why did this shooting start?

K: Because they wanted to rob a bank.

I: Is that the other drawing?

K: Yes. Here's the bank, people are laying against the floor. Here's the cashier, and this is the money. They're guarding the door, and here's another one outside, guarding the money in the truck after they stole it.
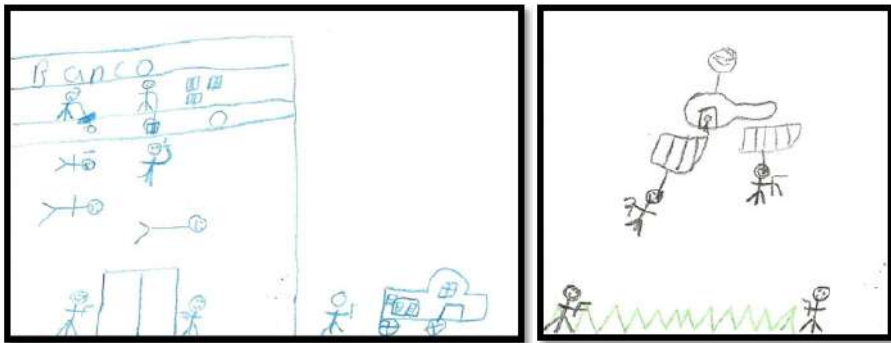
(Karina, female, LC)

Figure 1. Men robbing a bank (source: Karina, female, LC).
Figure 2. Men shooting the Marine (source: Karina, female, LC).

For this story, Karina said that she was partially inspired by the movie *Fast Five*[20], which narrates the planning of a bank robbery and a persecution in Brazil. Figure 1 depicts an aerial perspective, where the criminals are shown with guns in three positions: waiting in the car, guarding the entrance, and threatening the cashiers to give them the money. In Figure 2, the Marine is going after the criminals while they are shooting each other. This is a negotiated narrative, where Karina mixes events that she said she heard on the news (bank robberies) with action movies clichés such as persecutions, shootings and helicopters.

The type Minor Crimes was the most popular, which agrees with reality since these are the crimes that happen most frequently according

---

[20] *Fast Five*, directed by Justin Lin (2011; USA: Universal Pictures), DVD.

to the records of the Secretary of Governance.[21] This is why it is more probable for the child to have heard about this crime happening to someone close to him or his family; plus, it is also a crime that may easily appear in children's media content.

Major Crimes are those that have the purpose to deprive someone from his/her life or freedom, or hurt him/her, such as murder or intention of murder, kidnapping or intention of kidnapping, physical attacks, extortion or threats. These were considered major because it involved more violence than Minor Crimes.

> I: Tell me about your drawing…
> B: It's a person kidnapped… actually four women. He hanged two of them, he killed and took an eye out to another, and the other… he's going to murder her. I mean, he wants to in case they don't give him what he wants, he's calling her parents but I didn't draw the phone.
> I: It's one against four? [He nods].
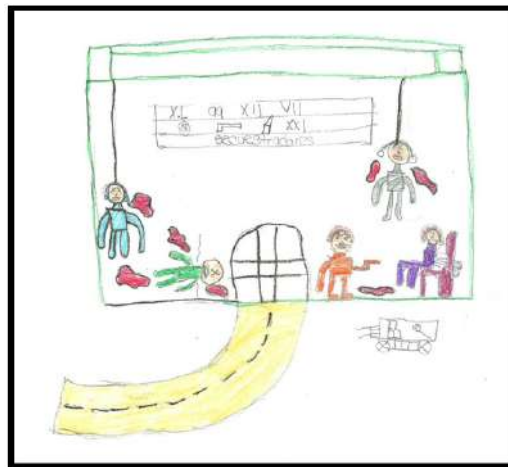> (Spongebob Squarepants, male, LC)

Figure 3. Man murders four women. (source: Spongebob Squarepants, male, LC).

21 México. Secretaría De Gobernación. Centro Nacional De Información. *Incidencia Delictiva Del Fuero Común 2014.* September 2014, accessed May 28, 2015, http:// www.secretariadoejecutivosnsp.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/ Resource/131/1/images/publicacionCIEISPago14.pdf

Most of the Major Crimes were drawn by male participants, which is not surprising because a lot of them said they were inspired by videogames whose target market is male, such as *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA),[22] *Heavy Rain*[23] and *Assassin's Creed.*[24] In the specific case of Spongebob Squarepants, he plays GTA Vice City and San Andreas without his mother's approval. Both versions have elements that are similar to the ones drawn, such as a wall with weaponry and men being violent to women. The graffiti on the wall says *secuestradores*, which means kidnappers in Spanish.

Drug-dealing related insecurity is a different category, because while they're committing a specific kind of felony, they also mix some of minor or major crimes. The complexity is usually higher than the two types explained before.

I: What is happening?

F: They're trafficking drugs.

I: Where are they?

F: In the woods.

I: Here in Mexico?

F: Yes.

I: What is this? [Boxes]

F: Drugs.

I: What kind of drugs?

F: Hmm… diamond.

I: And who are these two guys?

F: Men, they're drug dealers.

(Fer, male, LC)

---

[22] *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, produced by Rockstar North (Japan: Rockstar Games Capcom, 2002). Videogame. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, produced by Rockstar North (Japan: Rockstar Games Capcom, 2004). Videogame.

[23] *Heavy Rain*, produced by Quantic Dream (n.p.: Sony Computer Entertainment, 2010). Videogame.

[24] *Assassin's Creed*, produced by Ubisoft (Montreal, Annecy, Sofia, Milan and Toronto: Ubisoft, 2007). Videogame.
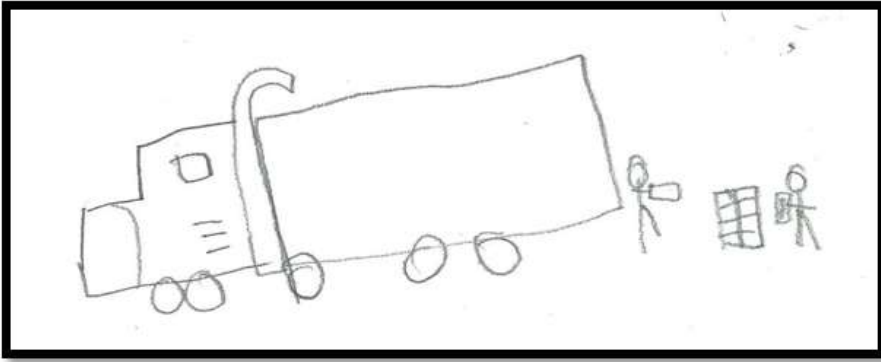
Figure 4. Drug-dealers unpacking drugs. (source: Fer, male, LC).

Fer (male, LC) was a boy that didn't want to get interviewed in the first place. He had been expelled from two public schools because of his bad behavior, and his mother was very worried since he was hanging out with boys his age (10) with drug problems that had dropped out of school already. Since he wasn't happy about the interview, his responses were very short and superficial. He did say he liked to play videogames like GTA, so on the one hand he might have copied this story from the narratives and missions of the game, and confused drugs with an actual diamond. However, he might know underground or non-commercial drugs since he is very close to drugs through his friends.

A second example that is associated with GTA is from Rodrigo Luna (male, UMC). This particular participant had a personal experience with insecurity, since his uncle had been kidnapped and murdered by organized crime in another state of Mexico. It was because of this event that his family openly talked about cartels, drug-dealing issues and insecurity, which allowed him to have a lot of conversation during this interview.

His drawing portrays the shooting between two different groups, fighting over a cargo of marihuana. His explanation was very detailed, as shown in the quote:

R: Well… there's a videogame called *Grand Theft Auto* that I don't like that much but I play it sometimes. The, sort of mobsters, the majority are rich, because they sell marihuana and that stuff. That has happened in a lot of movies that I've

watched. They can be the owners of clubs, let's say a strip club or something like that. So they are rich, and to avoid to "get their hands dirty", I think they hire other people… so that other person, well they pay him so he will do whatever he tells him to do. Like, assassins or workers…

[…]

I: Do you imagine the situation like this because is how you saw it in the videogame?

R: […] in the XBOX you can go in the strip club and there are the girls. In this one, the iPad one, you can't get in. You just stay in the garage and you get the missions there, you don't go in. That's why I was able to download that one, my parents allowed it because of it.
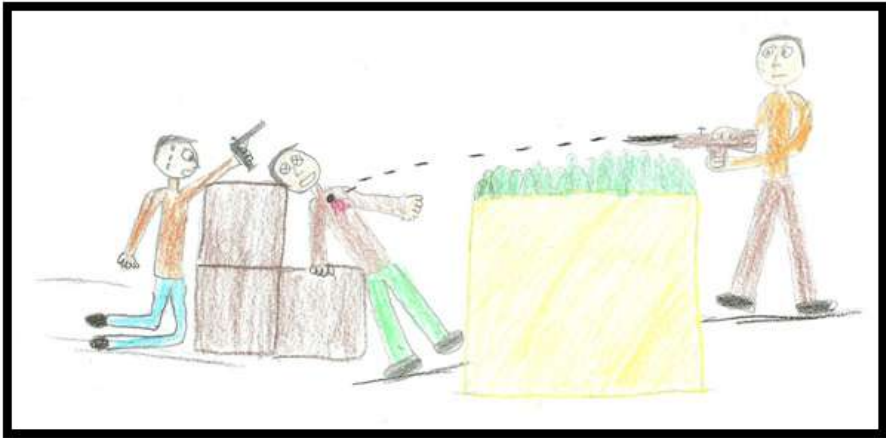
(Rodrigo Luna, male, UMC)

Figure 5. Criminals fighting over a marihuana cargo. (source: Rodrigo Luna, male, UMC).

Rodrigo Luna is very similar to Spongebob Squarepants because he integrated GTA elements such as the boxes to protect, or the scenario chosen, as well as the storyline completed in a strip club where the guy in orange successfully completed his mission and delivered the cargo to his boss. However, Rodrigo's story was much more complex since he incorporated organized crime and not only one murderer.

Another case that could be in this type (although the participant wasn't aware of it) was DylanC's drawing.

I: What is going on here?
D: A fire.
I: Where is it?
D: In the casino.
I: In Monterrey?
D: Yes.
I: Why is it on fire?
D: Because they provoked it.
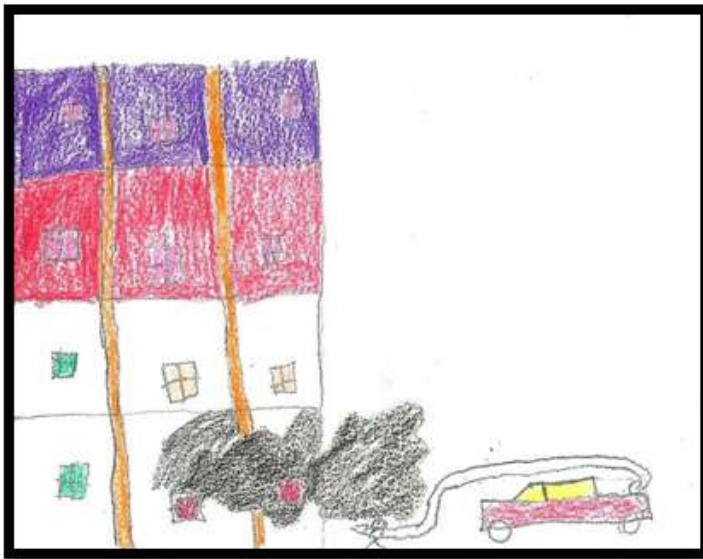I: Who did?
D: The bad guys.
(DylanC, male, LC)

Figure 6. Fire in a casino. (source: DylanC, male, LC).

In August 25, 2011, the Zetas, an organized crime group in Mexico, set the Casino Royale on fire in Monterrey at 3:50 p.m., killing 52 people who were purposely trapped inside. DylanC did not explain this was an event related to organized crime, but there is a coincidence in the colors of the casino. Taking this into account, this participant could have taken a real life event as an inspiration for his story.

Something similar happened to Cristy (female, UMC), who drew a narco-blocking without quite understanding what she illustrated. She explained that it was "a *retén,* to take their money or something like that…" (Cristy, female, UMC).[25] This participant used to watch the soap opera "El Señor de los Cielos" (The Lord of the Skies), which is inspired in an actual drug lord named Amado Carrillo from the Juarez Cartel.
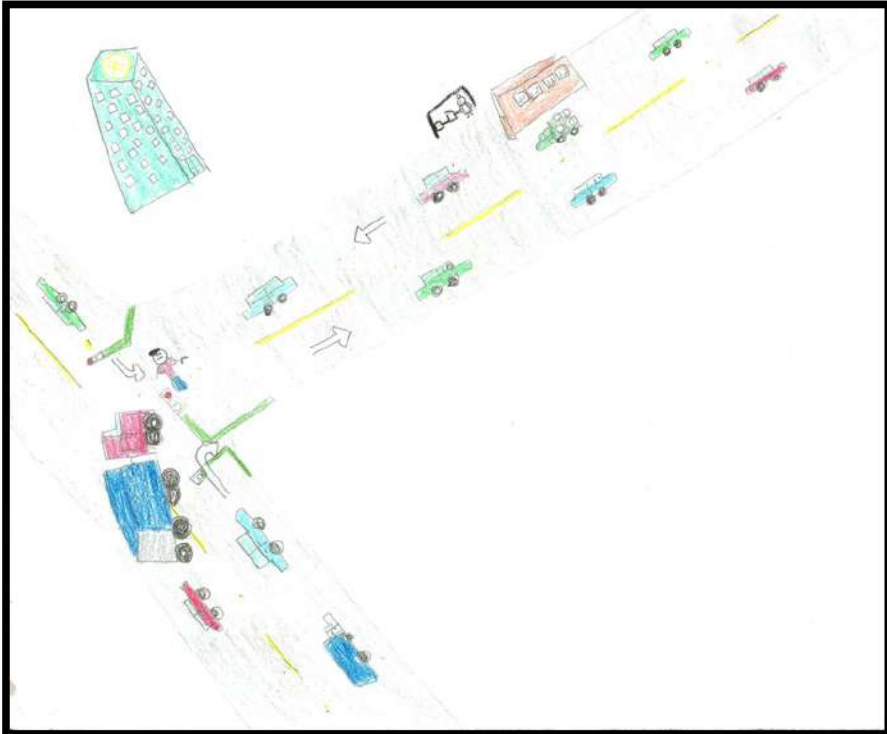

Figure 7. Narco-blocking. (source: Cristy, female, UMC).

Cristy was not able to explain the narco-blocking, or even relate it to organized crime. However, this event happened a few times in Monterrey, which means that she had heard about it and had a clear image, even when she couldn't understand the meaning or the purpose of it, and that is why she ended up mixing crimes like simple robberies.

---

25 Retén is a word for police or military checkpoints in highways or cities. Cristy uses this word to explain the forced stop of traffic.

The fourth type of crimes was called "Other", since there was no crime or violence at all, but several children understood insecurity as mistrust and nervousness in their contexts. The first example of Gerardo (male, UMC) shows the anxiety that generates watching the news in his home:

I: Tell me, what is this drawing about?

G: It's my mom watching the TV, a shooting. She is very sad and then I say "Please God, make it stop!"
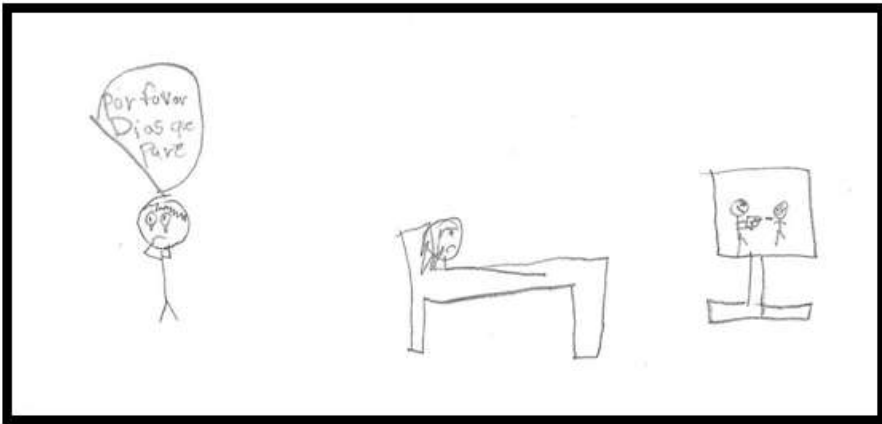
(Gerardo, male, UMC)

Figure 8. Anxiety watching the news at home. (source: Gerardo, male, UMC).

The second drawing is about being suspicious on certain people. In most of the narratives, upper middle class children showed mistrust towards specific groups of persons: construction workers and *cholos*, which is a word used for members of urban gangs. This did not happened as much with lower class children because most of them personally know members of urban gangs (there are two popular ones in the neighborhood where these interviews were made), and most probably, they know adults who are construction workers (since they mostly belong to lower class communities). For the upper middle class children, construction workers are the closest "unknown people" that they get to see in their private neighborhoods.

Regarding Pau, her story was a projection, since she told it in first person:

I: Tell me what is going on here?
P: Well, it's night, and we were walking and there's a suspicious man in a car.
I: Why is he suspicious?
P: Because it's very late at night and it's a lonely street… and well, he's alone. It's not normal for them to be locked in a car with almost no light and so…
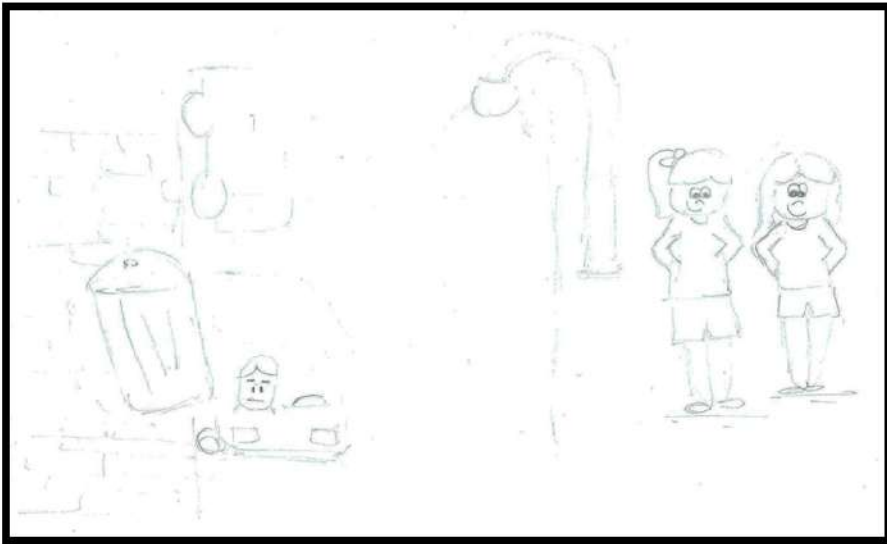(Pau, female, UMC)

Figure 9. Two girls and a suspicious man. (source: Pau, female, UMC).

The four types of insecurity appeared repeatedly in both social classes, which allowed them to be categories with enough evidence to be considered like that. For some were personal or close experiences, and for some were spectacular stories they had seen in films, TV or videogames. They seemed to prefer narratives they could understand enough to make a drawing and talk about it, even when they did not have the adequate terms or concepts to explain their stories.

PLACES AND TIME

There were important differences between social classes regarding the imaginaries of places. Lower class children located their insecurity incidents in Santa Catarina, San Pedro or Monterrey municipalities (which are close to their neighborhood), while upper middle class children positioned their stories in far areas such as San Nicolas, Apodaca, Guadalupe, but also mentioned Monterrey and Santa Catarina. UMC participants didn't mention San Pedro, which most probably means they live in gated or guarded communities.

> I: Do you imagine your story in any neighborhood or municipality in specific?
> D: Hmm… no. Probably San Nicolas, or… in Guadalupe… over there, in the poorest neighborhoods. There is where the poorest of the poorest live.
> (Daniela, female, UMC)

As Daniela's example, upper middle class also relate poverty with delinquency, as will be explained further in the next section regarding the description of criminals.

The scenarios were mainly the same between social classes, since they mentioned the street or alleys, as well as lonely, dark and/or abandoned places; all of them are mainly clichés from films and television. However, they mentioned as well their schools, homes or parks close to their communities, which shows that they don't discriminate much places for insecurity to happen.

Concerning time, this aspect was hard to see in drawings, but most of the children explained that they considered delinquency to happen mostly during the night.

There were three moments of the story narrated: before, during and after the picture. The before part for most of the participants was about planning the crime or waiting for the victim:

> I: Before he got there, what was he doing?
> M: He was planning with the bad guys what was he going to do… or planning the structure and that the policemen wouldn't see him.

I: Where was he planning all this?

M: I imagine him in the street, under those bridges where there is a lot of garbage and there are fluff balls flying around. Nobody goes there because it's very dirty. (Miranda, female, UMC)

By fluff balls, she referred to the tumbleweed that is usually depicted in cowboy's scenery. The majority of the children were able to distinguish the complexity of planning between the different types of crimes, in some they involved a group of criminals and in others they were alone, depending on their needs and interests.

In the events after of the drawing, most of the children discussed their perception of justice on criminals. Girls were more optimistic than boys, since they believed most of delinquents were captured and put in jail, while boys though they were not.

I: What happened after this?

R: I don't know… the guy took the money, and maybe one day he'll be in jail. And the lady, well, she'll have to get more money for her needs, no?

I: Yeah… and how much time does he need to do in jail for this?

R: I don't know how much for stealing her…

I: What do you think?

R: I think maybe 5 months, he's young, he doesn't know what he's doing. (Rihanna, female, LC)

Rihanna is a good example of how childhood discourse is supported by them, since they believe that at that age they are not capable of distinguishing right from wrong, correct from incorrect, and legal from illegal. Time in jail varied from child to child, which can be explained by the fact that they don't know very much about legal procedures and punishments.

On the pessimistic perspective, Spongebob Squarepants (Fig. 3) was one of the participants that doesn't think justice is very effective:

I: What do you think will happen next?

S: I don't know, the man will leave them there, throw away the bodies in a river or something. The man will run away to USA or some other country, and well,

the police will keep looking with the parents of the victims… They will see what happened to this, with the four women. Then they'll look for the man who did this tragedy.

I: Do you think they will find him?

S: Well I… no, I don't think so. Maybe they'll keep looking in the news or something…

(Spongebob Squarepants, male, LC)

Most of the media contents with drug-dealing issues have moral endings where justice is effective and the bad guy has a sad ending, the government and policemen are heroes and victims are saved. However, when children talked about crimes such as robberies, kidnappings, murders, and so on, they believe that impunity happens often. This is actually close to reality, since 91.6% of the crimes like robberies, extortion, and frauds are not even reported to the police.[26]

Characters Involved

There were four different characters involved in the scenes of insecurity: the criminals, the victims, the authorities and "innocent citizens". None of the characters appeared in all of the drawings, since in the "other" category sometimes only innocent citizens appeared, while the majority had the formula of criminal + victim in their image.

Although there was a big diversity of descriptions for the delinquent, there were some characteristics that could be generalized over the drawings and narratives of the participants. Unanimously, children believe the criminal is a man, which was consistent with Blackman and Walkerdine's findings on women being underrepresented in media for delinquency.[27]

His appearance was described as a skinny or thin man, dark hair, brown eyes and brown skin. Their responses were more diverse when

---

[26] "Solo Uno De Cada Diez Mexicanos Denuncia Los Delitos De Los Cuales Ha Sido Víctima." *Noticieros Univisión*, August 28, 2012, accessed July 14, 2014, http://noticias.univision.com/video/253650/2012-09- 28/noticiero-univision/videos/uno-de-cada-diez-mexicanos-denuncia-delitos

[27] Blackman and Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria.*

talking about height, and there were some variations on the color of their skin (black and white), eyes (green, black, blue or even red), hair (white and red; but never blond), and weight (sturdy). They felt the need to justify their descriptions so it doesn't sound politically incorrect (racist), especially on the color of brown skin by saying that is the color of the typical Mexican, even when they had the same skin color. Weight was also an aspect that was sometimes justified by saying that they lost weight since they had to run away from policemen, or that it was related to drug consuming habits.

Regarding fashion, they usually imagined him with black or red clothes, loose jeans and shirts, and tennis shoes. There were some brands mentioned like Jordan, Nike, Hollister, Polo Sport and TC, but they also said that these were imitation brands or stolen clothes, not original bought by them. Two girls from UMC mentioned that criminals buy their clothes at the store Wal-Mart (which is associated with lower class consuming habits). The particular brand of Polo Sport was inspired on two very mediatized captures of drug lords: "el JJ" and "la Barbie", who were wearing this shirt at the moment of their arrest, and later became very popular.

Figure 10. Drug dealer with a Polo Sport shirt. (source: Cristy, female, UMC).

Figure 11 and 12. "El JJ" and "La Barbie" captured with Polo Sport shirts.
(sources: *Medio Tiempo*[28] and *Proceso*[29])

Piercings and tattoos were also elements that were mentioned by practically all participants, with several variations on designs and places. In other aspects that were asked about them, they were divided between believing they were smart or not, since some thought they must be intelligent to plan their mischievous projects. Most of the participants thought they are bad people, although they frequently justified them by saying they are poor or had a bad childhood (bullying or bad parenting).

Victims were usually women and children, especially when the pictures were robberies. Most participants believe that these two groups are the most vulnerable in society.

Figure 13. Man attacking women and girl. (source: Sara, female, LC).

[28] Notimex, "Trasladaron a 'el JJ' Al Altiplano," *Medio Tiempo*, January 23, 2011, accessed May 28, 2015, http://www.mediotiempo.com/futbol/mexico/noticias/2011/01/23/trasladaron-al-jj-a-el-altiplano

[29] Hernández, Anabel. "'La Barbie' Tira El Caso De Los Narcogenerales." *Proceso*, November 17, 2012, accessed May 28, 2015, http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=325528

When victims were described as men, they were usually friends with the criminal and told a story about treason. Also, in Major Crimes (murders and kidnappings) there were often imagined male victims.

Regarding authorities, the most popular one was the police, although there were several drawings with Civil Force, Marine and Army. Civil Force is a particular variety of police that uses different weaponry (more intimidating), are in the city, and have different privileges than regular police. The Army and the Marine are for federal areas (such as highways between cities), or in special events in the city. They were drawn with similar elements as the delinquents, especially with guns in their hands and balaclavas (as seen in Figures 11 and 12 behind the drug lords).

And finally, innocent citizens are those that are not involved directly in the scene of insecurity, but that are present in the drawing. They hardly had any important role in the story, which evidences that children don't think they are able to intervene in the scene or help the victim when needed. They are also considered the people who discussed insecurity (which made the participant feel anxious and unsafe even when they weren't directly victims) in the drawings, since they acted like worried people being witnesses or audiences to these violent scenes.

Discussion – "The Situation of Insecurity" according to…

Whereas there is a clear stereotype that ties delinquency with poverty, it is important to note that sociological crime studies in Mexico agree with this representation, since they believe that urban gangs are the most vulnerable group to get involved in organized crime. For example: Perea defines urban gangs as a way for poor young people to live in the city, characterized by three main features: breaking with the institutions, group identity and the adoption of conflictive behavior, and sense of respect.[30] He describes them as being members of a broken family (or problematic), school dropouts,

---

[30] Departamento De Seguridad Pública. Secretaría General De La Organización De Los Estados Americanos, "Definicíon y Categoricacíon de Pandillas", Washington, DC:

and distanced from citizenship practices. Barraza on the other hand, believes that juvenile delinquency is not always related to social class, but to bad parenting.[31] And finally, Martínez reported that organized crime during 2006-2012 affected mainly young people, since most of the murder victims were men around 20-29 years old (most probably, members of cartels or gangs).[32]

The descriptions of the three authors mentioned above are very similar to what children imagine from delinquents, since they justify their criminal acts by saying they are poor or they had a bad childhood. Also, as mentioned before, most of the murder victims that were drawn were young men.

These imaginaries, even though children are conscious about extracting them from mass media, are close enough to the reality that criminal research and publications report to be as facts. Additionally, children demonstrated to be capable to appropriate the information they obtain from media. Not only did some of them understand processes, crimes, weapons and other aspects of delinquency, but also several of them successfully adapted stories from other contexts to their local one. The best examples were from Spongebob Squarepants and Rodrigo Luna, who were inspired by the videogame GTA but their stories were in neighborhoods from Monterrey and its metropolitan area.

Through these pieces of information that they got from different sources, the participants were able to make sense of "the situation of insecurity" that was the main topic on the agenda of Monterrey citizens. The role of media was significant both in their realistic and fictional genres, since a lot of the children's stories were framed to what they had seen before in TV, films and videogames.

Organización De Los Estados Americanos, 2007, accessed May 28, 2015, https://www.oas.org/dsp/documentos/pandillas/Informe.Definicion.Pandillas.pdf, 5.

[31] Barraza, Rolando. "Delincuencia Juvenil y Pandillerismo." *Archivos De Criminología, Criminalística Y Seguridad Privada* 3 (2009): 4, accessed May 28, 2015, dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4016182.pdf

[32] Martínez, Juan. "Dossier. Violencia Y Juventud En México." *Quadernos De Criminología: Revista De Criminología Y Ciencias Forenses*, no. 23 (2013), accessed May 28, 2015, http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4722989

However, it should be questioned if this means that they are actually negotiating readings, strictly in the form of inserting their own rules and operating with exceptions. In a very simplistic interpretation, it seems like they are mostly mixing sources that are reproducing the same discourse on delinquency: male, poor, young, bad parenting, lack of education; but they are not being critical about the stereotype nor are they mentioning the possibility of alternative profiles for delinquents. There are very few elements of alternative meanings mentioned during the interviews, and one example is Katy:

> K: His parents were millionaires, but he started to steal ever since he was a child, so his parents sent him to live with an uncle. The uncle didn't want him but he had to educate him by force, so once he was done, he went back to his parents. They thought he had given up stealing, and started his studies in criminal minds… this career to be detective or policemen, or all professions that need to study criminal minds, how bad guys think. Well, that's how I imagine it because, do you remember when in Colorado, what happen in the cinema, with the premiere of Batman, that he went disguised as a character and the guy killed a bunch of people? And that they said he had studied criminology or something?
> I: Ok, so that's how he knows how to attack people…
> K: And that's why they say that career is very dangerous.
> (Katy, female, UMC)

Although the bad childhood and male discourse is still present, this was the only case that broke with the poor and uneducated stereotype, which made it the most alternative representation of the delinquent within the participants. One of the suppositions at the beginning of this research was that having a personal experience would also create alternative interpretations of insecurity. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that given the strong apprehension of these discourses, they might act as filters to interpret immediate reality according to those same ideas and thus, strengthen them. The best example of this is Abe, who witnessed a robbery in a convenience

store, but still mixed information from different sources that suited his understanding of delinquency.

> A: The drawing is what happened in 7-Eleven.
> I: Tell me about it.
> A: It was Halloween, and all Halloweens some neighbors and I get together, they're friends with my parents ever since university, so my mother asked me to go to the store and buy some boxes of chocolate milk. I got them, and I went to the register, and then some construction workers came in. I was about to pay for my stuff, but then a man said "take it easy, take it easy", he said he had a gun and that it was loaded. Well, I thought it was a joke for Halloween, but when, they were two, when the other one went out, he jumped to the cash register to the other side to check on the employee. Then I realized it was real and I went back. I was very scared. They took whatever they were going to buy and some cigarettes.
> -----
> I: How do you think they caught them?
> A: Well, maybe with the fingerprints or the cameras.
> […]
> I: How do you know they take fingerprints?
> A: Because I like to know about mystery. I like books and, also TV shows.
> I: What TV shows?
> A: CSI[33]
> I: Do you like CSI?
> A: I like CSI because they not only show you how people find evidence and all that… it's also because I like the characters.
> (Abe, male, UMC)

Abe's case shows a prejudice when he's narrating his personal experience, by saying the robbers were construction workers. He explains how this conclusion was drawn by observing their shoes, which were dirty with what he believed was construction material. He believed they were already in jail at the time of the interview, based on

---

[33] Zuiker, Anthony, writer. "CSI." In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Jerry Bruckheimer Television, Alliance Atlantis, CBS. 2000.

what his family said to him, followed by the quote on his information obtained from CSI program.

In Abe's case, all sources are conveniently aligned to the same delinquent stereotype: male, poor, and construction worker. Even when the three main sources are fundamentally different (firsthand witness, interpersonal communication, and media), he managed to create a mixture of elements that gave a full meaning to his interpretation of this event. But again, there isn't a negotiation of meanings, but more of a dialogue between sources sustaining the same discourse, which is not that different from the narratives of participants that contain only mediatic sources.

It seems that what allows them to negotiate meanings is alternative information, like the event of the massacre in the cinema seen in the news, as explained with the case of Katy. However, this is not frequently accessible, and as a result, individuals prefer to use predetermined or already formatted – mainly mainstream – images, that are accepted as a common interpretation of insecurity and delinquency.

Further research could expand this analysis by questioning on the possibility of unusual profiles of delinquency (female, rich, educated, good parents, good childhood), in order to study their reactions to alternative meanings of insecurity.

Works Cited

Assassin's Creed. Produced by Ubisoft. Montreal, Annecy, Sofia, Milan and Toronto: Ubisoft, 2007. Videogame.

Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore: SAGE Publications, 2008.

Barraza, Rolando. "Delincuencia Juvenil Y Pandillerismo." *Archivos De Criminología, Criminalística Y Seguridad Privada* 3 (2009): 1-10. Accessed May 28, 2015. dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4016182.pdf

Blackman, Lisa, and Valerie Walkerdine. *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001.

Brown, Sheila. *Crime and Law in Media Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003.

Casey, Bernadette, Neil Casey, Ben Calvert, Liam French, and Justin Lewis. *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Fast Five. Directed by Justin Lin. Performed by Vin Diesel, Paul Walker. USA: Universal Pictures, 2011. DVD.

Gauntlett, David. *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. Produced by Rockstar North. Japan: Rockstar Games Capcom, 2004. Videogame.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. Produced by Rockstar North. Japan: Rockstar Games Capcom, 2002. Videogame.

Götz, Maya. "'I Know That It Is Bush's Fault' How Children in Germany Perceived the War in Iraq." In *Children and Media in Times of War and Conflict*, edited by Dafna Lemish and Maya Götz, 15-35. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During, 507-17. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

–. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage in Association with the Open University, 1997.

Heavy Rain. Produced by Quantic Dream. N/A: Sony Computer Entertainment, 2010. Videogame.

Hernández, Anabel. "'La Barbie' Tira El Caso De Los Narcogenerales." *Proceso*, November 17, 2012. Accessed May 28, 2015. http://www.proceso.com. mx/?p=325528

Lamish, Dafna, and Maya Götz, eds. *Children and Media in Times of Conflict and War*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007.

Martínez, Juan. "Dossier. Violencia Y Juventud En México." *Quadernos De Criminología: Revista De Criminología Y Ciencias Forenses*, no. 23 (2013). Accessed May 28, 2015. http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/ articulo?codigo=4722989

Secretaría De Gobernación. Centro Nacional De Información. *Incidencia Delictiva Del Fuero Común 2014*. México: Centro Nacional de Información, 2014. Accessed May 28, 2015.
http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnsp.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/ Resource/131/1/images/publicacionCIEISPago14.pdf

Orozco, Guillermo. "Los Estudios De Recepción: De Un Modo De Investigar, a Una Moda... Y De Ahí a Muchos Modos." In *¿Y La Recepción? Balance Crítico De Los Estudios Sobre El Público*, edited by Florencia Saintout and Natalia Ferrante, 15-30. Buenos Aires: La Crujía, 2006.

Departamento De Seguridad Pública. Secretaría General De La Organización De Los Estados Americanos. *Definícion y Categorizacíon de Pandillas*. Washington, DC: Organización De Los Estados Americanos, 2007. Accessed May 28, 2015, https://www.oas.org/dsp/documentos/pandillas/Informe.Definicion.Pandillas.pdf

Zuiker, Anthony, writer. "CSI." In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Jerry Bruckheimer Television, Alliance Atlantis, CBS. 2000.