Parental Approaches to Enhancing Young People's Online Safety

// Literature Review

Jess Strider, University of Western Sydney
Dr Amanda Third, University of Western Sydney
Kathryn Locke, Murdoch University
Dr Ingrid Richardson, Murdoch University

YOUNGAND**WE**LL
Cooperative Research Centre

// February 2012

An Australian Government Initiative

CRC AUSTRALIA

University of
Western Sydney
Bringing knowledge to life

Preface

This pilot study has been undertaken as an initiative of the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre. The study has been conducted in collaboration with Google UK and Google Australia, with funding from Google. Workshops were held at the Google Headquarters in London.

The Young and Well CRC (youngandwellcrc.org.au) is an Australian-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners and innovators from over 70 partner organisations to explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how those technologies can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program.

YOUNGANDWELLCRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

Introduction

A Young and Well CRC supported, and Google funded, literature review was published in April 2011 (Collin et al.). This review found that the use of Social Networking Services (SNS) – such as Facebook.com and Twitter.com – had become a popular and integral part of everyday communication in Australia. In addition, it found that young people in Australia are particularly enthusiastic users, with the vast majority engaging on a daily basis with SNS via a computer or

The internet offers young people many benefits and opportunities

mobile phone. Building upon these findings, this review focuses on parental approaches to enhancing young people's online safety.

Indeed, the internet is an integral part of the day to day experience of many young people. Much of the literature surrounding online safety agrees that the Internet can and does offer young people (12 – 25 years old) many benefits. These benefits include opportunities for learning and development, access to new sources of knowledge, broadening experiences, creativity, expression and entertainment (Livingstone & Helsper, 2009).

The risks and dangers however, are often given significantly more attention in the literature. These include, but are not limited to: the internet being unregulated and difficult to control; exposure to inappropriate material (e.g. violence, profanities, sexually explicit material); potential exposure to racist or hateful material, unreliable information (including the challenges of filtering and distinguishing between 'reliable' and 'unreliable' information); requests to provide personal information (leading to identity theft); communication with strangers; and bullying and predation (Ey & Cupit, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2005).

Young people's understanding and use of online safety sometimes conflicts with adult perceptions of what risks young people face online.

There are divergent opinions over what constitutes online risks, dangers or threats to young people online. Online environments fostering anonymity, for example, can be perceived as both a risk and benefit to young people. Whereas some adults believe anonymity generates an unsafe place for children and young people, young people themselves report that anonymity provides them with a greater sense of online safety (Livingstone & Helsper, 2009). Research demonstrates that young people's understanding and use of online safety sometimes conflicts with adult perceptions of what risks young people face online, that young people lack awareness of these online risks, and that young people lack attention to safety concerns and the action required to protect themselves from online threats (Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Peterson, 2009; and boyd, 2007).

Whether we imagine young people's use of online space as beneficial or dangerous, the issue of online safety and how parents should best manage their children's online interaction has become a widely discussed, debated and contested topic. It has been explored through themes as diverse as media literacy and the generational divide, and psychology and parenting techniques.

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

A somewhat underdeveloped area of study, and the focus of this review, is parents' digital literacy and how their understandings of the online environment influence their abilities to help their children manage online safety. In this context, a number of questions emerge:

- What are privacy settings and what are the current trends in parents' usage of these settings?
- What are online risks and how do parents deploy management strategies to assist or protect their children?
- What software is currently available and how can parents best integrate it into their home?
- How can parents become more internet literate to assist their children in practicing online safety?
- Are there specific concerns for children and young people at particular ages?

Current Trends

The internet requires a variety of mediation techniques to help parents deal with their children's access to unwanted content.

It has been suggested that parental management of new technologies is not a new concern that has arisen with the introduction of the internet into the family home (Livingstone, 2007). Unlike more 'traditional' media like TV and radio, where content access could be reasonably controlled or at least more easily understood across generations (as well as media literacy of broadcast content often being taught at school), the internet requires a variety of mediation techniques to help parents deal with their children's access to inappropriate content (Eastin et al., 2006). In addition, unlike broadcast media the internet is two-way. This means that when it comes to parents assisting their children to stay safe online, their techniques must address not just access to inappropriate content, but also the range of risks involved when young people upload content (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

Parents are faced with new challenges due to the increased physical mobility of technology throughout (and outside of) the home.

Many parents speak of the new challenges they now face due to the increased physical mobility throughout (and outside of) the home that comes with the technological advancements in mobile media (Livingstone, 2007). Previously, the family computer would often be in a central location such as the living room, whereas laptops combined with broadband wireless have now instigated the trend of children and young people accessing the internet from a variety of locations, whether that be outside the home or in the unsupervised privacy of their bedrooms. Smart phones have accelerated mobile online access to the extent that children and young people can be online anywhere anytime. Further, mobile online access is not bound by dependency on a mobile phone data plan, due to accessibility to the web via public hotspots. This, parents say, demands new skills and techniques for managing their children's use of online and networked media (Livingstone, 2007; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

Although there are many filtering and blocking software options available to parents, it is reported that many parents do not use these tools, or even know that they exist. Research that documents current trends in parents' use of filtering or blocking software is beginning to emerge, and evidences a seeming disconnect between parental concerns about their children's safety online and the range of practices parents deploy to

address these concerns. In the US Mitchell et al (2005), for example, discovered via a national telephone survey (n=1,501) that although 84% of parents believed adults should be extremely concerned about young people's exposure to inappropriate material online, only 33% of parents with children aged ten to seventeen years old reported the use of filtering or blocking software in their home. Of those parents who did utilise filtering or blocking software, the use of such software was connected to four main considerations:

- Having younger children (ten to fifteen years old)
- High level of concern about exposure to sexually explicit material
- More extensive knowledge of their children's online use
- Low trust in their children's ability to use the internet responsibly

Filtering and blocking software is viewed as one of the most frequently deployed parental prevention methods used to monitor and manage young people's online use, however is not utilised by some parents

Filtering and blocking software is viewed as one of the most frequently deployed parental prevention methods used to monitor and manage young people's online use, however is not utilised by some parents. Mitchell et al (2005) claim that filtering and blocking software may not be used by parents for a variety of reasons. Some of these include:

- It may not work well within the dynamics of some families (e.g. parents may not feel they have control over their children)
- Many parents prefer more active methods of parenting (e.g. communicating with their children rather than installing software)
- Older children may object to internet restrictions
- Parents may be unwilling to provoke conflicts with their children
- Parents may not believe that the internet poses a serious risk to their children
- Parents my be sceptical about the effectiveness of the software
- Parents may lack media literacy regarding computers and the internet

Likewise, telephone surveys (n=520) conducted in the US by Eastin et al. (2006) found that parenting styles correlate with styles of online mediation and techniques. They found that blocking or restricting access was found to be highest among "authoritative" parents. An Australian based study of risks associated with the internet and parents' management strategies found that parents monitored children less as their children became more confident with understanding and using the internet appropriately and safely (Ey & Cupit, 2011). Other research has found that parents do in fact implement a range of strategies, however often favour "active co-use and interaction rules" over technical restrictions (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008). Findings from Livingstone and Helsper's (2008) research correlate with other available educational sources (e.g. Google Family Safety Centre) on parental strategies regarding technical controls and regulation.

Parents often prefer to implement "active co-use" rules rather than technical restrictions
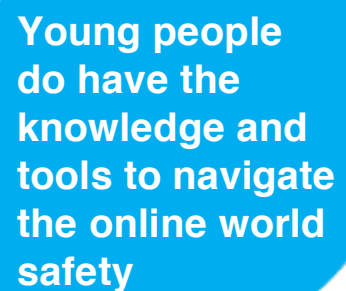
The Google Family Safety Centre provides links to short YouTube videos that offer online safety education modules for parents that model methods they can deploy to promote their children's safety online. These snapshot videos featuring "tips from parents at Google" (http://www.google.co.uk/familysafety/tips.html) offer

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

personal insights and techniques into managing online safety in the home, especially with young children. The UK site has parents speaking specifically about online safety practices and techniques via which parents can assist their children. One mother speaks of setting boundaries and parameters with her daughter (for example, 10 minutes on her mother's iPhone per day). Another parent sets rules with his two sons whereby (besides using the internet for school work) for every 30 minutes spent online they must then spend the same amount of time playing outside on the same day. This, he believes, offers his children a balanced life. Parental boundaries, parameters and rules are offered as preferred parental management strategies rather than monitoring children's every online move, having access to passwords and checking the history in the browser menu. In addition, another mother speaks of educating her children by requesting that she be present when her children register on new sites with user names, and prefers that her children use an alias for such online activities. Additionally, she encourages dialogue between herself and her children and always speaks with them after each online session to find out what they were doing and what they enjoyed. This, she explains, is much better than watching like "big brother". What is clear from the parents shown in the YouTube clips on the Google site is that offline relationships between parents and children are integral to online safety, and are indeed much more important to children's online safety than simply deploying privacy controls.

Privacy Settings

The online environment encourages people to share and connect with others. As described above, this is viewed as both a benefit and risk of online media. Although people of all ages are exposed to the web, there is a widespread perception that young people are particularly susceptible to online risks and dangers. It is suggested by some that this focus on protecting young people from online risks is based on the adult assumption that young people lack awareness of online dangers (Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Peterson, 2009; and boyd, 2007). Taking Facebook as an example, we see through many studies that young people spend greater amounts of time on social networking sites than adults, yet young people often disclose more information and use privacy settings less (Christofides et al., 2009). Other research suggests young people are indeed aware of threats online and do take steps to minimize online dangers (Hitchcock, 2008; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). A survey of attitudes and practices about Facebook's privacy settings with a cohort of 18 and 19 year olds provides grounds to challenge the widespread assumption in cybersafety, policy and educational debates that young people do not navigate the online world in a safe manner (boyd & Hargittai, 2010). This study found young people often engage safely online by moderating and maintaining safety settings. It is important to note that there is also a distinction between privacy settings and security settings on users browsers and the settings available on the site being accessed by a user. Remembering that safety settings might differ between sites, taking Facebook as an example we can see that there are a variety of tools available to protect the privacy of users, for instance: updating account information, resetting passwords, controlling who has access to your profile, unfriending or blocking someone and reporting abusive or offensive content (https://www.facebook.com/safety/tools/). Skype, by

Young people do have the knowledge and tools to navigate the online world safety

contrast, suggests "vigilance" whereby users should learn how to identify spam and fraud and phishing emails (http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/security/online-safety/#privacy-settings).

Confirming those studies mentioned above, recent survey results by MTV-AP from September 2011 show that, in addition to being capable of staying safe by using aliases, changing passwords and so on, young people are now more likely to intervene when they witness online bullying than they have been in the past (Kaufman, 2011).

Young people are more likely than ever to intervene when they witness online bullying

Set within the online climate of social networking services (such as Facebook and MySpace) and social media sites (including blogs, YouTube and social games such as foursquare), users of all ages exercise (some might say limited) control over disclosing personal information. This control can be exercised via, for example, privacy settings whereby parents can lock computers to safe search functions at various filtering levels in order to screen sites containing inappropriate material. In addition to search and privacy settings, parents can deploy a range of techniques to help keep their families safe online. These include keeping computers in a central place, knowing which sites children use, and teaching internet safety (such as using privacy settings protecting passwords) (Livingstone 2007).

Managing Safety

Parents are often placed in the tricky position of being responsible for protecting their children from online risks and dangers, while oftentimes having a very different relationship to online media technology

As indicated above, online risks are of great concern to parents, with dangers ranging from being exposed to inappropriate material of a sexually explicit or violent nature, meeting strangers, being asked to provide personal information, cyberbullying, sites promoting inappropriate behaviours such as eating disorders and drug use, and malware (http://www.google.com.au/familysafety/advice.html). Parents are often placed in the tricky position of being responsible for protecting their children from online risks and dangers, while oftentimes having a rather different, if not distant, relationship to online media technology. This being said, research demonstrates that parents' lack of media literacy and adults' use of social networking sites is changing. Findings from a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (n= 2,251) indicate rising levels of adult engagement with online and networked media. For example, adult Internet users who have a profile on an online social network site quadrupled in the four years between 2005 (8%) and 2008 (35%) in the US (Lenhart, 2009).

Other research shows that media literacy is not necessarily the key to preventing online risks, in that the 'risks' are not radically different in their nature or scope than offline risks (Palfrey et al., 2008). Strategies and techniques for offline parenting can thus be leveraged and deployed for online safety management by parents. Researchers such as Eastin et al. (2006) have explored the relationship between management strategies in the home and the rise of new media.

// Management strategies

Exploring parent's mediation styles and children's online use, Eastin et al. (2006) outline three overarching parental mediation styles identified in the research on parental mediation of new media.

Table 1: Parental mediation styles

Style	Description
Factual	Equips young people with the technical knowledge of content production common to many media literacy programs. It allows young people to focus on content and learn to distinguish between fantasy and reality.
Evaluative	The general influence of family co-viewing (e.g. watching TV together) and the impact of parental input on young people's interpretation of media content.
Restrictive	Rules regarding the amount of time and type of content young people can access/view.

Each of these management strategies offers parents a means of educating or monitoring their children's online usage and environment. Additionally, parental monitoring and regulation can be assisted via the use of software.

// Parental monitoring/regulation

Mitchell et al (2005) outline some of the software available to parents.

Table 2: Software available to parent

Software	Description
Time-Limiting **Software**	Allows parents to set limits on how much time, or at what time, a child can use the computer or internet.
Filtering and **Blocking Software**	Limits access to some sites, words, and/or images.
Outgoing Content **Blocking Software**	Regulates content leaving the computer to prevent young people from revealing personal information (e.g. name, address, telephone number etc.) to people they do not know.
Kid-Oriented **Search Engines**	Operate similar to regular search engines while providing special features to screen inappropriate material.
Monitoring Tool **Software**	Informs parents about young people's online activity by recording the addresses of visited websites or displaying warning messages to young people if they visit inappropriate websites. This does not necessarily limit access – but does provide warning messages

YOUNGANDWELLᴄʀᴄ
youngandwellcrc.org.au

Research Questions and Future Directions

Drawing upon insights from previous studies, a new point of departure emerges in terms of how to promote parents' digital literacy as a way to encourage and facilitate young people's online safety. In this new context, young people's experience of online safety, coupled with an intergenerational dialogue between young people and parents, is at the very heart of what online safety means. Questions concerning how this might be achieved include:

Young people's experience of online safety, coupled with an intergenerational dialogue between young people and parents, is at the very heart of what online safety means

- What do parents think the main safety concerns are for young people online?
- What do young people perceive as their main safety concerns online?
- What can parents do to help their children stay safe online?
- What do young people do to stay safe online, and how can this knowledge and practices be used to inform adults?
- How can and do parents find out about parental controls? And, how can they learn how to use them effectively?
- How can and do parents search for information regarding keeping their children safe online?

Conversation between young people and adults regarding online safety is imperative to closing the technological generation gap

Although research is emerging with evidence to say that young people are indeed becoming tech-savvy with the know-how and confidence to keep themselves safe online, this review has demonstrated that the technological generational gap remains large. Conversation between young people and adults regarding online safety is imperative to parents understanding cybersafety and young people staying safe online. It remains crucial that research is conducted to explore these questions with adults and young people.

Acknowledgements

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

References

Acquisti, A., & Gross, R. (2006). Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. Proceedings of 6th Workshop on Privacy Enhancing Technologies (pp. 36-58). Cambridge, UK: Robinson College. Retrieved from: http://privacy.cs.cmu.edu/dataprivacy/projects/facebook/facebook2.pdf

boyd, d., & Hargittai, E. (2010). Facebook privacy settings: Who cares? *First Monday*, 15(8-2). Retrieved from: http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3086

Eastin, M.S., Greenberg, M.S., & Hofschire, L. (2006). Parenting the Internet. *Journal of Communication*, 56, (486-504).

Christofides, E., Muise, A., & Desmarais, S. (2009). Information Disclosure and Control on Facebook: Are They Two Sides of the Same Coin or Two Different Processes? *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 12(3): 341-345.

Ey, L-E. & Cupit, C.G. (2011). Exploring young children's understanding of risks associated with internet usage and their concepts of management strategies. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(1), 53-65.

Google Family Safety Centre. Retrieved from: http://www.google.co.uk/familysafety/tips.html

Hinduja, J.W. & Patchin, S. (2008). Social networking and identity construction: Personal information of adolescents on the Internet: A quantitative content analysis of MySpace. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(1): 125-146.

Hitchcock, J. (2008). Public or private? A social cognitive exploratory study of privacy on social networking sites. *Masters Abstracts International*, 46(5): 2364.

Kaufman, G. (2011). Cyberbullying, sexting widespread, MTV/AP survey reveals. Retrieved from: http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1671547/cyberbullying-sexting-mtv-ap-survey.jhtml

Lenhart, A. (2009). Adults and social network websites. PEW Internet and American Life Project, Washington. Retrieved from: http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Adults-and-Social-Network-Websites.aspx

Lenhart, A. & Madden, M. (2007) Social networking websites and teens: An overview. Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington.

Livingstone, S. & Helsper, E. (2009). Balancing opportunities and risks in teenagers' use of the internet: The role of online skills and internet self-efficacy. *New Media & Society*, 12(2), 309-329.

Livingstone, S. & Helsper, E. (2008). Parental mediation and children's Internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 52(4), 581-599.

Livingstone, S. (2007). Strategies of parental regulation in the media-rich home. *LSE Research Online*. Retrieved from: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/1019/

Mitchell, J.J., Finkelhor, D. & Wolak, J. (2005). Protecting youth online: Family use of filtering and blocking software. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29, 753-765.

Palfrey, J., Sacco, D., boyd, d. & DeBonis, L. (2008) Enhancing child safety & online technologies: Final report of the internet safety technical task force. Harvard University: Berkman. Retrieved from: http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/ISTTF_Final_Report.pdf

Raynes-Goldie, K. (2010) Aliases, creeping and wall cleaning: Understanding privacy in the age of Facebook. *First Monday*, 15(1-4). Retrieved from: http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2775/2432

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

Further Reading

Boonaert, T. & Vettenburg, N. (2011). Young people's Internet use: divided or diversified? *Childhood*, 18(1), 54-66.

Brandtweiner, R., Donat, E., & Kerschbaum, J. (2010). How to become a sophisticated user: a two-dimensional approach to e-literacy. *New Media & Society*, 12(5), 813-833.

Briggs, F. & Hawkins, R. (1997). *Child protection: A guide for teachers and child care professionals.* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Christofides, E., Muise A., & Desmarais S. (2011). Hey mom, what's on your Facebook? Comparing Facebook disclosure and privacy in adolescents and adults. *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, 2(5).

Christofides, E., Muise A., & Desmarais S. (2009). Information disclosure and control on Facebook: Are they two sides of the same coin or two different processes? *Cyberpsychology & Behaviour*, 12(3), 341-345.

Fernback, J & Papacharissi, Z. (2007). Online privacy as legal safeguard: The relationship among consumer, online portal, and privacy policies. *New Media & Society*, 9(5), 715-734.

Heim, J., Brandtzaeg, P.B., Hertzberg Kaare, B., Endstad, T. & Torgersen, L. (2007). Children's usage of media technologies and psychological factors*. New Media & Society*, 9(3), 425-454.

Livingston, S. & Bober, M. (2005). UK children go online: Final report of key project findings. *LSE Research Online.* Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/399/

Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Olafsson, K. & Vodeb, H. (2001). *Cross-national comparison of risks and safety on the internet: Initial analysis from the EU Kids Online network.* London: EU Kids Online, LSE.

Patchin, J.W., & Hinduj, S. (2010). Trends in online social networking: Adolescent use of MySpace over time. *New Media & Society*, 12(2), 197-216.

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au

Author Biography

Jess Strider works at the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney on research projects affiliated with The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre. She is also working on an ARC funded research project entitled 'Young People, Technology, and Wellbeing Research Facility'. Jess has an academic background in Anthropology and Gender Studies, with a BA (Hons) from Monash University (2007) and a double Master's degree in Gender and Women's Studies from Utrecht University and Central European University (2010). Jess' MA thesis entitled 'Doing Justice Differently: Alternative Courtroom Spaces and Practices in Contemporary Australia' critically explored the benefits and limitations of new design/architectural, procedural and technological ways of delivering and performing law and justice. In 2008 Jess was awarded a two-year Erasmus Mundus Scholarship from the European Education Commission. She has presented research papers at the 7th European Feminist Research Conference in The Netherlands and at the Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference Bodies in Motion at the University of Rhode Island. With a strong interdisciplinary background, Jess' main research interests gravitate largely around feminist theory, gender and space, post-colonial studies, (feminist) phenomenology, ethnography, and the role new technologies play in the development of new theories, methodologies and ways of thinking through the body.

Dr Amanda Third (Research Program 2 Co-Leader, YAW-CRC) is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, and a member of the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney. Dr Third has a research interest in youngpeople's everyday use of online and networked technologies and the potential for new technologies to support young people's wellbeing. She has conducted several large externally funded projects with organizations using technology to support young people. She co-leads YAW-CRC Research Program 2: Connected and Creative, and is the Chief Investigator on an Australian Research Council Industry Linkage project entitled "Young People, Technology and Wellbeing Research Facility". She has been a member of the Technology and Wellbeing Roundtable since 2008. In 2009 Dr Third was awarded the Murdoch University Medal for Early Career Research Achievement.

Kathryn Locke is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Curtin University (Western Australia) and a freelance researcher and writer. She also teaches externally for Murdoch University in Perth. With a background in Cultural Studies and Psychology, Kathryn is currently completing a PhD with Murdoch University entitled, Locating the Creative City: Tracking theories, language and practice of a new discourse. Prior to entering academia, Kathryn worked as a project manager at FORM, a not-for-profit cultural organisation. Her publications include: Urban conversations: Making Perth a Creative and Lively City, co-edited with T. Jones, Perth: UWA Press, publication pending; 'Access Denied: Reading, Writing and Thinking About Techno-literacy' in The Revolution Will Not Be Downloaded: Dissent in the Digital Age. (Eds) M. Kent and Tara Brabazon, London: Chandos, 2008; and 'After Dark: Perth's Night-time Economy', (Ed) T. Brabazon, Liverpool of the South Seas, Perth: UWA Press, 2004.

Dr Ingrid Richardson (Research Program 2 Co-Leader, YAW-CRC) is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Creative Media, and Director of the Centre for Everyday Life at Murdoch University, Western Australia. She has published articles and book chapters on the cultural effects of new and emerging interfaces, including mobile media, the internet, Web 2.0, games, urban screens, and virtual and augmented reality. Dr Richardson has also led or collaborated on a number of large externally funded projects that focus on young people's use and experience of new media and communication technologies, including the Nintendo DS, the mobile phone, interactive television, mobile weblogs and social networking. She is a member of the ARC Cultural Research Network, and recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Early Career Research (Murdoch University, 2008).

YOUNGANDWELL CRC
youngandwellcrc.org.au