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The meaning of online problematic situations for children

Results of qualitative cross-cultural investigation in nine European countries

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with members of the *EU Kids Online* network

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Meaning of online problematic situations for children. Results of qualitative cross-cultural investigation in nine European countries. This report is based on qualitative investigation carried out from February to September 2013 in nine countries, with children aged 9–16. It has been produced by Monica Barbovschi, Catherine Blaya, Miguel Angel Casado, Martina Černíková, Lorleen Farrugia, Maialen Garmendia, Leslie Haddon, Leen d'Haenens, Estefanía Jimenez, Ana Jorge, Bojana Lobe, Giovanna Mascheroni, David Smahel, Sofie Vandoninck, Anca Velicu, Michelle F. Wright, with the help of members of the EU Kids Online network (Annex 2).

Previous reports and publications from *EU Kids Online* include:
- Vandoninck, S., d'Haenens, L., & Smahel, D. (2014). *Preventive measures: How youngsters avoid online risks.* http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/55797/
- Barbosa, A., O'Neill, B., Ponte, C., Simões, J., & Jereissati, J. (2013). *Risks and safety on the internet: Comparing Brazilian and European findings*. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/54801/
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Content:

1. KEY FINDINGS

The EU Kids Online III Study

- In this report, the findings of qualitative research from the EU Kids Online III study are presented. The research included children who used the internet weekly. The children were from nine European countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- This research focused on the following: what children perceive as being potentially negative or problematic while using the internet, what risks children are aware of when using the internet, what consequences online negative experiences might have, how children react to negative experiences, what children do to avoid or prevent these problematic experiences, and why children perceive certain situations as negative.
- Interviews and focus groups were used to collect children's data. The main fieldwork, using the revised research procedures guide and the topic guide, was carried out from February to September 2013 in all nine countries, with children aged 9–16 (N = 378). Schools or youth centers were used to recruit children for 56 focus groups and 114 interviews.
- The term "children" refers to children aged 9–16. Internet usage refers to a variety of activities across various platforms, which can be accessed anywhere, alone, or with others.

Feelings and types of online problematic situations

- Overall, the most common online problematic situation includes the sending of content that is violent, vulgar, or sexual. Other problematic situations include perpetrating, experiencing, and/or witnessing hateful, vulgar, or nasty messages. Although less covered in the risk literature, some involve being killed, cursed, excluded, and/or verbally assaulted in online games. Lastly, some include meeting online peers offline, sending "friend" requests or communicating with strangers not their own age.
- Turning first to sexual issues, although many children are bothered by vulgar content displayed in dating site advertisements, some post attractive or sexual content, usually through pictures, to attract peers.
- Occurring less frequently, some children engage in the sharing of private, naked pictures of someone without the owner's permission. This activity is mostly perpetrated by boys.
- Online problematic situations related to school involve children using incorrect information for school assignments, and perpetrating or knowing about the cyberbullying of teachers.
- Sexual content is often perceived as bothersome by children and often found by mistake, but sometimes children, particularly older children, intentionally search for this content. Older children sometimes report positive feelings about this content as well. Girls experience more sexual communication and post "sexy" or provocative pictures to receive "likes".
- Sharing personal information and passwords for Facebook or game accounts with family members and friends is common across all groups of children. This particular activity isn't perceived as risky, despite some children indicating that someone had misused their personal information.
- Many children recognize the symptoms of internet addiction, including losing contact with reality, losing interest in activities, headaches, eye problems, sleep problems, and losing friends.
- Children download illegal games, software, videos, and music. They do not perceive such behaviour as particularly harmful.
- Children sometimes encounter fake information and racist or hateful content on the internet, which they perceive as bothersome.

Awareness of online problematic situations

- Children's framing of online problematic situations differs from adults' perspectives especially in the case of online bullying, whereby children distinguish bullying from other forms of online conflicts (i.e., "drama").
- Awareness of risks that children are less likely to experience, such as "stranger danger," is influenced more by the sensationalist tone that figures heavily in media representations.
- There are significant age differences in how children make sense of online problematic situations: younger children's awareness reflects the perceptions of the media and parents, whereas older children draw more on personal experiences or those of their peers.
- Some risks – notably both "stranger danger" and bullying – are perceived as strongly gendered.

Dealing with problematic situations online

- Many children self-monitor their online activities through planning, strategizing, and reflecting on ways to avoid risky online problematic situations.
- Proactive strategies are used more frequently than seeking-support strategies when dealing with online bullying.
- Girls are more likely to seek social support when faced with online problematic situations compared to boys.
- The usage of preventive strategies depends on the most popular online activities for a particular age group. The older age group (14–16) use more preventive behaviour, which intensifies as their social networking site (SNS) usage increases.
- Avoidance tactics, that is, avoiding or clicking away from certain online platforms, applications or websites, is a popular strategy among the youngest age group (9–11). In general, behavioural avoidance turns out to be an effective way of preventing problematic situations related to content risks.

Mediation

- Many concerns that parents express about the online world stem from ones they have about media or more general experiences in the offline world (e.g., about the content encountered, time spent on a particular activity, or talking to strangers). Hence, even parents who are not so familiar with the details of the internet are usually able to provide some guidance.
- There is a range of parental mediation interventions, from those that explicitly express and explain their concerns to their children to those who may have concerns but articulate them less, failing to fully explain the nature of the risk as they see it. Parents also adjust these strategies based on their children's age.
- Younger children often view parental intervention as positive, or at least do not mind it, whereas older children are more ambivalent and often prefer to talk with peers. The latter often see parents as invading their privacy, especially when they check the devices they have used. This is an issue because it can cause tensions in the family and make it less likely (along with punishing or being critical of children) that the children will confide in parents when problematic situations emerge.
- Siblings and cousins provide support to children and serve a protective role, particularly for younger children. Despite introducing children to online risks, siblings and cousins can also provide advice and support in online problematic situations.
- Aunts, uncles, and grandparents also provide advice for children, and sometimes children find it easier to talk to them than their parents. However, children can find it more problematic if these

relatives (as well as siblings and cousins) are asked to monitor what children do online by the children's parents.
- Peers also support each other, including through sharing negative experiences. Such experiences allow children to learn from their peers' mistakes and to discuss these risks. However, peers might potentially introduce children to risks as well.
- The involvement of different schools in mediation varies considerably, largely based on the school's environment. While some schools provide children with strategies for dealing with online risks, others do not do very much, or scare children about the dangers of online activities.

Policy implications

- Given the variety of online problematic situations that children experience, it is necessary for them to receive a broader education about the online world (for specifics, see further policy recommendations in Chapter 9). Such education might help children better evaluate and deal with an assortment of online situations.
- In official advice adults should be encouraged to refrain from simply forbidding children's access to the internet as the digital world is likely to continue to be embedded in children's lives, making it difficult to avoid online problematic situations. Furthermore, certain online situations might represent a developmental need, potentially bringing something positive to children's lives. Instead of prohibiting access to or scaring children about online situations, parents in particular should be advised to discuss online experiences with their children, explain why something is risky, be sensitive about (particularly to older) children's desire for a certain amount of privacy, and teach them about the broad array of online problematic situations they might encounter and how to avoid them.
- Parents should be encouraged to foster understandings whereby children feel more comfortable about confiding in them. This is important as some online problematic situations, such as encountering sexual content, make children uncomfortable talking to their parents about unpleasant experiences.
- Schools should provide broad eSafety advice (e.g., about commercial risks, about how online conflicts between peers can escalate) and offer forms of support. Through eSafety, schools should highlight the good points about the internet and avoid creating a moral panic by overstressing the online world as a dangerous and misleading place. In addition, an environment should be created where children can be encouraged to report online problematic experiences to their teachers.
- Parent–school collaboration should occur in the context of eSafety. Parents should be encouraged to inform the school of cyberbullying incidences, and in return, be informed of the policies and measures that schools implement to promote the positive use of the internet and to ensure online safety.
- The power of the peer group should be harnessed to tackle cyberbullying and other types of online victimization as children report the usefulness of bystander support, instances of collective coping with online bullies, and peer intervention for mediating conflicts.
- Sometimes children disengage, minimize the problem, and believe that aggression "just happens." Such actions cultivate an atmosphere of normalization of peer aggression. To this end, fostering increased awareness of how acts thought to be "just teasing" can escalate into serious, harmful incidences might help to motivate children to take preventive measures to neutralize the situation before it gets out of hand.
- Children should be taught non-violent conflict management strategies through anti-bullying campaigns. Such strategies are important as children do report aggressive retaliation and minimising these experiences

2. INTRODUCTION

David Smahel & Michelle F. Wright

Young people are currently surrounded by digital technologies, and through these technologies they experience a variety of positive, but also negative, situations (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). The unique pan-European survey of EU Kids Online II (2009–11) offered insights into how often and what types of harm children experienced in the following online risks: cyberbullying, exposure to sexual materials, sexting (sexual communication), meeting online strangers, personal data problems, seeing dangerous websites, and excessive internet use. EU Kids Online II also studied how children cope with some of these risks, and the effectiveness of parental mediation strategies to reduce these risks. Although there are several pieces of research studying specific online risks from qualitative perspectives (i.e., Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012; Šléglová & Černá, 2011; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2008), most of the current research on online problematic experiences is quantitative, and aimed at understanding the prevalence, definitions and measurement, and the associated psycho-social consequences. But as we know, perceptions of risk differ for children and researchers (Cohn, Macfarlane, Yanez, & Imai, 1995). What researchers describe as "risky" is sometimes perceived as normal and not negative among young people. Therefore, this report introduces research from the EU Kids Online III (2011–14) studies on risks and online problematic situations from children's perspectives. We ask what children perceive as problematic on the internet, and the *meaning of online problematic situations according to children*.

To fulfil this goal, we proposed qualitative investigations, where we took a children-centred approach and asked what children perceived as problematic on the internet. Using this approach, children spontaneously reported many different online situations, from the harmful and unpleasant to the neutral, as well as positive experiences. For example, meeting an online stranger in offline settings was typically a risk from the researcher's perspective, but from the children's perspectives, it was mostly seen as an online opportunity. Children's experiences with meeting strangers varied from very pleasant to harmful feelings. We therefore decided to avoid the term "risks," where children experienced a broad scale of different situations, and instead used the term "online problematic situations" to describe any unpleasant, bothering, or harmful situations on the internet.

We proposed the following *definition of problematic online situations*: "encompassing a broad range of possible online behaviours and experiences that, together or individually, result in a disruption of relationships, values, daily obligations, and or mental or physical well-being" (Mitchell, Sabina, Finkelhor, & Wells, 2009, p. 707). Such a definition of online problematic situations is broader than the previously used term of "online risk," which is defined as the probability of harm (Livingstone et al., 2011). In this report, both terms are used in different contexts.

Research presented in this report is based on focus groups and interviews with *368 children* from the following *nine countries*: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom (UK). Teams from the EU Kids Online network voluntarily joined this comparative research. Therefore, the selection of countries is not the selection of coordinators, but instead a group of voluntary, cooperating research teams with one coordinator (David Smahel). As explained in Chapter 3: Methodology, we involved children from many different social and cultural backgrounds, and recorded a large variability of different perspectives and meanings of online situations. Nevertheless, this report intentionally does not include a special section on cultural comparisons across countries, because producing a systematic analysis of cultural factors remains difficult in qualitative research with relatively

small samples. Despite this consideration, across this report possible observations about country differences have been made, including ones that draw on a background knowledge of specific countries.

The emphasis of this report was on pooling the data from the countries in order to describe the range of online problematic situations, and coping and awareness of them, along with various mediational strategies. We believe that this pooled sample has generated enough material to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the meaning and experience of online problematic situations for children in Europe.

Research questions

To understand children's meanings of online problematic situations and risks, we proposed the following research questions, which we answer in the chapters that follow in this report:
- What do children perceive as being potentially negative or problematic when using the internet?
- What online problematic situations and risks are children aware of?
- What are the consequences of online negative experiences?
- How do/would they react to it (including emotional reaction, behavioural reaction, opinion change etc.)?
- What do/would children do to avoid or prevent these online problematic experiences?
- What is the context for children's perceptions of certain situations as negative?
- In which circumstances are certain situations perceived as negative? In which circumstances are other situations perceived as neutral or even positive?
- What coping strategies work best from children's perspectives?
- How do children evaluate situations that adults consider problematic?
- How are children's negative experiences mediated?

To answer these questions and to conceptually understand these online problematic situations, we propose a new analytical model, which is described below.

Analytical model

The focus of this chapter is to introduce an analytical model that will be used across the whole report. The model was used as a framework for our research, and it will therefore help readers to understand how sections of this report are interconnected and related to each other. This model was developed from one used originally in the EU Kids Online II research (Livingstone et al., 2011), and was enriched to understand processes within the complexity of online activities. The proposed model is also the result of our analyses of qualitative data and is more complex because originally, we used a simpler model. This newer model was constructed during the process of data analyses as we saw new relations between categories of our analyses.

The proposed model has four levels that you can see in the different colour boxes in Figure 1:

1) *National context:* economic, social and cultural factors that shape the individual and his or her online experiences, for example, the educational system, which varies across countries and directly influences media education in schools. The national context also plays a role in our analyses of data from the nine countries because each country has its own social and cultural system.
2) *Social mediation:* the level of the environments that shape and mediate online activities. In this report, we focus on mediations of parents, siblings, other relatives, schools, and peers.

3) *Individual user:* covers offline characteristics of the individual that shape their online activities. These characteristics include demographics (age, gender, socio-economic status etc.), psychological factors (i.e., self-esteem, anxiety, emotional problems), as well as digital skills and literacy, resilience to risks, and awareness concerning problematic experiences (analyzed in detail in this report).

4) *Online activities:* covers the broadness of situations that individuals experience on the internet. These situations can be less or more problematic, but they can also bring opportunities to the user. The arrow between risks and opportunities indicates that both are closely intertwined and "go hand in hand" (Livingstone et al., 2011, p. 142). Preventive measures are preventive online and also include the offline actions of individuals to avoid risks. Therefore, the box of preventive measures is inside both online activities and the individual user levels. Similarly, coping with problematic situations can happen online and also offline. These are actions that individual users do after the online problematic experience. In addition, preventive measures and coping are interconnected, because they influence each other, as explained later. The impact of the online experience can be both positive and negative and also online and offline, depending on the situation, and other characteristics of the individual user (i.e., the same sexual materials can have positive or negative impacts depending on the age of the individual).

Figure 1: Analytical model of the qualitative investigation
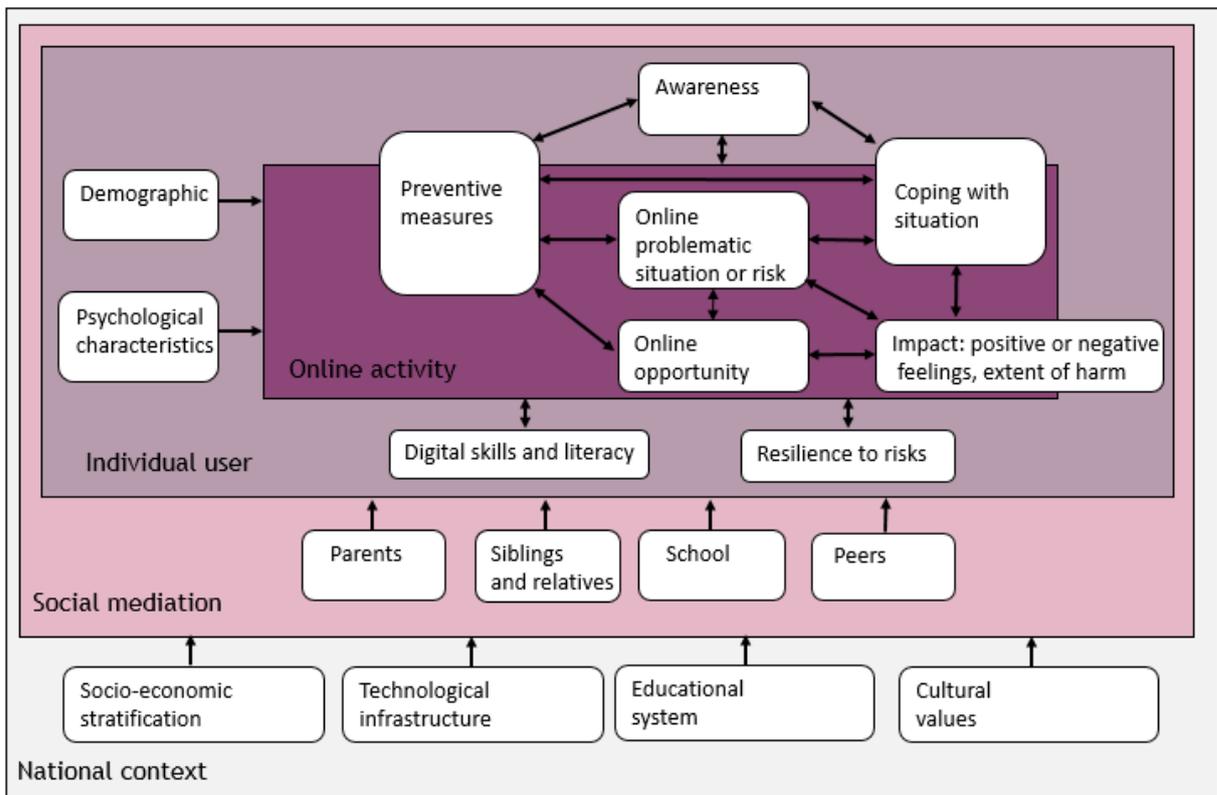
Structure of the report

In Chapter 3: Methodology, we describe our sample, explain in detail the sampling procedures of our qualitative investigation, and introduce two levels of coding that were used to sort the data.

The following sections of the report can be explained using categories from the analytical model (see Figure 1):

1) Online problematic situations: what children experience and what feelings they have in relation to various risky situations
2) Awareness of online problematic situations: what children know and what they are aware of in problematic situations
3) Dealing with problematic situations online, which includes both preventive measures and coping: what children do to avoid risks and what they do when they experience something problematic
4) Mediation from parents, siblings, other relatives, schools, and peers

These sections are organized in the same way and include the following sub-sections:
a) Introduction, which explains definitions of the analyzed categories and describes how they relate to other categories
b) Bullying, harassment and aggressive communication, which describe experiences, awareness or coping of children with any kind of aggressive content or communication, including cyberbullying and harassment
c) Sexual content and communication, which focuses on experiences, awareness, and coping with sexualized materials or communication
d) Meeting strangers, which describes children's experiences with meeting strangers, both online and offline
e) Privacy and the misuse of personal information online, which covers all kinds of privacy and personal data problems, such as sharing personal or intimate data, hacking, etc.
f) Other problematic situations, which includes commercials, health problems, online addiction or excessive internet use and technical problems

The only exception to this structure is Chapter 7: Mediation, which has sub-sections on mediation by parents, siblings, other relatives, schools, and peers.

Finally, age and gender perspectives are also described, where authors focus on possible demographic differences in relevant problems. At the end of each chapter, a summary of the main findings is given.

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3. METHODOLOGY

David Smahel

Participants and sampling

Data collection was organized within the EU Kids Online III project network. The following nine European countries were included: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Pilot focus groups and interviews with young people aged 9–16 were conducted from October 2012 to January 2013, with a minimum of one focus group and two interviews per country. There were 15 focus groups and 18 interviews. The pilot investigation focused on testing the research tools, including the common topic guide and the coding guide. Researchers from the nine countries attended the EU Kids network meeting in January 2013. At this meeting, they discussed their experiences concerning data collection, and were also trained to perform the first level of coding (see section describing coding). The research procedures guide and the topic and coding guides were updated after the discussion.

The main fieldwork using the revised research procedures guide and the topic guide was carried out from February to September 2013. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with young people aged 9–16 in the nine countries. The average number of focus groups was six in each country; three focus groups included girls and three included boys, with age distributions of 9–10, 11–13, and 14–16 (two focus groups each). The average number of interviews was 12 in each country, six for each gender, with the same age distribution as for the focus groups. Young people were selected from at least three different schools and/or youth centres. Schools were chosen to reflect the different types of in each country (public x private, city x suburban x rural). In the schools or youth centres, researchers chose children who had internet access at home and used the internet every day or several times a week. Children used for the interviews were different from the children included in the focus groups. There were 56 focus groups (N = 254) and 114 interviews (N = 114) conducted across the nine countries (see Table 1 for an overview of the data collection).

The study received ethics approval from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Research Ethics Committee (UK). Researchers fulfilled their countries' national ethics requirements. To accomplish ethics requirements, participants were informed about the research in an understandable way, and researchers asked for explicit written agreement (Vandoninck & Haenens, 2013). Informed consent was received from children, parents, and school directors.

Table 1: Overview of data collection in the nine European countries (EU Kids Online III)

Countries	Focus groups			Interviews			Schools	
	Number of groups	N (males + females)	Average duration	Number of interviews	N (males + females)	Average duration	Number of schools or youth centres	Characteristics of schools or youth centres
Belgium	6	36 (17 + 19)	69 mins	20	20 (9 + 11)	30 mins	1 school + 3 youth centres	Catholic and public schools, youth centres
Greece	6	26 (13+13)	88 mins	8	8 (3+5)	40 mins	3	2 public, 1 private (all in the capital)
Malta	6	27 (13+14)	95 mins	12	12 (6+6)	44 mins	18	6 public, 9 church, 3 private
Italy	6	30 (15 +15)	85 mins	12	12 (6+6)	42 mins	3	All public: 1 urban, 2 suburban
Portugal	6	22 (10+12)	66 mins	12	12 (6+6)	50 mins	3	All public and suburban
Romania	8	28 (14+14)	80 mins	11	11 (5+6)	40 mins	6	All public
Spain	6	30 (15+15)	77 mins	12	12 (6+6)	60 mins	4	1 public urban; 1 public semirural; 2 private religious urban
United Kingdom	6	30 (15+15)	90 mins	15	15 (8 + 7)	43 mins	5	
Czech	6	25 (15 + 10)	80 mins	12	12 (7 + 5)	40 mins	5	All public: 2 rural schools, 1 suburban, 2 in cities
Summary	56	254		114	114		51	

Data collection, coding and analyses procedure

A common topic guide with lists of questions was used across the nine countries. The recommended length for a focus group was 80 minutes, and 40 minutes for an interview (see the average length of materials across countries in Table 1). The research was focused on children's perceptions of online problematic situations. During focus groups and interviews, researchers asked what children perceived as being potentially negative or problematic while using the internet, what risks children were aware of when using the internet, what consequences online negative experiences might have, how children reacted to negative experiences, what children did to avoid or prevent these problematic experiences, why children perceived certain situations as negative, and how children evaluated things that adults considered potentially problematic. Because sharing direct unpleasant situations can be problematic in a group of peers, interviews were more focused on the interviewees' direct experiences in comparison to the focus groups. However, some countries had different experiences with the usefulness of the interviews versus focus groups; for example, Italy, Spain, and Romania reported more fruitful and richer focus groups than interviews, with children actually encouraging each other and stimulating the conversations.

First level of coding

Focus groups and interviews were transcribed in the national language of each country (nine languages). Transcriptions were not translated because of the huge amount of material, and therefore the first level of coding focused on condensed descriptions of the material in the English language (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). First-level codes were self-explanatory descriptions concerning the whole material, with the exception of the parts not relevant to the research. Codes included the context of the situation, distinguishing who experienced the situation (e.g., the child, someone the child knew, from the media), and, if necessary for understanding, the researcher's question was also coded. See the example of first-level coding in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Example of first-level coding from the transcript

> MI   Yes, for example when we were outside school people used to take picture of us, I mean, we were taking a picture of us and one... she has a funny face or look and they used to put it on Facebook but the people didn't like it because they will say, I don't look good in this picture, can you take it off?

Komentář [H59]: Images: Miriam knew of instances when people posted pictures and those in the picture asked them to take the image off the profile because it was embarrassing—which they did

From each coded focus group and interview, researchers translated the relevant paragraphs to pick out the 5–10 most interesting passages, or to clarify passages where the meaning of codes was hard to understand. The translated parts were highlighted and stored in a separate file. Table 2 indicates the total number of first-level codes and translations for each country.

Researchers from each country coded data after they were trained during the EU Kids meetings. Two researchers independently coded a minimum of two of the same transcripts, merged their coding into one file, discussed differences in their coding, and sent their results for verification by the coordinator. The coordinator was reviewing the documents in line with the coding manual to ensure quality of the coding procedure across the countries. After verification, researchers coded all materials independently, sending the coded material to the coordinator.

Table 2: Number of first-level codes and translated sections across the countries

Countries	Number of first-level codes	Number of translated interesting sections	Number of problematic situation experiences codes
Belgium	4,518	137	**788**
Czech Republic	2,707	161	**618**
Greece	3,180	120	**384**
Malta	2,809	121	**524**
Italy	2,493	241	**403**
Portugal	1,992	102	**661**
Romania	3,371	168	**732**
Spain	3,410	154	**498**
United Kingdom	2,216	228	**567**
Summary	**26,696**	**1,432**	**5,175**

To maximize the information received from focus groups and interviews, each coded transcript included the following information: country, name(s) of interviewer(s), name(s) of coder(s), number of participants, age of participants, gender of participants, school (type of school: rural, city, private, public etc.), duration (in minutes), and description of the context. The description included information about settings, potential relationships between children, notes about the group climate, notes about emotional reactions, and other circumstances important for the focus group or the interview. Researchers were also asked to code their comments for better understanding of the context of the interview, especially in relation to culturally specific situations.

Second level of coding

Because the material collected in the first level of coding was extremely large (see Table 2), thematic analyses procedures were applied (Feredey & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The following areas were covered in the second level of coding:

- *Research area:* problematic situation experience, problematic situation impact, problematic situation awareness, preventive measures, online activities, mediation, literacy, opportunities, researcher comments, off topic (without any relation to the research)
- *Problematic situation:* strangers, bullying and harassment, sex, unwanted content, commercial risks, technical problems, health and over-use
- *Platform:* social networking sites (SNSs), email, pop-ups, websites, chat and message, video platforms, games and virtual worlds, online phone and video, school platforms, boards and forums, mobiles and tablets
- *Actors – who was involved:* respondent, friend, peer, sibling, parents, teachers and school, media, other people
- *Feelings:* if any feeling were present, both positive and negative

Because detailed descriptions of the coded areas are possibly over the limits of this report, we refer to the "definition file,"[1] which was used for a common understanding of the codes. Five research assistants

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[1] For definitions of the second-level coding, see: http://fss.muni.cz/~smahel/eukodef2013.docx

from the Czech team coded first-level codes for all the countries. The reliability of coding across coders was ensured, with a minimum inter-coder reliability of 0.70 (Kappa) for each category. Information about gender, age, country and method (focus group or interview) was added to the coding file directly from the transcripts.

Second-level codes and translated sections were interconnected by "translation codes" which were linked to the relevant lines of codes. This way researchers were able to find first-level codes and relevant translations for their research (i.e., problematic experience in games, preventive measures and parental mediation etc.). All information was sorted in Excel files and also in an NVivo file. The concrete ways of work with second-level codes and translations varied across teams analyzing different sub-sections of this report. Some teams used NViVo software for analyses; other teams were working directly with Excel files and translated codes.

Limitations

Despite using standardized interview guides and coding guides, attending meetings, and having various online conversations, the different ages, gender, social status, communication styles, and researcher interests from the nine countries might have influenced the direction of the interviews and focus groups. In addition, first-level codes were included in the researchers' national languages, which might have created differences in their decisions about these codes in English. Each of these considerations makes it difficult to compare the findings across the nine countries. We recommend that future research includes smaller groups of researchers from fewer countries. Such a procedure may allow for cross-culture interpretations of findings.

We did not include all European countries in this research. In particular, countries from northern Europe, such as Norway and Sweden, were not included. Including different European countries is important as children from these countries might encounter special kinds of online problematic situations as they are distinct from the rest of Europe, due to their high exposure to online risks and parental mediation (Helsper, Kalmus, Hasebrink, Sagvari, & de Haan, 2013).

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4. ONLINE PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS: WHAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

Introduction

David Smahel & Michelle F. Wright

As we know from EU Kids Online II and also from several other research projects, children experience a variety of positive and also negative situations online (Livingstone et al., 2011; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Although current research shows that positive and negative online experiences are interconnected (Livingstone et al., 2011), most of the current research has only examined negative aspects of internet use (such as online risks, cyberbullying, and meeting strangers), and has not looked at the problematic experiences of children in its complexity, such as interconnections between risks and benefits. In our qualitative investigation, where we interviewed more than 350 children across Europe, who were spontaneously speaking about their negative but also positive online experiences, we are trying to fill this gap in research.

In this section we introduce the online problematic experiences of children from their perspectives. We also describe feelings that children had in relation to relevant problematic experiences. We aim to cover various problematic situations in their complexity, and therefore report both, mostly negative but sometimes also positive, feelings that are related to these experiences. This is also indicated in Figure 3, where online problematic situations are directly related to online opportunities. For example, meeting a stranger can be very dangerous and risky on the one hand, but on the other hand, the child may meet someone who will enrich his or her life.

But the online problematic experience is also related to the preventive measure because preventive actions undertaken by the child can reduce risk to a minimum. The problematic situation could influence the preventive measure – for example, after a bad experience with meeting an online stranger, the child will avoid meeting any online strangers. The impact of the online problematic situation can be at the level of negative feelings and/or even harm, but children often reported just neutral or even positive feelings from the same situation – for example, sexual materials may cause harm, but also pleasure. But as already mentioned in the introduction to this report (Chapter 2), demographics (gender, age, social status, etc.) and psychological factors also play their role in problematic situations. Age and gender in particular are interconnected with the developmental contexts of children, such as peer or romantic relationships, sexuality, identity, and also morality. Previous research has indicated that developmental factors and children's internet usage are interconnected (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006), and we have also revealed that problematic experiences of children are linked to developmental context (Smahel, Wright, & Cernikova, in press). Next we focus on the interconnections between problematic experiences and the developmental contexts.

Figure 3: Online problematic situations as object of analyses in the model
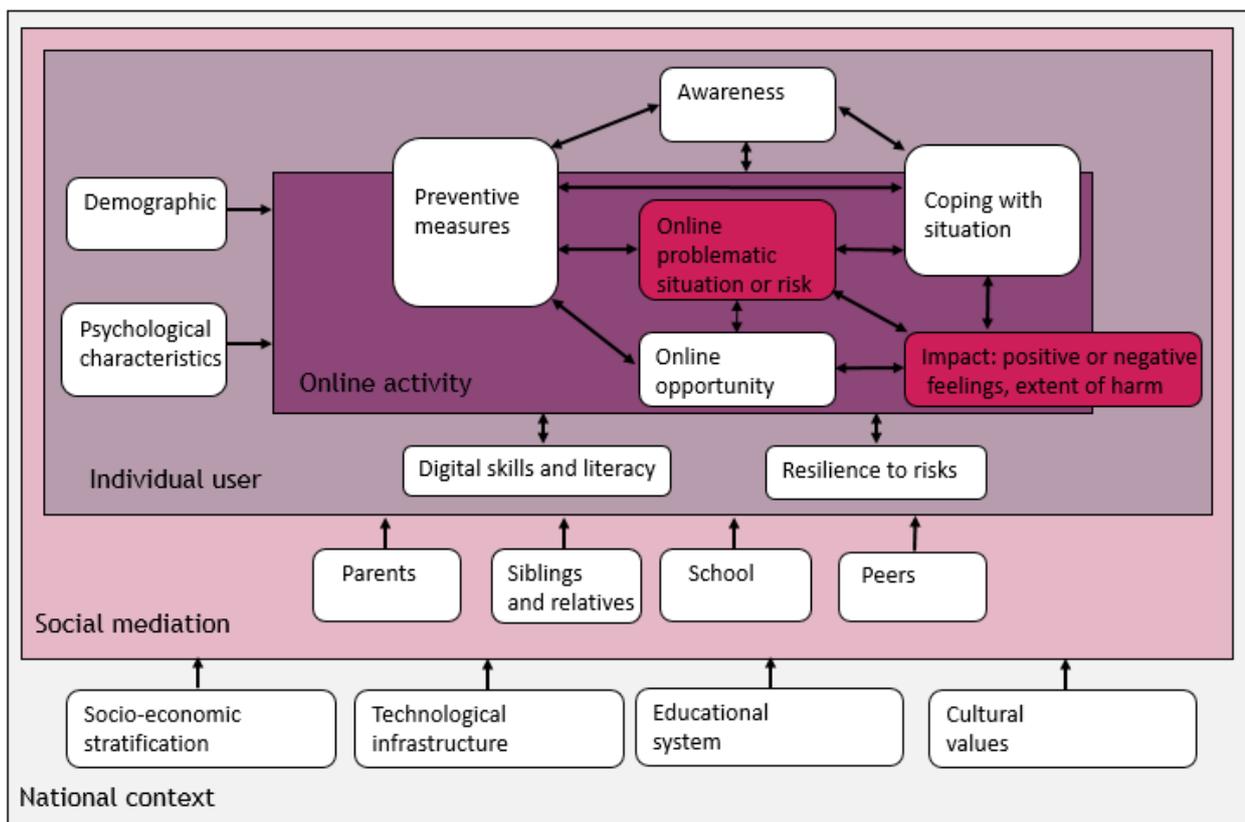
This part of the report is divided into five sub-sections, which describe the following online problematic situations and related feelings: (1) aggressive communication, harassment, cyberbullying and related feelings; (2) sexual problematic situations and related feelings; (3) online strangers and related feelings; (4) privacy and misuse of personal information online and related feelings; and (5) other problematic situations: commercials, health problems, technical problems and related feelings. At the end we describe age and gender perspectives, and summarize the relationship between developmental contexts and online problematic experiences.

Aggressive communication, harassment, cyberbullying and related feelings

Martina Černíková & David Smahel

Children report a range of situations that are included in the categories of aggressive communication, harassment and bullying online. One category called "aggressive communication" encompasses "swear words," "bad language," "calling names," and "cursing." Children usually mentioned these encounters through YouTube, games, or SNSs. These situations are reported across all age categories. The bulk of them occur in the older age category (12–16). Children could see these situations passively in comments or through active communication with others. Children reported examples of "rude" and "bad" comments that they experienced on YouTube or in Facebook groups.

22

And [the internet] is very educational...but stuff on YouTube...there's sometimes...they're starting like 'Suck my D.'...and lots of swearing...it's so annoying...I just had to put it on mute and I don't have to hear that bad stuff... *(boy, 9–10, UK)*

Cases were reported of aggressive communication with strangers. Situations linked with strangers were associated with feeling "annoyed." Some girls also reported feeling fearful – they were scared when strangers wrote bad things to them. Others just evaluated these situations as "weird."

I was on one of those online games. And there's a chat that allows you to speak with everyone else in the game. And I was speaking, I don't remember what, I was a beginner and I asked different things and they offended me; and I told them to cut it out. And it got even worse, but I don't understand why they got mad, for something silly. He said, 'Just wait, I'll find you and beat you up,' and stuff like that. (boy, 15–16, Romania)

Girl: …The only thing is that at some point I picked a fight with someone, but it wasn't a big thing; I just blocked him… He was calling me names.
Interviewer: Was it a stranger?
Girl: Yes, he wasn't even in my friend's list and he had just sent me a message. And I blocked him.
Interviewer: How did you feel?
Girl: It was weird in the beginning because it has never happened before, but then okay, I got confused in the beginning, I didn't know what to do; I didn't keep talking to him and I then blocked him.
(girl, 14, Greece)

Children mentioned also feelings of "anger" or just perceived the situation as "unfair" that somebody had been rude to them:

Boy: Like... I can't remember what it was. I think it was from this kid on this game that I was playing and then this stuff... I can't remember what it was, so I reported him to Club Penguin and then they got him banned from it because... He was using bad language to me and towards my friends… It was a bit of a surprise, but it's happened...it happened quite a long time ago so I...yes, that was the only time and, yes, it was a surprise to me because nobody had spoken to me like that.
Interviewer: Right. I mean, was it just a thing of the moment or were you quite upset a little while afterwards?
Boy: I wasn't upset. I was just like angry because he was being rude and I hadn't done anything to him.
(boy, 10, UK)

Also common were stories of aggressive communication with friends. Situations involving friends could be perceived by children as innocent jokes or tiffs. Arguing and fighting with friends online were also reported. In cases when children perceived these situations as innocent, and called the perpetrators friends, they did not report serious consequences. These situations are also linked with the offline world.

Yes. A friend of me [mine] she once posted a status update, and then somebody commented on this and then they started a fight… Floor [fictional name] she had, she had like posted, 'I'm hot,' on my profile. And then, there is a friend, but she is always…she always says things are not true. And then she had given comments on that post, and then another friend has also commented on this, like 'Take a look at yourself,' and bla bla bla. (girl 14, Belgium)

When we were in year seven, there was a case where...this was a case where…we were like having an assembly, and after our head of year said that someone posted another picture of someone else on Facebook, but they didn't have permission to do it. And after...when I was on Facebook, people were liking the picture, and they were saying like…really horrible comments about that person. And normally she's friends with that

person. I think she meant it as a joke, but she didn't actually realize what she was doing and how it could hurt her friend's feelings. (girl, 11–12, UK)

There were situations that were unclear as to whether they were cyberbullying. Children in some cases directly said that they were not sure if the situation was cyberbullying or not:

She wrote to me that I am a bitch and so on and that she does not know what I think about myself, then she came to me with an older friend, I think she was seventeen or so, they shouted at me and just kept writing, and ugly things. And I then told it to Monča, like, the older sis, and she wrote them to let me be, that it could be enough, and since then I do not go on Facebook much. (girls, 12, Czech Republic)

Some children explicitly said that they were cyberbullied usually via SNS, like Facebook. Children received nasty comments, offensive messages and other children laughed at them. They also reported perpetrators creating Facebook pages against the victim or creating fake photos of the victim:

At lower secondary school I was not in a very favourable environment, to speak frankly, I have been a victim of bullying and cyberbullying. And...on Facebook, being mocked in front of everybody, subjected to continuous comments to candid photos – I mean, not candid, but inappropriate – or to status updates; it is not nice. I was continuously harassed via chat, and I didn't like it at all, so I ended up blocking two or three people… They created a Facebook page that was against me… They took photos where I was joking with my friends, with weird faces, and this was the image of the profile, of the page, and then the page was full of offensive messages. The teachers forced them to delete the page, but it took them some time. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

We received some cases when victims where cyberbullied by peers who had stolen/hacked their profiles. Then perpetrators made nasty comments to people on the victim's profile while pretending to be the victim. In such a case, the victim ends up being cyberbullied twice. They are first bullied by the perpetrator stealing the victim's account, and again, with the perpetrator sending the victim's friends nasty messages from the victim's account. Sometimes the victim's friends do not believe that it was not the victim who sent the nasty messages:

Girl: I don't have Facebook anymore, because I was cyberbullied on there… So some guy got into my Facebook account and wrote all kinds of disgusting things to my friends. Like, I'm going to come and beat you up, stuff like that… Or that my dad will.
Interviewer: Aha. So what was that like?
Girl: Horrible. I had to leave school…
Interviewer: Right. Did you then find out, like, who did it?
Girl: I did. My brother found out. It was one of my friends, but not one I hung out with much.
(girl, 12, Czech Republic)

Children also shared stories of schoolmates and peers who are/were cyberbullied:

One of my friends, Maisy [fictional name], she gets bullied quite often on the internet, in school. It's been happening for years now, they just don't leave her alone, and they have to always pick everything out. Say…she would upload a picture, this girl, she used to be in my year but she isn't anymore… Everyone had to pick out little things, like she had a spot and then someone had to pick it out. Now she's still being bullied, people still pick on her. Teachers have got people in trouble but they just carry on, they don't stop. (boy, 11–12, UK)

24

In cases reported as cyberbullying, children also linked these situations with the offline world and offline situations. They were bullied at school or peers were laughing at them in the offline world.

Interviewer: And have you heard about people who are bullied online?
Boy: Yes, my brother. And first he was afraid to talk about it… He's younger, he's in sixth grade [of primary school] now. Almost in the first year of secondary school. So, yeah, he got bullied at school too, by some girls from his class. And yeah, I accidentally found out about that. And then, yeah, immediately, my whole family, my parents, and so…he received a lot of nasty comments in this pictures from Lotte [fictional name]. There he is bullied. And then it's like: 'Eih, Jente [fictional name] has bad taste.' And things like that. And it continues, it's at school, and it's on Facebook that these girls ridicule him. (boy, 14, Belgium)

A special type of aggressive communication or exclusion from groups happens in games. Children, especially boys, reported cases of "cursing." They also experienced exclusion from a group because of age. Games also make it possible to have avatars and to pretend to be or act like someone else. Using their avatars, children sometimes reported acting violently:

Boy: Well, I've played Chivalry War, it's like, really violent, and well basically it's like set in medieval times and you have like, medieval weapons, and like, when you cut someone's head off it explodes, so, well, if it doesn't explode it just rolls off, and you stab someone; it's really violent.
Interviewer: You say that with a certain pleasure?
Boy: Yes, it's…well, as a site it's like kind of funny, like, when it's like happening to someone else, but like when it's happening to you, [unclear] its really scary, yes.
(boy, 13–14, UK)

Sexual problematic situations and related feelings

Martina Černíková

From all the responses received, we identified two main categories related to problematic sexual situations reported by children. We called these responses "sexual content" and "sexual communication." Sexual content includes sexually related content that children encounter on the internet, such as commercials, pictures, games and so on. Sexual communication is more about relationships and interactions with others.

Sexual content

Situations connected to sexual content that children perceived as problematic or inappropriate are often associated with sexual images or videos that can pop up unexpectedly on the computer screen or that children might encounter in commercials when visiting various web pages. Commercials are linked to dating, porn sites, and/or are trying to sell or tell you something. Instances of sexual content are reported across all platforms, and as an example, young people reported sexual commercials found on YouTube:

Boy 1: If you are on Minijuegos, for example, and things flash up saying, 'ehmm…switch on the webcam and look at this girl…'
Boy 2: Yes, yes, or when you are downloading music, there is this screen at the side with a girl doing dirty stuff!
Boy 3: Some ads come out with those girls, in their bra, showing their whole body. But you can't put it off…it's there all the time.
(boys, 14–16, Spain)

A special platform related to sexual content is gaming sites, where a range of sexual images of naked women or commercials is found. Free porn sites were also reported; some of these sites include sexual content that can't be closed.

I went on this gaming site…and it came up…like… 'Click here to see free…um…porn'…and I didn't want to click it…but then…it looked disgusting. (girl, 11–12, UK)

Some ads come out with those girls, in their bra, showing their whole body. But you can't put it off…it's there all the time. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Also related to sexual content are those situations where children are attempting to find images, websites, games or other content related to homework, and are inadvertently directed to sexual material, such as nude pictures or porn pages. These inadvertent encounters occur among all age groups:

Sometimes I come across very different things. One day I was looking for things and a girl with bare breasts appeared. Just like that, when I was looking for drawings to colour them, I had downloaded some which were already coloured. The photo was obviously coloured! Very strange. (girl, 10, Spain)

Those pictures and movies with nudity…those are, I've tried, I clicked on pictures and I saw exactly that. Although I was looking for something else. Well, usually I search for images. Every time I search images, for most of them, I receive such things. (girl, 14–15, Romania)

Children reported a variety of feelings related to sexual images, videos, and sexual content connected to commercials or unintentional findings. Children aged 9–13 predominantly evaluated this content negatively, stating it was "disgusting." They also reported that what they encountered was "annoying," "feeling sick," "shocking," or "upsetting." They felt "ashamed," too.

Boy: There are some really disgusting adverts like the ladies in bikinis…it's so annoying…it's really inappropriate. Well, it's like…on YouTube…it's just a giant picture of ladies' boobs…and next you see men staring at it…eyeballs like that…er, that's disgusting…and that happened to my cousin once…and he called me…and I said, 'Why did you call me for such a thing like that, that's disgusting?'
Interviewer: What, he had the same picture?
Boy: Yeah, he got the same picture…and then he called me…and started laughing at it…I'm like staring at him… 'You're just…ah… You're just gross'…and I felt sick… I nearly vomited.
(boy, 9–10, UK)

Children aged 14–16 reported that these situations were "bothering." Some explained that they "don't worry" or "don't care" about these situations. We also found cases where such content is perceived as positive, with feelings being described as "enjoyable" or "good." Positive feelings are associated with situations in which children seek out sexual content, such as watching porn with friends:

Well, I don't click on them [sexual videos], so you just have to ignore them, but it's bothering… As when I am looking for a movie in streaming, there are advertising of meeting…the pictures, directly on the page so then it may be bothering. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Boy: We saw it together [youporn].
Interviewer: And how did you feel? Did you enjoy what you saw?
Boy: Well, more or less, I liked it…but after a while it bothered me…
Interviewer: It bothered you? Why?
Boy: Because we saw it on my pc and I was concerned that my parents checked my history…(boy, 14, Greece)

Sexual communication

Children reported sexual communication with known people, but also with strangers. Some girls posted provocative photos of themselves in order to receive "likes" on SNS. They also discussed examples of boys and/or men talking to them or sending them sexual messages and comments. Generally, sexual communication was rarely reported by the youngest age category (9–11), with the bulk of cases reported by older girls (13–16).

Girl: Yes, I've seen that...someone sent me a friend request and we had a lot of friends in common. And he had pictures too. It was a boy and I accepted him. He approached me...well, the first time he said, 'What are you up to?' and 'How old are you?' He asked me a few things about me and from one point on, just like that, all of a sudden, he started suggesting some things I found completely overboard. And I completely blocked him on Facebook.
Interviewer: What kind of suggestions?
Girl: I don't know. In a way, I'm ashamed to say because...
(girl, 13, Romania)

Girls also mentioned seeking out ways to talk to men/boys. For example, girls from Spain chatted with different people from various countries. They used Google to find chat rooms and used webcams to talk to random people. Sometimes older people would tell them things like "take off your t-shirt," or do so and so:

Girl 1: When you are at home with your friends one evening doing silly things, and one might say, 'Let's do this and so and so'… We may laugh about or make jokes to people or we may see some older people who may say, 'Take off your t-shirt or do so and so…' And we say, 'What do you mean, you have gone mad!'
Interviewer: And where do you go for that?
Girl 1: On ChatRoulette.
Girl 2: There are loads… You type 'chat' into Google and you get a long list of places you can go.
Girl 1: The last one I used, with some friends at my house, was ChatRoulette.
Girl 2: You set up the webcam, and you go round meeting different people from different countries. And every so often, whenever you want, you can change people.
(girls, 11–14, Spain)

Another kind of communication is the sharing of sexual content, such as porn sites, sexual videos, or images. These situations are sometimes perceived as wanted or unwanted. Young people didn't usually like sharing such content and evaluated them as inappropriate. They reported feelings of "anger," "disgust," or "bothersome."

Yes, some kids would send me that stuff on Facebook with YouTube, with those ugly videos [porn]. And I wouldn't accept them, I'd tell them stop sending me that stuff, guys, cause I don't watch that kind of stuff, and I told them no more, those would upset me very much. *(boy, 12, Romania)*

Children, especially boys, reported sharing wanted sexual content, which they perceived as normal. Children also mentioned watching sexual material together. These situations are usually reported by older children (14–16).

Interviewer: So…and do you talk about this [watching porn]?
Boy 1 and Boy 2: Yes.
Boy 1: Yes, even here at the youth organization.
Boy 2: And at school.

Boy 2: Yeah, well… I sometimes recommend things. [laughter]
Boy 2: Well yeah, it's like…when I have seen a good porn actress… [laughter]
(boys, 14–16, Belgium)

Girl: I learnt about [porn] when I was a little girl and I started exploring the internet with friends, boys and girls…we found out these things [laughter]. We were looking for them, we knew some sites and we visited them.
Interviewer: And you were watching all together?
Girl: Yes
Interviewer: What were your reactions to that?
Girl: We were young [12–13 years old] and we were laughing.
(girl, 16, Greece)

A special kind of communication involves somebody posting or sharing intimate personal content without the owner's permission. These cases are reported on a continuum from innocent misunderstandings to serious cases. An example of something innocent was a girl who took a video of her friends dancing in a sexy manner and who then posted it:

Girl 1: She recorded a video at a friend's house – nobody noticed it – while some girls were joking while dancing, it was filthy dancing…they were dancing sexy. Then, she uploaded in YouTube.
Girl 2: And the girls appeared on the video without having given their permission…
(girls, 11–13, Spain)

There were serious cases where naked pictures or videos of intimate acts, such as masturbation, were posted and/or shared. These situations usually involved indirect situations that happened to close friends or peers. Such situations were mostly reported by girls.

A girl from the next town…she was with her boyfriend and her boyfriend asked her to masturbate and record the video. And the girl did it, and when they split he uploaded the video. (girl, 9–10, Spain)

Girl: Once, yeah… I stayed around my friend's house and like…and she... I was like…taking my top off, yeah… I was taking my top off in the bathroom to change into my pyjamas…yeah…[others laugh]…and she come in and she took a picture of me like this [others laugh as she poses]…and she posted it all over BBM…and I thought, like, 'You really did that.' [laughs]
Interviewer: So was that embarrassing?
Girl: It was, yeah…it was…and there was a massive black line like that up the centre [indicates a vertical line through her body]…do you know why…cause we'd had like a fight…a pen fight.
(girl, 11–12, UK)

The posting of sexual material as revenge was also reported, including children who shared/or posted naked images, videos, or other sexual content received from an ex-girlfriend to SNSs or YouTube. Sometimes these images and videos were forwarded to friends.

She sent a photo like that, without clothes on, to a friend of mine, a boy. Well, I don't know the girl, I've just spoken to her a few times, and the boy was a friend of mine. I don't know what happened, and the boy, of course, out of revenge, put the photo up. Her photo naked on Tuenti. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

No…I've never…or yeah, well, there was this girl and she had… Yeah, she was a friend of mine, and she sent a naked picture to her boyfriend. And she told us her Facebook password at the party that was going on at the

moment in my house. And some of my friends went to her Facebook profile a few months later, and there they found out about this picture. And then the girl was bullied. (girl, 16, Belgium)

It is common for children to report being a bystander in situations involving the sharing of sexual content without the permission of the owner. As bystanders, their feelings were linked to the victim, such as "felt sorry for the girl" (victim of inappropriate sharing), "felt bad," "felt shocked," and "felt out of place." Young people also perceive these situations as "stupid," especially when they didn't know the victim personally.

Interviewer: So, how do you feel about these things happening? [the boys just told a story about a sexting incident, about naked pictures from a young girl that were shared on Facebook by a boy]
Boy 1: It depends to who it's happening.
Boy 2: Yes, I think… Actually it's painful… But it's also funny.
Boy 3: With some people it's funny.
Interviewer: And why is this funny with some people, and painful with other people?
Boy 3: When you don't really know them.
(boys, 14–16, Belgium)

Online strangers and related feelings

Michelle F. Wright

Although children discussed their interactions with online strangers, they did not experience a variety of feelings regarding such interactions. Based on children's feelings concerning these interactions, the following main areas were identified: friendship requests from online strangers, requests for personal information, contact with online strangers, and compliments by online strangers.

Friendship requests from online strangers

Children reported more feelings pertaining to receiving friendship requests from online strangers when compared to the other areas listed below. This problematic situation elicited feelings of "fear" and "annoyance." They also felt such friendship requests were sometimes "bothersome" and "creepy."

I got a friend request from a boy with no picture and no friends and I got scared [she thinks it was a boy but wasn't sure]. No location, no date of birth, nothing, so I didn't accept the request. *(girl, 13, Romania)*

I received a friend request from an old man [31 years old], a stranger. It was very creepy. *(girl, 14–16, Belgium)*

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So they check it... Good. And... Are requests still occasionally coming from strangers?
Girl: Uh-huh.
Interviewer: How do you react to that?
Girl: I reject it right away.
Interviewer: Okay, okay. And what do you think about it? Who are these people sending the requests? Where do they come from?
Girl: Well, I do not think about it that much. So whenever I receive a request, I immediately refuse it, because I am really afraid to add any strangers.
Interviewer: Uh-huh. And what could happen if you added a stranger?
Girl: Well, they could find out my information and abuse it.

Interviewer: Aha. How would they abuse this information?
Girl: Well, maybe, if they were a thief, so they could break into an apartment or something like that.
Interviewer: Yeah, like that.
(girl, 11, Czech Republic)

Requests for personal information

Many children explained that online strangers requested their phone numbers, addresses, and the name of their school. The request for this personal information was perceived as "bothersome". It also led some children to feel sadness and anger.

Someone asked for my phone number, Skype, and address through a game. I was bothered and so I ignored them. *(girl, 9, Portugal)*

On Facebook someone asked me for my address and phone number. My mom told me not to give it and I deleted the person. I felt sad and angry. *(girl, 9, Portugal)*

A stranger wanted me to add my telephone number on Facebook. It was bothering, but I ignored the request. (girl, 11–13, Italy)

Contacted by online strangers

Sometimes children described their contact with online strangers more generally, without specifying the nature of the contact. Despite the type of contact, children felt "scared" or "bothered" when unknown people contacted them online.

I was accessing the internet and YouTube when someone showed up wanting to talk to me. I felt scared and called my mother. I thought the person could stalk or harm me. I was afraid. My parents told me to ignore it, but it didn't help. I still felt very bothered by the experience. (girl, 9, Portugal)

In blogs and Tumblr, I was contacted by others, but their identity was not disclosed. I was scared and bothered by this contact. I was scared because I felt exposed. (girl, 16, Portugal)

A stranger was asking me to meet up. I was scared and he kept contacting me as soon as he went online asking me to meet up. I did not speak to him and I blocked him. (boy, 9–10, Malta)

A stranger asked for a picture of me in my swimsuit. I was scared and told my mom and friends. (girl, 13, Italy)

Compliments from online strangers

A final area described as problematic by children was receiving compliments from online strangers. Generally, such compliments made them feel incredibly "uncomfortable" and "scared."

When I was 14, I created a Facebook account. I received a compliment about my looks and I didn't reply. It was from an adult man and I was scared. I realized who I should be in contact with, and I changed my privacy settings. (girl, 16, Portugal)

A stranger said that he liked me and that I was pretty. This was creepy, and I felt uncomfortable and weird about this. (girl, 11, Belgium)

Privacy and misuse of personal information online and related feelings

Monica Barbovschi

The children expressed a variety of feelings related to privacy online and misuse of personal information, mostly their own, but also of their peers. The following main areas were identified from children expressing their feelings about various problematic situations they encountered online: private information, shared or tagged without permission, and misused, hacked and fake accounts.

Private information

The general area of "private information" referred to general situations about the lack of privacy online, too much exposure and giving out personal information, and included "too much information about others", "too much information about themselves" and "giving out information about themselves."

Too much information about others

Negative feelings about people posting too many, silly, or private things (i.e., information that they deemed as being too private and thus inappropriate for posting for others to see) was mentioned mostly by older adolescents (14–16), but also those in the 11–13 group. Their feelings varied from "annoyed" and "bothered" to "I don't like it," "uncomfortable," to feeling overwhelmed by the nature and amount of information posted by others. However, a small number of children reported having got used to the amount of information and not being particularly bothered, or just thinking of this practice as being silly:

> *Interviewer: Hmm, hmm. So do you think here is too much crap on Facebook?*
> *Girl: Yeah!*
> *Interviewer: Yes?*
> *Girl: Yes, and lots of useless things, like 'I'm now going to work', and things like that all the time, yeah…*
> *Interviewer: And do you have specific friends who really post too much on it?*
> *Girl: Yes.*
> *Interviewer: And do you feel bothered by this?*
> *Girl: Yes. There is this girl, in my school, I don't really know her very well, actually I've never talked to her. But I know who she is. And she posts a picture about every hour… Yeah I really don't like that.*
> *Interviewer: And do you do something about that?*
> *Girl: No, well yeah, if she really wants to do that… I'm not going to tell her because yeah… I'm just thinking to myself 'you could post less often'.*
> *Interviewer: But you don't delete her as friend?*
> *Girl: No.*
> *(girl, 16, Belgium)*

Too much information about themselves

This usually involved expressing negative feelings about the pressure to reveal information or to be constantly online, or the sensation of being constantly watched and spied on. The feelings children expressed were being bothered or not liking it, and being scared by the prospect of people constantly watching. Few children said they were not bothered by the pressure to be constantly online and to reveal information about themselves:

Interviewer: Are there any other unpleasant things that can happen online to kids and young people your age?
Boy: Stalking. For instance people like me who put up a lot of posts about what's happening and so on, there would be people who are accessing their profile and they see what's going on. For instance, you notice that this girl adds you and then she would be stalking you. She would know that last time so and so happened and you were there and it's like scary.
Interviewer: Why is it scary?
Boy: It's true that I divulged the information, but it is scary how much people can follow what you do and don't do.
(boy, 14–16, Malta)

Disclosing personal information on websites

The third type of situation in relation to disclosing personal information online was filling in information about themselves for various online accounts, websites or contests, which prompted feelings of annoyance or worries and concerns about strangers accessing it.

These situations involved no wrongdoing, unethical or illegal behaviour, as opposed to other main types of situations reported. In general, the negative feelings expressed were of rather moderate intensity, with no significant reporting of harm occurring. However, this assessment is biased as it depends heavily on specifics of the interview procedures, circumstances in various national contexts where data was collected, and accuracy of translated materials and codes.

Shared or tagged without permission

The second area that children expressed negative feelings about was the practice of unwanted sharing or tagging of photos and videos by peers on SNSs. This area included "peers posting private or embarrassing information (pictures, videos) of the respondent without the child's will," "peers tagging the respondent without her or his will," "peers modifying pictures without the child's will," and "peers refusing to take down the picture/untag the respondent."

The practice of sharing photos of peers and tagging is widespread among all age categories investigated. However, it sometimes might happen without the child's explicit permission, or it is done in a way that is meant to be hurtful. Children's feelings are somewhat aligned with the perceived severity of the act and the degree of control they feel they have over it. Although they express general feelings of being annoyed or bothered (Belgium, Italy, Malta, Romania, across all ages), they sometimes feel it is okay if a friend does it and the friend is willing to remove the picture or the tag. However, their feelings can escalate to extreme anger or severe depression and sadness if the peer who did the unwanted post refuses to remove it:

Or, like this friend of mine, who one day on Facebook posted a picture of the two of us together when we were skiing, but I was fine with it because he had also written 'my best friend and I'. (boy, 9–10, Italy)

Misused, hacked and fake accounts

The third area of problems children reported negative feelings about was "misused, hacked and fake accounts," which encompassed a variety of situations, including "fake or impersonating profiles of others," "impersonating profile of the child used to hurt him (mock him, make fun of him)," "hacked account of child/used to send rude messages," and "receiving rude messages from hacked accounts of

peers." The practice of "peers sharing SNS passwords and misusing the account" was reported by a small number of children (Romania).

Fake or impersonating profiles of others

The first situation, having to deal with fake or impersonating profiles of others, created various feelings, from not being particularly bothered or even bored by the practice, to being bothered or extremely upset and angry. The case of a girl in the Czech Republic stands out as a particular instance with harm occurring after falling in love with a fake Facebook profile created by her peers:

> Girl 1: And then we were writing with one of her friends I. [full name], that probably, to our fake profile...
> Girl 2: Fell in love. I guess so.
> Girl 1: Unfortunately.
> Girl 2: Unfortunately.
> Girl 1: But really.
> Girl 2: It was horrible.
> Girl 1: It's disgusting and A., I hate you because of it completely now.
> Girl 2: We just...and it was such a moment when we began to talk with A.
> Girl 1: And we're talking normally.
> Girl 2: Like cool.
> Girl 1: Okay well, tell me, tell me. She fell in love, right.
> Girl 3: Well, she fell in love with us. And it was embarrassing, you know. Not that I would totally hate her, but I was annoyed that she does not talk with me, so I am not talking to her. And it was quite funny at the beginning and then it was really embarrassing. She was really nice, she was saying...that was really stupid. And then E. said, if I do not want to do it instead of her, that it is too much work. So I wanted to end it somehow. So the model will fly to America to take pictures for a lot of money, the guy was really quite nice.
> (girls, 13–14, Czech Republic)

Impersonating profile of child used to hurt him

A second type of impersonating profiles, this time with peers impersonating the respondent, elicited negative feelings, with children being in general very upset and frustrated by this happening to them. At times, the severity of the act was perceived as worse when one of their friends did it. However, some children reported just being puzzled, indicating either the ability to build resilience or some sort of desensitizing occurring by the increased perceived normalcy of these practices:

> My sister, who is 16. The is an SNS to meet people [Badoo] and a friend of hers sent her a message saying that, using photos of my sister, someone was pretending to be her. Then she saw what had happened and she was really upset; they went to report it to the police and they deleted the account and everything. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Hacked account of child/used to send rude messages

The type of situation children reported most in terms of negative feelings was having their accounts hacked (computer, games, Instant Messenger [IM] or SNSs). All countries and ages reported some form of hacking and negative feelings varying from bothered, scared, worried, powerless, unsafe, violated, panicky, to extremely upset and angry, or furious. The severity of the feelings reported usually increased when the hacked account of the child was used to send rude messages to peers, relatives, or teachers, with children facing the additional embarrassment of having to explain and justify themselves. The annoyance reported

was also related to the amount of work needed to restore the account, for example, having to add all the contacts back deleted from an IM account:

> *Interviewer: Aha...and has your account ever been hacked? Any account?*
> *Boy: Yes. A loooot of them…especially my Messenger account...all the time.*
> *Interviewer: By people you know or strangers?*
> *Boy: Yes, people I know.*
> *Interviewer: And did it bother you?*
> *Boy: Friends...yes...it bothered me... I used to have a lot of friends.*
> *Interviewer: And what did they do... I mean, did they delete your friends or what?*
> *Boy: Yes... I used to have a great deal of IDs and couldn't memorize them all.*
> *(boy, 14, Romania)*

Gender differences can be found in relation to reporting negative feelings regarding hacked games accounts (mostly boys, in Romania, the Czech Republic and the UK). The severity of the feelings reported increases with the amount of perceived loss, for example, stolen items from games accounts, sometimes items they have paid with real money (although country differences might play a role, with UK children being more upset by the hacking in itself than by the amount of loss, as opposed to Romanian children). One Romanian boy (12) reported not being particularly bothered because he did not care much about his games account. However, there are few indications of children getting used to having their accounts hacked, and learning to accept this as a part of their online lives, such as the case of one Romanian boy (14), or Spanish girls who reported not being bothered (11–13). In one case, a Greek girl reported mixed feelings (exercising patience, but also getting cross) in relation to her account being hacked:

> *Interviewer: How many friends do you have on FB [Facebook]?*
> *Girl: I had a FB profile but it was hacked and, like, I had 900 friends or so, and now, about a week ago, I opened a new one and now I have about 500!…*
> *Interviewer: What exactly happened?*
> *Girl: They logged into my profile; basically, they changed my password and I couldn't log in. Then my best friend logged in at hers, checked out mine and saw that everything was deleted…photos, files, everything…*
> *Interviewer: So do you know who did it?*
> *Girl: Yeah I do!*
> *Interviewer: And how did you deal with it?*
> *Girl: …with patience to begin with [laughs], but then I got crossed and told him 'don't you ever do that again' 'cause he's done it to my friend as well, though he didn't delete anything there. But we do know it's him cause he was, like, joking with it a couple of days before, going 'I'm gonna hack your profiles' and stuff, and we didn't take him seriously*
> *Interviewer: So it's not as if you've fallen out or something?*
> *Girl: No, not at all, we're [still] friends.*
> *(girl, 14, Greece)*

Receiving rude messages from hacked accounts of peers

A fourth type of situation involved feelings about receiving rude comments from hacked accounts of peers. Children reported feeling ambivalent about these situations, particularly when they couldn't assess the credibility of the peer denying the act: they reported being confused, not knowing what to think, in addition to being angry and upset. One girl in Belgium (15) reported not being upset because her friend was able to prove his account was hacked:

Interviewer: What? And how did you find out about that?

Girl: Yes, so I sent ansms to my friend, and he told me the profile was fake. So he went home, and yeah, then he told it was fake.

Interviewer: So, somebody, your friend, you were first thinking, that he was having a fight with you on Facebook?

Girl: Yes, but yeah…

Interviewer: Yes? And then you sent your friend an SMS to ask 'why are you doing this'? Or…?

Girl: Yes, and then he said he didn't do anything, but first I didn't believe him.

Interviewer: Hmm, hmm

Girl: And yeah, then he forwarded me this, so to prove to me that it wasn't him.

Interviewer: Hmm, hmm, and did you anything about this fake profile?

Girl: No, but then he deleted this himself, so yeah.

(girl, 15, Belgium)

Peers sharing SNS passwords and misusing the account

The last type of unpleasant situations children have to deal with is password sharing among peers and misuse or their accounts, although this was only reported by a small number of children (all in Romania). Two girls (13) reported feeling "weird" about a classmate wanting to share her Facebook password with them, and a third girl (15) reported being bothered by peers logging into her account and "liking things in her name," and putting her in a relationship with a boy without her knowledge and permission:

If it were a friend with whom I had shared the password, because it's happened, now I've changed it but before, two friends knew my password but they weren't logging in because they didn't have anything to do there anyway. Just because I had given it to them, when I was over at their place and I was too lazy to write and they did it for me but they didn't log in anyway, yes once, during winter break, when I had spoken, I don't remember anymore, with a boy, one of them logged in and saw everything I had said and she wrote me and liked my other friend's post for which she kept calling me insisting I should like and I said I couldn't because I was on the phone and it's too stupid and I can't like posts and...and later I realized I could, and I like it, and then I got upset and when I got home I changed my password and withdrew the like for that post. (girl, 15, Romania)

Other problematic situations: commercials, health problems, technical problems and related feelings

Martina Černíková, David Smahel, & Michelle F. Wright

Commercials

Problematic situations connected to commercials were reported in a variety of situations. It is common for young people to encounter commercials or pop-ups while they are using the internet – receiving messages, visiting SNSs, and browsing websites; situations where advertisements or pop-ups appear while they were playing games or trying to find information were also very common. Young people reported a variety of feelings with regard to situations where pop-ups or commercials suddenly appeared. Their feelings toward these situations included "frustrated," "annoyed," "bothered," "irritated," "angry," "hate," and "upset". Young people also explained that there were cases of advertisements on YouTube before a video started, which "bothered" or "annoyed" them.

I don't like that every time I look for 'pencil', say, then some pink boxes appears, which is advertising, and sometimes I scroll the page, in order to avoid clicking on it, but they move and I click on it. I mean, they move as if there were someone moving them and...I don't like it, it's bad...something pops up, for example, if it is a game advertisement, or a video...then this pop-up shows up and asks, 'Do you want to install this game?', or 'Do you want to download this video?' And it bothers me a lot, because you are doing an online search and you are diverted to something you are not interested in. (girl, 9–10, Italy)

Like YouTube, if you click on it and you go into it...sometimes there's an advert and it says, 'You can start this thing in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1'...I can't be bothered to wait so long...to wait for that advert to open up...and then sometimes it takes...you have that circle that goes round and round for ages. (boy, 9–10, UK)

Strong feelings and an amount of reported cases could imply that problematic situations connected to commercials are "hot topics" for children. We received examples across all age categories. But younger children (9–12) mentioned cases when they couldn't close the advertisements. These situations were accompanied with negative feelings, such as "annoying" or "upsetting."

For example, when I click somewhere by mistake and there is an ad that is not possible to close so simply or to reboot the computer is not possible… (boy, 11, Czech Republic)

Another category linked with commercials included situations where commercials or pop-ups tell you that you could win something or suggest you buy, download, fill something in or click on a link.

Yeah...the thing like...if you press something on the internet...say you're doing research or playing a game of something...you click on it and then things like, 'If you press this button now win an iPhone 5'... I don't do that because... I was once tempted to do it but my brother told me that once you clicked on it will just...like the whole computer system go corrupted. (girl, 9-10, UK)

Children also reported commercials where sexual content was found in games, on YouTube, or when they browsed the internet.

Yes, and then it gets stuck [grey bar on YouTube]. Then a pop-up comes up, for example, it would be women, you know those women you can buy! Real life women! Like you. They are selling them so that men can take advantage of them. (mixed focus group of boys and girls, 14–16, Malta)

Many children reported strong feelings connected to commercials and pop-ups. Children experienced these situations as intensely "irritating" or "frustrating," and occasionally they would break devices. Some children perceived it as something "awful." They explained that commercials and pop-ups were present on every webpage, and it was annoying as they could not always get rid of them.

Boy: But like, as soon as a pop-up comes up… I don't like it…because things will come up on pop-ups…pop-ups will become more pop-ups…and it'll just become a big pop-up mess.
Interviewer: Right. And as you said before, that irritates you.
Boy: Yes. So much. I almost broke my laptop. I almost…ripped the screen in half…I mean…seriously like …I was holding the middle of it…and you could see little cracks appearing…and then I stopped and I thought, 'No. No, better not.'
(boy, 12, UK)

Health problems

Children reported cases when they were able to see connections between health and internet usage. What children perceived as problematic is, first, excessive use of the internet. They perceived it as an "addiction" such as when they couldn't stop playing games or get offline. Many cases perceived as addiction were linked with games, SNSs, or just globally, with the internet. They also mentioned examples of being online "non-stop" and using their smartphone at school.

And I wanted to see what is it about, how you play it, what is it...and like this, I couldn't give it up. It was winter, I liked it. I like to see how it snows, I like to make snowmen and I just couldn't quit. My mom was calling me to dinner, I was telling her 5 more minutes, and on and on, it kept on going until she came to get me. (boy, 10, Romania)

During the holidays I'm on Xbox all night non-stop. (boy, 13–14, UK)

Some children did not mention situations in which they spent a lot of time online as "addiction." Instead, they reflected that time passed them by while they were online. They felt "bothered" or "annoyed" that they spent too much time online.

Yes, there are times that you are on the internet and the time just flies and you think, 'Oh no, an hour has passed and I was here the whole time.' But I think that if you don't want to be on the internet, you can do other things. (girl, 14, Spain)

I spend most of my time on YouTube. I stay there and I don't notice time is flying by. (boy, 9, Portugal)

Other situations connected with health problems are linked with scary/gory content. Children reported examples of scary/gory games, videos or pictures that caused them nightmares. They also reported feeling "bad" or "frightened" after viewing such content. These examples were usually mentioned by the youngest age category (9–11).

Interviewer: How does it work, zombie games?
Boy 1: You have to kill zombies, shoot them and so on... But I do not like it because I have bad dreams when I play, quite brutal…
Interviewer: Do you have bad dreams?
Boy 1: Well, when I play quite a brutal game.
Boy 2: Me too.
Interviewer: Really? And what kind of dreams?
Boy 1: That someone kills me or pushes me off a block of flats.
(boys, 10, Czech Republic)

Some videos I see on the internet make me scared. They are filthy videos or that sort of things. I don't feel frightened… Filthy images don't frighten me! But they make me feel bad. Because I don't like them. And frightening things stay in my mind. (boy, 10, Spain)

In the context of health, young people reported seeing pro-anorexia or bulimia websites. They also found profiles promoting anorexia or bulimia as well as racism.

I have met people with eating disorder problems and I know that the internet is not a factor that helps. Today there is this idea of physical beauty that young people try to achieve, and the internet is a way to expose that image even more. (girl, 16, Portugal)

Yes. On Twitter sometimes you find people who have some ideas which have nothing to do with yours. People picking on somebody from a different race… Or, I have even seen some accounts promoting anorexia. I find it...appalling! I have reported such accounts. (boy, 13, Spain)

Problematic situations linked with online communication could lead to losing contact with reality. Children explained that they had their own online world, different from adults.

I joined an online story writing club and almost lost contact with reality. I lived in the virtual world. (girl, 16, Romania)

Technical problems

Some children experienced problematic situations involving technical problems. Many of these situations occurred via the internet, computers, and gaming. Furthermore, children reported a variety of feelings resulting from specific problems they experienced while navigating or attempting to navigate the internet, using computers, and playing games. In particular, they felt "annoyed," "frustrated," "angered," and "bothered" by slow internet, freezing internet, the internet not working, and failed internet searches. Failed internet searches also elicited "disappointment" when a search yielded unnecessary information.

Unpleasant when internet is not working and error messages appear. (girl, 11, Romania)

The worst and frustrating thing is freezing internet when you need to find something I need for a lesson. The internet freezes and I have to shut it down and turn it on again. (boy, 12–14, Czech Republic)

I typed 'games for phones' in the search box and found a shop selling phones, so I was very disappointed. (girl, 9–10, Italy)

Usually I can find what I'm searching for on the internet, but when I don't I get annoyed. (boy, 9, Czech Republic)

Similarly, children explained that they felt "annoyed," "frustrated," "angered," and "bothered" by their laptops/notebooks needing to be recharged, getting a virus on their computer, and not being able to use the computer because it was too slow, crashed, or had some error. In addition, they also reported that they felt "scared" when their computer got a virus, "worried" about the possibility of their computer getting infected, and "sadness" when people sent them computer viruses.

I am bothered by the slowness of my computer not only on the internet, but also when I use other programs. (girl, 9–10, Romania)

Slow computer can be annoying when doing schoolwork. (girl, 13, Belgium)

I feel sad when people send me viruses repeatedly. (girl, 12, Malta)

I felt scared and nervous when the computer froze. I feel more anxious when I use my mother's computer because it's faster than mine. (girl, 16, Portugal)

Not only did children report less technical problems concerning online gaming; they also discussed fewer feelings. Children felt "annoyed," "upset," and "bothered" when they lost progression in a game, experienced a computer problem that negatively influenced game play, or received a virus from a game. "Anger" was also reported in response to experiencing a computer problem while playing a game.

> While I was playing a game, my computer blacked out. I was so angry that I broke the keyboard and punched the wall next to me. I had to start playing the game again from the beginning. *(boy, 14, Czech Republic)*

> I was upset because I could not play some very cool games because of my computer. *(girl, 9–10, Romania)*

> I am bothered by viruses you would find in games. *(girl, 9–10, Italy)*

Age and gender perspectives

Problematic situations related to aggressive communication, cyberbullying, and harassment did not differ much by age and gender. Such situations were reported most often by the older age category (12–16). Boys and girls both mentioned cases of aggressive communication, with boys reporting these situations in games and girls on SNSs. Direct cases of cyberbullying are reported more by girls, but generally cases of cyberbullying are present in both girls' and boys' stories. Children in the youngest age group reported cases of aggressive communication when somebody wrote bad words to them. These situations were perceived as unfair and elicited feelings of anger.

Experiences linked with sexual content involved children of all age categories finding sexual content by mistake. However, the older age category (12–16) sometimes intentionally looked for porn. We found differences in their feelings connected to sexual content. Younger children mentioned mostly negative feelings, such as "annoying," feeling "sick," "shocked," and upset and disgust. Older children (14–16) did not always perceive sexual content negatively. Sometimes they felt bothered by such content, but they also thought this content was enjoyable and good.

Cases related to sexual communication are directly and indirectly experienced by the older age category (12–16). Sexual communication was mostly reported by girls. They experienced cases of strangers talking "sexy" to them. From girls we received stories about posting sexy or provocative photos just to receive "likes." Stories about watching porn with peers were also reported. Another situation involved boys posting naked or private photos of girlfriends or ex-girlfriends as revenge. Sometimes these boys posted such photos for no particular reason.

Problematic situations connected to meeting strangers did not differ too much by age and gender. More specifically, all age groups reported that strangers would send them messages and friend requests. Older children communicated with unknown people and met online peers in the offline world more often than younger children.

Children's reports concerning problematic situations connected to private information did not differ much. Older children (14–16) reported that they were bothered or feel angry by people reporting private information online. Younger ages also mentioned similar feelings. Situations such as posting, sharing or tagging photos of friends online were present in all age categories and reported by girls and boys.

Other problematic situations, such as technical problems (e.g., freezing computer, slow internet, failed internet searchers) or having to watch commercials in order to review desired content did not differ

much across the age groups. In addition, all age categories reported strong feelings linked with unwanted commercials that they were sometimes unable to close. Unwanted commercials often interrupted the viewing of desired content.

Summary: linking online problematic situations and children's development

Michelle F. Wright, David Smahel, & Martina Černíková

Digital media are embedded in many children's lives, and therefore it is likely that the situations they encounter through these technologies extend into various developmental contexts. Supporting this premise, research indicates that children's online and offline worlds are interconnected, intertwined, and bi-directionally related with each other (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006). Furthermore, other research (i.e., Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011) suggests that online and offline risks are associated. As another social environment, the digital world impacts children's development. We argue that online problematic experiences impacts young people's development in the context of peer relationships, romantic relationships, parent–child relationships, schools, sexuality, identity, health, and morality, and retrospectively, developmental context shapes the problematic experience. We describe these arguments in details in an article focused on this issue (Smahel, Wright, & Cernikova, 2014), and here we summarize how the developmental contexts of young people and problematic experiences are interconnected.

Considering that children spend a great amount of time with their peers, it is not surprising that many online problematic situations involved their peers and friends (Parker et al., 2006). As described above, they reported that their peers and friends sent them content that was violent, vulgar, or sexual. In addition, children perpetrated, experienced, and/or witnessed hateful, vulgar, or nasty messages. Bullying and bothering content are widespread on the internet, and children are particularly concerned with such experiences (Livingston et al., 2013). Most stories of aggressive communication, cyberbullying, and harassment were reported by the older age group (12–16), with girls reporting these experiences most often through SNSs. Another form of bullying occurred when children were killed, cursed, excluded, and/or verbally assaulted in online games. Many children join social groups (i.e., clans, guilds) through online games, and being excluded or killed is distressing (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2007). Boys explained that they experienced these forms of cyberbullying through online games more often than girls. Another activity that children, particularly among the older age group, reported was meeting peers they met online in the offline world. In addition, sending friend requests or writing to strangers their age were activities reported by all age groups and across both genders.

Children were aware of the dangers associated with online dating, and many were bothered by sexual or vulgar content displayed in dating site advertisements. Although bothered by this type of content, children reported that they posted attractive or sexual content, usually through pictures, as a means of attracting their peers. Such findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Katzer, 2009; Siibak, 2009). Little attention has been given to children's involvement in revenge porn, but our findings reveal that revenge porn does exist among this age group. Among these experiences, children reported that they knew of incidences that involved their peers sharing private, sexual pictures of previous romantic partners as revenge.

Many children strive for autonomy by creating their own online identity separate from their parents' world (Parker et al., 2006). With this desire, it is not surprising that conflicts do occur among parents and their children concerning the amount of time that they spend online and the type of content they are allowed to view (Mesch, 2006). Parents restricted young people's ability to create profiles on SNSs,

40

argued with them regarding being addicted to the internet or mobile phones, invaded their privacy, and spied on them. Children were bothered by this behaviour as they believed that it meant their parents did not trust them.

Online problematic situations connected to the school context involved children encountering untrue information while completing schoolwork. Many children do not have sufficient experience to determine credible sources (Flanagin & Metzger, 2010). Thus, some children explained that they had used untrue information for their school assignments, which was perceived as bothering and problematic. Cyberbullying targeting teachers was also reported as another online problematic situation that involved children perpetrating such actions or knowing about it.

Children's exposure to online sexual content is a major concern of parents and researchers as it is difficult to completely avoid such content in the digital world (Yan, 2006). Consistent with this research (e.g., Katzer, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2013), our findings suggest that exposure to pornography and other sexual materials occur through various platforms. Despite being bothered by some sexual content, children reported sexualized communication with their peers, and sharing sexual pictures or videos to receive "likes" from their peers. Although children of all age groups found sexual content by mistake, older children (12–16) sometimes sought this content out intentionally. Younger children explained that they felt mostly negative feelings toward sexual content, whereas older children's feelings ranged from the negative to the positive. Girls were more likely than boys to report that they experienced sexual communication and had posted sexy or provocative photos to receive "likes."

To express their identity in the digital world, some children shared personal data (Subrahmanyam et al., 2006). Although an understudied area in the literature, identity and personal data are other prominent online problematic situations reported by children. They shared personal information online as well as their passwords to their Facebook or game accounts with their family members and friends. Despite experiencing instances of someone changing or misusing their personal information, children did not perceive the sharing of passwords as risky. These experiences were reported among younger and older children.

Some children also reported health consequences of internet addiction. Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Chou & Hsaio, 2000), children reported headaches, eye problems, sleep problems, and losing friends after becoming addicted to the internet. Children recognized the symptoms associated with internet addiction, such as losing contact with reality and losing interest in activities.

With the technology boom, some researchers (e.g., Shin, 2008) have proposed that information technology might undermine children's moral values. However, our findings are unclear as to whether they support this premise. Children engaged in unlawful activities, such as downloading illegal games, software, videos, and music. They also encountered racist or hateful content on the internet, which is supported by previous research (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2007). Through online commercials, pop-ups, and email, children reported that they were exposed to fake information, but the specific content was not described in much detail.

Taken together, our findings reveal the complexity of various online problematic situations that children experience, either directly or indirectly. We also found that their experiences were connected with developmental contexts. In addition, situations which researchers might consider problematic were not always perceived in the same way among children, such as sharing passwords with their peers. Many prevention programmes focus on cyberbullying and meeting online strangers offline. Such programmes are narrowly focused and might be better revised to help children deal with an assortment of online

problematic situations. Redesigning these programmes as ongoing and as adjusting with age is important. The internet is an unavoidable aspect of all our lives, and therefore it is not likely that children will be able to avoid online problematic situations. The policy implications are described in detail at the end of this report, in Chapter 9.

Based on the idea that developmental contexts of children and online problematic experiences are interconnected, we propose a new classification of online problematic situations, which is explained in Chapter 8: Conclusions.

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5. AWARENESS of ONLINE PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

Introduction

Giovanna Mascheroni

Children's and adults' perspectives on online risks may differ greatly: what parents, teachers and other caregivers label as dangerous may not be framed as problematic within youth cultures. Children make sense of online experiences, and define them as problematic or not, on the basis of their developmental context (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006), and according to peer norms and expectations (Flores & James, 2013; Hagen & Jorge, forthcoming): the process of *sense-making* of internet risks (Wall & Olofsson, 2008) is situated in the child's social and psychological context.

The co-construction of online risks is of particular interest for understanding young people's online experiences, as it is on the basis of what is socially constructed as problematic that children define, negotiate, and adopt preventive measures aimed at reducing unpleasant and harmful consequences. As shown in the model of analysis (see Figure 4), awareness of online risks informs strategies whereby children try to prevent encountering risks on the internet or react to online negative situations, thus moulding the overall quality of online experiences. In turn, awareness is also the outcome of both preventive and coping measures, being therefore shaped by online negative experiences the child might encounter and how she/he tries to deal with the issue. Moreover, it is related to the child's individual characteristics – including socio-demographic variables as well as her/his developmental stage and psychological characteristics; her/his own experience of the internet – namely, digital skills; and the mediation of parents and other family members, peer group, and school. In other words, awareness of online risks varies by age, gender, internet experience, and socio-cultural context.

We identified five main sources that shape children's perceptions of what is problematic on the internet: (1) first-hand online experiences – when the child encounters a problematic situation and consequently adjusts his or her definition of risk (e.g., when children distinguish between bullying and "drama") (Marwick & Boyd, 2014) based on their own engagement in online conflicts with peers; (2) second-hand or indirect – at times even mediated – experience that is part of peer culture, circulating via word of mouth – when children define risks drawing on the experiences friends shared with them, or stories from the news that are appropriated and circulated in the form of peers' experiences; (3) parental concerns, which are expressed in the form of advice as well as restrictions – for example, children reporting their parents warned them against contact with strangers on Facebook; (4) awareness-raising and eSafety programmes in school – for example, online safety initiatives run by the police; and (5) media representations – usually sensationalist news stories about harmful consequences of online risks (e.g., suicides associated with bullying, or offline meetings with online predators), which influence children's knowledge and attitudes both directly and indirectly (via peers and parents).

This chapter examines children's knowledge, subjective opinions, thoughts and judgments about online risks, in order to understand:

- why something is (not) problematic, risky, dangerous, or unpleasant;
- under which circumstances something is framed as (not) problematic, risky, dangerous, or unpleasant;
- opinions, thoughts, and judgements related to the nature of the problematic situation itself.

More specifically, then, it is aimed at understanding what children perceive as risky and on what basis. In other words, we want to understand the influence of the developmental and socio-cultural context in shaping children's concerns and awareness regarding the following problematic situations: bullying and harassment; sexual content (pornography) and messages (sexting); meeting strangers; privacy issues and problems related with personal data; and other problematic situations such as commercial risks, technical problems and health issues. For each risk under investigation, we discuss, first, the awareness of the problematic situation (main concerns about it, and common perceptions, including judgements); and second, the primary sources of awareness children draw on in making sense of a specific risk. Finally, a discussion of the main variations by age and gender is provided.

Figure 4: Awareness as object of analyses in the model
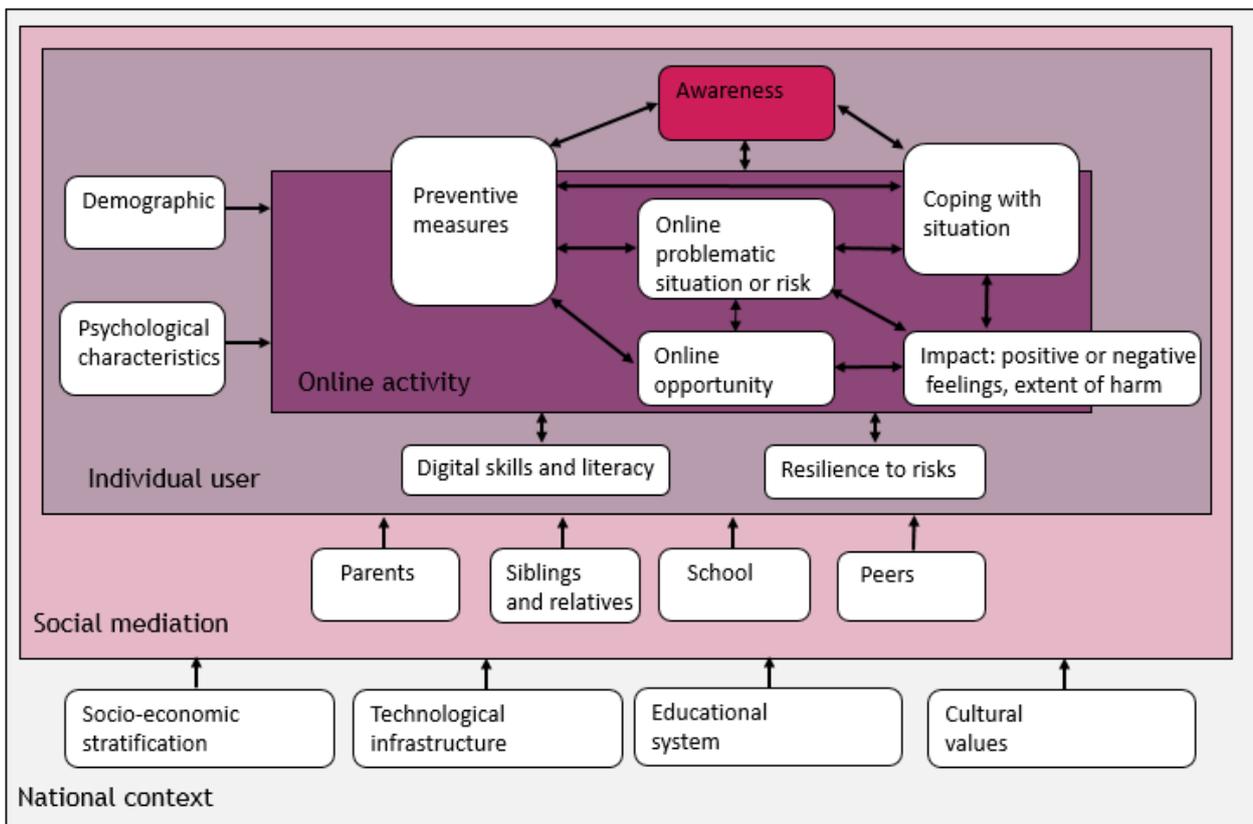
Awareness of bullying and harassment

Lorleen Farrugia

Children seem to be aware of several aspects of the online experience that they perceive as bullying and harassment. However, when analyzing children's discourses about bullying and harassment, it seems that this awareness has several features that need to be understood well to obtain a better appreciation of these perceptions and where the children get their awareness from.

Main concerns related to bullying and harassment

Children are aware of, and sometimes they often witness and occasionally also experience themselves, instances of hate, disrespect, fights, gossip, rumours, rude and nasty comments, annoying, unwelcome or sexual messages, or outright bullying when they are online. As the previous chapter on online problematic experiences has shown, most direct experience of bullying, harassment, or "drama" (Marwick & Boyd, 2014) happens on SNSs. Children are also apprehensive of offences, threats, blackmail, insults, ridicule, trolling, swearing (which often happens when they are playing games) and to a lesser extent, racism or religious harassment.

> *Girl: A lot of things happen on Facebook. People say things like 'I'm going to beat you badly, what are you posting for god's sake?' and stuff like that.*
> *Interviewer: What is this exactly?*
> *Girl: Between friends, when friends pick up a fight they threaten each other. They call each other names, things happen.*
> *Interviewer: Is that worrying?*
> *Girl: Not necessarily, but I think that those who bully each other are some people who cannot do it in the real world, offline and because they do not have the courage to do so. When online, you don't even see the other person. You are liberated.*
> *(girl, 15, Greece)*

> *Interviewer: When I asked whether you are careful of anything when you are online, everyone nodded. Can you tell me what you are careful of? Someone already mentioned these kinds of websites.*
> *Boy: One has to be careful of bullying as well. You would be on Facebook and someone who has nothing better to do would insult you without any reason. You would hardly know him and you would have met him just once.*
> *(boy, 13–14, Malta)*

Association with negative emotions

Children often seem to associate what they perceive as bullying or harassment with negative emotions and unpleasant consequences. Despite the fact that most children had not experienced cyberbullying first hand, they exhibited a depth of understanding of the experience of someone being bullied online. Children can understand how someone experiencing bullying or harassment can be bothered, upset, feel uncomfortable, or be afraid, while others emphasize how such experiences can be painful and cause hurt or suffering, and even the possibility of more serious things such as depression, death and even suicide.

> *But now... I think kids in our generation...we are more protected on Facebook because of all the stories...a girl got killed, so now we're more like, 'Oh no, I'm not going to do that, because I've read this...and it says that this girl got killed, so I'm not going to do this or I'm not going to do this.' (girl, 11–12, UK)*

> *Girl 1: People say things which are really… Well, those comments you can delete them…*
> *Girl 2: Yeah, but even so! Once you read it, it can be deleted from the computer but not from your head!*
> *(girls, 15, Portugal)*

www.eukidsonline.net

Children's awareness of bullying and harassment

A distressing experience

When they refer to cyberbullying, children are very extreme in the language they use. Several children mentioned cyberbullying as being the worst thing that could happen to someone online. Children also used terms such as "it can crush you" (girl, 12, Spain) to indicate that the experience and effects of cyberbullying could be devastating. This language might be a result of how the media often portrays stories of cyberbullying leading to negative consequences. In reality, albeit not an insignificant percentage, only 6% of children claimed to have been bullied online in the EU Kids Online II research (Livingstone et al., 2011).

People who bully or bother me. We didn't talk about this earlier, but I know what it is, ok. I think that is a lot worse for children, even if…they play just for playing and who…if…they receive this and think, because they're not that curious or, maybe, they really are curious, they think that is pretty to watch and start being called to reason, being forced to do this and that, lie to each other because of them, do things they don't want to… So I think that is very much… I think that is unpleasant, because I think that there shouldn't be people doing that, I think that is pure evil, it's not very proper. (girl, 12, Portugal)

Interviewer: Ok, bullying, why would this bother you most?
Girl: Because it's personal. It's really like, well, they pick at you. So that is…
Interviewer: Yes.
Girl: Yeah, like for examples viruses, that's for everybody the same. But bullying that is more…[personal]. (girl, 14, Belgium)

A fine line between jokes and bullying

Children seemed to make a distinction between what they classified as jokes, teasing, or nasty comments, and what they perceived as harassment. They argued that jokes, teasing, and some nasty comments were not always bullying; "having fun" and "making fun of" (girl, 15, Greece) are distinct. However, they also understood that such jokes could easily spiral into a situation of bullying with undesirable outcomes. Apart from not always perceiving teasing as real bullying, sometimes an isolated episode of bullying was also not always classified as bullying. To classify behaviour as bullying, children seem to be implying that the harassment is recurring, ongoing, and has multiple sources. Children also referred to the source of bullying when making this distinction between teasing and bullying: when it was their friends, they seemed to be less inclined to perceive it as bullying and also adopted different strategies for dealing with the source of bullying. They found it easier to report strangers who harassed them, but would think twice about it if it were a friend.

Interviewer: The fact of fooling someone publicly, have you also seen these things?
Boy 3: No.
Boy 5: No.
Boy 2: It happened to me just once.
Boy 4: Yes, but it was a joke, a friend wrote to another classmate, 'you're dumb', but this was not…this insult.
Boy 2: Yes, but these are friendly insults, those you say when...
Boy 4: Such as...
Boy 2: Yes, right. And it depends from how you say it, if you send a smiley too then he knows you're just joking.
(boys, 11–13, Italy)

A sense of helplessness

Children's discourses often indicate that they perceive bullying as an occurrence that will somehow always be present.

Of course, there are always those situations. There are always people who bother other people. Because that's the way we are, all of us. There are people who get picked on more, or who people ignore. (girl, 14–16, Spain)

Well, definitely about Facebook, I think it's good, but maybe half of it is not good, anyone can write whatever they want, and you cannot prevent it. (girl, 15, Czech Republic)

This could be an indication that children might be feeling a sense of helplessness when faced with the issue of controlling bullying. Children also mentioned how difficult it was to solve situations of bullying, and how sometimes they feel at a loss when they want to do something about it, as sometimes reporting such bullying can victimize them further. With this awareness, children themselves seemed to reflect that rather than the somewhat impossible task of eliminating bullying, they needed to find other solutions. Children suggested that their peers should block, report, and try to avoid places (such as ask.fm), where the possibility of encountering bullying is higher. They also advocated against having any material online that could be used to harass them.

Interviewer: Hmm, and do you have ask? Because nowadays…
Girl: No, I don't do ask.
Interviewer: No?
Girl: Because they always write down hateful things on that…
Interviewer: Is that the reason why you don't have it?
Girl: Yes, I don't do that.
Interviewer: OK, and what do you think about people doing anonymously…
Girl: It's pretty stupid, because people sometimes kill themselves because of ask. So they actually shouldn't create this…because yeah, it's just something to write hateful things on.
Interviewer: So you believe it would be better to forbid this?
Girl: Yes.
Interviewer: Yes?
Girl: Yes.
Interviewer: Uhm, and do you think that something can be done, to prevent people from killing themselves because of this?
Girl: Yeah, certainly not making it anonymously…because most people write down hateful content anonymously, and then you can't find who did this… (girl, 14, Belgium)

The online disinhibition effect

The online environment is perceived as a space where one can feel disinhibited (Suler, 2004) and have more courage to express oneself, including when it comes to being mean and insulting others. Often the children argued that they would behave differently offline, and sometimes they were not bothered by what happened online because they were aware this would not be followed through in real life. Platforms such as ask.fm which offer the possibility of anonymity were also perceived as more dangerous as they allowed room for anonymous bullying to take place, keeping the perpetrator at an even safer distance than just being behind the screen: the bully can also remain unknown to the child.

Sources of awareness of cyberbullying

Online harassment and cyberbullying are the risks that children defined mainly based on personal or peers' experiences. Nonetheless, media representations and parental concerns also exert an influence on children's own *sense-making*.

Media influence

It is clear that children's discourse about cyberbullying is influenced by media portrayals of the phenomenon. Children as young as 10 were aware of deaths associated with cyberbullying, and some also identified the media as the source of this awareness. In countries (such as Malta) where there were no local deaths linked to cases of cyberbullying, children still mentioned suicide as a consequence of bullying. Knowledge of the case of Amanda Todd was widespread among the participants from most countries. This is an indication that the way the globalized media portrays cyberbullying is possibly shaping and framing children's discourse about cyberbullying.

> *Boy 1: The girlfriend of a guy went away from a group of friends and gave the guy oral sex, and when they were there a friend came in and started to record it. And when the girl realized she said 'you're recording?' And then the video stops…*
> *Boy 2: And they say the girl committed suicide.*
> *Boy 3: It was on the television. There are people who commit suicide because of these things.*
> *(boys, 14–16, Spain)*

Parental influence on risk awareness

Parents give children practical advice on how to behave online and how to prevent contact and conduct risk (see Chapter 9: Mediation). Their concerns and advice also inform how children make sense of bullying. Occasionally, children mentioned how some parents were involved in making them aware of the dangers of cyberbullying. Parents sometimes use the media as a gateway to discuss matters of bullying and harassment (such as grooming and paedophilia) with their children. Others make their children aware of the dangers of misunderstandings online, misuse of personal information, and of cases such as Amanda Todd's to create awareness. Often, however, children seemed to refer to parents for coping with really bad or persistent negative experiences online rather than as a source of awareness.

Risk awareness from own and peers' experiences

Peers are actively engaged in mediating children's online experiences of bullying and harassment, by providing direct support or advice, as shown in Chapter 9: Mediation. Peers are also important sources of information. Children often became aware of the risks of cyberbullying from their own personal experiences and from those of their peers. Rather than any other forms of awareness, such experiences were what gave them this "privileged position to speak from" (van Zoonen, 2012, p. 60), and it is through them that they could obtain the necessary tools to react and cope. The real-life, concrete experiences seem to give children a better resilience and know-how to deal with such matters, which is also in concordance with the finding that a greater exposure to risks is related to more resilience (Livingstone et al., 2011).

> *Boy: Yes, I know this girl, well, I don't know her personally. And she had her mobile number on Facebook. You can set your settings that your mobile number is visible I think. And yeah, suddenly she had like hundreds of messages. Because yeah, she has over 4,000 friends on Facebook or so. And all these people could see her mobile number. And then, yeah, she got stalked by people she absolutely didn't know.*

Interviewer: And what would you do if this would happen to you?
Boy: Yeah, I would certainly remove the number. But further on, I don't think you can do much about it.
(boy, 14, Belgium)

Children could be very punitive in their comments towards what their peers do online. Sexting was considered as silly, and reacting to offences and insults was labelled as not smart and stupid. It was not uncommon that even though they agreed that whoever shared sexts was at fault, they also blamed victims of sexting for sharing material that could be used to harass them.

Girl: There was this boy and there was girl in love with this boy. And uhm, that boy asked the girl for naked pictures. So she did, and she sent him the pics. And then he shared these pic with everybody, and well...yeah, I would never do that.
Interviewer: No...yeah, I've heard more of such stories...and what do you think when you hear about such things?
Girl: I don't understand that you can be so stupid to do this.
Interviewer: Yes.
Girl: And that boy is a real player, so then you certainly don't do this, I think.
Interviewer: Hmm, hmm, and these pictures were shared on Facebook, or...?
Girl: NO, but everybody now has these pics on their mobile phone, so...
Interviewer: OK...so do you believe this is something like cyberbullying?
Girl: Pfff, well...it's not really bullying, because this girl, well...she's responsible for it.
Interviewer: Hmm, hmmm
Girl: But, yeah, also, I don't think the boy should have shared these pics with others.
(girl, 15, Belgium)

School mediation

Besides becoming aware of the dangers of cyberbullying and harassment from media, parents, peers, and their own experiences, sometimes the consequences that happen to the children or their peers made them aware of such risks. Sometimes these were presented at school, through talks from police officers, and in other instances it was because they or their peers suffered such consequences first hand.

That if, someone sees you cursing...they either ban you for a few hours or permanently, who knows, it depends on the situation, or they ban you permanently, and then you can't access the game at all... (boy, 12, Romania)

Sexual content and communication

Ana Jorge

Sexual content, whether as images, videos, or messages, as well as communication of a sexual nature, seem to inspire great concern from parents, and also constitute one of the online risks in the top of the minds of European children. In the open question included in the EU Kids Online 2010 survey, children and young people said that pornographic and violent content was what they regarded as the main thing that bothered people their age online (Livingstone et al., 2013). If this tells us something about the social construction of the risk of being exposed to sexual content as part of the online experience, deeper understanding of the sources of awareness of these risks among children and young people, as well as the impact on their perceptions, was sought with the WP4 qualitative work of EU Kids Online. Therefore, in this

section, we look at children's knowledge, subjective opinions, thoughts, and judgements about sexual content and sexual contact risks.

Children's awareness of online sexual content

Generally aware, different emotions

Among our respondents in the interviews and focus groups, we found abundant discourse about sexual content, including violent sex, as a disturbing point young people encounter when going online. If we consider any message, picture, or video with sexual content (such as mass-distributed pornographic content, adverts to pornography websites, or pop-ups with naked people), this could appear in platforms such as web searches on Google, YouTube, Facebook, email, downloading/streaming sites, and in some countries, also WhatsApp.

> *Girl: If you're on YouTube, there are lots of videos that are inappropriate. The thumbnail or the title, it doesn't really seem like what you would want to watch, then don't click on it, because it could get you thinking about all these things.*
> *Interviewer: Could you clarify?*
> *Girl: Things that you don't really want to know, because I'm 12. I wouldn't want to know about inappropriate things.*
> *Interviewer: Yes. What do you think is inappropriate? This is a chance to give your view, rather than your parents' view, for example.*
> *Girl: If there was a particular video about sex, for example, then I'd find that inappropriate, because I'm at the age, where I know what sex is, but if I want to find information, I'd probably ask my mum for starters. I don't know what these people are going to say, they could put the wrong ideas in my head.*
> *Interviewer: Wrong ideas about how to behave sexually?*
> *Girl: Yes.*
> *(girl, 11–13, UK)*

> *For me [the worst thing] it's pornography because if there is a boy that with something he sees from pornography… I mean…it remains in his memory and he could be harmed. If you happen to get a virus you would be annoyed as well, but not as much, because then, it doesn't have an impact as much as pornography. (boy, 13–14, Malta)*

As shown in the previous section on risk experiences, children associate a varying degree of feelings to sexual content. Girls and younger children seemed to express a greater dislike for these situations. In fact, teenagers say they find so much unwanted content, including sexual, violent or rude images, messages or videos, that they start to find it "normal" or "natural" and just scroll down.

> *I think that…[sex] it's normal!… It's just that we don't need to see that, if we wanted to see it we would search for it! (girl, 15, Portugal)*

'Protect the younger' and the trivialization effect

Children and young people seemed to build up a discourse that sexual content was part of a larger group of unwanted content that they came across, and this was something they had to bear and cope with when using the internet. This happens partly because younger children have less literacy skills for web searches, and partly because they use online platforms such as gaming and video-streaming websites that are more prone to having commercial pop-ups, viruses, and embedded sexual videos. Therefore, there was

51

also a circulating discourse that put younger children as more exposed and vulnerable to unwanted content, including of a sexual nature.

This idea seems to come through the advice of peers and parents, as there is a generalized idea that younger users were more exposed to these risks. In fact, the children projected a greater vulnerability on younger users and showed concern for the younger ones around them.

> *Boy 1: And then the other one is the because I've got little brothers and a little cousin there's so many, like, inappropriate stuff on the internet and it's hard to get rid of for the safety of the little ones.*
> *Boy 2: What, like in your history?*
> *Boy 1: No, there's stuff that I wouldn't want my little ones to see.*
> *Interviewer: What kind of stuff is on there that you wouldn't want them to see?*
> *Boy 1: Inappropriate stuff like…*
> *Interviewer: Does it just come at you do you think, Jack [fictional name], or do they have, do the little ones have to go searching for it? I mean if they were just to go on and play, and they were go on and do the…?*
> *Boy 1: There was, like, there was this game I was playing, it was a good game, like, I went on the site and then the adverts on the side were showing like naked girls like animate and literally they were going, going at it, like, dirty advert and, yes, and this was from games, like normal fun games.*
> *(boys, 14–16, UK)*

On the contrary, some children, especially younger children, expressed the idea that unwanted content, including sexual images and videos, were uncontrollable for them. Therefore, age seems to matter in making it difficult for children and young people to attain sufficient capacity to be self-reflexive around the online experience, and to prevent and cope with these risks. This also seems to contribute to a representation that, with age, you become more resilient towards unwanted content.

> *Some ads come out with those girls, in their bra, showing their whole body. But you can't put it off…it's there all the time. (girl, 11–13, Spain)*

Sources of awareness of sexual content

Several sources of awareness contribute to this kind of awareness and perception among children about what is risky and what is not. Since it is common for most children to have experienced exposure to sexual content, involuntarily or not, with different emotions and coping strategies, first-hand experience and peer discourses are influential in creating the social representation that this is somehow part of the experience of going online. However, parents and schools play a role, often in raising concern for this content as risky. Some children resonated stereotypes, such as the one of pornography being "bad for your eyes" or "getting you addicted," which may have come from peers or parents.

> *Something you don't understand and...perhaps mothers are bothered because, I mean, you have to know things when you are grown up enough, or...when your parents explain them to you, not when you are sent emails that... (girl, 9–10, Italy)*

In its turn, the media can be a direct and strong source of awareness, especially when big events occur, sometimes as the only contact with extreme risks. This can happen both in the news media and in entertainment, as children from several countries mentioned similar programmes that raise awareness of possible risks, such as MTV's *Catfish*.

However, as in other mentions of online risks in the media, children and young people had only a vague recollection of what exactly they had seen on the news media. A Portuguese 16-year-old boy said: "I

can't really remember, but it came up several times on television." These discourses are then often combined with families' and peers' discourses.

Sexual communication

As already discussed, sexting includes sending, receiving, or exchanging images, messages or videos of a sexual nature with other people, be it people children know or not. Sexual communication can therefore go from seeing sexy pictures or videos from peers, to having conversations on webcam or chat rooms about sex, being asked on the webcam to take off their clothes, or having their pictures in sexy poses that are shared with others.

Meeting new people and strangers

There is some overlap with communication from/with strangers. While a 16-year-old Greek boy explained this as a disinhibition effect when sexting with strangers, most children associated this sexual communication with meeting new people online, which can entice a great risk if associated with fake identities. They have this knowledge from peer stories, as well as through media programmes such as *Catfish*, on MTV.

> Boy: I believe that you can't do it [sexting] your girlfriend, I think it's like, [awkward] to do it on mobile or Facebook. It's more likely [to happen] though between people you've met online.
> Interviewer: Why do you think this is weird?
> Boy: Cause I think that [sexting] with someone that you see all the time, uhm, it's uncomfortable, every time you come across them, you'll say hi, what's up and stuff, and you'll be thinking – 'oh, I texted you all this stuff last night.'
> (boy, 16, Greece)

> Girl: No, The only danger I perceive on SNS is to meet people who are older than you pretending to be your age, and asking you for photos, and later you may realize that they are much older than you.
> Interviewer: Do you know anyone that has happened to?
> Girl: Yes, to a friend of mine, but she went with a friend of hers and so nothing could happen. She realized that he was much older than her; she saw him and left.
> Interviewer: Can you tell us a little more about what happened?
> Girl: Well she started talking to a guy, who said he was 17, who lived in the same city. She was 16 and she was happy about it, because he told her nice things. And he started to ask for sexy photos of her. And she sent him one. And he sent her one, but it wasn't of him but of a different person. And one day they decided to meet and she was already a little suspicious. And her friend also said that something wasn't right and she decided to go with her and they realized that he wasn't who he said he was; he wasn't 17, but over 30. So she and her friend left. (girl, 14, Spain)

Experimenting with peers

While analyzing the discourses of children regarding sexual communication, one thing we have to bear in mind is their negotiation of what is playful and funny to do among friends, and part of children's cultures. There is some experimenting with gender and sex. Some forward and share messages to see the other(s)' reaction, as seems to happen with sexual images, usually sent from boys to girls. Spanish 11- to 13-year-old girls said they saw the sexual images they received from friends as a joke, while others reacted more angrily and reported the constraint of seeing sexual images sent by friends, such as a 15-year-old

Portuguese girl. Direct experience and peer recollection of these stories circulated among children and young people.

She recorded a video at a friend's house – nobody noticed it – while some girls were joking while dancing, it was filthy dancing…they were dancing sexy. Then, she uploaded in YouTube and now she's got about ten comments from the girls asking why she had uploaded it, their mothers have punished them for that. Now the girl feels guilty for doing that but she cannot remove it from the internet. And she didn't tell them that she was recording it! She pretended she was using WA but she was recording it and she put it on the internet. The mother of one of the girls who was dancing told her to take it off and she said that she couldn't. (girl, 9–10, Spain)

There is a social representation that it is stupid, especially among girls, to take sexy pictures of yourself when someone else asks you to. In other words, you could expose yourself to risk by agreeing to send sexy pictures to others.

Boy: Uhm, there was this girl from first grade, and she had this picture…and it was on Facebook.
Interviewer: What kind of picture? A naked picture?
Boy: Yes...
Interviewer: And she sent this picture to her boyfriend or…?
Boy: No.
Interviewer: Just a boy?
Boy: Yeah, just a boy…
Interviewer: So, whose fault is it then? The girl's or the boy's? Or both?
Boy: The girls.
Interviewer: Girls? So, you think that girls just send these kinds of pics, or the boys ask for it?
Boy: It's the boys who ask for it, but yeah, you're just stupid when you do this.
(boy, 15, Belgium)

Sources of awareness of sexual communication

As before, media arise as a source of awareness for more sensationalist stories, overlapping sexting with bullying, as sharing nude and sexy pictures could expose young people to threats and harassment, after the relationships end or by others who receive the pictures or messages through the original receiver. These stories often resonate among and are augmented by peers' transmission, and some news stories that young people echoed about bullying, such as Amanda Todd's, connect it with extreme consequences, such as suicide.

Girl 1: I saw a story about a boy…
Girl 2: Who published pictures of his ex-girlfriend, they broke up, he had pictures that were meant only for him and he decided to upload them for everyone!
Girl 1: And then people commented saying it was horrible, that it was stupid…
Girl 2: And it is…she will never be able to delete them.
Girl 1: Yes. As they say: once online, forever online.
(girls, 15, Portugal)

Meeting strangers on- and offline

Giovanna Mascheroni

When asked to rank the scariest risks among those raised and discussed in the course of interviews and focus groups, children often mentioned "stranger danger" among their top concerns. Actually, while harmful consequences of meeting strangers on- and offline are experienced by only a minority of children across Europe, children nonetheless draw a vivid, at times dramatic, picture of the dangers associated with communicating with strangers on the internet and, more specifically, meeting them in person offline.

In order to provide a systematic account of children's perceptions about meeting strangers, we distinguish between knowledge, opinions, and judgements related to communication with strangers on the internet first, and online contacts that may turn into offline meetings next.

Online contact with strangers

Contact with strangers is not necessarily perceived as risky or problematic by children: indeed, as prior research has shown, expanding one's social networks and meeting new friends, with whom to share interests and hobbies, represents an opportunity of the use of SNSs, and of online communication in general. More specifically, children recognize that their peers may take advantage of online communication in order to compensate for shyness in face-to-face relationships, as the following excerpt suggests:

Interviewer: Like when? What can be good about writing to people you don't know?
Girl: Maybe something would come out of it.
Interviewer: Yeah, like they would get something out of it?
Girl: Like for instance when a guy or a girl is alone, they want to have a lot of friends, maybe it's really beneficial for them.
(girl, 12, Czech Republic)

However, even younger children, who have not yet experienced online contact with people they have never met before, are aware of its potentially problematic outcomes. Children identified one primary condition that turned online communication with strangers into a risky contact: the age of the stranger. In other words, while communication among peers is usually perceived as legitimate, if not a clear opportunity, contact with adult strangers is worrisome:

When someone writes with kids, it's like, it's fine, but there is a danger that someone can pretend to be a child, but it can be a grown man. Like, that they put a photo of their baby and write their name there. (boy, 10, Czech Republic)

Girl 1: Perhaps, strangers don't bother me... I would rank it after inappropriate content because I've never experienced it, so I don't know what would happen…
Girl 2: You are right, when one thinks of strangers, one thinks of negative experiences but it may lead to a friendship. As in my class, I didn't know everyone, they were strangers to me and then I met them so... I wouldn't say strangers, I would say bad, mean strangers.
Girl 1: You mean adults that hurt you?
Girl 2: Yes indeed.
(girls, 9–10, Italy)

Therefore, children's concerns around "stranger danger" are grounded in two features of online communication: anonymity and, in particular, the possibility of fake identities.

Fake profiles and people pretending to be someone else

People pretending to be someone else on the internet was reported as common-sense knowledge – when not part of their own or their peers' online experiences – by children across all age groups and countries: the identity behind profiles on SNSs, or multi-player online environments, is never sure, because people may lie about their age and post fake pictures downloaded from the internet:

> Girl: Yeah, on his profile it was a man, but the age was not on his profile.
> Interviewer: Ah yes, and were there any pictures on his profile?
> Girl: Yes, but only pictures from animals and so, not from the man himself.
> (girl, 13, Belgium)

Children also mentioned a number of reasons why people would create fake identities on the internet, which are associated with ideal types of the online (adult) stranger: according to children, "catfishing" is primarily aimed at grooming girls and boys in order to meet them offline, or gaining access to the child's personal information in order to later blackmail and threaten the victim, or steal her/his material possessions. In these accounts, awareness, opinion, and judgements around "stranger danger" combine and overlap with perceptions around grooming, hacking, bullying, and sexting. Therefore the stranger is epitomized alternatively in the figure of the paedophile, the hacker, the bully, and the harasser. Considerable concern is expressed especially in relation to the offline, face-to-face consequences of online meetings with strangers:

> Girl: Miss, emm, many people on Facebook they also have a profile which is not with their name, for example, let me give an example, I find many profiles that would be like [a celebrity] as they know that many girls like him.
> Interviewer: Okay.
> Girl: And then, a lot of kids add him thinking that he is really going to speak to them, and he might be someone, who is older than you, who might start threatening you, or asking for your address to come to your house, and…
> Interviewer: Mhm, okay, and why do you have to be careful of this?
> Girl: When you are chatting with someone older than you, you don't know what could happen. They might ask you for your address, and you, thinking they are children your age you give it to them or your mobile number and they either kidnap you or call you at home to scare you.
> (girl, 11–13, Malta)

> Because sometimes they can like hack you and stuff and they can hack your PC and they can do anything. They can take information about you, they could fly over and kidnap you, they could do anything. (boy, 9, UK)

Meeting strangers offline

As the excerpts above anticipate, what scares children most is the fear that strangers could access information on the internet, which would then enable them to locate their victims. The concern for offline consequences of online contacts with strangers is articulated in two main risks: "physical threats" and "threats to personal belongings."

56

Physical threats

In imagining hurtful outcomes of meeting an online stranger offline, children adhere to a dramatic, stereotyped and often media-fuelled repertoire, one which epitomizes the stranger as a middle-aged paedophile, a cruel person suffering from mental disorders, such as the following vivid account exemplifies:

Or else he could take advantage of you before killing you. If you do not do what he says, he could touch your private body, hurt you, throw stones at you or smack you with a belt or stab you with a knife. (girl, 9–10, Malta)

Threats to personal belongings

Beyond being sexually abused and/or physically hurt, a second major concern raised by children is the fear that strangers aim to burglarize their houses or mug them. Often, the two risks are associated in children's discourses:

Because you wouldn't want anybody to know...like rape and steal...like and you don't want to get mugged...stuff like that...you would never want that to happen to you. (boy, 9–10, UK)

Sources of information on "stranger danger"

Children develop their knowledge and perceptions on risky contacts with strangers drawing on a variety of sources: peers' experiences, parental mediation, eSafety initiatives, and media representation. On the contrary, the number of children directly exposed to this risk and, more importantly, to its harmful consequences, is low.

Peers' experiences

Children make sense of their own online experiences on the basis of peer cultures, and shared norms and knowledge. The experience of peers comes in two main forms: experiences of people the child is in direct contact with, as in the excerpt below; or "urban legends" that are circulated via word of mouth and become an integral part of youth culture:

Interviewer: Yes, and did your friend meet him?
Girl: The man wanted to meet, but she said no.
Interviewer: Yes. And how was his profile? Could you see on his profile it was a man from about 40?
Girl: Yeah, on his profile it was a man, but the age was not on his profile.
Interviewer: Ah yes, and were there any pictures on his profile?
Girl: Yes, but only pictures from animals and so, not from the man himself.
(girl, 13, Belgium)

Parental mediation

Parents are a major source of advice against the risks of contacts with strangers. Parents themselves gather knowledge drawing on word of mouth or media representations:

My dad, for example, told me that the daughter of a colleague of his accepted a boy, they started talking to each other, and they decided to meet. Ehm...but her mother accompanied her, because she has never met this boy before, and when they were at the place and they could not see this guy, she called him and the mobile phone of an adult started ringing, he was on the other side of the road... (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Girl: Yes, my dad knows my Messenger and Facebook passwords. He sometimes checks to see if I've spoken with strangers after the cases they've heard of...
Researcher: What cases? What do you mean?
Girl: On the TV, someone killed a girl from Facebook and he checks every now and again.
(girl, 12, Romania)

eSafety initiatives

In recent years a considerable role in promoting children's awareness of "stranger danger" and informing their perceptions and fears has been played by eSafety initiatives in schools, often organized in cooperation with police authorities. Children often mentioned the police or awareness-raising campaigns or videos as their primary source of information about the risks of meeting strangers on- and offline:

Boy 1: We had a presentation with the cops here, as the paedophiles were here, so the cops told it to us, how we should behave, they showed us movies, and on Facebook, who we do not know that we should not put them into friends.
Boy 2: That they could find out, according to the name, where we live, through the internet.
Boy 1: Or when we write with them, and they ask us some questions, like where I live, when we are going to be alone at home and such.
(boys, 10, Czech Republic)

Media representation

Finally, the imaginary around "stranger danger" is media-fuelled. Television programming – in the shape of both news media and youth formats such as MTV's *Catfish* show – informs both parents' and children's discourses, and plays a prominent role in circulating and fixating social representations of the stranger:

I can use the internet as long as I don't upload any photos, and that, because later the kidnappers may chat with me… My parents have already told me, not to chat with people I don't know. They don't want me to talk to unknown people in case they are kidnappers and they want to meet me face-to-face… I've seen lots of cases. But I don't mind, since it's like it won't happen to me… They show cases on the television, people who have started chatting to somebody, then they have met up and been killed. (boy, 11–13, Spain)

Privacy and personal data misuse

Bojana Lobe

Children and young people are generally aware that the privacy of personal information is of great importance when acting safe on the internet. They had developed their own strategies for giving information about accounts, identity, passwords, about personal details, etc.

This section examines children's knowledge, subjective opinions, thoughts and judgements about privacy and personal data misuse issues. It reveals children's understanding and perceptions of what constitutes the meaning of privacy online, how it is being compromised, and how their personal data can be misused.

Three main areas of privacy and personal data misuse emerged from the qualitative data: visibility and disclosure of personal data, photo and video sharing/tagging, and misused and hacked information.

However, the children's interpretation of what personal information is differs. For some of them, personal information strictly refers to the "big" information about themselves, such as name, surname, phone number, home address, and birth date. Others see personal information as something personal, something that cannot be read or acquired elsewhere, such as their own personal taste for books, movies, etc. For example, a girl from Italy, aged 9–10, explained that a personal taste was her favourite movie or book that was not to be shared with the world.

Visibility and disclosure of personal data

In general, children and young people emphasized that sharing personal information was not necessarily a risk imposing action. They had the knowledge about what dangers and risks sharing personal information could trigger, but were also aware that this could be avoided when making personal information (i.e., profile) private and not visible to everyone. They made an explicit link between the risks of sharing personal information and the visibility of it. The higher the visibility (the more people can access it), the greater the risk. Some of the children believed that sharing too much personal information about them was bad. The following quotes illustrate this:

I am not concerned, because also on the gaming websites, Giochi.it, I gave personal information but my profile is private so only I can see it. (boy, 9–10, Italy)

I would not post about personal issues as I am aware that there would be gossip and I would want to stick to my values. (girl, 15, Malta)

On the contrary, some respondents believed that the internet was actually a good thing as they could share information about themselves faster. They were also aware that they had to set limits as to how much information they would reveal about themselves. It was not only sharing "too much of personal information" but "too much of any information" that could impose serious risks of unwanted rumours, people knowing too much about them, etc. The quote: "What comes online, stays online" was mentioned by at least one respondent across the countries:

Hmm... Young people use the internet because it is cool... Everybody knows what you are doing. Young people know that almost all of their acquaintances and friends use the internet, so the news spread fast. I think that young people use the internet because it is chilly outside. (girl, 16, Romania)

I think maybe creating your own profile on different social websites can lead to people knowing too much about you. That's why I have to be careful that I don't really update all the time, because some things are meant to be less confidential. Maybe sometimes, when you're angry, you say things on a social website and it gets to another website and people on those websites see it, rumours start spreading. That's about it. You just have to keep yourself to yourself, that's what I do. It's not a problem with letting your friends know what you've done on this particular day, who you were with. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm just saying that there's a certain area, where you just have to stop. Some things, maybe another person would feel uncomfortable about it. (girl, 11–12, UK)

Social networking disclosure issues

The disclosure problem is primarily connected with SNSs. In children's eyes, Facebook is among the least trustworthy. Even if the information on Facebook was only visible to their friends, they were aware that their friends could share that information with people they did not know. A respondent reported that there was no privacy on Facebook, because everything one posted was visible to everyone. This might

suggest that either not all children are familiar with privacy setting options on Facebook, or that these settings are too complex for children and young people to be able to use them efficiently.

> *I don't know if you can hide personal information on Facebook, but at least on Skype when someone sends me a request of friendship, he cannot see all my details. Then, if I accept him, he can see some data, I don't know if you can do it on Facebook and then I don't trust. (girl, 9–10, Italy)*

> *In my opinion if you post personal things on Facebook they can go everywhere and...my mother says that when you upload your picture they can come and look for you, and do something to you, so it is dangerous. Instead on Skype you can, you can indeed upload you picture but it is more reliable than Facebook. (girl, 9–10, Italy)*

> *On Facebook you are giving yourself away completely. (boy, 13, Malta)*

> *FB can be very risky. Someone may copy a profile [same name, address] and upload content that others have not seen. (boy, 13, Greece)*

Among the respondents, Twitter and Instagram seem to be perceived as more private than Facebook as they usually used nicknames and revealed less personal information. Further, the children believed that on Twitter and Instagram they shared less identifying information, apart from a profile name and picture. Especially interesting was the perception of Facebook by Maltese respondents – girls aged 12 reported that they were reluctant to use Facebook precisely for privacy issues. Facebook held the potential of giving oneself away completely. Another girl respondent reported that she was quite careful about what she posted on Facebook in order to keep her details private.

> *Someone who is a friend of your friend on Facebook and send you a friend request which you refuse, can still check your wall from your friend's wall. (girl, 12, Malta)*

Italian respondents were more open to sharing information on SNSs, but emphasized the importance of setting limits. A girl, 11–13, thought you were potentially able to disclose plenty of personal information, but she preferred not to fill in all the fields. A boy, 14–16, stated that it was appropriate to have a public profile, but "within certain limits," which meant showing your name, and some posts, but not all your wall, and keeping some information protected.

Privacy setting problems

Some respondents also criticized the privacy setting options. They reported privacy settings were sometimes automatically rebooted/reset. Therefore, they had to regularly check their privacy settings.

Photo and video sharing/tagging

Children and young people in the interviews and focus groups spoke quite a lot about various practices that included sharing and tagging photos or videos of them. Sharing and tagging photos/videos on SNSs was not depicted as inherently a negative practice, despite being quite an intimate one. Some perceived it as appropriate practice in cases when they were the ones deciding to share their photos as opposed to the photo being circulated against their will by their peers.

> *Boy: Yes because it is you who published it so the other guy is free to do what...he wants…*
> *Interviewer: Do you all agree with what he said?*

Boy: Yes, because it was you who decided to upload it, so...
(boy, 11–13, Italy)

A girl, 14, from Belgium, reported that she sometimes tagged her friends in photos she posted online as she believed tagging was okay. However, if people asked her to remove the tag, she did. This demonstrates that young people are quite comfortable with such practices, even though it can result in an unwanted photo sharing.

"Collection" photo pages and false profiles

However, many see photo sharing as problematic, as peers and also third parties may make ill-intended use of it. Two risk awareness categories including photo and video sharing emerged from the data. The first includes non-allowed, unwanted re-use and editing of photos by peers. Lately, SNSs, especially Facebook, are full of pages that are made of collected photos from teenage girls' personal profiles in which these girls are semi-naked, striking what they believe is a "sexy" pose or "selfie." The new Facebook pages are then usually created and called a nasty name, such as "sluts" or similar. Children also mentioned the possibility of creating false profiles, with strangers taking pictures of someone.

One needs to be careful for people using and editing one's Facebook photos. (girl, 14, Belgium)

Girl: And there are people who can cause harm with some photos that they post, who are not aware of what can be done with those photos. People don't realize.
Interviewer: When you say that harm can be done, do you mean deliberately, or...?
Girl: Yes, Older people who pretend to be your age and may use some photos to cause you harm. Like I have heard a few times on the television, some paedophile has taken photos from the internet or has asked people for photos of them in their underwear and has used these photos to harm that person
(girl, 15, Spain)

Someone might create false profiles with pictures taken in public spaces of you. (boy, 11, Portugal)

Photos as tracking devices

The second category includes photo sharing that reveals a great deal about people's lives, what they are doing at the moment, their whereabouts, etc. Respondents believed this was risky as the photos they posted about their current daily activities, plans etc. could serve as a very easy tracking device.

Uploading revealing photos of oneself is very risky…due to possibility of someone hacking them and editing them to look different… (boy, 14, Greece)

I will not constantly post status updates. Only when something 'important' [in her perception] happened, like a special event. I will not post status updates about my usual daily activities. I will post things that I had done, not things that I 'am doing'. (girl, 13, Belgium)

Younger, less careful

Respondents also mentioned that younger children, especially girls, were likely to post more inappropriate photos of them, either of their bodies or specific situations, in their quest for peers' attention.

I've seen 11-year-old girls drunken, taking pics of themselves and uploading them in SNS. (girl, 15, Spain)

Misused and hacked information

Misuse of personal information

The children often mentioned the misuse of personal information. They believed in most cases that personal data misuse happened on SNSs. The possibilities of identities being stolen, hijacked, manipulated etc. were also mentioned. Girls from Italy, 9–10, mentioned the possibility that children could blackmail their peers through threatening to share personal information. Some other scenarios describe the misuse of personal information:

> If the user is not effectively informed about what can happen online...someone might trap them into giving away his personal details and then post them online. (girl, 12, Greece)

> Yes, or you're in another country and someone who knows or is planning on it, can break into your house; or who knows? I heard about that; read it in a magazine. (girl, 15, Romania)

Hackers, stolen passwords and fake accounts

Children spoke a lot about hackers and fake accounts, even though there were very few personal experiences reported. Hackers were often mentioned as being able to steal and make inappropriate use of their personal information, especially social network profiles and photos. Hacking was perceived as an illegal activity of acquiring personal information from other people, typically by using some special software. Younger children were more concerned about hackers:

> Hackers can always find your personal information, passwords can be hacked, and things like that. As internet users, we are always somehow vulnerable. (boy, 15, Belgium)

As children grow up they are more knowledgeable, but still mention hackers as a source of concern:

> I don't think that there are such risky things to make people worry. Of course there are hackers that can break your account and steal your password… Well yes this I think could be unsafe, because there are hackers who are well known such as Anonymous. (boy, 14–16, Italy)

A girl from Spain, 14–16, mentioned that, "the one stealing your password is a friend or someone you know, someone you don't know does not bother to." Fake profiles were usually understood as posing a threat to privacy. Even though the children did not approve it, they did not necessarily perceive it as a threat to privacy. They believed that some children created fake accounts to compensate for their insecurities, lack of friends, or unpopularity.

Peer-to-peer password sharing

The children also discussed the possibility of peers sharing SNS passwords and account misuse. Apparently, there is a fashion of peer-to-peer password sharing in order to prove their loyalty to their partners, best friends, or other significant others. Some just do it for fun or because they do not see it as problematic. But many stress the importance of keeping passwords private.

> Interviewer: You have talked about couples who exchange passwords. What do you think about that?
> Girl 1: It doesn't seem right to me… Everyone has their own things… They do that because the girl thinks that the boy is doing something…or to show their trust: 'look, I'm not doing anything, here…' It seems really silly to me. If you trust someone you don't need to have their Tuenti password to know they aren't doing anything.

Girl 2: I've given my password to my boyfriend. I have nothing to hide…but he wants it because he doesn't trust me.

Interviewer: And aren't you afraid that…these relationships might change, might break up…?

Girl 1: Well, you change the password. I have changed mine…

Girl 2: Well I think that he is old enough not to do these things… to think 'now I have your password, I'm going to change it'. If I end a relationship, I'd change my password and that would be the end of it.

(girls, 14–16, Spain)

Sources of information on privacy and personal data misuse

Sources of information on privacy issues are age-dependent: younger children mentioned parents and schools as their main source of information about privacy issues and personal data. Children incorporated parental discourses in which personal data misuse and "stranger danger" were coupled:

Interviewer: That's true. So you know what you should and shouldn't do online?

Girl: Yes, I do. And my mum always says, and I never do this, that I should never post really personal things on Facebook, or dirty things.

(girl, 11, Belgium)

Moreover, children mentioned schools that typically organized privacy and safer internet workshops or/and projects:

Because before, in year three, we did: never give away to other people your personal information. And before that, I didn't give it away, but I didn't really know about it, I didn't understand it. (boy, 9–10, UK)

Younger children also reported having heard from the news stories from which they learned about the risks of giving out personal information. Instead, as children grow older, they are more likely to draw on their own or friends' negative experiences of personal data misuse as a source of awareness on privacy issues:

Well, since this happened, I look out and I check people who want to add me as friends. Make sure they are real and things like that. And yeah, never talk to…actually never talk to strangers and never tell personal things to them, for example where you live and things like that. Yeah, I learned from this issue. (girl, 16, Belgium)

Other problematic situations

Maialen Garmendia, Estefanía Jimenez, & Miguel Angel Casado

Commercial risks

Social research has for a long time studied children's perception of online advertising (Martinez, Jarlbro & Sandberg, 2013; Sandberg, Gidlöf, & Holmberg, 2011) and their difficulties in identifying it properly. This research has proved that children find online advertising as disturbing and annoying, probably as the rest of internet users do, no matter their age. Most children regarded commercials, mainly identified by them as pop-ups, as an obstacle while surfing on the internet. This view was shared by all age groups among minors, and also between boys and girls. All of them said they feel annoyed when they come across these ads, because they interfere with their online activities – mainly with games – and were subsequently a waste of time.

Boy: Ads, for sure, there are ads on a lot of sites all the time. Which, of course, I know is good for those sites because those sites live from it, but sometimes they are in places where it bothers one too much. For example across the entire screen…
Interviewer: Uh-huh. And with what do the ads bother you?
Boy: So just when it makes it impossible for me to do what…to do what I want. But such ads on those parties and such, I do understand it and it does not matter so much to me…
(boy, 15, Czech Republic)

But regardless of the commercial's influence on the surfing activity, as a general rule, children perceived some connection between advertising content and online risks. Actually, younger children tended to perceive commercial risks as connected to *inappropriate content*, mainly referring to sexual images that appeared while they were surfing

You know, it was on YouTube, and there is always commercials like 'you are visitor number 1,000', but if it's not that, it's things like…[laughing]…'slap my ass' or 'undress me'. (boy, 10, Belgium)

However, minors tended to consider these kinds of unwanted commercial messages a relatively serious potential risk, not because of the content itself, but rather because they thought unwanted content could provide access to hackers of their personal data. Hence the sense of lack of control and a usual climate of distrust shown by some of the interviewed teenagers.

For example, internet e-shops, where they were cheated, that they ordered something, they sent a ten thousand deposit there and did not get anything… (boy, 9, Czech Republic)

Sources of awareness

As far as commercial content is concerned, children talked about it based on their own experience, and remarked on how it interfered with their surfing activity. They came across much of it on videos' and games' websites they often visited. At some point, when asked for their personal data, they realized it could be some sort of fraud. They didn't mention any awareness source for preventing commercial risks.

Girl: Basically, there are many [pop-ups]… I have seen…you click on it to answer [a question] and there are some numbers, like how many legs does an elephant have…
Interviewer: And, do you answer?
Girl: I've tried [answering them], but nothing happened and then you had to write numbers down or something…and I thought, forget about it.
(girl, 10, Greece)

Technical problems

As using digital devices may imply exposure to some technical risks, children will need some digital skills in order to be able to identify and cope with such risks. Children seemed particularly worried about being hacked by viruses (see earlier). As far as virus consequences are concerned, children's perceptions varied noticeably. The worst one for the interviewed children was having their computer formatted and information deleted.

For example, on Google, be careful of what to download as your computer might get formatted. (boy, 9, Malta)

Some website contact with strangers was also regarded as the source of viruses:

Ummm, because once, um, I went on my Skype and I found – and I found – I found these two people they were new I don't know why, and then they started – and then they were – they started telling me 'Go on the virus, Go on the virus!' so the computer will get damaged but I didn't do it but… (girl, 12, Malta)

Yes. They do that a million times, to give you a virus. There was this young man who once sent me a message; he was wearing a mask like the ones thieves wear. Only his eyes were visible. I called my mother to check whether she knew him and she said no. (girl, 14–16, Malta)

Skype transmits a lot of viruses. (boy, 10–11, Czech Republic)

Along with age, children have a better knowledge of their digital environment and sometimes, the older ones are able distinguish between different technical risks, although this does not guarantee their ability to get rid of them:

Interviewer: And have you ever had an infected computer?
Boy: Many times.
Interviewer: How many? Or how did it work, those viruses?
Boy: Well, whether slowing down all of the computer, crashes, blue death, that is when the whole screen turns blue, it says a bunch of things and then your computer shuts down. Subsequently, it was not possible to switch it on several times. So I also repaired it or had it repaired. But antiviruses manage most of the viruses. Whether Avast or similar programs…
(boy, 15, Czech Republic)

Nevertheless, when children compared such risk with some others, they considered them less serious than, for instance, cyberbullying, as this attacked or hurt people instead of computer devices.

Boy: Because the virus will hurt only your computer and the strangers will hurt you physically. Generally.
Interviewer: So those strangers can hurt you somehow.
Boy: But it can also be a combination of the two, that maybe the virus will send personal information, where they live and so on, and then the person will come and such.
(boy, 10–11, Czech Republic)

Yeah, like, for example, viruses, that's for everybody the same. But bullying that is more…[personal]. (girl, 14, Belgium)

Sources of awareness (peers, parents, media, eSafety)

Peers and parents share common awareness sources related to web pages containing viruses. Relatively often children could not see the viruses on the computer, so parents let them know they shouldn't visit certain web pages in order to avoid computer infections. In a similar way, some classmates – based on their own experience – may tell them which pages were safe or not.

Yes, there was a website, but I stopped going on that website. My dad told me not to go on that website any more, because it had viruses and things like that. (boy, 13, Belgium)

Downloading content

Downloading content from the internet seems to be a controversial issue. Very often the downloading takes place in sites where the content is provided free, even though it should be subject to authorship rights, while in some other sites, downloading is done using P2P programs such as uTorrent. In

this report legal aspects are disregarded, as the different legal frameworks between countries do not allow comparison. On the one hand, children mainly justified downloading content based on economical reasons. On the other hand, they regarded downloading as an opportunity, as it allowed them access to some content they could not get any other way:

> Boy: I think that…it's quite useful [downloading]. It can be useful, as well, but…it's illegal.
> Interviewer: Useful in what way?
> Boy: Ahm…music, for instance. Ahm…if we were to buy all the albums that we want, we would…we would have to be rich for that, cause we…at least here in our home we listen to a lot of music. It's there, lots of disks, these closets are filled with disks. But…besides this, there is a lot that came from the internet and…that's it.
> (boy, 13, Portugal)
> I do that because we have bought a hard drive, so you can download films on the computer, and instead of seeing them at the cinema, which is expensive, you can download them free and watch them on the television. It's that simple, whenever you want. *(girl, 9–10, Spain)*

> *Once wanted a song for my iPhone, and I didn't find it on iTunes, and I was on the internet. Either you pirate it or you don't get it. (girl, 10, Spain)*

None of the children mentioned any moral problem related to the nature of authorship rights, or the damage downloading could cause to authors and industry. The only worry was related to the hypothetical prosecution of downloaders by the police and to the quality of downloaded content, as sometimes these could be the source of viruses and some others did not fulfil their expectations – and, eventually, could turn out to be pornographic content.

> *Yeah...they try to hid that it's illegal [uTorrent], but I know that it's illegal because it's been on the news sometimes and people downloaded from there and go to prison...and I don't want to go to prison...I don't download stuff onto my laptop. (boy, 9–10, UK)*

> *Interviewer: What do you think about downloading things from the internet?*
> *Boy: That it's unsafe. Luckily, I have antivirus software.*
> *Interviewer: And how is it unsafe?*
> *Boy: It can bring in a virus, the biggest threat to computers.*
> *(boy, 10, Czech Republic)*

> *My father told me 'You are so keen on downloading, download some hunting films… We were watching video after video. And the last one, we started to watch it, and we saw these images of dogs and that, and then it turned out to be a porn film. Zoophilia. And my dad said… 'OK, switch it off'… (boy, 14–16, Spain)*

Sources of awareness (peers, parents, media, eSafety)

The information children get about this activity is quite complex. Most, however, knew that downloading is illegal, as such ideas were quite widespread through media campaigns trying to persuade them about the negative effects of piracy. Sometimes the children were reluctant to talk about how they downloaded material, as they preferred avoiding anybody finding out about this activity, or because some of them thought they might be jailed.

> *Boy: The government keeps an eye on all these things, so…when I tell you the name of the website, it will be blocked, and then I have to find a new website, so…*
> *Interviewer: Yes, okay, so what do you do then on this website? You can write it down.*

Boy: Mostly, I download things.
(boy, 15, Belgium)

Even though the children showed fear about being discovered, the activity is quite extended and even natural among them. Their peers downloaded content and borrowed them from each other. Sometimes they stated that even their parents were interested in the content. Actually, it seems to be quite usual that when perceiving their children more skilful than themselves, some parents asked them to download films or content for them.

My father told me 'you are so keen on downloading, download some hunting films… (boy, 14–16, Spain)

Excessive use

Children quite often mentioned in the interviews problems related to excessive use of the internet. Many admitted spending too much time online, and thought this may affect them negatively in two different ways. On the one hand, it may cause them anxiety related to their need to be permanently connected and pay attention to new messages on their mobiles or on SNSs. On the other hand, they may feel guilty because they were aware that they should be spending more time on some necessary activities – such as schoolwork – or on some more gratifying activities.

You are always connected, but sometimes I put the mobile away, because it can get too much when everybody…well not everybody but…if you are speaking to someone and you don't feel like talking any more it's not like…chatting on FB or Tuenti, you can't just disconnect! So I pretend I haven't heard it, or I put it on silent mode. (girl, 14, Spain)

It's sort of like...yes, I know. It's sort of, like, addictive really. It's...like, once you start talking to people you want, like, someone to talk to different people, and stuff like that. It's, like, you have to update your status all the time, so... (boy, 13–14, UK)

The perception of excessive use is not only related to the use of internet platforms such as SNSs; it is also quite common with games, either on a PC or on some other electronic devices:

So... It is quite an interesting question. Because early on, like, from the age of 11, when I actually got that computer until…wait...24.11.2011... I think it was... Yeah. Well, that I was very, I would say, addicted to playing. As indeed, I did not spend there 2, 3 hours a day. I spent there 8, 12 hours, for example. When I had free time, so I spent it just there. Very interesting... No. It was bad. I do not know. Somehow I totally became addicted to it and I lost interest in anything else. Like... (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

Boy: As far as videogames are concerned, besides their excessive use, children show some worry related to violent games as they may influence their behaviour. They fear such games may affect their perception of the real life and, sometimes, even violent behaviour can be related to the excessive use of such games.
Interviewer: And for those younger than you?
Boy: For younger kids, yes. You can't have a six-year-old kid playing counter-strike. He could become obsessed and...my cousin told me about a neighbour of his, he's been playing counter-strike since he was five and when he'd go out he'd pretend he was shooting with his cap.
(boy, 14, Romania)

Yes, I'm bringing him back to reality [overtalking]. Exactly but we also, when it comes to Black Ops, yes, like all these killing games you can play them, yes, but not for long, like, there should be, like, people should be aware of how long they're playing but people get addicted, like there was this, there was that event that happened

in America where this kid who was known to be very addicted to Call of Duty games killed all these kids. (boy, 13–14, UK)

Sources of awareness (peers, parents, media, eSafety)

Most of the children interviewed talked about excessive use of the internet based on their own experience. For instance, it was very common to hear them say how time had flown by while surfing on the internet.

Interviewer: Have you ever felt you were a little addicted or not?
Girl: Ahm…no. It was just…sometimes I…go to the computer, I have a full battery… That has happened, yeah. And then suddenly I go and check how much battery I have left and there's only 17 minutes and I start thinking: 'Was I on the computer for such a long time?'
(girl, 11, Portugal)

But it is an interesting feeling when you just find out that you think you have spent just a while there [on the internet] and suddenly discover that half a day has gone. Kind of confused. That they do not know... (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

Whereas some other times, parents called the children's attention to what they regarded as excessive use:

Interviewer: How do you evaluate your parents' view?
Girl: I think they're right. But I feel I need to go online for some time.
Interviewer: Why do you think that they are right in telling you off?
Girl: Because it distracts me from homework, and I get sucked into it for hours in front of a screen without interacting with the rest of the family.
(girl, 14, Greece)

As far as the relationship between excessive use of video games and violent behaviour is concerned, even though they did not expressly mention mass media, we may guess that parents tended to attribute such a relationship to the role of media when giving this sort of news. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, children don't seem to believe that such a relationship exists:

Because I play Call of… I play Black Ops too a lot and I go clay pigeon shooting every weekend and I shoot a lot, I have my own air rifle and everything and I have no tendencies to kill people. (boy, 13–14, UK)

Eating disorders

Even though it may not appear in a very articulate way, some children considered that the use of the internet could promote the exhibition of their own image and, as a consequence, it might contribute to eating disorders among children who didn't comply to the "desirable image." On the contrary, nobody considered the internet as a provider of content that could contribute healthier habits in a positive way.

Interviewer: Do you think it affects boys and girls in the same way?
Girl: More girls than boys. In a way.
Interviewer: And do you have contact with those kinds of messages?
Girl: Yes, for instance in Tumblr where people expose everything, talk about everything, and…I've seen some messages, I have met people with those problems and I know that the internet is not a factor that helps.

Today there is this idea of physical beauty and etcetera that young people try to achieve, and the internet is a way to expose that image even more.
(girl, 16, Portugal)

Age and gender perspectives

Findings on awareness of various risks show that age and gender differences matter in the way in which online negative experiences are socially constructed as problematic. In general, we can observe a clear age pattern across risks, whereby younger children tended to draw on adults' representations of risks (mainly, parental concerns and media coverage), while teenagers developed awareness based on their own or peers' experiences and knowledge. Moreover, some risks are clearly gendered, that is, they are socially constructed as affecting girls more than boys.

Age differences

There are some age differences in children's discourses on bullying. Older children seemed to be more aware that online bullying left evidence that could be traced back to the source. In contrast, a younger boy mentioned how with anonymous or private (e.g., on chat) bullying, it is more difficult to find support, which might indicate a lack of awareness in younger children of what could be done to report or not reply. Older children seemed to be more able to deal with insults and feel less annoyed by them, except in cases where they were bullied about something that really mattered to them, such as family. This increased awareness in older children might be attributed to more exposure and experience in the online world. Younger children *indicated that they feel more bothered, especially when they can see no way out.*

Girl: It's fine when they offend you about trivial things or so…but then it's not fine when they hit closer to home. If there is something that you really wouldn't want to talk about and they use it to offend you – for example, my brother is disabled.
Interviewer: Mhm…
Girl: And if they offend me about my brother, I'm going to do something about it for sure. I wouldn't offend them but if I find out who that person is, I wouldn't let it pass.
(girl, 15, Malta)

Sexual content, and unwanted content in general, is also variously perceived according to age. Younger children perceived sexual content as more bothering and annoying than older teenagers. For example, children aged 9–10 found banners or pop-ups containing sexual content particularly annoying, while teenagers normalized the presence of unwanted sexual content on the internet as something they became used to.

Age differences are also noticeable regarding meeting strangers: while children of all ages were aware of the potentially harmful consequences of meeting strangers, contact with people never met before was perceived as particularly risky by younger children. However, as children grow up, they perceived the major danger in online communication as represented by their own peers, and by bullying, as the following excerpts clearly show:

Girl 1: So sometimes the problems with Tuenti come up among people who know each other…
Girl 2: What a mess!
Girl 3: Sometimes people you know give you more trouble than the unknown ones.

Girl 4: Yes, because the people you don't know aren't going to bother looking at what you are doing. And also if you send a message to someone on Tuenti who you don't know, it doesn't matter, because you probably don't know them or you are never going to see them again. You just ignore it…
(girls, 14-16, Spain)

The perception of fraudulent commercial content is also quite closely related to age among the children interviewed. But even the youngest ones were aware of fraud risks related to some ads. As already mentioned, they tended to consider and avoid such contents based on their own experiences.

Interviewer: Why didn't you want to [to reveal personal details]?
Girl: Because then...they' re fraudsters…they say you've won some money, but you actually lose money, you never win it!
(girl, 10, UK)

Children's perception of risks is generally closely related to their digital skills and to their age. This is particularly true of technical issues. Even though all children perceived viruses as part-and-parcel of their use of computers, for the younger ones, the nature and effects of viruses were unclear. Along with age, children have better knowledge of their digital environment and, sometimes, the older ones are able to distinguish different technical risks, although this does not guarantee their ability to get rid of them:

Of course not all [virus], some of them can just bother us. Some of them are [obscure] malware. So you have ads pretty much everywhere all the time on the computer and it is a virus, it's not an ad, it is really a virus. And that is rather annoying, but it does nothing with that computer. And then there are those computer viruses that can totally ruin your computer. (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

Children in all age groups talked about excessive use of the internet, even among the youngest ones, referring to excessive use and its consequences for their everyday life activities:

Interviewer: You started off by saying you use it [the internet] 'a lot'. That time you used it for four hours, was it just once or does it usually happen?
Boy: It happens a lot of times…
Interviewer: Do you use it more than you want to? Have you ever felt that?
Boy: Yes, too much.
Interviewer: Why? With the games?
Boy: Games…! I spend most of my time on YouTube. I stay there and I don't notice time is flying by.
(boy, 9, Portugal)

Interviewer: What exactly do you mean? Because I 'read' it in a different way...
Boy: Well, sometimes I sit in front of the PC and don't even listen to what others say!… Once my brother was talking to me and [was distracting me]…but I didn't want to drop what I was doing, so [showing a gesture of attracting once attention] I pushed him away and threw him on a chair!
(boy, 9, Greece)

*C*hildren's perception of risks related to excessive use changes with their age – while the eldest ones talked often about addiction and even described it as a traumatic situation in their lives, the youngest ones, when referring to it, often mentioned the harm caused to their eyes:

I played before too. But we had some kind of old computer, so I occasionally played as a child, but...the first day I spent, when I got it, eight hours playing chess. Because I was very happy that I got it. And then it went all wrong. Then the next day my parents were happy that it made me so happy so they left me there, then they

did not stop it. I'm not proud of it, but then again it seems silly to deny it and say that I was a saint. However, then such a little turnaround, a bit of a twist in my life happened. And since then I left it. I still play, but I am not so addicted to it. I am doing other things. Like sport, which I was not doing those four years practically at all. (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

We shouldn't spend a lot of time – first of all it's because of your eyes. Secondly you need to study as well and not just spend time on the computer. Apart from that, the more time you spend online, the greater the chance that someone you do not know talks to you. (boy, 10, Malta)

Well, laptop computers hurt the eye, makes you get glasses if you keep using them and you might turn blind...which should never happen...that's why you shouldn't go on for over an hour...if you want to go on it should be about 30 minutes... I don't really usually go on for that long...if I play games it will just be a game for about 5 minutes...then I'll start researching...if I can't find anything...I'll just make a story, make a poem, do anything...for 10, 15. 30 minutes...
(boy, 9–10, UK)

Gender differences

As anticipated, certain problematic situations are strongly gendered, the most notable examples being bullying and harassment and meeting strangers.

Both girls and boys seemed to agree in their perception that girls had more fights online and that they were more dangerous, more affected and more at risk than boys. However, the children themselves debated whether how one reacts to what happens online is more a question of one's personality than one's gender. When it comes to incidents related to sexting, boys often mentioned how this is a sad experience for the girls, and it seems that often it was the girls who were victims of sexting rather than the other way round.

Well, I don't laugh with [at] it, because it's painful for the girl. And sometimes there are suicides because of such videos. (boy, 14–16, Belgium)

Discourses on strangers are also strongly gendered: both boys and girls assumed that girls were generally more vulnerable to being groomed on the internet and sexually abused or physically hurt offline.

Yes. Usually it's not boys being kidnapped. Its girls who usually are…raped and stuff, all of that. (boy, 11, Portugal)

The gendered nature of risk perceptions associated with meeting strangers is part of lay discourses and is a product of sexual double standards adopted by young people constructing gender identities (see Ringrose et al., 2013). However, it can acquire particular declinations in different cultures. More specifically, in Italy, Spain and, partially, Greece, girls who have contact with strangers on the internet were perceived not only as victims, but as also co-responsible for harmful consequences: adding strangers on Facebook for a high number of friends was a marker of popularity; posting provocative pictures or spending too much time on Facebook were all risky behaviours exposing girls to "stranger danger":

…then you see young girls who go out with...and also adults who write 'Hi sweetie, let's meet offline', and so. And then these girls accept to meet them and are raped – I mean sexual abuse is never right, but I claim: what are you doing yourself? Why did you accept to meet a stranger who contacted you on Facebook? (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Generally, the girls felt more often worried than boys about technical risks such as having their data hacked. This worry could be due to girls' vulnerability related to contact with strangers, or their bigger concern related to getting their sexual images through a webcam. Boys, however, tended to worry more about the nature and technical characteristics of viruses, as they claimed to be more skilful with new technologies than girls (Livingstone et al., 2011).

As far as excessive use of the internet is concerned, both boys and girls talked about this kind of situation. Nevertheless, among boys it was more common to talk about excessive use of video games than among girls.

Summary

Findings show that some risky situations are perceived as more dangerous than others: namely, online bullying and harassment; risky contacts with strangers on- and offline; and risks associated with misuse of personal information (including privacy and online reputation issues) top the list of children's concerns. Indeed, they are often combined in children's discourses, whereby both bullying and "stranger danger" are often associated with misuse of personal data.

Comparing different risks, there is evidence that awareness of online problematic situations varies consistently across risks and according to age, gender, and primary sources of information. In general, younger children are more likely to incorporate vocabularies and frames from the media and parents' discourses. Moreover, media representations are a greater component of the awareness of risks, which children have less probability of having experienced themselves. Conversely, older children usually draw on their own or peers' experiences in making sense of online risky situations. When they refer to media coverage, they often do so in forms of stories appropriated from the media and re-circulated within their internet cultures. For the same reasons, risks that are more clearly embedded within the boundaries of peer-to-peer relationships, such as bullying, tend to mobilize discourses in which first-hand and second-hand experiences prevail. Overall, then, the analysis of children's awareness of online problematic situations mirrors the development of the so-called "i-pistemology" (van Zoonen, 2012), whereby lay discourses around specific issues combine personal and peers' experiences – recognized as the most authoritative sources – with information gathered from the media or other "expert knowledge" – in this case, advice from school, in the form of eSafety programmes, and from parents.

Findings also showed that children and adults' perceptions could differ a great deal, based on children's discourses. That children frame online problematic situations differently from their parents and adults in general is most evident in the case of bullying, whereby the children drew a distinction between acts of online bullying and other forms of online conflict that were perceived as less serious and more ordinary. Drawing on Marwick and Boyd (2014, p. 5), we can label online fights among peers as "drama," that is, "performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media." Drama differs substantially from bullying as it involves reciprocal conflicting relationships with peers, whereas power imbalance is a distinctive feature of bullying. We can observe not only that drama is recurrent in children's discourses but also, and most noticeably, that consistent with Marwick and Boyd's interviewees, children drew a clear boundary and recognized drama as part of peers' internet cultures.

Finally, since awareness of online problematic situations informs choices and practices that children adopt to prevent encountering such situations on the internet, how children make sense of specific risks has relevant policy implications: digital skills and empowering risk awareness could help children develop

efficient preventive measures. Some questions arise regarding the effects of the sensationalist tone and the "child as a victim" frame usually employed in media coverage. Do media representations operate at the detriment of eSafety education and the development of effective preventive strategies? How, conversely, can media representations contribute to children's empowerment? These issues are particularly pressing for, as we have seen, the influence of global and sensationalist news stories is particularly strong and lasting with respect to those risks that children are most concerned about, because they potentially have more serious harmful consequences: bullying and meeting strangers.

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6. DEALING WITH PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS ONLINE: PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND COPING

Introduction

Monica Barbovschi & Sofie Vandoninck

Children in the EU Kids Online III project (2013) spoke about a wide range of problematic situations they face online, and also about the measures they took to deal with those situations. Dealing with problematic situations online has a preventive aspect and a reactive (coping) aspect. Many times, children learned from their experiences and started adopting preventive measures after coping with an unpleasant situation. After evaluating the effectiveness of certain coping strategies, children learned how to avoid re-occurrence of problematic situations in the future. Hence, reactive coping and subsequent preventive behaviour are related to each other, represented in Figure 5. The unique feature of the EU Kids Online III data – a qualitative study where children gave spontaneous responses about what bothered them online – offers the valuable opportunity for looking at the overall picture of how children deal with online stressors. In the future, these spontaneous responses can be used for generating ideas for relevant, adequate (preventive) coping scales for quantitative research.

Figure 5: Preventive measures and coping as categories of analyses: analytical model
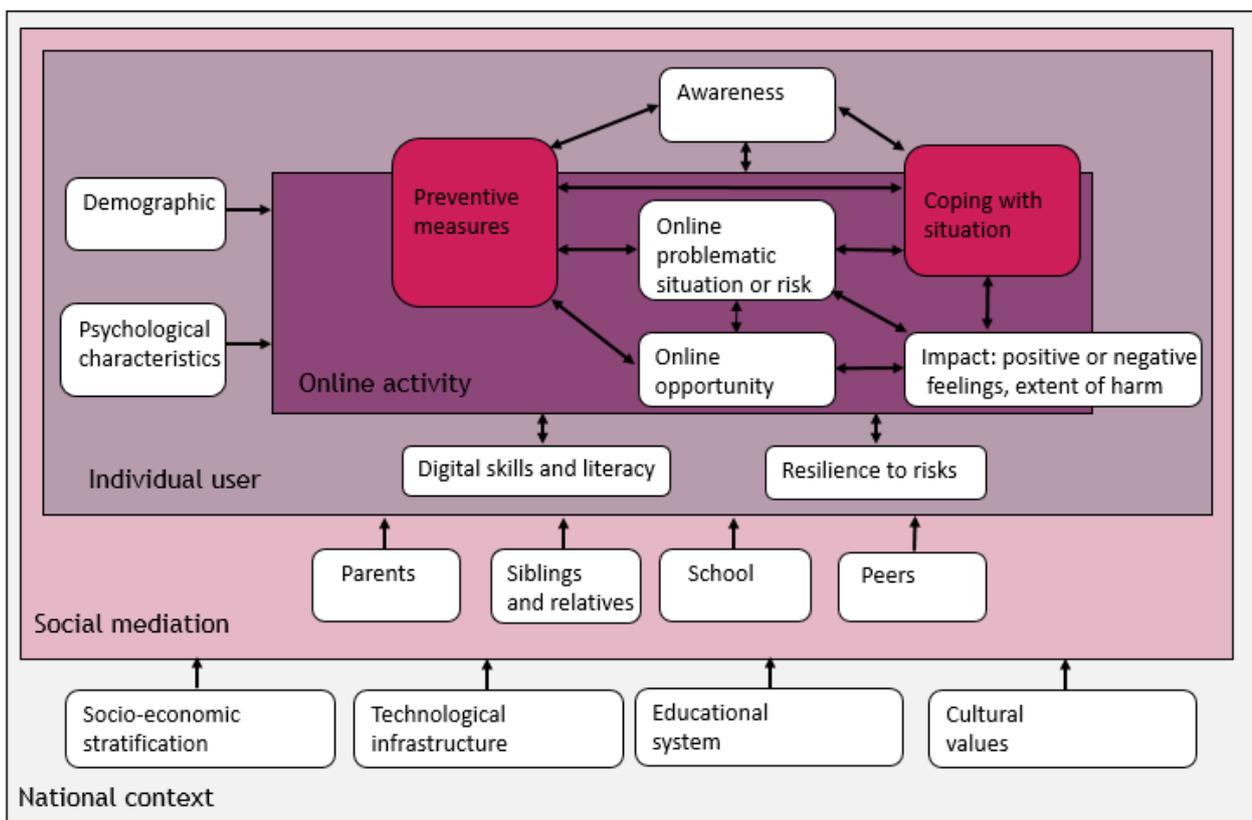
Both preventive measures and reactive coping share the theoretical starting points, namely, the transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) and the approach-avoidance model proposed by Roth and Cohen (1986). These have been the building foundations for numerous typologies for children's coping with general and specific stressors, in the case of online stressors, cyberbullying being one of the most investigated one. Earlier findings about reactive coping are helpful in understanding how children deal with online risks: coping behaviour is risk-specific, and children often combine strategies when confronted with a problematic situation online. For example, technical problem-solving strategies such as deleting messages, blocking the sender or using report buttons are more related to online bullying and sexting, both examples of conduct risks. Talking to somebody is the most popular reactive coping strategy across all types of online risks (d'Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013).

The following sub-sections 6a discuss children's strategies in dealing with problematic situations in preventive and reactive ways. In Parris and colleague's (2012) categorization, children's preventive measures and reactive coping responses are presented as conceptually distinct. However, we acknowledge being aware of possible overlaps noticed by Šléglová and Černá (2011), with many measures taken as subsequent coping also taken to prevent unpleasant experiences from happening again. The most notable parallels between preventive and reactive strategies are:

a) *Self-reliant versus other-reliant dimension:* we differentiate between situations where children deal with the problems themselves, and situations where children decide to seek support within their own social network (parent, peers, siblings, etc.) or institutional support (schools, online help lines, counsellors, etc.)

b) *Proactive technical measures:* young people often turn to tactics such as blocking online contacts, changing (privacy) settings or deleting content or messages. These measures often arise from an (indirect) unpleasant situation, and the intention is to avoid (repeated) exposure or harm in the future. A typical example is children changing their password after having had their account hacked.

c) *Confrontation with (potential) stressor or aggressor:* children engage in personal confrontations, either face to face, or online. In the preventive stage, these confrontations are generally non-violent, with the aim of avoiding escalation and misunderstandings. In the reactive stage, both violent and non-violent confrontations occur.

d) *Combining strategies:* often one single strategy is not sufficient to solve the problem or prevent it from happening; when a certain strategy turns out to be ineffective, young people build up towards a more inventive or complex approach based on a combination of strategies.

e) *Collective approaches:* children unite to deal with problematic situations online. Most often this happens among groups of close friends or classmates who stand up for a (potential) victim as bystanders, but it can also happen among online gamers or other online communities.

f) *Disengagement:* in some situations, young people decide not to engage in any preventive or reactive measures. Minimization, mistrust, acceptance or trivialising the situation are common motives for non-engagement.

The central aim of this chapter is to map the different preventive measures and reactive coping responses among 9- to 16-year-olds when confronted with problematic situations online, and to assess how young people differentiate strategies according to the type of online risk they are facing. Furthermore, we compare boys and girls, and examine how preventive and reactive practices change when children grow older.

The two sub-sections on children's preventive and reactive coping measures addresses situations related to:

a) *Aggressive communication, harassment and bullying online*, looking at situations when children are victims/recipients of aggressive communication, bystanders or perpetrators of bullying or aggressive acts as retaliation for other offences from peers

b) *Sexual content and communication*, including sexting, followed by peers disseminating compromising photos of others to the larger group

c) *Online strangers*, including receiving friend requests from strangers, strangers asking for personal information or sending unpleasant messages and offline meetings with people met online

d) *Privacy and misuse of personal information online,* including perceived lack of privacy, giving out or others giving out too much information about the child or themselves, misused, hacked or fake accounts, and sharing and tagging of personal photos/videos without the child's permission

e) *Other problems*, such as unwanted commercial content, technical problems (e.g., slow computers, viruses) and excessive internet use.

6a Preventive measures: ways to avoid problematic situations and negative experiences online

Sofie Vandoninck & Leen d'Haenens

Introduction

Preventive measures are strongly related to awareness of online problematic situations. This awareness of potentially problematic situations online motivates young people to think about ways to avoid negative experiences online, and informs their decisions on which precautions to take and which preventive measures to adopt (Kowalski, Limber & Agatson, 2008; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012).

Preventive measures, synonymous with future-oriented proactive forms of coping, are understood as a set of actions or strategies undertaken in advance of a stressful or potentially harmful situation, in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of its (re)-occurrence and/or its negative impact (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Folkman & Mokowitz, 2004; Parris et al., 2012). Preventive strategies are understood as proactive, in the sense that they take place prior to anticipatory and reactive coping. However, prevention is not only about avoiding first-time exposure, but also the re-occurrence or escalation of an unpleasant situation. This risk/impact-reduction intention is crucial to the way preventive measures are conceptualized in this study. It includes both initiatives aimed at preventing initial exposure and strategies meant to avoid escalation or continuation of an unpleasant experience. Preventive action involves the accumulation of specific resources and skills in preparation for an undefined potentially stressful event, and it is potentially self-promoting if the outcome of preventive actions is positive.

Because preventive measures take place prior to the (re)-occurrence of an unpleasant situation, they are virtually always proactive, tackling the cause of the potential problem. Cognitive coping and emotion-focused coping, which focus on buffering negative feelings, are therefore considered as rather ineffective in this preventive stage, unless accompanied by specific behavioural actions (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). However, our results show that cognitive strategies such as planning and strategizing fulfil an important role in moving from mere awareness to concrete preventive actions.

Definitions and conceptualizations: types of preventive measures

Self-reliant strategies

Proactive problem-preventing strategies is the most important category of preventive measures and includes actions and strategies aimed at tackling the potential stressor and finding an effective solution. Three sub-types are identified:

a) *Instrumental actions* are concrete actions or behaviour to avoid a problematic situation from happening. This often involves so-called technical measures that require some digital skills, for example, changing privacy settings, installing filters or software, using report buttons, etc. In some cases, instrumental actions are non-technical, such as arranging a meeting with an online contact in the company of another person.

b) *Self-monitoring* is about controlling or limiting one's online activities and disclosure of personal information, for example, only posting neutral, non-intimate pictures or limiting online communication to

people one personally knows. This strategy reflects the "think before you post" principle. Sometimes, children also limit their online activities to applications or platforms known as safe.

c) *Behavioural avoidance*, which is (temporarily) disabling or staying away from platforms or applications, and avoiding some online activities or actions. Examples are not accepting friend requests, not answering or ignoring online contacts, or staying away from certain (online) practices such as taking "sexy" pictures.

The category of *planning, strategizing and reflecting* is about critical thoughts or reflections about how to prevent (hypothetical) problems. This category is at the edge of awareness and preventive measures, because it is about what is going on in children's minds and not about actual behaviour. Nevertheless, measures such as constructing scenarios about what they (would) do when they are at risk, thinking about specific criteria to decide when something is risky, or talking about the circumstances under which a situation is risky or safe, are crystallizations of mere awareness, and a crucial step in the preventive process. We have two sub-categories:

a) *Thoughts, reflections or arguments*, for example, criteria for adding new people to SNS contact lists.

b) *Suggestions* from participants or advice to other stakeholders (e.g., industry, parents, teachers, peers) about how to increase online safety.

Sometimes children explicitly said that they did not do anything to prevent a problematic situation from happening, which is labelled as *disengagement*. There is a link with awareness, because usually children disengage when there is a lack of interest or involvement in the situation. Two types of disengagement are identified:

a) *Minimization, acceptance and trivializing* – the children accept the situation as part of life. They generalize the situation and claim it is normal that everybody has these issues.

(b) *Justification*, where children argue why they do not perceive situations as problematic, or why it is not worth getting upset over an issue. Tactics of cognitive reframing are included in this sub-category, as some children try to reframe the issue as non-risky in an attempt to defend themselves for not taking any preventive measures.

Other reliant strategies

In some situations, children feel the need to rely on others when it comes to avoiding a problematic situation. *Contacting others* should be understood very broadly, as it also includes consulting online or non-personal sources such as websites, profiles, videos, offline media, online helplines, etc. Because of the involvement of the children's social context, this category is related to the area of mediation. Children rely on others for:

a) *Information-seeking*. One motive is the feeling that their skills and knowledge are insufficient to protect themselves, for example, when it comes to password security, protection of personal information, unsafe websites, etc. Another motive for information-seeking is uncertainty reduction, such as screening people's profiles or consulting others to gather more information about a person or situation.

b) *Support-seeking*. This can be instrumental aid, such as advice, help or feedback about planned actions or strategies, or this can be support in a sense of reassurance and comfort. The latter is more about confiding and sharing experiences.

Preventive measures are not always initiated by the children themselves. Frequently it is another person, mostly a parent or teacher, who takes the initiative. These references are labelled as *preventive measures initiated by others*. Because of the strong involvement of others, this category can also be understood as preventive mediation, and shows how preventive measures are connected with the area of mediation. However, as the focus of this section is on self-initiated preventive measures, we will not discuss this category any further. Mediation is discussed in Chapter 7.

Bullying and harassment

Proactive problem-preventing strategies

Many young people turn to so-called technical *instrumental actions* such as deleting unwelcome friend requests, unfriending, unfollowing or blocking people they do not want to hear from, or showing themselves as "offline" or "invisible" so others cannot disturb them. These strategies are perceived as helpful, as they prevent (potential) perpetrators from sending unwelcome content. Participants sometimes mention the use of report buttons. Especially when profiles are fake, or when people insult others in games or virtual worlds, young people consider using a report button. Although such technical instrumental actions can also be labelled as reactive coping, the respondent's intention is often to avoid further unpleasant exposures in the future. Non-technical approaches such as never disclosing one's password or choosing a very difficult password are also strategies that should protect young people from unpleasant experiences.

> *I go on their profile and block them. Depends what he asks me. If it's something that is relevant, or like, I don't know. If it's something abusive – straight away, I block. If it is a message that makes sense, I go to their profile and check; if I don't like what I see, I block, as well. (boy, 13, Malta)*

Besides these, some instrumental actions are connected with communicative strategies such as information-seeking and support-seeking. When feeling uncomfortable about (potential) bullies, several participants claimed they (would) talk with their parents to come to an adequate solution. Some bystanders considered even showing print screens or other materials to "prove" what the risks were, and a few would go as far as contacting the police. Direct personal communication with (potential) perpetrators of online bullying or sexting is also a recurring strategy, both in online and offline settings. Mostly, the intention is to prevent further escalation, either by explaining why the person is not pleased with the situation or by informing others what exactly happened. For example, in case of a hacked profile or account, the victims would inform their network about this incident through other communication channels, in order to avoid misunderstandings that could turn into fights. Confrontation is also a recurring problem-solving strategy in reactive coping, although the intention might be malicious, when the aim is to get back at the perpetrator and take revenge. Finally, although this could probably prevent a lot of trouble, only a few participants told us they would first ask people's permission before posting photos or videos online.

It happened in our school. Someone took a picture of someone in a pose and then they edited the picture making a small comment and then…my schoolmate was pretty sad about it, then I told everyone to delete the photo because I just asked them, if that was you, how would you feel, so they deleted the photo and everything's fine now. (boy, 11, UK)

Some participants claimed that *self-control* on how and with whom one communicated could prevent them from online bullying victimization. They preferred applications or platforms that allow one-to-one (private) communication, and avoided posting messages or "liking" things on profiles where everybody could see a post and comment on it. To protect oneself from online bullying, it was considered better not to accept people with a bad reputation. Related to this, some participants pointed out that one had to make sure that profile settings were on "friends only," and not on "public". A few participants even went beyond this, intending to only share things with sub-groups of friends they had a good and steady personal relationship with.

There are people who write things I don't agree with, vulgar things, so I avoid adding friends of those people. It happened just a few times that I deleted someone, but because this person wrote something that was really…I mean…one may be bothered by a wall full of offensive posts and swears. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Participants who experienced online bullying as bystanders sometimes turned to *behavioural avoidance* tactics such as deleting their account, disconnecting or going away from the platform or service. For example, when their friends or classmates had serious problems related to ask.fm, some participants decided to remove themselves from this platform by way of prevention. Some even claimed they would never create an ask.fm account because they considered risks for online bullying as too high.

No, I don't do ask. Because they always write down hateful things on that… It's pretty stupid, because people sometimes kill themselves because of ask. So they actually shouldn't create this… It's just something to write hateful things on. And certainly not making it anonymously…because most people write down hateful content anonymously, and then you can't find who did this. (girl, 15, Belgium)

Cognitive strategies: critical thinking, strategizing, suggesting

Some young people realized there was a connection between disclosing (personal) things on SNS and being vulnerable for online bullying, since (potential) bullies could easily misuse the information shared on (public) profiles to ridicule them. The principle of "think before you post" was believed to be crucial in protecting oneself from acts of online bullying; keeping a "low profile," not seeking attention and not disclosing sensitive things, one is less likely to become a victim. A few children suggested that parents should check their posts, as they believed that parental monitoring was helpful in internalizing this attitude of thinking before posting. Being aware that their parents could see what they posted on their profiles, they were more careful about what they shared online.

Well, I put photos online but I do not post anything private so that people would not know where we have what… For example, I post a picture sitting with my dog on the couch, but I do not have the dog on my lap on another picture. (boy, 10, Czech Republic)

Young people especially are concerned about services or applications that allow *anonymous communication*, such as ask.fm. They realize that the possibility of posting answers or comments anonymously facilitates online bullying, because it is more difficult to find the perpetrator. They also criticized the public character of these services; the fact that others could see these nasty comments made it even more painful. Some young people, especially adolescents, had abandoned these kinds of

applications, proclaiming that it was about being mature enough to withstand social pressure and not to answer offensive questions or give nasty comments. This attitude often goes together with the suggestion towards industry and policy to ban or forbid these kinds of applications. Ask.fm is targeted in particular, as it is seen as leading to lots of hateful comments and social drama.

For instance, once I had this fight with a girl who is in my group – I cannot stand her! – and she came to offend me on Ask but she forgot to turn off the 'unknown' and her name showed up. I told her: 'If you want to tell me something, do so on chat like I do with you dear [sarcasm].' When one offends someone on ask, I really do not like it. If I have to say something, I'd say it to their face and I wouldn't bother. (girl, 14–16, Malta)

Another issue is children's struggle in *defining the line between teasing and bullying*. This line is often thin, and sometimes it is unclear for young people to see where teasing stops and where bullying begins. Generally, teasing among close friends about trivial things was accepted, but escalation should be avoided. However, participants realized that some issues could escalate easily, and that acts of teasing sometimes unintentionally turned into a case of bullying. To avoid such situations, participants pointed out the importance of mutual respect and handling others as you would like to be handled yourself. Open and clear face-to-face communication with perpetrators and bystanders was also believed to be effective in neutralizing issues at the edge of escalation, for example, in a situation where classmates made fun of each other. Approaching the situation with humour or (temporarily) ignoring things were other strategies that could reduce the risk of escalation, since showing the perpetrator that they were not affected would probably discourage the perpetrator to go on with bullying. Ignoring aggressive acts was also identified as a common reactive response to online bullying. Additionally, some children acknowledged the complicated but important position of bystanders. They suggested supporting friends who were bullied so the victims wouldn't feel completely alone and abandoned.

When people send me offensive things, as I've already said, I'm not really bothered by them. If it's something really small that I can work on, I'm going to work on it. If it's something really big that is going to affect everything, and it's like they offend me about it, I wouldn't change as it is better to stay the same and know what is going on rather than removing something. (girl, 16, Malta)

Some participants were sceptical about the helpfulness of report options. They doubted that something would be done and that the situation would really change. It was not always clear under which circumstances you should or should not use report buttons, as it was not acceptable to report nasty message. When the message came from a friend (i.e., someone known personally), or when it was "just for fun", peers may disapprove reporting. It was therefore important to verify whether it was just an act of teasing or whether there was an intention to harm. Unfortunately, it can be very difficult to correctly label an act or situation. While some participants suggested awareness-raising campaigns about cyberbullying, others were more sceptical.

It depends on two things when you report stuff. If it's my friends…the thing is we're friends and we make up, but if someone that we don't know came and 'made you a tsunami' and you're taking it friendly, second time you say it was a mistake, but the third time you know for sure and if he does it again, then it starts to piss you off. (boy, 12, Romania)

Victims of online bullying are often advised to *talk about it with an adult*. However, some participants were critical about this approach. First of all, they realized that not every child had a good relationship with their parents, and that it was not evident for these children to communicate about sensitive issues such as bullying. Second, some children (would) also hesitate to talk about it because they were afraid of their parents' reactions. They thought their parents would overreact or exaggerate, or would

have a wrong image of their child's behaviour. Therefore, they preferred not to involve their parents in issues of online bullying. Suggestions to deal with this issue were obliging providers or creators of services and applications to develop better reporting systems, to monitor more intensively acts of bullying and banning perpetrators from their platforms.

> *I would tell my mother, because she would not get cross with me, I know. Some other children may not trust their parents, or they may have had some trouble and don't trust them. So they tell someone else. That is to say, they might tell you, they might tell a teacher… I have seen that happen. To a friend, to anyone. Anyone except their parents. Even their grandparents. But never their parents. And really I don't understand it, firstly because it seems strange to me, and secondly because it is really silly. (boy, 11–14, Spain)*

Communicative strategies: seeking and providing information and support

Despite all opportunities for digital communication, *talking face to face* remains a powerful way to neutralize escalating situations. Young people realized that face-to-face communication simply provided more cues to understand what was happening and how to interpret things, which is very helpful in finding out where teasing ends and bullying begins. This strategy turned out to be helpful, both in the preventive and reactive stage. Asking a person directly to stop sending annoying messages or to delete an embarrassing picture has more impact, and people are generally more respectful face to face. Instead of commenting back on people's profiles, children felt that more empathy was created in a face-to-face confrontation. When situations are vague, talking face to face is very helpful in clarifying what has happened and avoiding misunderstandings that could escalate into a fight. For example, in the case of a hacked SNS profile, children talked personally to their friends to make sure they would not believe the profile's fake content.

> *It's funny because it's also stupid that you…when you do this [posting nasty messages] on Facebook… In the first place, you should do this on the chat where nobody else can see this happening. And even then… It's better to just tell people in the face what you want them to say. (boy, 14, Belgium)*

Children know that *support from bystanders* is crucial in situations of online bullying. When they had a close relationship with the victim, they would stand up for their friend. However, when the close circle of friends was not affected, children may prefer to keep a distance because they do not want to get involved themselves. Support is mainly emotional; only in a few cases did children say they assisted friends in changing settings or deleting painful comments or pictures.

> *Well, actually I have my profile, and there's this window for questions, so someone can write there you're a cow, or disgusting things like that. Well, it happens a lot to some people, but I don't have such a big problem with it. I just try to be the kind of person who doesn't gossip. The ones who gossip, get themselves mixed up in it, and they're the ones who get the bad messages, so I just try not to say anything. (girl, 11, Czech Republic)*

The *role of parents in providing support* strongly depends on the type of parent–child relationship. In communicative families, children more easily talk about online bullying. Moreover, they seem to accept a certain level of monitoring, as their parents keeping an eye on them gives them a safer feeling. Emotional support is again most important, although some parents assisted their children in gathering proof, such as chat messages. Nevertheless, some children were very reluctant to talk with their parents about online bullying, as they were afraid of repercussions or the exaggerated reactions of their parents.

My parents trust me. I may be on the mobile and if my mother comes and says 'let me see that photo', I will show it to her because I don't mind. I talk to my mother as if she were a friend. That's why she asks me about things and I show her. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

[To prevent online bullying], parents should check on their children. My mom often watches over my shoulder when I'm on Facebook. I don't mind that, but not all people do this. (girl, 14, Belgium)

Disengagement: minimizing and justifying

Most children feel affected by online bullying, but occasionally children do not believe preventive measures are helpful. A *fatalistic attitude* could result in disengagement. Indications of such attitude are beliefs that not much can be done about online bullying, that awareness-raising campaigns are ineffective, and that companies are not likely to do something when inappropriate things are reported. Eventually, a few children even said they got used to receiving nasty comments and they accepted online bullying as part of life. Hence, they disengaged in preventive practices.

Girl 1: Yes, [we have reported] people who posted pictures…it was on Facebook. In this case it wasn't people, it was a page they created to tease people. And a friend of mine was there, last year, teasing 'this girl is acting like an emo', I don't know. And we…they created the page that was a 'troll', so they were teasing the girl with it, and then lots of people were teasing her too. So I reported the picture and all the pictures in that page, even the page itself.
Interviewer: Was it closed?
Girl 1: No! Although many people…there were many people in my class reporting…
Girl 2: Who sees the reporting? And I think that…this is not very important. And it only works if it's really…
Girl 1: Yeah, improper or offensive content.
(girls, 15, Portugal)

Victims of online bullying were not always perceived as defenceless. In some situations, young people believed it was the *victim's own fault* that they were bullied. Participants did not have much compassion with people seeking attention or making a scene, such as girls who shared sexy pictures or people sending nasty messages themselves. Hence, keeping a "low profile" was a good protection strategy against online bullying. Even if they felt some compassion for the victim, bystanders mainly omitted helping behaviour because they were afraid of getting involved personally and becoming victimized themselves or wanted to avoid social drama at school.

Sexual content and communication

Proactive problem-preventing strategies

A practice that is most often recommended to avoid problems with sexting is *simply not taking sexy pictures* or undressing in front of the webcam. Surprisingly, both boys and girls believed it was the girls' responsibility to avoid these kinds of practices; while girls who took sexy pictures were labelled as "stupid," it was considered more "normal" for boys to share these pictures. However, to prevent problematic situations, both boys and girls believed it was better not to accept, edit or share sexy pictures anyway, especially not when the portrayed person was somebody they personally knew.

Never post pictures where you seem older than you are, so I don't post pictures of myself half naked and I don't post pictures where I have the t-shirt like that…maybe when you are with your friend, but I post normal pictures. (girl, 11–13, Italy)

When protecting themselves from exposure to (shocking) sexual content, a general trend among the participants was to claim they *avoided clicking on things that looked weird, unfamiliar or suspicious*. Examples are commercials with sexy ladies or pop-ups with contests or competitions. A few participants came up with a surprising argument for avoiding clicking on sexual content; they believed this content was inappropriate for their age, and that it could distort their ideas and beliefs on sexuality.

Occasionally, young people moved towards technical instrumental actions such as installing software (anti-virus programs, ad blockers) or filters to avoid exposure to unwelcome sexual or commercial content.

Cognitive strategies: critical thinking, strategizing, and suggesting

Participants strongly disapproved of taking or sharing sexy pictures or undressing in front of the webcam. They called it stupid, naïve, and dumb to agree on such *sexting* requests, as it was very likely that this practice would lead to trouble at some point because once a picture was online, it was online forever. It was considered one's own responsibility not to engage in sexting practices, and girls in particular should be conscious about this. It was up to them so deny requests from boys and to make sure no sexy pictures were taken or shared. Girls should not trust boys, not even their boyfriends – in case of a break-up a boyfriend could take revenge and share sexy pictures. Although young people seemed to agree it was their own responsibility, a few also mentioned that it was unethical for boys to share sexy pictures without the permission of the person portrayed, or to blackmail (ex)-girlfriends. Some children came up with some funny alternatives, like giving a classic paper photo album with sexy pictures, or asking a boyfriend to meet up face to face if they wanted to see the other undressed.

> There are some friends of mine that post pictures of themselves with a lot of make-up, lipstick, their mother's high heels…they get many 'likes' but, what the hell, don't they understand that everyone can see those pictures? That they can comment on it? And those comments could be also very vulgar? I'll never post pictures like that! (girl, 11–13, Italy)

Adolescents seemed to agree that *mass-communicated pornographic content* could be disturbing, and they mostly approved of the development of filtering systems to protect (young) children (i.e., elementary school children) from exposure to this sexual content. They were aware that early or frequent exposure to pornographic content could distort beliefs about sexuality. Participants complained about failing filters in Facebook that should automatically remove pictures with naked body parts, so they suggested that industry and policy makers should develop stronger and stricter age-based filtering systems for sexual content.

> I think pornography is the one big thing because, I mean, at our age we can see violent films, but pornography, well, hopefully none of us at school will have sex before an appropriate age so no one should really be seeing pornography too early. But then there probably are those odd one or two people who are watching it and while getting ideas or something in their heads which will then ruin the rest of their lives. (boy, 13–14, UK)

Young people also recognized the impact of *parental and educational styles* on how children communicated about sexual content. When parents or teachers feel uncomfortable about sexual issues, children feel more embarrassed and are reluctant to talk with them about sexual content online, not only in a preventive stage but also after exposure to sexual content. Nevertheless, participants tended to favour open communication about sexuality and saw sexual education as an important parental task. For younger

children (i.e., under the age of 12), participants saw parental regulation and monitoring as an appropriate strategy to protect them from inappropriate sexual content.

What worries me most is that my young cousins, when their parents let them have a mobile, may look for anything and may see it, being so young… Some sort of control, a function for young people using computers so that some pages won't come up should be put in place. But even so, that might not stop them seeing something inappropriate. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Communicative strategies: seeking and providing information and support

Generally, young people are not likely to handle sexual issues online in a communicative way. Mostly, they try to avoid problems on their own and prefer not to talk about it. Young people still seem to feel uncomfortable talking about these issues, especially with adults. In a few situations, for example, when a close friend is involved, children would confront senders of sexting messages personally with their behaviour. The most important motivation to talk with parents is the fear of repercussions if the parents were to find out later that their child had been confronted with sexual content or communication online. They feel it is better to confess immediately to their parents before they discover it themselves.

[Comments about sex] make me feel quite strange, when I hear these conversations… The other day I heard someone making comments that had to do with sex, you know. And I left, I didn't want to stay. I don't like those things. It is too early to talk about these things and I think that their mothers should monitor it a bit more. Their dads, or moms, or whoever is with them. (boy, 11–13, Spain)

Disengagement: minimizing and justifying

Not taking any precautions mainly results from a belief that unwelcome *sexual images or messages are inevitable* and simply part of online experiences. Even filters or detection systems were unreliable, according to some participants; if sexual content was banned from one platform, it would show up on another.

When children disengage in talking about sexual images or messages, it is mainly because they feel a bit *ashamed or afraid of their parents' reactions*. Among peers, sexual content is often ridiculed or laughed at, which may inhibit serious or critical discussion about this topic.

Responsibility for sexting incidents was mainly attributed to the girls taking sexy pictures of themselves. Taking sexy pictures and sending them to a boy was very likely to end up in a problematic situation, so it was felt that these girls should not be surprised when they were suddenly ridiculed. According to the participants, it was normal that people (especially boys) shared these pictures, so it was up to the girls to say no and to refrain from these practices.

The girl [victim of sexting] was ridiculed for a long time. It's the boys who ask for it, but yeah, you're just stupid when you do this [taking sexy pictures]. You can just say that you don't want to do this. (boy, 15, Belgium)

85

Meeting strangers

Proactive problem-preventing strategies

Self-monitoring one's contacts or friend lists was considered important in the struggle against unwelcome messages from strangers. To avoid problems, being cautious in accepting friend requests was recommended. Some young people were more careful than others, but criteria frequently mentioned were *only accepting people seen at least once*, people from one's own town or school, people of about the same age, or people with sufficient mutual friends. Additionally, participants mentioned being careful with people who had "weird" names (e.g., foreigners), people without a clear profile picture, or people one had never talked to on the phone or over the webcam.

I look at, for example, the place where the person lives…if I know that the person lives in the same town, I would add him as a friend. But when I see that the person lives in a different city, I won't add him…because I don't really know the person. You can also look at mutual friends. When my classmates or friends are mutual Facebook friends with this person, then I add the person. (girl, 14, Belgium)

For example, yesterday I have been sent a request from someone whose name was 'The Stupid' and we shared nine friends. It could have been someone I met before, but for safety reasons I didn't add him…and then on Facebook, as I said, if people with whom I share 100 contacts send me a request of friendship I add them, but then I have also friends I've never been talking to. (boy, 14–16, Italy)

When communication with strangers is at stake, participants recommended not commenting on posts from people not personally known, and limiting online communication to close friends only. Controlling communication is especially relevant on gaming platforms – if using chat application in games, one should only talk about the game itself, not about personal things. Some players went a step further by only talking to players they knew personally, or they only used game platforms that were monitored and where offenders were expelled.

A very popular practice in uncomfortable situations with strangers was simply ignoring questions, comments or messages to avoid further disturbances. As a reactive response, ignoring unwelcome friend requests or messages was also a popular strategy. Some participants were more cautious when it came to strangers, and avoided any kind of communication, even about trivial or "innocent" topics.

Cognitive strategies: critical thinking, strategizing, and suggesting

Children agreed that *not everything should be shared with everyone*: some information was simply not intended for complete strangers. Hence, they recognized the importance of privacy settings (i.e., friends only) and the "think before you post" principle, which means not disclosing contact information and not posting about intimate or personal things. As knowledge and skills on (privacy) settings are considered important, young people suggested schools and teachers practice these skills in class.

Although children seemed to know very well that the "rule of thumb" was *not accepting strangers as friends*, their actual behaviour sometimes diverged. While children first proclaimed they would never accept strangers, later in the conversation it turned out that most of them at some point had accepted requests from (quasi)-strangers. It is clear that young people struggle with the definitions of "stranger" and "knowing someone personally," which leads to schizophrenic behaviour in accepting friend requests. Although participants claimed they would only accept people they personally knew and never accept strangers, their criteria for accepting someone as SNS friend were rather minimalistic. Eventually, lots of

young people are likely to accept people going to the same school, living in the same town, people they have noticed once on the street, people with mutual friends, people having a familiar name or a recognizable profile picture, people they have seen on the playground, etc. Clearly, some of them had a very broad interpretation of "knowing someone personally.".

> *Well, I check if we have many friends in common, if I get requests from people with one or two friends in common and I don't accept their request, I check the 'I don't know this person' option and they won't send me requests anymore. I check whether they've commented and whether I recognize them. (girl, 12, Romania)*

Some participants reflected explicitly on the *new concept of "friendship."* They acknowledged that accepting people as friends on SNS went very fast and easily. Yet, they felt there was still a difference with "real friends" with whom they had a real "offline" relationship. More experienced SNS users tended to disapprove competitions among classmates about the number of SNS friends, and turned to practices like "cleaning up" lists of friends. Because the label "friends" to indicate a list of contacts in SNS is confusing, young people suggested developing different labels to indicate groups of (online) connections and contacts.

> *Yes, I do [add people I don't really know]. Like people that I've seen only once or so. But I want…when I add them as friends, I want to be sure that it's a real person. Not like this man, with his fake account… I made more friends, and things like that. And now I see them when I go out, and now they have become really good friends. And when I'm sure they are nice people, then I talk to them. (girl, 16, Belgium)*

Most young people have been educated about the *"stranger danger" discourse,* which focuses on the practice of grooming. This has led to great cautiousness about meeting people offline. Girls in particular seem very cautious about this risk, and children regularly referred to older men pretending to be an adolescent, and the possibility of being kidnapped or abused. Therefore, young people who do not comply with the "basic rules" of meeting new people (i.e., meet in a public place, take a friend to the meeting, inform others about your plans) were perceived as weird, dumb, naïve or stupid. Adolescents (13–16) believed that mainly younger children should be protected from strangers, which could be achieved by (automatic) monitoring systems or parents checking on their children's online connections. They suggested, for example, developing a detection system to identify people who sent out too many friend requests to children.

> *I can use the internet as long as I don't upload any photos, and that, because later the kidnappers may chat with me… My parents have already told me not to chat with people I don't know. They don't want me to talk to unknown people in case they are kidnappers and they want to meet me face to face… I've seen lots of cases. But I don't mind, since it won't happen to me… They showed cases on television, people who have started chatting to somebody, then they have met up and been killed. (boy, 11–13, Spain)*

Communicative strategies: seeking and providing information and support

Before accepting a friend request, young people say it is important to verify the person's identity. Both personal and non-personal sources are consulted to gather information about the person. Popular information-seeking tactics are *screening the profile* to verify the age and identity based on pictures, comments and posts, and checking the number of mutual friends and searching for common pictures. Just a few children would search on Google for more information about the person.

> *Usually on Skype, when I use it, and someone wants to add me, usually if they don't have a picture, I wait until the next day. For example, if one of my friends sent the request, I ask her 'is it you who sent the request?' If she says no then I don't accept the request. If she says yes, than I do. (girl, 9, Italy)*

Children's offline social connections are also important sources of information about online contacts. Before accepting a friendship request, children are likely to consult friends, classmates or family members to check how the person is connected to the offline social network and what impression others have about this person.

> *For example, when I'm chatting on a game, then sometimes people come and ask me like 'where do you live?' And things like 'how old are you?', 'in which street do you live?'… Then I ask my mom if it's okay to give this, and then she says no. Because they could come after you. (boy, 11, Belgium)*

To make sure the friendship request does not come from a fake profile, children try to consult the sender face to face or through mutual friends, in order to verify whether the request was really sent by them. Another approach is to *accept the person and start a conversation* to find out more about him or her. If it turned out that the person provided inconsistent answers or was vague about mutual connections, children claimed they could still decide at that point to unfriend, delete or block the person. This strategy seems less cautious, but shows that children are sometimes just curious about the person and have sufficient trust in options to delete or block the person in case they feel bothered. This add-and-delete or add-and-make-fun approach is discussed in Chapter 6b: Coping.

When it comes to meeting people, young people tend to *ask their friends or parents for some assistance*. One "rule of thumb" on meeting with strangers was not going alone, so they were very likely to take friends with them, or to ask their parents to bring them to the meeting and stay nearby in case something bad happened.

Disengagement: minimizing and justifying

In the beginning of the interview or focus group, participants tended to give socially desirable answers, and claim they had never had contact with strangers. After a while, however, we noticed that some of them gave inconsistent answers and *admitted they had had contact with strangers*, online and/or offline. At this point, they tried to explain why it was okay to have contact with strangers in these specific situations. For example, children argued it was okay to accept friend request from strangers if their profile did not contain too much personal information, if the person had some mutual friends or if the conversation was only about practical things (e.g., game strategies) and not about feelings or emotions.

Some children did not believe that anyone would be interested in their information, so they *did not care about strangers looking at their profiles* or contacting them. They could not imagine a stranger would really misuse their information, as the content they shared was perceived as "nothing special". A few even thought that it was impossible to protect oneself from strangers trying to get in touch, because they could always bypass privacy or security settings.

Personal data and privacy problems

Proactive problem-preventing strategies

The participants expressed concerns about sharing personal or intimate things online and emphasized one should *not post "important" information*, that is, contact information (home address, phone number) and information about the place where one lived (pictures of one's home, geo-based information, or holiday locations). Young people believed this information could attract burglars or "bad people." In line with this, they expressed the importance of limiting oneself to neutral or non-intimate

information and to only posting "normal" pictures where they looked decent, carrying out "usual" social activities or group pictures with friends. Frequent posting about "stupid" daily activities, such as having a meal, was also disapproved of by some participants. The same carefulness about disclosing personal information applied to creating a profile or an account; participants disapproved of completing all the fields, and some were not reluctant about filling out fake information.

> *Strangers could pull out information from me and so on, and then rob a house. It's very simple; they would ask where I live and I would answer. They would find out how long my parents work and when I am at school, and they could simply come to the house as burglars. (boy, 9, Czech Republic)*

A recurring technical instrumental strategy is *changing privacy settings to "friends only."* Young people's motivation to change settings was sometimes the result of a previous negative experience; they increased their online safety to avoid similar unpleasant encounters in the future. Some were even more restrictive and created a special group (e.g., group of classmates) with whom to share their pictures and contact information. As protection against privacy abuse, a few participants mentioned the importance of correctly logging off their accounts, especially on public computers or in public Wi-Fi zones.

> *I only post things that can really be public, no personal things. For example, things about games or so. Actually you can do this very specifically, because… For example, you post one thing for 'public' and another thing for 'friends only'. But on my profile I only post things for my friends, those I know really well. Those people I trust, as I put the others in the list of 'acquaintances', so… (boy, 15, Belgium)*

Also related to privacy protection, a few participants believed that covering the webcam with some tape or paper protected against personal data misuse. Alternatively, some chose to fill out false, fake or misleading information, or chose a picture that did not show their face, which should make them more anonymous and less easy to find in the online world. Participants also mentioned the importance of never disclosing one's password or choosing a very difficult one.

Cognitive strategies: critical thinking, strategizing, and suggesting

Young people do care about their privacy and what happens with their personal information. Stories about misuse of personal data in the media or within their own social network could have a serious impact on how they (preventively) deal with privacy risks, as these *stories made them realize it was not unthinkable to become a victim of personal data misuse*. This urged them to be more cautious about their personal information. Numerous stories about privacy issues show that perpetrators could be children's own online contacts, strangers or (commercial) companies. Examples are peers taking over or 'hacking' profiles, stalkers or burglars hunting down location information to break into houses, or phishing messages claiming they have won something. As there is some overlap between privacy-related risks and issues such as online bullying, grooming or commercial risks, it was not self-evident for children what could be labelled as "privacy problems." Again, some participants suggested developing better age-rated filters or monitoring systems. More severe punishments for hackers and other privacy perpetrators were also proposed.

> *[You have to be careful] because, not that there are so many people but… But kidnappers or paedophiles or so… But I know, I heard about this story from a friend of mine, and his friends. They were with a group of friends, and they once pretended to be a little girl. And someone responded to this, but apparently it was a paedophile, and he responded to their posts. And then they arranged a meeting, but the police was hidden at that place. (boy, 15, Belgium)*

Nevertheless, children seemed aware that *people who disclosed too much personal information were more vulnerable* for personal data misuse. Children considered being careful with contact and location information, having a good password, only posting decent and neutral pictures and not disclosing intimate or emotional information as the most helpful preventive strategies. Yet, they did not unanimously agree on how to get protection against privacy problems; while some were very cautious and anxious (almost paranoid), others were more relaxed and confident that nothing would happen to them. Some participants had the courage to confess they felt they did not have sufficient knowledge and skills to protect themselves from privacy problems. They had difficulties with changing privacy settings, password protection or did not know how to report problems, and often felt helpless and incapable of protecting themselves properly. A few suggestions children came up with were assisting peers in their privacy protection and sharing good practice among each other, which is a good example of collective coping.

> *Actually, I think this here, on revealing too much about people is a bit… There was this one time when I saw a girl on Facebook saying she had lost… Saying she had lost her virginity. And I thought that was really something intimate, that she shouldn't be there saying it to everyone. She wanted to show off, but honestly I think it is worse, because everyone will know and… I don't know her very well, but if for instance I go to a dinner and a friend of mine takes her, I'll feel constrained. (boy, 15, Portugal)*

Measures to protect personal information are not only applied out of worries about personal data misuse. For some young people, an important motivation for (not) disclosing certain information was *creating an image towards peers, parents and others*. Several participants expressed their concern about the ideas peers would have about them, for example, in case of a hacked profile with false information about themselves. Others worried, for example, about what their parents would think if friends posted "silly" pictures.

> *You don't feel good. When there are a lot of comments against you they ridicule you. Even when your own friends see all these comments against you on Facebook, they might think something's wrong. Your friend could see these comments and think whether it is still a good idea to be in your company. Your friends could leave you for example. (boy, 14–16, Malta)*

Communicative strategies: seeking and providing information and support

To avoid problems with privacy and personal data, children saw it as an important task to *verify other people's personal information*. Similar tactics to avoid problems with strangers were used: screening profiles, consulting mutual friends or checking face to face with the sender. Again, confrontations with (potential) perpetrators turned out to be a preferred strategy. They especially worried about fake or hacked profiles, and so-called "hackmails" or misleading chain messages that may contain viruses.

> *Well, I look at the pictures, then I look at what they write about themselves, I mean their statuses and then add them or not. (boy, 12, Czech Republic)*

Children sometimes struggled when judging which information was okay to disclose and which was not, for example, when creating a profile, taking part in a game, making an online photo album, etc. In order to reduce uncertainty, they tended to *consult their parents, older siblings or peers*. Some children even felt more comfortable with explicit rules at home about consulting parents before disclosing or posting information, because they were afraid of doing something wrong or stupid. Sometimes children also asked for instrumental assistance, for example, in changing privacy settings or deleting pictures.

I show things to my mom. My dad…well we aren't very close. I very often tell my mother 'look at the photo I have uploaded, do you like it?' (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Seeking professional support, such as contacting the police, a computer crime unit of IT specialists, was perceived as a last resort option. Only in very serious situations or when things had got out of control (e.g., grooming or stalking), did young people turn to professional assistance to prevent further harm.

Disengagement: minimizing and justifying

Some children did not care about privacy settings or disclosing personal information. Parallel with disengagement towards contact with strangers, these participants had the *impression that nobody would be interested in their profiles*. Hence, they did not mind that their information was shared publicly. The main argument for having a public profile was that "nothing special" was shared there, and misuse was perceived as very unlikely.

Interviewer: So, for example, I'm not a FB-friend of you, if, for example, I would search for you tomorrow, I can see your complete profile?
Boy: Yes.
Interviewer: And do you think it's okay that everybody can see your things?
Boy: No, because I don't post anything wrong, so I don't really care.
(boy, 15, Belgium)

A few others disengaged in privacy precautions because they did not believe that protection strategies were helpful. Their feeling was that *nothing could be done to protect themselves completely form personal data misuse*. Many young people lied about their age to get access to platforms or services, which reinforced the perception that others would lie about their identity too, and that privacy protection was easily bypassed.

Other problematic situations

Unwanted content

Sometimes children felt bothered by mass-distributed content, described as unpleasant, aggressive, violent, rude, nasty, shocking or disgusting, which could be text, images or videos. Unwanted content also includes situations where children (accidentally) encounter content they were not looking for, for example, ending up on a website with misleading or fake information after entering wrong key words. In general, measures to deal with unwanted content were very similar to those used in dealing with disturbing sexual content.

Children tended to *delete or remove suspicious or potentially disturbing content immediately*, by deleting the text or file, closing the window or scrolling up or down. A related strategy was reading the short text in the search results, or looking at the screenshot before clicking on the link or video. This means children are exposed to some "preview" of the disturbing content, so, in a sense, this could be understood as a reactive coping response. Nevertheless, deleting or removing were believed to be helpful in order to avoid full or follow-up exposure. Technical strategies were quite popular when it comes to avoiding unwanted content; young people installed software such as filters or virus scanners screening for inappropriate content, sometimes with the help of parents or other family members. Although these programs or applications can never guarantee full protection, children had a high level of trust in this screening or filtering software.

For example, those parodies. When those parodies of films exist, they are the worst. Those just seem completely normal, but then there is a rude parody. Well, that I turn immediately off. (boy, 10, Czech Republic)

Other instrumental actions were *blocking, banning, reporting or defriending* senders of disturbing content. These could be unfamiliar or anonymous people such as hosts of a gaming website, or well-known friends or classmates who keep on sending them unwelcome content such as game requests or gory pictures. In case children knew the sender of unwelcome content personally, they sometimes even confronted them personally with this issue and asked them to stop sending the content and/or delete it. When the sender was unknown, some children used report buttons or related applications to report things such as inappropriate content or fake profiles.

Avoidance strategies are less complex and require less (digital) skills, but children considered these tactics as helpful in avoiding unwelcome content. They looked for *clues that were indications of potentially bothersome content*, such as strange or suspicious links, titles or senders. Based on these clues, they decided not to click it and avoid any exposure. Some children completely avoided websites or platforms with a bad reputation, either because others had warned them about these or because of their own experiences with (potentially) disturbing content. Some participants also believed that exposure to unwelcome content could be avoided by precautions such as ignoring requests or messages from senders with a bad reputation, refraining from commenting on inappropriate things, and not replying or forwarding unwelcome messages. Just a few children kept it very simple, and said they just looked away or closed their eyes when something disturbing appeared on the screen.

If children mentioned self-monitoring strategies, they mostly referred to only *using familiar and age-appropriate games or platforms* with low risk for unwanted content. Other self-monitoring tactics were sparingly sharing content or "liking" posts, preferably only from good friends or trustworthy creators, as inappropriate sharing or "liking" could provoke unwelcome content being sent to you. Some children also promoted checking or verifying web links as protection from unwanted content, instead of just random clicking on anything.

Girl 1: If I was looking for the planets, I'd just say, planets 'Facts for Kids', and then just look at [unclear] websites. Yes, [I do this] most of the time. My sister, she's in year nine, so she sits there with me and tells me the good websites, as well.
Girl 2: I always put 'for kids' as well. And if it says it in the name, 'for kids', or in...because when you type it, it has the title, and then it has a little paragraph about it. If it either says in the title or the little paragraph, 'for kids', I would click on it, but if it only said facts about planets, I would probably check with my mom first.
(girls, 9–10, UK)

Commercial risks

We talked about commercial risks when children felt bothered by spam, commercials or advertisements, when they had problems with online purchases, and when they were confronted with fake or misleading websites promoting or selling products or services.

Children mainly dealt with these commercial risks with avoidance tactics and instrumental actions. Self-monitoring was not considered a promising strategy. The children tried to avoid commercial content by not clicking on ads or banners on websites. In particular, websites for games, gambling and sexual content were considered "risky". Some children explicitly said they *avoided misleading banners or messages* that promised a gift or claimed they had won something. Less common was children's avoidance of websites or platforms where you could purchase products or pay money for services; some children believed that

online money transactions put them at risk for misleading commercial tricks. Children tended to learn from previous experiences with misleading commercial content – which mostly occurred when they were novice internet users – and their preventive strategies often arose from earlier attempts to cope with commercial risks.

Common instrumental actions are *using a second email address for spam and installing an ad-blocker*, sometimes with the help of another family member. Although it would be a helpful strategy, only one child talked about ticking boxes to indicate they did not want to receive newsletters. When it comes to online purchases, children mentioned precautions such as asking for a clear picture and/or specific information about the product, using safe systems to pay (e.g., PayPal), never paying before receiving the product, and checking or verifying the company's information.

> *I have my official email…my alternative email is for games sites, for instance for the YouTube account and for the streaming site Wareztuga, and I don't use my account that is for school work. (girl, 16, Portugal)*

A typical self-monitoring strategy *is selecting carefully the websites or platforms where you purchase products or services*. Children suggested only buying in webshops that were familiar, and only using platforms for gaming or downloading where they were not charged for the service. Websites that promised gifts were generally perceived as being suspicious.

> *For example, internet e-shops, where they were cheated, that they ordered something, they sent a ten thousand deposit there and did not get anything. So [to prevent problems], you first look at the company, if it exists, then look at the address that they have, simply if it exists, if not it is just bullshit. (boy, 9, Czech Republic)*

Technical problems

Technical problems such as viruses infecting the computer, slow computers, running out of battery power, problems with downloads or difficulties with accessing websites or platforms could provoke feelings of frustration among young people. Children spontaneously talked about these issues, so we included technical problems as one of the problematic issues children have to deal with.

To prevent technical problems from (re)occurring, instrumental actions were believed to be most effective. Most common is the *installation of antivirus software* to prevent the computer from being infected, often with the assistance of a family member. Previous problems with viruses – often as novice internet users – were an important motivation to preventively install antivirus software. To avoid problems with access to accounts or platforms, the importance of a decent and difficult password was emphasized. As a protection measure against hackers who could "break into" your computer via a webcam, children across several countries believed that an effective way to prevent this from happening is to stick a piece of paper in front of the webcam. Finally, although it would be a useful preventive strategy to avoid loss of important documents or files, only one child talked about making a back-up of homework files on a USB drive.

Avoidance tactics that were believed to be helpful in the prevention of technical problems were avoiding clicking on automatically sent messages, emails or links. It was also felt that clicks on banners, especially those with sexy images, could get you into trouble. It turns out that some children learned these avoidance strategies after a negative experience in the past, often when they were (very) young and had just started to explore the internet. Furthermore, children suggested avoiding some (unfamiliar) game websites or websites with too many banners or pop-ups, as these were "full of viruses." Finally, some

children thought it better not to download things, and to turn to alternatives such as buying or borrowing CDs for games, and using streaming websites for music and videos.

> *When I get all kinds of spam in my email, like some people writing to me in English, I delete everything. I do an antivirus test and most of the time it says not to open it, so I delete it. (boy, 12, Czech Republic)*

However, some children were less radical and believed that self-monitoring gave sufficient protection against technical problems. They did not completely avoid downloading, but suggested *restricting themselves to well-known, approved and verified websites or platforms*, and downloading only those things that had been approved by other users, for example, by a number of "likes."

Health and over-use

Children sometimes worry about the potential negative consequences of excessive internet use, such as sleeping problems, nightmares, addiction, physical problems with eyes or back, etc. Typical strategies to avoid these problems were self-monitoring of online activities and instrumental actions. Avoidance strategies were less popular.

Children who were aware of the risks of excessive internet use tried to avoid physical or psychological problems related to online addiction by monitoring their internet use. Most likely, they tried to limit their time online, for example, with the help of an alarm clock. Other strategies were only going online after homework, only during weekends or for delineated periods. While self-monitoring of time was quite popular, children seldom selected consciously their online activities; just one girl mentioned she tried only to log in on Facebook when it was necessary, that is, when she wanted to send a message.

> *Sometimes if I'm studying instead of keeping it next to me I ask my mother to keep it, so I am able to concentrate, you know? Otherwise you are looking if you get a WhatsApp. (boy, 14–16, Spain)*

To avoid sleeping problems or nightmares, some children mentioned turning off the sound or "blood option" in aggressive games or switching to sports games instead of violent games just before going to bed. When online videos became too scary or frightening, children tried to shut down the video before it really was too much. In some cases, children preferred avoidance strategies to protect themselves from nightmares; they simply chose not to play violent games or watch aggressive videos. A few children also refrained from SNS because they were afraid of becoming addicted.

> *Yes, when I go to this game, there's lots of 18-year-old games there, and I'm not allowed to get them. I may be able to get a 12, but you can actually turn the violence off on the 12 games, or on some of them. You can actually turn the violence off. (boy, 9–10, UK)*

6b Coping

Introduction

Monica Barbovschi

This part on children's (reactive) coping shares numerous points with the previous one on preventive measures, such as the theoretical background and the acknowledgement of overlaps, with many measures taken simultaneously as a reaction to a problem children deal with, but also as a preventive measure to avoid unpleasant exposure in the future. Building on the generous literature on young people's coping with cyberbullying, this chapter uses an inclusive framework developed elsewhere (Barbovschi, 2014) to illustrate children's responses to a wide variety of problems encountered online.

Three dimensions emerged from children's responses (as well as from previous literature), which were used to develop a framework for discussing children's coping with various problems:

1. A first dimension, differentiating between s*elf-reliant versus other-reliant (support-seeking)* strategies, has been widely acknowledged by previous research as an important distinction between situations where children can deal with the problems themselves or where they reach out for the help of others. *Support-seeking from peers, siblings or parents* (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008; Kowalski, Agatston, & Limber, 2008; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Stacey, 2009), or *institutional support* (e.g., schools, hotlines or the police) are main examples of other-reliant measures. This distinction was also deemed relevant for preventive measures taken by children. Also noteworthy, this dimension is highly relevant for enhancing children's agency with specific policy interventions.

2. A second dimension, *technical measures*, such as deleting or blocking threatening messages (as opposed to *non-technical*) as the most at-hand solutions to dealing with aggression online, was reported in several studies on coping with cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2008). The distinction was deemed useful for discerning among cases when technical solutions work, and cases where these are not sufficient or useful (Parris et al., 2012; Šléglová & Černá, 2011). In a preventive approach, technical strategies can further be useful for avoiding reoccurring unpleasant experiences in the future.

3. A third dimension builds on the previous EU Kids Online coping framework (Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Segers, 2012), which distinguished between proactive and fatalistic measures, but proposes the distinction between measures *away or towards the stressor*, in order to address previous criticism related to the ambiguity of the so-called *fatalistic* measures, many of them proven useful by previous research (e.g., purposeful ignoring found useful for children dealing with cyberbullying by Macháčková, Černá, Ševčíková, Dědková, & Daneback, 2013; Šléglová, & Černá, 2011). In Chapter 6a , related to preventive measures, similar terminology was adopted, with disengagement being seen as covering children choosing not to approach the stressor by using cognitive reframing such as minimizing the problem or justification. The noteworthy difference is the acknowledgement of behavioural avoidance, such as blocking the sender or disabling the account are among the proactive strategies that have been found useful in dealing with the problem.

These three dimensions are used throughout the following pages as a red line connecting separate instances of children's coping with various problems. As the complexity of children's online problems increases, they can be used as a backbone for discerning between situations where children rely on their own resources or where they reach out for the support and help of others, for having a clearer picture of the usefulness and limits of technical measures, and finally, for noticing which situations children feel they have some control over and can respond to, and which situations where they do not.

Coping with aggressive communication, harassment, and bullying online

Monica Barbovschi

Children mentioned many cases where they were the target of, noticed, or where they were involved in aggressive communication, harassment or online bullying; given the fact that the project was not particularly concerned with the topic of bullying, a distinct line between what could have been bullying or just aggressive communication was not drawn, although in some cases the duration and severity of the act could be inferred from children's accounts. Children were involved in situations as victims or as bystanders, for which they reported a variety of coping strategies.[2] Finally, children also reported bullying or aggressive communication towards peers as retaliation (reactive coping) for another offence. These situations are relevant for a better understanding of children's aggressive behaviour towards others, which motivated the inclusion of relevant examples in this section.

Children as victims of aggressive communication or bullying online

Many times *ignoring* aggressive acts is something children do when faced with aggressive communication from peers. There was a generalized feeling that "these things happen," so children might feel helpless and *did not react*, although they were bothered:

> *Girl: People say that I'm ugly on Moviestar Planet and so…*
> *Interviewer: Yeah? Are they saying that to you?*
> *Girl: Yes.*
> *Interviewer: Oh, but that's totally not true! I think you're a really pretty girl! So what did you tell to those people?*
> *Girl: Nothing, I just ignored them.*
> *Interviewer: And to you know these people?*
> *Girl: Yes, they come from the same school…[she looks sad]*
> *(girl, 11, Belgium)*

"These things happen" was sometimes used to minimize the problem, with children adopting a rather unaffected attitude, such as boys facing aggressive communication in online gaming. Other forms of *ignoring* also include *belittling* the bully or the act and *non-engagement* with the bullies. Non-engagement was seen as a particularly useful strategy, because engaging might trigger the bullies even more (boys, 11, Belgium). In a few cases non-engagement is an indication of cognitive reframing and self-control, although this is dependent on the perceived and experienced severity of the act:

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[2] Although the treatment of bystanders' responses as coping might be questionable, we decided to include bystanders here as relevant for their reaction (or lack thereof) to acts of aggression directed at their peers.

When people send me offensive things, as I've already said, I'm not really bothered by them. If it's something really small that I can work on, I'm going to work on it. If it's something really big that is going to affect everything, and it's like they offend me about it, I wouldn't change as it is better to stay the same and know what is going on rather than removing something. (girl, 15, Malta)

Another set of strategies were *technical measures*, which included using the report button or blocking the unwanted person:

on Facebook, being mocked in front of everybody, be subjected to continuous comments …or to status updates, it is not nice, so I preferred, or being continuously harassed via chat, I didn't like it at all, so I ended up blocking two or three people. (girls, 14–16, Italy)

The children resorted to numerous *confrontational* measures, some of which were non-violent, such as *asking the bully to stop*, or *standing up for oneself*:

Interviewer: And did they say rude things to you?
Girl: Yes, one time, a Dutch guy told me 'girl, you suck very much.'
Interviewer: Oh, and what did you say then?
Girl: Well, I had more points than him, so I thought like 'okay', and I told him he should first look at himself and see if he really can play the game.
(girl, 11, Belgium)

Many other confrontational measures were less peaceful, varying from *sarcastic retort* to more violent *verbal retaliation* (curse words), *threats* or even *physical retaliation:*

For instance, once I had this fight with a girl who is in my group – I cannot stand her! – and she came to offend me on ask but she forgot to turn off the unknown and her name showed up. I told her: 'If you want to tell me something, do so on chat like I do with you, dear.' When one offends someone on ask, I really do not like it. If I have to say something, I'd say it to their face and I wouldn't bother. She is that way…she's scared, do you get it? She tried to play it cool but in fact she gets scared easily, do you understand? (girl, 14–16, Malta)

Girl: Well, just...we just had a big argument, like a really big fight, something stupid. Just over something stupid. And we were, like, arguing, and then she was really pissed at me and started cursing at me on Facebook. And I wasn't going to let that fly, so I started cursing at her as well [laughter].
Interviewer: And what happened then?
Girl: Then I signed out of Facebook and the next day I went to see her at recess and we talked about it, so then we were fine again.
(girl, 11, Czech Republic)

It happened to me on Facebook not on ask. For example – my friend and I used to go often to and once, there was a quarrel and they knew we were there and people were talking. I told her 'I'll tell you, come on chat.' And she came on chat and said, 'It was me. Do you have anything to tell me?' I told her now we'll meet in Valletta and we see what happens. She's like…insulting you about your family… What does she expect? That she says whatever she likes on ask, and that nothing happens to her? (girl, 14–16, Malta)

I had an argument with him because of my ex-girlfriend… But it all started when we were together, sitting on a bench, talking, I didn't know he'd come to and... She had called him. He came, I was talking. When he put his hand on my shoulder, I turned around, he hit me right away. There was nothing I could do, he ran down the street and I called a friend. He came and then we went down the street and beat him up... (boy, 15–16, Romania)

Seeking support from peers or parents is something that is particularly helpful for children facing online aggression:

> She wrote to me that I am a bitch and so on and that she does not know what I think about myself, then she came to me with an older friend, I think she was 17 or so, they shouted at me and just kept writing, and ugly things. And I then told it to Monča [fictional name], like, the older sis, and she wrote them to let me be, that it could be enough, and since then I do not go on Facebook much. (girl, 12, Czech Republic)

On some occasions, children reported enlisting the help and support of institutions, such as schools or the police:

> Girl: They created a Facebook page that was against me.
> Interviewer: I see, so you could see it.
> Girl: They took photos where I was joking with my friends, with weird faces, and this was the image of the profile, of the page, and then it was full of offensive messages. The teachers forced them to delete the page, but it took them some time.
> (girl, 14–16, Italy)

> Boy: I was not bullied online, but a friend of mine was.
> Interviewer: Yes, and what happened then?
> Boy: Well, the bullies have ridiculed him on Facebook.
> Interviewer: Yeah, and how did they do that?
> Boy: I'm not sure, but in the end he had to go to the police.
> Interviewer: Okay. And do you know that maybe the bullies have responded on his pictures, or that they have hacked his profile or something?
> Boy: They have made like…like lot of statuses about him.
> (boy, 14, Belgium)

However, children also reported *withdrawal* when they didn't know how to handle online meanness from their peers, such as *technical withdrawal* (quit using the internet, closing or disabling the account), such as the case of a 15-year-old girl in Italy who stopped using ask.fm, or *social*, including *life-altering changes*, such as the case of a 12-year-old Czech girl who moved to another town.

Rarely did the children resort to just one measure; they tried a *combination of measures*, such as seeking support from multiple sources (e.g., parents and school, school and the police), or seeking instrumental support for how to proceed further in dealing with the aggressors:

> It was my family more than anything. I did not know how to behave and they supported me. They helped me, suggesting how to behave, and on my part I was clever enough to listen to them, because there are people who don't. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Children seemed to distinguish between "just teasing between boys" and "real bullying" at an early age. They also seemed to distinguish between nasty messages sent from strangers and bullying from peers, the former being easier to cope with: in one Belgian boy's opinion (14), sometimes people get mad on the chat (while playing games), but he didn't feel bothered by this, because he didn't know these online players who insulted him. He didn't care about that; he even laughed when it happened. These were just "people from the internet," and they couldn't really hurt him.

Children as bystanders in aggressive communication or bullying online

Children were also witnesses of online aggression towards their peers; they sometime chose *to stay out of it*, for fear of retaliation from bullies, while other times they *reported* the bullies, *intervened* directly and *confronted* the bully or *offered support* to the victim:

> Interviewer: And what did your other classmates do? The ones you were more intimate with…
> Girl: They were scared too. They supported me when we were not at school, when we were at my place or out, but at school they were afraid of being mocked too.
> (girl, 14–16, Italy)

> Boy: One time a boy, a boy came over and logged into his account. And spoke with a boy and that boy was using foul language and I spoke with him, I said why are you being mean with him and I schooled him and that's that and that kid thanked me a lot that I had schooled him and because he wouldn't leave him alone at all.
> Interviewer: Was he younger than you?
> Boy: No, he was a month older than me and he still wasn't leaving him alone.
> Interviewer: Aha.
> Boy: And I helped him and he got rid of him eventually and never bugged him again.
> (boy, 12, Romania)

> Interviewer: Why ugly – what was happening? What were they telling this boy?
> Boy: Insulting him, eh. The same insults, pretty banal. I tried to stop them and I got the blame as well.
> (boy, 14–16, Malta)

A particular set of mediating conflicts in a group or peer mediation of conflicts deserves special attention as a new way of addressing aggression and bullying collectively. In one case, Italian girls reported dealing with conflicts on the class web page:

> Girl: Don't know as...or when, let's say, when there's a quarrel, don't know, in class, one may apologize on the group's page, then in class they talk again so everything finds a solution…
> Interviewer: So, it's a way to deal with...
> Girl: Yes, at least starting [to find a solution], because one might not be able to talk immediately, face to face, so one might prefer to write on the page and then the next day at school talk and solve it.
> (girl, 14–16, Italy)

In other cases children intervened to facilitate communication between peers and to help solve conflicts:

> Girl: Yes…I mean, one girl kept on insulting the other one on Facebook, but then at school didn't say a single word so in this case...but I did it face to face, on Facebook I read it, but...
> Interviewer: And what did you tell her?
> Girl: No, I ended up saying her 'why don't you talk to each other? 'cause that you insult her on Facebook and then in class you do as if she weren't here is not fair. So talk to each other and end it.' Even because the atmosphere in class was so...
> (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Children as bullies: aggression as a coping strategy

On some occasions, children reported being mean or aggressive towards others as retaliation for other offences. In one case boys reported making a page for another boy to mock him in retaliation for something:

Boy 1: I forgot what I wanted to say…oh, yes…sometime ago, about two years ago, I don't remember why I was upset with Tudor [fictional name] and I made some sort of page with his name of Facebook with embarrassing things and I made the entire Asian continent who was playing that game to laugh. [all laugh]
Interviewer: Did you know about this?
Boy 2: Yes, I knew. And actually I changed my name and I set Andrei's [fictional name] picture, a former colleague…
Boy 1: But admit it, it was pretty…the whole continent found out.
Boy 3: Your name was very… [they laugh]
Interviewer: Did you feel bad?
Boy 2: A little bad, I mean, my own friend could do something like that.
Boy 1: But theoretically I didn't tell him, I just set it [the profile], we started laughing then forgot about the account.
(boys, 12, Romania)

In another situation, a Greek boy (16) reported a wave of rage against a girl who had distributed a naked photo of her friend on Facebook, with lot of threats being made against the perpetrator:

Anybody can do anything they feel like…this girl took a naked photo of hers with her mobe, and kept it there…and her best mate, at some point sent this photo to her own [the friend's] mobe… I don't know what happened between the two friends…or why…but the second posted the first's naked photo on fb…and all hell broke loose… Everybody from here [in Athens] to the upper north part of the country knows about this…ask around…every school in Athens are aware of this… They were slugging her off from Xanthi [north Greece] to Elefsina [central Greece], everyone was calling her names 'Why did you do that?'…she [the culprit] had to delete her profile, somebody even said she killed herself, others that her friend killed herself, and stuff like that; they were saying 'we're gonna gather 300 people and bit her badly at school!' (boy, 16, Greece)

On some occasions, children reported technical retaliation against peers, such as sending viruses or repeated reporting to have someone's account suspended:

Boy 1: That buddy wanted something from me and I was mad at him and something, and I put one of those viruses on a CD and then I gave it to him, as if the game was there. There are even funnier viruses, when you click on it, a sign pops up that you have downloaded a virus. And that man is totally frightened, like, Jesus, but you can just hide it like that.
Boy 2: Yeah, you send it to them and they click on it and, for example, the mechanics eject or perhaps the computer restarts.
Boy 3: Yeah, well, that's nasty.
Boy 1: I learned to create such a virus, I do not really know if it's a virus, but probably not. And when it is created, when you click somewhere, and another window with a virus pops up, and another and another, yeah, everything starts jumping and it is quite nasty, I did it to my mum and mum asked what it is, what it is and now.
(boys, 12–14, Czech Republic)
Once, last year, it was here in the school, I was…we were in French class and I was near two [boy] friends. I and said 'I hate that girl' and they said 'me too'. And they went like 'let's report her at the same time, the

three of us'! We did…it was a joke! [laughs] And then the next day she was like 'oh, I'm out of Facebook…' [laughs] *(girl, 14–16, Malta)*

These situations show that adolescents exert a high degree of the perceived controllability of the new media affordances that can be used as tools against someone they deem undesirable or who has offended them, or as tools to support others in need.

Dealing with problematic situations involving sexual content and communication

Martina Černíková & Monica Barbovschi

Problematic situations about sexual content online involved inadvertently seeing sexual content online (usually in the form of unwanted search results or pop-ups that automatically open in browser windows), but also receiving sexual content from peers online. In addition, problematic situations related to unwanted sexual communication involved receiving sexual messages (e.g., unwanted innuendoes and compliments, explicit sexual comments) but also situations where sexual images of peers were disseminated to a larger group. Young people reported resorting to various measures, from self-reliant to other-reliant, technical and communicative measures, to deal with the situations to the best of their abilities.

Dealing with sexual content online

In this category children primarily reported cases when they accidentally found sexual content or when they received it from others. The most common situations encountered were inadvertently clicking on sexual content while searching for something else or pop-up ads that opened in their browser. The usual measures were *technical ones* or *asking the support of parents, siblings and peers*. Technical measures such as "closing sexual content" or "deleting it" were mentioned frequently. Other technical strategies included "hitting a back button," "blocking content," and "logging out."

> *Girl 1: I was typing what I wanted to listen to, and then suddenly this pop-up screen came up of like dating and naked ladies over there, and then I'm like 'What!' And you quickly delete it and you get off the computer.*
> *Girl 2: Sometimes when you see these pop-up ads, you just want to...it's normally all about these dating websites, so normally I just…normally when these popups come up I just delete them... I just delete them. I carry on playing on YouTube and just listening to my music and that.*
> *(girls, 11–12, UK)*
>
> *Interviewer: Nude images or videos, of naked people.*
> *Boy: I know, I…blocked it, because when I wrote it and then it appeared and I blocked it.*
> *Interviewer: What did you write?*
> *Boy: I wrote 'Pokémon' and one of these things appeared and I blocked it.*
> *(boy, 10, Portugal)*

Some girls mentioned after seeing sexual content that they "didn´t play that game anymore," "had a nightmare," "think about it while". It is noteworthy that not all children are able to block unwanted content, such as one girl talking about using technical strategies as "deleting" or "hiding" unwanted posts. But she "never reports anything," because she doesn't know how it works:

Sometimes I delete the post, or hide it, but I have never reported anything...because I don't know how it works... I report and then what happens, you can also block someone... But then I guess he doesn't receive any notifications anymore so I said it doesn't matter. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Peers, siblings, and parental support was reported across all age categories. We did, however, find variety in how children used it. Some children mentioned cases when they were *more comfortable talking about having seen sexual content with siblings and friends* but not with parents (with younger children more likely to discuss such matters with parents). Nonetheless, in this age category (9–11) there were also cases when children refused to talk about sexual content with parents:

Interviewer: Do you happen to tell your parents what you have seen?
Girl: I prefer not to talk about it
Interviewer: Why, (name)?
Girl: I don't like talking about these issues, it's bad. I mean... also because it is normal to find this kinds of things nowadays, I think...
(girl, 9-10, Italy)

Stories about *difficulties in talking to parents* about having seen sexual content were usually linked with worries, such as parents punishing them by restricting their internet use. Some reported having tried talking to parents, especially in cases when they also needed help. Receiving restrictions was reported as not helpful, resulting in feelings of shame and further inability to communicate about what had happened:

Interviewer: So, feeling 'uncomfortable' isn't because you feel you may be harmed, but because you are worried your mother sees you…
Girl: That's right!! And how will I explain afterwards that it happened by accident and that I didn't do it on purpose??… I won't be allowed to play on the computer ever again…
(girl, 10, Greece)

It is important, but I don't dare to speak about it, I don't like to speak about it. It is so poky that I don't like to talk about it. Well, sometimes I tell things to my mum, that a bad site came in, and to help me out from there, and in this case my mum helps me… But after that my mother tells me not use the computer, and to continue tomorrow or day after tomorrow. (girl, 11, Romania)

Strategies for children talking to parents about sexual content were connected to situations when parents were nearby when the incident happened. However, some children were able to talk about such things with parents because "that's life," as one Belgian girl said.

…I talk often with my mum about this, because my mum always wants me to talk about it [the other girls start laughing]... Because when I talk with my classmates about it, they always say 'iiiiuw, iiiuw'. But then I say 'Yeah, I always talk about this with my mum, and actually these things are not dirty. That's life...' (girl, 10–11, Belgium)

Another type of situation was when children received sexual content from peers. In these cases, strategies such as *using the report button* or *talking to peers and asking them not to send sexual content* anymore were used:

Yes, some kids would send me that stuff on Facebook with YouTube, with those ugly videos... And I wouldn't accept them, I'd tell them stop sending me that stuff guys, cause I don't watch that kind of stuff [porn], and I told them no more, those would upset me very much. (boy, 12, Romania)

In some stories children also mentioned cases when their friends wanted to borrow their computer and looked at sexual content such as porn sites. One boy *lied to his friend* that his computer had run out of battery. These cases are also linked with worries that parents could discover it.

He doesn't have a tablet PC, so he asks me if he can borrow mine, so at the party for my First Communion he asked if I could lend him, and I said it was out of charge, because I knew he would have looked for such things. I lie to him first because I am disgusted, and I don't want him to watch these things. If he wants to watch it then use your own devices! Because, then, if I lent it, all these things remain in the history, then your parents check it and see them. Because once I have lent it to him, and from that time I understood that... I let him use my computer and after my mum saw that on Safari there were written such things. (boy, 9–10, Italy)

Dealing with sexual communication online

Dealing with sexual communication was mostly reported by girls receiving messages from boys/men. Girls in all age categories reported strategies like *ignoring the situation*. They sometimes decided to talk to friends or parents about it, or combined the two measures:

Girl: Something dirty happened on my Facebook. I was with a classmate. I was chatting with this boy, I'm not going to tell his name. And he says to me 'I have to tell you something'. So I asked 'What is it?' And…well…I didn't expect that something was wrong, I thought he would tell me something funny. And suddenly he says: 'It's something to do with puberty, something came out of my…' [all girls respond very shocked]
Interviewer: Oh yeah, that's shocking that he tell it like that. So, what did you say then?
Girl: I didn't respond.
Interviewer: And did you tell your parents about this?
Girl: Yeah, but they say 'don't respond'. But it's pretty dirty/shocking, because I don't know much about boys' puberty.
(girls, 10–11, Belgium)

Sometimes older girls (13–16) talked to boys/men for a while and when they realized that something was wrong, they usually mentioned technical strategies like *reporting or blocking* the person. These strategies seemed to be successful and have long-term duration. They also resorted to more drastic technical strategies: to cope with a sexting incident, one girl (16, Belgium) *disabled her account for a while*. These coping strategies seemed to be helpful in the short run, as they immediately shielded the recipient from being a target of unwanted messages, and deflated the momentum of teasing comments:

Interviewer: Hmm, okay, let's go back to Facebook. Did it ever happen that, uhm, somebody you don't really know, started talking to you on Facebook?
Girl: Uhm, yes, but… I just ignore them a bit, and… I never give them my mobile number or so. One time, I have a friend, and she… Well, he asked my friend to give my mobile number, whether he could have my mobile number. But then I blocked him, so nothing really happened.
Interviewer: And did you have to block many people on Facebook?
Girl: Two.
Interviewer: And both for the same reason?
Girl: Yes.
Interviewer: So actually because you didn't know them?
Girl: No, well, also because they were saying like 'I think you are so pretty, I like you, you're so sweet', and things like that [laughs].
Interviewer: And how do you feel when people say such things to you, people that you don't know?

Girl: Uhm, pfff, I first ask who they are, but they never answer that. One time, I was thinking it was a paedophile, but it turned out that was not the case [laughs].
(girl, 15, Belgium)

One Spanish girl (12) also mentioned a case when she received nasty comments on her ask.fm question. In this case she just *removed this question*.

Yes. But I don't mind, I remove the question and that's all. If I don't know that person… I didn't like what I was told, but I don't know the person who said it to me and they didn't even say who they were… So, I remove the question and that's it. (girl, 12, Spain)

Furthermore, girls reported *being cautious* about talking to boys or men online, and developed specific strategies, such as *never talking to them alone*. Spanish girls talked about "not letting their faces be seen." Explorations with online communication in the presence of peers seem to be part of children engaging in "risky opportunities," with peer support being readily available:

Girl: When you are one evening at home with your friends, doing silly things, and one might say 'let's do this and so and so…but we do not show our faces', because we never show our faces, not me at least, when we do it we do not let our faces be seen, just down from our nose. It is very difficult to recognize anyone. We may laugh about or make jokes to people or we may see some older people who may say 'take of your t-shirt or do so and so…' And we say 'what do you mean, you have gone mad!'.
Interviewer: And where do you go for that?
Girl: On ChatRoulette.
(girl, 11–14, Spain)

The strength of *collective coping and peer support* is making a powerful impression on young people. Some girls mentioned a Facebook page where people share their unpleasant experiences with "sex maniacs." These "scary situations" are documented and used as cautionary tales:

There's a page on Facebook called 'you bastard sex maniacs', not it's 'I hate those bastard sex maniacs', where people who receive messages from individuals with a by-end, and with a mental disorder in my opinion, so they take a screenshot of the conversation and post it on this page, and sometimes you really see scary conversations, they make me feel anxious, it is really sex maniacs that harass young girls. These are the things that scary me. I mean, if it happened to me... (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Seriously bad experiences with sexting incidents (e.g., sharing naked photos online) were only mentioned indirectly. Children reported stories that had happened to their close friends or to somebody that they knew. In these situations, strategies such as *changing school* or *visiting a counsellor* were mentioned.

Because Jill [fictional name] is in my classroom, and she also went to the school's counsellor, together with a friend. So I heard her mumbling in the corridor with Loran [fictional name], her friend, that first she didn't want to go to the counsellor, because she was already feeling better. But eventually she went to the counsellor. (girl, 14–16, Belgium)

Children mentioned cases where they had participated in sexting incidents as *bystanders*. In some of these situations they employed *collective strategies*. Some young people mentioned cases when peers had taken proactive measures to ensure that compromising pictures of their friends were not spread further.

Interviewer: So, yeah, do you share these kinds of pics [sexting pictures] with others?

Girl 1: When I receive these things, I would show it to others, like 'look what I just received'. But, for example, with Jill's [fictional name] pics, I didn't wanted these pics, because…she's a friend of mine, so… And then I don't want such images on my mobile.

Interviewer: And you, would you share it?

Girls 2, 3, 4: NO.

Girl 4: But I would talk about it.

Girl 2: Yes, talk about it.

Girl 3: And when I receive such pics on my mobile, I would delete them. I don't want to have these pics on my mobile.

(girls, 14–16, Belgium)

Another collective strategy was talking to friends to prevent further victimization from happening in the future, such as girls trying to dissuade friends from talking to boys/men online, from meeting them offline or sending them intimate photos:

And then we told her, we made it clear for her, is it clear to you that the guy wants to sleep with you. And he does not want anything else from you. He is ugly and I do not know. Just, like. And she was, like, she still did not understand it. She asked me what I was doing there. And I said that I read the messages with him. And she says, well why does he not want me. So then I sent her the individual pieces of conversation, what he wanted from her. And then she found out. And she said, ok, ok, ok, he just wants to sleep with me, he does not want anything else from me. And then it hit her, like that aha moment. And then she said, you could not say it before to me? And then she started to bitch at us that we did not tell her. (girl, 13–14, Czech Republic)

In some cases, dealing with sexual incidents as a bystander involved *confronting or talking to the perpetrator* (usually a boy disseminating nude photos of a girl), in order to persuade him to remove the photos, either amiably or by use of threats.

Yes, I have a friend who did it. She isn't a close friend... She sent a [naked] photo like that, without clothes on, to a friend of mine, a boy. Well, I don't know the girl, I've just spoken to her a few times, and the boy was a friend of mine. I don't know what happened, and the boy, of course, out of revenge, put the photo up. Her photo naked. On Tuenti. And of course we all told each other what had happened, and we had a look and we said 'ok she might have done something to you, alright, but it can't be enough to post a private photo of her'. And he deleted it and…there was quite a row…! (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Dealing with problematic situations involving online strangers

Monica Barbovschi

When talking about experiences involving online strangers, children usually referred to what they knew or assumed to be older people online, outside their circle of peers. They mostly described dealing with three types of unpleasant situations involving strangers, which were "friend requests from strangers," "strangers asking for information or sending unpleasant messages," and "offline meetings with online strangers."

Friend requests from strangers

The easiest response children adopt when receiving unwanted friend requests from strangers is *ignoring*, in either the form of *not accepting* the request (*rejecting*) or simply *not adding* the person. As one child pointed out, the two differ because if you reject, the person might figure it out and try to add you again, maybe with a different account, but if you just ignore the request, the person cannot add you again.[3] Other children employed even cleverer strategies, such as "add and delete," in order to prevent bad reactions. Another strategy mentioned by one boy was "add and make fun" of a stranger, when he received repeated contacting attempts:

> Boy: And, the rest...strangers add me.
> Interviewer: And do you accept the requests?
> Boy: Well, if they're Romanians, I do, if not, I don't. Just now, there was an Arab guy and I had accepted his request a while back and he started calling me on Facebook. I turned him down...then I answered... I started mocking him and talking whatever came to mind first.
> Interviewer: In Romanian?
> Boy: No, not in Romanian.
> Interviewer: In English?
> Boy: No. Whatever came to mind, words that don't even exist.
> Interviewer: Yes. And?
> Boy: [laughs]...and then he'd curse at me in English.
> (boy, 14, Romania)

Other strategies included *technical measures* such as *turning off the computer* or *closing the page* (usually younger children), *blocking the sender* of messages, and even *making a new account*:

> Interviewer: But why, why did you create a new profile?
> Girl: Because I used to have a lot of friends and...whom I didn't know, cause I had accepted them for no reason, and now I started to really regret it. And now, I would have to search for all of them and delete them... I thought it would be easier to create a new Facebook account and delete this one. They can...only people who know me can find me.
> (girl, 13, Romania)

Following unpleasant experiences with strangers, some children increased their account security:

> Interviewer: But do you do something different now, so that it doesn't happen again?
> Boy: Yes, I made my Facebook private and stuff. So…everyone could see my Facebook and now I'm more careful.
> (boy, 12, Portugal)

Finally, *support was usually sought* from friends when children wanted to verify the identity of an unknown person requesting their friendship.

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[3] Facebook has the option "not now" when responding to a request for friendship, which equals rejection.

Strangers asking for information or sending unpleasant messages

Among the most common responses, *blocking* and *ignoring* were mentioned by children dealing with strangers asking for information or sending them unpleasant messages. The responses were sometimes tailored to the level of unpleasantness, with children blocking senders only when they sent very rude or offensive messages:

> *Girl: I don't know, because there are people who write things I don't agree with, vulgar, so I avoid adding friends of those people*
> *Interviewer: But you keep having them [vulgar people] as friends?*
> *Girl: Yes... It happened just few times that I deleted someone, but because he wrote something that was really... I mean...one may be bothered by a wall full of offensive posts and swears.*
> *(girl, 14–16, Italy)*

Lying or *giving false information* is another strategy adopted by the children:

> *In one game called Kulečník on some pages, there you can chat with anyone in Europe, and I asked him how he was doing, and he said fine, that he's living, and then he wrote me, 'where do you live?', so I wrote him back, but I wrote for instance Liberec, Prague, Olomouc, or something like that. And then he asked if we could meet up, and I said no, that we're moving. And he asked if it couldn't wait a bit, the moving, and I said no, that Dad has to move because of work. (boy, 11, Czech Republic)*

Sometimes younger children reported *seeking parental support*, other times they engaged in *verbal retaliation*, such being the case of a Romanian boy (14) who reported swearing and cursing back and not being at all affected by rude messages. Finally, in some cases, children needed to resort to *combinations of measures*, such as *increasing security* and repeated *blocking* of unwanted people:

> *This friend of mine, we practice dance together, and we were in the same class in primary school, she accepted this guy called Marcello, she asked him 'who are you?' and he referred to a friend of us. So she accepted him, they started chatting, and he asked her for pictures in swimming suit, he turned out to be a bit... So she told her mother who at first chided her, and said 'you could have told me earlier'. So they blocked, they blocked him, and she changed her Facebook name, she used a nickname but he found out her new email, her new profile, so he sent her another friendship request, but she managed to block it, and then he stopped bothering her. (girl, 11–13, Italy)*

Offline meetings with online strangers

In a few cases of unpleasant situations involving meetings with online contacts, children reported *telling a parent* or *taking a friend along* with them or, in the case of a Spanish 15-year-old girl, engaging in *physical retaliation* when she realized the boy she met did not look like his online pictures. Overall, children's responses to contacts with strangers online show a lot of cautiousness, such as not wanting to make the other person angry, but also abilities in manipulating the situation in order to stay safe. As opposed to other situations, children displayed less confrontational measures and more deceptive strategies.

Dealing with privacy and misuse of personal information online

Monica Barbovschi

Children experience a variety of unpleasant situations in relation to privacy and misuse of personal information online, which they have to deal with. Three main areas of problematic situations have been identified from children's responses, which can be grouped into private information, shared or tagged without permission, and misused, hacked and fake accounts.

Private information

The area of "private information" referred to situations about the lack of privacy online, too much exposure and giving out personal information, and included "too much information about others," "too much information about themselves," and "giving out information about themselves/peers giving out information about the child."

Children might find the amount of information they are receiving as overwhelming and bothersome, but usually they choose to *ignore* it. One strategy children use when they are asked to give information[4] about themselves is *providing false data*, a strategy found in both younger and older adolescents.

When it comes to peers disclosing information about them, children might take more determined action, even collectively. In one Romanian focus group, some girls reported a common problem with one of their male classmates disclosing one of the girls' phone numbers to another boy who started harassing her. The harassment stopped with the girl's father answering the phone. However, all the girls *confronted* their classmates and interrogated them about disclosing the phone number.

Shared or tagged without permission

A second area of problems that children deal with is related to the practice of unwanted sharing or tagging of photos and videos by peers on SNSs. This area included dealing with "peers posting private or embarrassing information (pics, videos) of respondent without the child's will," "peers tagging respondent without her or his will," "peers modifying pictures without the child's will," and "peers refusing to take down the picture/untag the respondent."[5]

Having photos shared or being tagged without permission differs in terms of malicious intension (to hurt the child, such as modifying the picture to mock the child's physical traits) and willingness to remove the tag/the picture. Children's reactions varied according to the perceived severity of the act, with the simplest being *self-reliant technical measures*, such as *trying to remove the photo or the tag themselves, or using the report button*, or even engaging in *technical retaliation*, such as responding with the same kind of "joke." They sometimes engaged in *non-violent confrontation*, such as *asking to remove the photo or tag*:

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[4] Children dealing with strangers requesting information about them is treated in the section related to coping with requests and messages from strangers.

[5] These situations were dealt with in similar ways by the respondents; the coping strategies are not therefore differentiated by sub-types of problematic situations.

The girls from the gym class took a silly picture of me and posted it on FB and tagged me in the pictures. They said the picture was cool but I think it was silly. They did not want to remove the picture. So I decided to remove the picture and the tag, but then apparently the person that posted the picture get a message that says 'Evelien wants to remove the picture', so I felt a bit embarrassed. (girl, 12–13, Belgium)

Other times, the confrontation became *violent*, with children engaging in verbal retaliation (reported by Czech and Romanian boys) and verbal threats or physical retaliation:

You beat her and that's it. (girl, 14–16, Spain)

Sometimes the children were able to deal with these situations in a mature manner, such as in the example of *cognitive reappraisal/reframing* below:

You must be mature and don't go more against that person, other way problem will never end. (girl, 11–13, Spain)

Other times, they might find it difficult to deal with the situation or they were not able to deal with it at all, as was the case of a Spanish girl (9–10) who stopped using the internet after some children shared a "bad photo of her" (*technical withdrawal*) and she even refused to go out of the house (*social withdrawal*).

Misused, hacked and fake accounts

Dealing with (own) hacked accounts (SNS, IM or games)/being used to send rude messages to peers

When dealing with their own account being hacked, children employed *self-reliant technical measures, such as requesting another password via email, making a new account/increasing safety.* These cases are the least problematic, with the children managing to retrieve the passwords themselves and restoring the hacked account, with little or no damage to the account (deleted messages or contacts, rude messages sent as from the owner of the account). Another strategy of dealing with hacked accounts is creating a new profile and sending new friend requests (sometimes with an explanation about the hacked account).

Interviewer: Aha... And for you, as a user, this type of hackers are bothersome?
Boy: No, because I'm a child and I don't... I don't have websites, I don't...he's got nothing of mine to hack...he hacks my account… I make another...
Interviewer: Aha. So for you, it's not a problem...
Boy: No.
(boy, 14, Romania)

Another usual technique after experience with a hacked account is more cautiousness with privacy settings, and the choice of more secure passwords. Some stopped using public computers to go on Facebook. These subsequent measures can also fall under the preventive measures for coping, as they are explicitly directed towards preventing the bad experience from happening again in the future. Children also appealed to *other-reliant technical measures*, such as *technical information-seeking (when not sure if the account was hacked), and technical support from games administrators or significant adults.* In one case of a hacked account, a Romanian girl (13) recounted that when someone hacked her Facebook account, she appealed to a friend who worked at Facebook. She asked him to tell her when there were some activity on

her account and to check if her best friend, the co-owner of the account, was online. The result was that somebody else was active on her account. One Romanian boy had his account hacked and games trophies stolen, so after a failed attempt to retrieve them, he complained/reported to the games administrator who banned the hacker and restored the boy's account. Another Romanian boy (12), realizing his games account was being hacked, called a neighbour who told him to turn off the computer immediately. Another boy mentioned asking for his parents' help with changing the password to a hacked account.

However, children do not always confront their online problems head on. At times they might engage in so-called *technical withdrawal, such as disabling or deleting an account, stopping using a platform or website,* or more drastic measures, such as *stopping using the internet for a while.*

Sometimes children resorted to *non-violent confrontation* with the hacker, such as politely asking for the account back; other times they had *violent behavioural reactions,* such as aggression towards inanimate objects, for example, swearing, shouting, breaking the keyboard or screen in the case of a stolen games account, which was reported by a Czech boy (12–14). An unusual strategy reported by one Romanian boy was that he *paid money to get his account back from a hacker*. Although uncommon, it is nonetheless interesting how children find self-reliant, rational solutions to their problems:

> Interviewer: Facebook. And did you get it back or did you lose everything?
> Boy: Yes, I got it back. [answers simultaneously]… I found out who had hacked it and asked nicely to get it back… And he asked me for an amount of money.
> Interviewer: Oh yes?
> Boy: Yes.
> Interviewer: Was he from school?...
> Boy: No, he wasn't from this school.
> Interviewer: But...young...eh?
> Boy: Yes, young, my age.
> Interviewer: And did you give him...the money?
> Boy: Yes, good thing it wasn't too much.
> (boy, 14, Romania)

Cognitive reappraising of the context, such as *minimizing the problem*, was an outwardly directed coping strategy reported by several children. One girl (11–13, Italy) mentioned finding something on her Skype chat that she didn't write, but she hadn't changed the password because it hadn't happened again. One boy (14–16, Italy) reported being asked for his ID and password in exchange for "game money;" he didn't do anything about it because "these things happen."

When dealing with their own hacked account being used to send nasty messages to their friends, children resorted to *technical strategies*, such as *creating a new profile*, usually to warn others. *Warning their peers* when realizing their own account was hacked that they might be receiving unpleasant messages that were not really from them should be considered a coping strategy in itself, which might be achieved through creating a new profile or via other media. Some young people might try to *explain to peers* in order to protect their own reputation, via another profile or other media. However, the coping aims (protecting themselves, protecting others) should be distinguished from means used to achieve them. Other strategies include *telling and asking parents to intervene*:

> Girl: So she was with these people and they sent me nasty text messages, Lieve [fictional name] too, messages like 'you are like the homeless people'. And then I asked why she sent me these messages. And then she said 'you belong there'.

Interviewer: So the girl sent these messages herself? Or did they took her mobile away and the others have sent the messages?

Girl: She was with these people, and she was sending these messages together with them. So I told my mum about this, but it continued for a while. Then we went to this girl's home and her parents. But her parents are very rich people and the girl is a bit spoiled, so they told that her daughter would never sent such nasty messages. So we showed her parents these messages. Then her parents were surprised and wondered why their daughter would send such nasty messages. So that was a bit weird. And my sister Laura [fictional name] was also very mad at the girl, and she still is very mad.

Interviewer: So the bullying stopped after you went to the parents of this girl? Or did the bullying go on?

Girl: Yeah, no. But…

Interviewer: So it stopped?

Girl: Yeah, I used to bicycle with her every morning to school. And my parents told me it's better to keep some distance now…it's better to go you own way for a while, to wait a while and go to other friends, to see how things evolve.

(girl, 12–13, Belgium)

Children also relied on *institutional support* to report fake profiles. One Spanish girl (14–16) had a fake Twitter account made with her photo and pictures. The account was used to spread "personal issues." She *reported it to the police* but they didn't find out who had done it. Another Spanish girl's sister (12) had someone impersonating her with a fake profile, so she *reported it to a hotline*; the hotline notified the police, who then removed it.

Combinations of coping strategies

Complex solutions often require more complex responses. For example, children might employ strategies directed towards the stressor, while working on their own attitude – in "coping terms," doing both a *positive reappraisal* and *confronting.* Others might resort to less peaceful approaches, with some boys reporting a combination of measures which included *finding the hacker*, *verbal retaliation against the hacker* and *subsequent increasing security* of their accounts:

I immediately found out who it was. Because they referred to all the people I have in my friends, with whom I associate. And then I found out who was not there. And it certainly had to be him. And I wrote that he was a jerk, or I was swearing like that. So I found out who it was like that. So I came to him, I began to bitch at him. And I immediately changed the password. (boy, 12–14, Czech Republic)

One of the most extreme cases, an indicator of serious harm, was reported by a Czech girl (12) not able to cope with bullying which followed her hacked profile being used to send rude messages on her behalf; she resorted to *changing school (one of the life-altering measures)* as a coping mechanism. This was another case of a *combination of coping* attempts. The girl told the interviewer she was bullied because someone hacked her account and used it to send vulgar messages to her schoolmates. Her family found out but the school was more interested in receiving explanations for the messages she sent than in dealing with the girl being bullied. Her mother had to go to school to explain, while her brother managed to log into her account and post a message in which he explained the situation. Because nobody did anything to stop the bullying, the girl had to change schools. She reported losing all her friends, except for two who believed it was not her sending the rude messages. She *learned to use more complicated passwords*, and *not to share her password* with anyone. She *stopped using Facebook*.

Collective coping was reported in several interviews and focus groups, such as in a Belgian interview where a girl, 15 reported dealing with a fake profile together with her friends, asking the impersonator to stop posting rude messages, and acting together to delete the profile. In one Romanian focus group, some girls reported a shared account being hacked and nasty messages sent to a colleague on their behalf. So the next day, they interrogated all their classmates to find out who had done it.

Dealing with fake (impersonating) profiles

Many times the case of fake/impersonating profiles are just for amusement among peers that cause no problems or harm, and cases of strangers impersonating younger people are usually easy to handle. Among the *self-reliant measures* children use, *technical* ones, such as *blocking the fake profile*, were common. One Belgian girl (16) talked about a man posing as a handsome young boy on Facebook, and sending fake pictures to her and some of her friends. The solution was blocking the profile. *Technical support-seeking* from adults was mentioned in Malta (12, girl). The children also mentioned *non-technical, other-reliant measures,* such as *information-seeking* or *asking friends* if they knew the profile (Greece, 15, girls).

This type of problematic situation is sometimes approached with *a combination of coping strategies*, such as *ignoring*, *confronting* and *telling parents:*

> *Girl: About two years ago, someone created a fake FB account with a friend's name. I knew him from primary school and in the beginning, when I asked him at school why he hadn't befriended me, he said I don't have an account. But I thought he was joking, that he wanted to avoid something; the other guy [who made the fake account] started talking to me, we don't know who he is, and was being nasty; like, what are you doing at midnight, do you want to meet, I know where you live and stuff. So you see somebody did it with someone I knew...*
> *Interviewer: When you realized that it wasn't your old friend, did you tell anyone?*
> *Girl: In the beginning I just ignored it, I said 'I know it's not you, just knock it off because you'll get into trouble'. Then I told my parents, we called other parents and I don't know what they did, and then the guy deleted the account*
> *(girl, 15, Greece)*

Collective coping was reported by children dealing with fake profiles online. As a special type of coping, it draws on the resources of the group, and is used to protect a member of the group. Some girls in Malta talked about *collective reporting* of a fake profile, with the purpose of having it deleted. Other young people resorted to *collectively warning* a peer they thought was in danger:

> *Girl: Because she was going to meet that person and she couldn't understand that the person she was talking to didn't exist, was not who she thought it was, and we had understood that a long time ago. And it was us who had to talk to her and warn her, so…*
> *Interviewer: So she never got to meet this person.*
> *Girl: No, she didn't.*
> *(girl, 16, Portugal)*

However, fake profiles are often created either by peers or online strangers to purposefully damage the reputation of the targeted children. These unpleasant situations were perceived as extremely stressful and bothersome. Simple technical solutions did not usually work, and often a combination of coping resources was required. Another type of situation is relevant here, when children receive nasty messages from a fake profile impersonating one of their peers.

Dealing with receiving rude messages from hacked accounts of peers

Children resorted mainly to *two strategies (non-technical)* when dealing with receiving rude messages from friends' accounts, such as *confronting and asking for explanations/asking to stop*, directly to the hacked profile. Sometimes children's reaction was to *contact the friend via other media or check in person* if they were really the sender of the nasty messages, to avoid getting into unnecessary fights. They often exercised caution in immediately engaging in online retaliation, an indication of *cognitive reappraisal* of the situation:

> *Yeah, for example when you are on Facebook or MSN, and you receive a message. And then suddenly, this is like some kind of hate mail, and it says things like 'you are a stupid bitch' or these kinds of things. And then the next day you ask the person about this hate message, but then she says 'no, I don't know anything about it'. And then you don't know what to believe. (girl, 12–13, Belgium)*

Peers sharing SNS passwords and misusing the account

One last type of situation involving misused accounts was that of peers sharing SNS passwords and misusing the account, which mainly involved children *changing the password* and reporting *being more careful* with sharing passwords (or stop doing it):

> *Yes. Once I gave my password to someone and...he...how do I put this?, today they call it 'hitting on' let's call it. A boy started hitting on me and I didn't know; and when I met up with him, he said 'What's up, honey?' (girl, 13, Romania)*

Other problematic experiences: commercial and technical problems, excessive internet use

Monica Barbovschi & Martina Černíková

Coping measures related to unwanted commercials

Children reported many strategies that helped them to avoid commercials or advertising content. The easiest mentioned strategy of refusing unwanted commercials and pop-ups is linked with *technical measures*. Often mentioned were examples of closing the page, emphasized with uses of the "X" button. Some children accentuated that they "close the page immediately." These strategies sometimes also had unwanted consequences – as with commercials, children closed other pages that they didn't want to.

> *Also when I am playing, I click on a game and another window opens. And so I think it is the game, but it is not, it is something else, another game and I don't like it… I turn it off, I mean, I press X and close it. But then you close everything, the game too. (girl, 9–10, Italy)*

Closing web pages seemed to be sometimes unsuccessful, so other strategies were needed, such as when children reported how impossible it was to close the page when pressing the "X" button repeatedly (even a "thousand" times). Also mentioned were examples of not finding the "X" button and repetitive commercials that often came back, even if they closed them.

Boy: I'm always getting this one: You just won a tablet. Well, I just say, screw that, I ignore the ads… Well, it's kind of weird, when I want to click on something, the ad moves over there and it always does that, it's shitty.
Interviewer: So it annoys you, but you close it...
Boy: Yeah, but still, another one will pop up.
(boy, 12, Czech Republic)

In such cases of failed attempts to get rid of ads, they developed strategies such as "turn off the devices," "close the devices," "hit the device," "disconnect it or leave it to discharge," or simply "ignore" advertisements. One girl mentioned a case when she was in a situation where she could not close a pop-up for an unwanted game. She felt like she was "forced to play this game." Strategies mentioned above also raise some complications, such as, losing data, and restarting everything (not only shutting down the commercials). Many negative feelings were often reported.

Interviewer: What happened when you clicked on a pop-up by accident?
Girl: Then…some games I am not able to close them anymore, so I am forced to play it or, when I really don't like it, that I am tired of it, I turn the computer off and restart everything.
(girl, 9–10, Italy)

In some cases, children reported watching advertisements just to have a quick look at them. If they didn't like them, they used the strategies mentioned above, such as turning them off. Some children perceived commercials as "necessary" or a "good way" for websites to gain money.

So, for example, when loading a video there always start ads where 30 seconds are screaming cats and it is so uninteresting... Well, I mostly watch it, what it is, and if it is some weird advertising, so I rather turn it off and I am looking for something else. (boy, 14, Czech Republic)

Another kind of problematic situation linked with commercials is concerned with spam. Children mentioned them in connection to email. In some cases, children developed a strategy of "two email addresses" to avoid advertisements. They had two accounts, one that they used to receive commercials and another one that they used as their common email address. However, the strategy of "two emails" was not so popular and not frequently mentioned. More common were cases when children just *deleted spam emails*. Sometimes, however, they were not able to recognize spam, so they read them first.

Boy: Yes, I have two email addresses… One from school, we have to create that. And one for private things. But I'm smart, because that email address from school I use that one for games. That's easier, because then you're not bothered by these emails.
Interviewer: What kinds of email do you mean?
Boy: Those from Mojang... That's the brand from Minecraft, and they send ridiculous things and adverts like 'buy this', and things like that. I was bothered a lot by this.
(boy, 9, Belgium)

Cases of children asking for *parental instrumental support* were also mentioned. Children asked parents to help them with commercials that suddenly appeared or with other situations connected with the commercials.

Close the page. And I have told my parents. When I told my mum that about Amazon, that I wanted a particular Lego set, and you had to type in the information, suddenly one of those advertising pages appeared. And I was with my mother… I've been told to be careful. As soon as I see one of those pages [naked girls] I should close it. (boy, 10, Spain)

It is striking that just one boy mentioned a strategy of technical protection. He used advertisement block applications to deal with irritating commercials. Children only seldom applied this strategy. From the interviews we collected, we know only about strategies that have just a transient effect and are used repetitively, such as "use 'X' button," "turn off the devices," "close the devices," "hit the device," "disconnect it or leave it to discharge," or "ignore" advertisements. It is also noteworthy that technical problems were mostly reported by younger children who, as they grow up, then learn to navigate the online environment, develop skills and resilience, and become less likely to have to deal with unwanted advertisements.

Coping measures related to technical problems[6]

Most of the technical problems children reported were about viruses and virus-related problems, such as slow computers, programs or computers crashing, and destroyed IM accounts. In some cases, children were able to *rely on their own resources* to get rid of the viruses, such as quickly *closing the browser* or *turning off the computer* when they suspected some virus activity. In more severe cases with extensive damage, the solution was *reinstalling the operating system, fixing or replacing the computer*:

Researcher: Has your computer ever been infected by viruses?
Boy: Yes. There were probably 3,000 viruses on it.
Researcher: How did that happen?
Boy: I don't know. I probably, I probably put too many games on it… Just now I uninstalled everything, took it to the repair shop and still, there were still viruses on there, just a bit less of them.
Researcher: And how did you find out that you had so many viruses there?
Boy: Well, when we went to the repair shop, the guy there, like, the guy who looked at it, he looked really frustrated. It took him a long time to fix it for us. He had to clean everything out, uninstall everything, like completely restart the computer. Erase everything, just leaving some important things.
(boy, 11, Czech Republic)

It is common for younger children to *rely on the instrumental support* of adults (parents, other relatives) or older peers to help them deal with the situation. In more severe cases, they enlisted the *help of a professional* to have their computer fixed. In a few cases children *dreaded telling their parents* about their problem with viruses, afraid of their reaction about the costs encumbered by repairing the damage. Instead they preferred to tell a peer or sibling: "I'd tell my cousin not my parents… I don't know what my cousin would do, but she'd help me," reported a Spanish girl (14–16).

In a few instances children reported losing their temper over bad experiences with viruses in *violent outbursts*, such as kicking the computer or hitting it with a baseball bat (boys, 12–14, Czech Republics), or hitting the screen (girls, 9–10, Romania). Some children believe *there's nothing you can do* about viruses (girls, 14–16, Belgium). Other reactions included *deleting the Facebook account* because of too many viruses (girl, 12, Romania).

Other problems, such as being stuck in a game or not being able to play a game, were dealt with by simply *choosing another game* or *asking parents for help* (usually younger children, 9–10). Slow or 'freezing' computers were also dealt with with *technical measures*, *asking for support* or simply *switching to another (offline) activity* for a certain period of time. After encountering technical problems, many children relied

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[6] Account hacking, which can be classified among the "technical problems," was described in the sub-section on how children cope with privacy issues and misuse of personal information online.

on *subsequent measures* in order to prevent the problem from happening again in the future, such as *installing anti-virus software* or *changing their browsing behaviour* (e.g., not clicking on pop-ups and ads anymore, not downloading games anymore).

Last, children do try to keep each other safe online; for example, on becoming aware that one of their peers was unknowingly spreading "infected" links, they resorted to *warning each other.*

Coping measures related to excessive internet use

When it comes to excessive use of the internet, although aware of the existence of the problem "out there," some children chose to exercise no restrictions, as *they didn't perceive their own behaviour as problematic*. For example, one Belgian boy (14) didn't feel bothered by the idea of being constantly online or spending too much time online. He received notifications on his phone, even when he was away from his computer, to know what was going on. Other times, even if they acknowledged their use of the internet or mobile devices as problematic, they *chose to ignore the problem*:

> *Sometimes I try to forget about the mobile, as it's oppressing. Too many messages. And it's difficult to stop chatting, you can't just disconnect. So I pretend not having heard the messages, or turn to silence. (girl, 14, Spain)*

Self-awareness is the turning point before they start doing something about the way they use the internet:

> *I hate when I'm doing something uninteresting and just fiddling around. (girl, 11, Romania)*

> *You can't be online all day. (boy, 11, Belgium)*

Other times, *physical constraints*, such as sore eyes and headaches, prompted the stopping (boys, 11–13, Italy). Among the self-reliant measures, *self-monitoring* for signs of addiction (girl, 13, Romania) and *self-imposed restrictions* were reported. Stopping the behaviour was a common solution, sometimes supplemented by *technical measures*, such as *disabling the account* (girls, 14–15, Romania). Other times they needed an extra push, such as *placing bets with their friends*, in order to stay on course:

> *Girl 1: No. When I felt that...well, I would always feel the need to log in, I deactivated my account. Because I. said I wasn't going to last a month without Facebook and so we made a bet to prove I could last even three months without logging into Facebook at all.*
> *Girl 2: Yes. And I have to give her something.*
> *Researcher: And what was that like? What was the feeling… Especially in the beginning...?*
> *Girl 1: The first few days were really hard. I constantly had...I wanted to log in and 'But wait, I have nothing else to do on the internet if I don't have a Facebook account'.*
> *(girls, 14–15, Romania)*

Another useful strategy was *making resolutions to change the behaviour*, to prevent it from happening in the future, and *engaging in other activities*, such as playing sport or simply going outside, away from the screen, to consciously curb the addictive behaviour (boy, 15, Czech Republic; boys, 14–16, Spain):

> *I played before too. But we had some kind of old computer, so I occasionally played as a child, but...the first day I spent, when I got it, eight hours playing chess. Because I was very happy that I got it. And then it went all wrong. Then the next day my parents were happy that it made me so happy so they left me there, then they*

did not stop it. I 'm not proud of it, but then again it seems silly to deny it and say that I was a saint. However, then such a little turnaround, a bit of a twist in my life happened. And since then I left it. I still play, but I am not so addicted to it. I am doing other things. Like sport, which I was not doing those four years practically at all… I lost my friends. All of them. Except for one… With the friend, with whom I thought I knew for a long time, right, that I am good with him, it went a little worse, pretty much. And then after half a year it changed completely, so that I was actually talking just with one person in the classroom from those 23 or 22, minus me, of course. And if you do not have friend in the classroom, it changed me a lot. I used to be very cheerful. I'm happy again now, I changed again, but then that year. I maybe was suffering from depression and the like. Because really the loss of all companionship. So it hurt me very much... So I stopped, I started to do something, I started to exercise, I started to be more interested in, I became interested in Buddhism and Tai Chi or coexistence of the body and the soul and the like. These things. And I changed. I am very happy now, because now, like, I first felt bad, like after I'd spent so long on the computer, then even worse because I lost pretty much of all my friends. But I feel completely fine now. (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

Boy 1: That's right…but it is the same with any other game. Call of Duty lasts 10 or 15 minutes, but Battlefield…a game of that lasts an hour. And it is time you could have spent studying or doing homework.
Boy 2: When you realize you think, okay, that won't happen again.
Boy 1: At times they have had to take my console away from me. Because I was…that is, I would get home, put on the television, I would go down to eat something and I would start playing. I spent the whole day playing.
(boys, 14–16, Spain)

Finally, when self-reliant measures fail, children reported instances of parental intervention. For example, one Portuguese girl (14–16) reported that she was addicted to Facebook, and when her parents banned her from going online, she felt "she was going to die"; however, she was glad she got over the addiction eventually.

Age and gender differences in dealing with online problems

Monica Barbovschi & Sofie Vandoninck

Introduction

As children grow older, their meta-cognitive skills become more elaborated, which facilitates the development of preventive behaviour and coping capacities. In general, adolescents tend to use a wider variety of strategies, in particular more cognitive forms of coping, compared to pre-adolescents (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Despite this increase of coping capacities, adolescents could also be more vulnerable, as they are more likely to be overwhelmed by emotions, and more easily internalize negative experiences (Eisenberg et al., 1997). Although some developmental processes are universal, young people's capacity to deal with stressful situations is not fixed at birth. Personal experiences with stress and the social ecological context contribute to how young people deal with unpleasant situations, both in a preventive and reactive way (Masten, 2007; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Previous findings on reactive coping indicate that while older children are more likely to use proactive strategies when facing online problematic situations, younger children tend more towards support-seeking. According to the EU Kids Online survey results, children below the age of 12 more often portray passive or fatalistic coping behaviour, which suggests that older teenagers see more options to solve the problem and have more cognitive capacities to think about possible tactics. Furthermore, the EU

117

Kids Online survey results indicate that boys and girls differ in the way they deal with problematic situations online. Girls are much more talkative, regardless of their age, and are more likely to consult others for support and/or information-seeking (Livingstone et al., 2011; d'Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013; Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Donoso, 2010).

Gender: similarities and differences

Technical proactive measures are popular among both boys and girls. Young people favour the *friends only* settings, although some of them go a step further and use the customized settings to share their content only with private groups, such as classmates or friends from hobby clubs. Another common strategy is deleting or blocking unwelcome contacts (strangers, bullies) from their friends lists. Criteria for accepting friend requests are a personal choice, but young people generally agree that you should have seen the person at least once in real life before accepting a friend request. The "think before you post" principle is high on both boys' and girls' minds; both disapprove of posting too many intimate details on profiles, too frequent postings about trivial daily activities, and disclosing contact information such as mobile number and home address. They seemed especially wary about giving information about holiday destinations and geographical location; however, these seemed to stem more from concerns from various media rather than from personal experience, as Chapter 6 showed earlier. Nevertheless, girls tended to reflect more on the potential impact of risky online behaviour, and were more likely to come up with suggestions for peers, teachers and policy-makers on how to improve online safety. To avoid shocking, gory or other disturbing content, strategies such as clicking away, scrolling further or closing down the window were popular among both sexes.

Girls talk more easily with parents and peers about unpleasant situations online. Furthermore, it seems that strategies of non-violent online or offline confrontation are also more popular among girls, which means talking to (potential) perpetrators (both unknown or peers) in order to avoid misunderstandings and to neutralize the situation before it escalates. This is related to girls' stronger preferences for applications that allow private or personal communication, which are used to talk with perpetrators about their behaviour. When it is about sensitive or intimate topics, posting comments publicly on people's profiles is "not done," according to the girls. When contacting others, the motive of (emotional) support-seeking is more important for girls than for boys. For example, as young girls enter adolescence, their curiosity about talking to boys online grows; aware of potential dangers, they reported more instances of talking to boys online, especially unknown ones, in the presence of their peers, as well as more instances of peer support for dealing with potentially risky contacts (e.g., meeting an online contact offline). Boys will rather seek support in an attempt to find information on technical measures, for example, how to change privacy settings or install software.

Although relatively few young people explicitly expressed disengagement, this phenomenon seems more common among boys. They tended to care less about strangers having a look at their profiles, believing that others were not interested in their personal information because they did not share "anything special or important." If girls showed disengagement, it was mainly because they believed that risks were unavoidable and that perpetrators would always find a way to bypass precautions.

Age: similarities and differences

Across all age groups, young people had similar concerns and adopted similar strategies to deal with problematic situations online: blocking, deleting, reporting, or ignoring annoying people were recurring strategies. All age groups also disapproved of practices such as publicly sharing personal or intimate things, posting too frequently about trivial activities, and disclosing contact information or location-based information.

Nevertheless, some differences were noticed between younger and older children. Older teenagers (14–16) have more experience and (digital) skills, which are required resources for technical proactive measures. The oldest age group is also most involved into SNS communication practices, which seems to go along with higher cautiousness about problematic situations on SNS and how to cope with these. In the youngest age group (9–11), behavioural avoidance is a more popular tactic; for these children it just feels safer to stay away from platforms or services they are not familiar with. As children grow older, cognitive capacities develop, and critical or reflective thinking become more prominent, along with more digital skills for both preventing and responding to online stressors. Older children have more experiences online, and gradually feel more confident in their own judgements on what is risky or not.

When it comes to avoiding unsafe platforms or applications, the youngest children (9–11) are more likely to refer to age limits and age restrictions, while the older teenagers favour or disapprove of platforms mainly because of concerns about bullies or misuse of personal information. Technical measures, such as clicking away, closing down or deactivating programs or accounts are popular across all age groups, with increasing degrees of sophistication, as more skills developing with age. Younger children employ technical measures mostly out of concern in order to deal with content risks, such as shocking sexual or gory images. For the older age groups, mainly the 14- to 16-year olds, these "closing down" strategies are also to deal with contact risks.

Although technical instrumental actions were most popular in the oldest age group (14–16), these older teenagers were at the same time more likely to show disengagement. One explanation for this passive behaviour is the perception that (potential) perpetrators were not interested in them, so nothing would happen to them.

Last, the category of young adolescents (11–12) deserves specific attention as a period marked by growing complexity of digital experiences (e.g., noteworthy onset of using SNSs), which often requires digital, critical, and social skills which might lag behind their exposure to risky situations.

Aggressive communication, harassment, and online bullying

Children across all ages seemed to make the distinction between "just teasing" and more serious types of aggression. One particular type of aggressive communication seemed to be dominating the world of online games for younger boys (9–10), which they perceived as something normal, as something "just happening between boys." Adolescence is the time when fights move to social networking platforms, although gender differences are harder to assess. Boys and girls alike reported being involved in aggressive episodes, to which they responded through a variety of measures, from ignoring the bullies, blocking the unwanted people, to confrontational measures or support-seeking from adults. When talking about how to protect themselves from being ridiculed online, both boys and girls acknowledged the importance of privacy settings as protection against disturbing incidents online.

As bystanders of aggression towards other peers, no particular gender differences were noted; however, these cases were rather few and generalizations should only be cautiously inferred. Children also seemed to be compelled to stand up for one another at all ages, even the youngest:

> *Boy: Yes, we reported this girl.*
> *Interviewer: Tell me about it.*
> *Boy: So, she was a bully. So on the Ketnet website you could report things, for example you could report messages as 'acts of bullying'. So we did this with all her messages. But OK…maybe it was exaggerated.*
> *Interviewer: So there was this girl…*
> *Boy: Yes, and we told her to stop the bullying. Because who knows what happens when you continue like that. But then I was thinking…but she's just weird. Who knows, she's in a bad situation, maybe her parents got divorced, or her dad turned gay…*
> *(boy, 9, Belgium)*

Children as perpetrators of aggressive communication towards others were only reported in a few cases (although no instances were reported among younger children), which might point to early adolescence as the onset of specific peer-related struggles. As contact risks belong more to the environment of older teenagers, they seem to favour communicative practices in dealing with incidents of online bullying and harassment. A common strategy is talking personally to the (potential) perpetrator in order to avoid misunderstandings and further escalation. Older teenagers (14–16) agreed one should use applications for private communication when engaging in non-violent online confrontation with the perpetrators. It was considered as "not done" to start a discussion or fight on people's profiles, where all other online contacts were bystanders of what was going on.

Sexual content and communication

Younger children were the ones reporting having to deal with unwanted sexual content, usually encountered while searching for other types of information online (since older children had developed both digital skills which helped them access the content they wanted and a different attitude towards sexual content); their reactions were rather limited, from simple technical solutions (e.g., closing the browser or the page) or telling their parents. As a preventive practice, the youngest children (9–10) simply tended to avoid unfamiliar websites or platforms. At this age (9–10), they are not sufficiently skilled to set in place technical solutions, such as filtering software. One adolescent boy recalled:

> *When I was nine years old, I was Googling for animal pictures…anyway, there was a pop-up. [It was a naked girl, moving here and there], and because I was too young, I was shocked and called my dad [laughter]... Well, I was very young and didn't know about such stuff, I was younger, at first grade of primary school. I haven't seen a naked body before and it felt weird. My dad was close by, and I couldn't pretend nothing had happened… (boy, 16, Greece)*

Sexual communication, however, seems to be gender-differentiated, with more girls, even at younger ages (10), reporting having to deal with unpleasant situations. What stands out as particularly interesting is the shared nature of these experiences, with young girls reporting instances of collective coping and bystander support, in the form of receiving or giving advice about online communication, such as "never talk to boys/men alone online" or "never let your face be seen," or peers taking damage control actions to ensure that nude pictures of their friends were not further distributed online. Perhaps worth mentioning are the situations where children, usually younger, felt too embarrassed or scared to talk to their parents about encountering or receiving sexual content or messages. Specific policy interventions, aiming at reducing communication barriers, which help instil a space where children feel safe and

comfortable talking about problems they face without the fear of parents admonishing and punishing them, are much needed.

Online strangers: friend requests, information requests, and offline meetings

Dealing with unpleasant situations involving strangers starts being reported around the age of 11, by both girls and boys; as a time when children slowly gain more independence and start expanding their circle of peers beyond immediate close contacts, this shift might also expose them to unwanted online interaction with unknown people. Simple coping practices, such as blocking the sender, did not present any gender or age differences. As a preventive practice, both sexes agreed on the risk of accepting friend requests from complete strangers.

When talking about accepting friend requests, the youngest age group tended to interpret the principle of "knowing somebody personally" in a more limited way. They would only accept people with whom they had a strong personal connection, such as friends, family, classmates, or schoolmates. The older adolescents believed it was okay to accept a friend request from a person they had seen or been talking to once, or people with sufficient mutual friends. While the youngest age group tended to contact others (mainly parents) to find out whether it was okay to accept a person or to click on a link, adolescents (11–16) actively argued and reflected themselves about the criteria for accepting friend requests or which websites were okay to click on.

Besides the technical measures, boys seemed particularly resourceful in handling unwanted friendship requests, with ingenious approaches such as "add and delete," "ignore but not reject," and "add and make fun" to keep unwanted people at bay:

> *Interviewer: So we were talking about strangers adding you as a friend on Facebook. And it happened to some of you. So, what do you do then?*
> *Boy 1: I add them, and then later I remove them.*
> *Boy 2: Yes, you first have to say 'yes', and then afterwards delete.*
> *Boy 1: First I say 'hello', and then I say 'goodbye'.*
> *Interviewer: Really? So, why don't you delete them immediately, before adding them instead of afterwards?*
> *Boy 1: Euuh…then they will be mad.*
> *(boys, 11, Belgium)*

From the age of 11–12 onwards, young people show more interest in meeting online contacts, which is reflected in active discussions about preventive measures to avoid an unpleasant or traumatic meeting. When planning to arrange a meeting, girls are a bit more suspicious, and tend to pay extra attention to precautions such as taking another person to the meeting, only meeting in public spaces, or in company with mutual friends.

Privacy and misuse of personal information online

Concerns about how others handle the child's personal information begin in early adolescence. Young people of 11–13, as well as 14–16 in our sample, reported providing false information about themselves in order to deal with requests of personal information (usually for signing in to different web services). They believe this creates confusion towards potential perpetrators, as it would be more difficult to trace them online and disturb them. It seems that boys are a bit more likely to use fake or false information, as protection against personal data misuse.

Young adolescence is also the age when they start reporting problems with peers sharing or tagging photos or videos without their permission. However, gender differences in how children deal with these situations are difficult to distinguish. To avoid painful online comments on pictures, girls tried not to look silly or stupid on pictures taken by others, while boys were more likely to avoid recognizable photos and select neutral pictures with a sports or games scene.

All age groups were concerned about privacy settings and personal information; however, younger children tended to avoid disclosing personal information at all times, while older adolescents were more familiar with applications to create groups for sharing things privately just with a selected number of good friends.

When dealing with hacked accounts, some gender differences can be observed, such as hacked games accounts being something solely faced by boys, whereas hacked SNS accounts were something both boys and girls encountered. In the first case, boys across all ages reported dealing with hacked games accounts with strategies varying from technical solutions (e.g., asking the games administrator to restore the account), confrontation, to more "creative" solutions, such as paying money to get the account back. However, when more complex situations arose, such as their hacked account being used to send rude messages, or when they received rude messages from hacked accounts of peers, the same strategies seemed to be employed by boys and girls alike: communicating, warning peers, or enlisting the support of adults and schools.

Other problematic situations: commercial and technical problems, excessive internet use

Situations involving unwanted commercial content were mostly reported by younger children, as they are the ones still in need of acquiring digital skills to enable them to set in place preventive measures, such as safe browsing behaviour or using filtering software. At a younger age, children are also more likely to rely on the instrumental support of adults when they face technical problems, such as a slow internet or computer or the computer being infected with viruses. Looking at gender differences, boys think more about technical measures such as installing virus scanners, ad-blockers and filter software to deal with unwelcome (commercial) content.

Conversely, excessive internet use and the problem of addiction was mostly reported by older adolescents in our sample, maybe because as they gain more autonomy from parental authority, their behaviour is less regulated and constrained by adult supervision and intervention, but more self-regulated. Gender differences are not particularly strong, with the exception of excessive use of games, which was mostly reported by boys.

Summary

When comparing different online risks, the results show that young people favour differing types of preventive measures based on the perceived seriousness and potential harm of the risky situation at hand. Hence, a risk-specific approach is followed in the prevention of problematic online situations. Attempts to control content risks such as exposure to unwelcome sexual or aggressive content are often based on avoidance strategies. Self-monitoring strategies are perceived as more helpful in protecting oneself from contact risks such as unwanted communication with strangers and misuse of personal information. Finally, instrumental actions are most popular when it comes to thwarting online bullying. These findings match earlier conclusions on coping with online risks: online bullying causes more harm and is therefore more likely to be tackled with proactive strategies. Content risks such as unwelcome sexual images are perceived

as less harmful, and avoidance tactics are generally viewed as an adequate response (d'Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013).

Moving from preventive strategies to how children respond to problems they actually encounter, similar patterns can be discerned, with perceived controllability and complexity of the situations requiring simple (e.g., one-measure technical solution, such as closing the browser window) to more elaborate strategies. Although the similarities with preventive measures are numerous (i.e., technical versus non-technical solutions, proactive measures or disengagement), a clearer indication of children's resilience to risks or harm encountered can only be inferred from how children deal with actual unpleasant situations (for more details regarding harm and resilience, see section 6b).

Models and typologies for reactive coping strategies have been a fruitful starting point for developing categories of preventive measures. Although some parallels are visible, we suggest the development of a prevention-specific typology. First, compared to reactive coping, the preferred measures are somewhat different in the preventive stage: proactive problem-preventing measures are far more frequent than support-seeking, for instance. This seems to be in line with the idea that preventive measures are virtually always active (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Second, in a preventive context, some types of measures have a different meaning and a different impact. While cognitive measures do not have an obvious positive connotation in the field of coping, we conclude that cognitive strategies such as planning, strategizing, and reflecting are quite common in children bent on avoiding risky online experiences, and that they could be an important step away from mere awareness towards concrete preventive actions. For example, we see how children develop specific suggestions towards parents, teachers and industry to improve online safety. Also, avoidance strategies have a mainly negative connotation as reactive responses (Jacobs et al., 2014; Völlink, Bolman, et al., 2013), but they turn out to be helpful and efficient in a preventive context, as well as in a reactive context. We argue that children who consciously choose to stay away from "problematic" platforms, applications or online practices, are actively taking steps to avoid unpleasant experiences. Another noteworthy distinction is the cognitive nature of most preventive measures, with children having to reflect on why they are taking a measure, whereas coping with real situations sometimes involves a non-reflexive reactivity, such as children reacting violently on having their accounts hacked or their computer breaking down from getting a virus.

Findings on the role of age and gender in preventively dealing with problematic online situations reflect findings in the field of reactive coping. As children's range of reactive coping strategies becomes more elaborate as they grow older, it is the oldest age group in our study (14–16) that evidences the most thorough preventive behaviour. This is not surprising since meta-cognitive skills reach a higher developmental stage around this age, facilitating the development of preventive behaviour (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). In addition, proactive measures are also intensified when related online activities become more popular. As children grow older, online communication practices and activities on SNS are equally on the rise. Correspondingly, their proactive behaviours towards risks related to SNS, online communication and meeting new people online become heightened. Our results indicate that girls are more communicative in both preventive and reactive contexts, and more likely to seek social support when faced with problematic situations. As previous studies have suggested, we can assume that it is socially more acceptable for girls to show insecurity and to turn to others in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about risky things (d'Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013). One noticeable difference in this regard, when it comes to reactive coping, is the reluctance of younger children, both girls and boys, to seek adult support and to communicate with their parents about having encountered unpleasant sexual content online for fear of parental retaliation, usually in the form of having their internet use forbidden or restricted, or simply out of embarrassment. Encouragement of active parental mediation, in the form of

empathic listening and encouragement of young people to talk freely about what happens to them online, should be fostered in awareness campaigns and policy measures.

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7. MEDIATION

Introduction

Leslie Haddon

This chapter covers "social mediation," focusing on the agents that have an influence on children's experience of the internet, in particular, risks and online problematic situations. It starts with the people who potentially have the most influence, especially for younger children: parents. But mediation of the internet is also practised by others within the immediate and extended family, and so the next group considered is siblings and other relatives. The third section deals with the influence of the school, in particular, the role of teachers, while the final section considers the part played by peers.

Figure 6: Mediation as object of analyses in the model
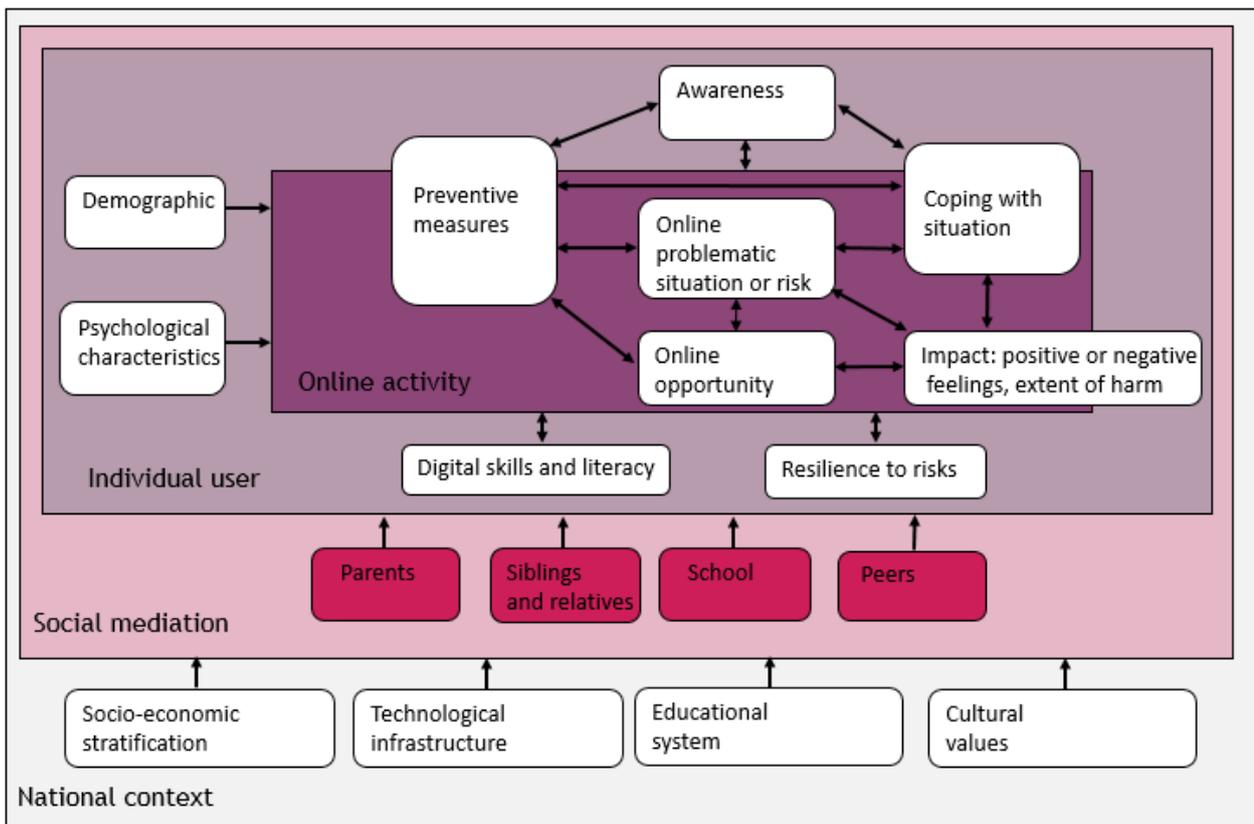
Parental mediation

Leslie Haddon

Introduction

A body of literature now exists that has documented parental mediation of children's use of the internet. This covers issues such as the types of strategies parents use and prefer (Kirwil, 2009; Pasquier et al., 2012), and the effectiveness of these interventions in either reducing experiences parents perceive as risks, or ameliorating negative feelings felt by children (Garmendia et al., 2012). In this section we start by examining children's accounts of the nature of parental concerns lying behind that mediation, be it in terms of making rules, giving advice or taking other action. Next we consider children's responses to this, in terms of how they evaluate and sometimes overcome parental concerns, whether they invite intervention, are ambivalent about it or resist it, and why. Last, given common eSafety advice to tell parents about online problems, we look at why many are reticent to adhere to this advice

General parental concerns

The EU Kids Online survey (Livingstone et al., 2011) had shown that the vast majority of parents mediate their children's online experience, especially through talking to them (70%), and the numbers are sufficiently large that this must include parents who are themselves not so skilled in internet use. In the interviews we asked children what their parents talked to them about and what rules the parents made, in order to appreciate the basis of parental concerns.

It is clear that even if they are not internet skilled or familiar with eSafety messages, some parental concerns about the internet and their interventions relate to historic concerns about media (e.g., television, cinema) such as seeing violence and sexual content[7] (but also gory or scary images – more so for younger children – and narratives with adult themes, as in some soap operas). So just as parents might limit games because of their content, children reported how parents limited what sites the children could go to, what YouTube clips they could watch, or what films could be streamed online. Another screen-related concern, also first voiced during the early years of television (Spigel, 1992), was that spending too much time online was potentially bad for children's eyes, while yet other parents worried about it keeping children awake. Hence parents put time limits on internet use just as they put time limits on game-playing of any kind for the same reason. And both games and the internet generally provoked fears of (media) "addiction" – another reason for time restrictions.

Another set of concerns about time spent online that children reported arose from a different yet long-standing issue, one also raised by adults as regards media such as television and popular reading matter (romance, comics): that media (and now the internet) took time from other activities. This is perhaps most clearly seen in relation to schoolwork, where the internet could be a distraction from doing homework, and hence the common parental rule across countries that homework needed to be completed before children could go online for entertainment in whatever form.

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[7] One possible cultural difference is that parents who were young during Romania's communist era experienced censored television with little sex and violence, and so that generation may have been less exposed to this particular anxiety about what children are exposed to on television.

Interviewer: So do you have any rules about internet use at home?
Girl: Yes, my mum and dad prefer that I'm not too much online, but now during holidays it can happen that we go online more often. But when it's school time, we first have to do our homework. And when we have exams, we can't go online from 2pm until the evening. So yeah, to make sure that we are really studying.
(girl, 16, Belgium)

More generally, and, seemingly reflecting the desire to find a balance in children's lives, it appears that some parents worried that time spent online might lead to their children missing out on "something else," offline, that might be beneficial. Hence, while some parents had less time rules about internet use in holidays when this was not competing against schoolwork, others might still restrict time online in order to promote that balance. There were also, of course, more practical reasons for limiting time children spend online, such as when the family devices for accessing the internet were shared with siblings.

A last set of concerns related to children breaking or losing expensive devices, for example, breaking the computer or losing a smartphone. These were also reflected in previous concerns about losing mobile phones, or having them stolen, although arguably the anxiety is more acute now because of the cost of devices some children now carry.

Hence, in respect to all the above concerns, while even those parents less familiar with the internet may not know the details of what their children might encounter and how, both they and more internet-savvy parents often applied certain principles consistent with how they managed their children's relationship with other media.

Arguably advice about how to handle cyberbullying was also based on advice about physical bullying, and the same is true for communicating with strangers online and speaking to strangers offline – although here the complexities of the internet may create a greater gap from offline concerns (e.g., how posting some pictures might be regarded as bullying). Finally, there are concerns that are relatively more internet-specific, such as fears about viruses (although you can get this on computers generally) and some personal information issues (e.g., the potential for reputation damage in the future based on what you post now). Some of these are not based on parents' experience of other media, although they can still appreciate some ways in which the online and offline world can interrelate: for example, in the advice "do not mention online that you are on holiday because thieves might break into the house."

As a caveat, some children across the countries mentioned that their parents did not impose time rules, but sometimes this was because the child did not spend much time online anyway. And the same applied to particular parts of the internet, for example, no rules about time on Skype because their child did not talk much on it anyway. In addition, it is worth noting that this listing of concerns and rules, above and in the sections that follow, does not mean that all parents were equally worried: some children reported that their parents simply thought that seeing certain content would not affect their own child – or, as we will see in the next section, that the children were now old enough to cope.

Age-related restrictions

A number of concerns outlined above related to children's age. This is shown especially in the UK children's frequent use of the word "inappropriate" content, which is clearly the term parents and other advising adults (as well as older children) were using. When elaborating, the children would explain that it meant "inappropriate for their age," and while the most common referent was sexual images, this could

include violence and adult narratives. So this was more of a concern about what younger[8] children should encounter, as when a Romanian boy (10) unsuccessfully tried to convince his parents that he should have a Facebook profile.

> *Boy: They say it's not for me...that I'm too young for Facebook, or that... [hesitates]...that there are some messages, like this... But they don't know much about Facebook. So I told them about my godmother, what she's doing...*
> *Interviewer: What is she doing?*
> *Boy: Well, I told them she is on Facebook, that also my classmate is on it, how he has games there, but I didn't push it too much [disappointed].*
> *Interviewer: So you wait for them to let you make a Facebook account?*
> *Boy: Yes, I will wait for them to let me.*
> *(boy, 10, Romania)*

Again, parents' rules in this respect carried over from those still applied to other media, for example, that their child should not play games with a higher age rating than their actual age, or see films online with a higher age rating than their age. It was not just rules that were sometimes age-specific – in keeping with the EU Kids Online survey findings on parental mediation, some children reported how parents used to check when they were younger, but not when they grew older.

Encountering bad language online was also another parental concern more often mentioned by younger children (i.e., 9–10), but slightly older children were more likely to make the point that it was hard to avoid encountering "bad language" in films and games, and besides, they heard it in everyday life anyway, including at school. Hence some parents acknowledged this, and said their children could see content with swearing as long as they did not swear themselves.

Turning to online-specific versions of the same age-related concern, some children were not allowed on Twitter, Skype, or MSN, or allowed to have email until a certain age. Even more generally, some parents banned 9- to 10-year-old children from going online at all, or banned them from having a smartphone until they reached a certain age (an age when the particular parent thought that the child was responsible enough).

SNS: processes of gaining more online access

The particular case of children gaining access to SNSs such as Facebook illustrates some of the complexities around parental age restrictions and the degree to which they can be enforced (especially given the EU Kids Online survey figures suggesting there are many "under-age" users (26% of 9- to 10-year-olds and 49% of 11- to 12-year-olds had an SNS profile). First, while many parents clearly worked with age thresholds – that is, "you cannot do this until you reach a certain age" – that threshold was not always the same as the official one. Some parents were stricter about "official" age limits, such as the child needed to be 13 to go on Facebook. But for others, it was a "stage" rather than "age" threshold, allowing the child to have Facebook (or other applications) when they moved from primary to secondary school. Yet others were more flexible, perhaps not allowing the child on Facebook when they were 10–11, but deciding that by 12 they were old enough to have their own profile. One more rare, but not unique, example was of a UK

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[8] Although "younger" is a sliding scale when 9- to 10-year-olds thought that they could cope with certain content that was inappropriate for, say, 5- to 6-year-old siblings, who they had to protect from such material. In fact, some children take a very strong line on controlling what children younger than them see, advocating strong parental interventions.

mother teaching her young son (11–12) about Facebook in preparation for allowing him to get an account at a slightly later age.

Some of the children mentioned that they had originally been allowed on Facebook when they were quite young, well below 13, not because of the social networking functionality, but because of games accessible through SNS. For example, one Italian (now 14–16) girl described how when she was younger she had been allowed to borrow her mother's account to play games. But then her mother got tired of opening the account each time she wanted to play, and so let her create her own profile. This also illustrates how one route to getting a personal account involves first sharing one.

Other parents did not present a united front over age limits, and so the child got more access through one parent. For example, the mother of one Italian boy (9–10) had not wanted him to be on Facebook, but his father had agreed, and so he helped the child open his profile. Meanwhile, in the case of a divorced Italian couple of a girl (now 11–13), her mother had not agreed to let her have a profile at the age of eight, but her father had allowed her to access Facebook when she was at his house.

For some, getting more access involved a process of persuasion that eventually got around their parents' objections:

Boy: I had to assert myself. Because, I mean, they didn't agree because they said it was dangerous…that it was not appropriate for children. But then I managed to persuade them.
Interviewer: How did you persuade them?
Boy: By telling them that I would have been able to talk with my friends, and then they have gradually been able to…they accepted it
(boy, 11–13, Italy)

Yet others simply bypassed their parents' restrictions. The Czech girl below had also got a Facebook profile against her mother's initial wishes, but the mother had eventually accepted it.

Girl: My mum did not want me to have Facebook, but when I was 10 years old, something like that, I simply, a friend already had it and I simply liked one game…mum was totally against it, as I am not going to have it any case. And then I did it. Simply. And she found out, she was angry and... [laughs]
Interviewer: Yeah. How did she react?
Girl: Well, she was upset that I did not listen, so she told me all different things about it, like, I can, do not add anyone else there and stuff. So then I just had it, well. [laughs]
(girl, 11, Czech Republic)

Internet access as punishment and reward

Sometimes parents withdraw children's access to the internet as an intervention relating to something they had done online. For example, one Portuguese girl (14–16) admitted she had at one stage become "addicted" to Facebook, and since her parents thought it had affected her school grades, she had been banned from using the internet at all for a year. However, controlling access to the internet can become part of the general scheme of rewards and punishment schemes operated by parents, which can apply to anything else the child values. So, just as some children lost access to their games when they had behaved badly, a Portuguese boy (13–15) and Czech boy (12) both reported that their parents had forbidden them to use the computer, and hence the internet, for a period because their school grades were not good enough – but with no argument that this had been because of the internet. The example below illustrates how banning internet access can also become a more general sanction.

Girl: I've been without computer for…a whole school year! It was terrible!
Interviewer: Without the internet?
Girl: [nods]
Interviewer: When was that?
Girl: On my 8th grade, for the whole year. It was terrible! I just had the internet at other people's homes. And in school.
Interviewer: And can you tell us why it happened, why did you stay without the Internet?
Girl: No… [laughs] [pause] I can do. It was because…it was not because of anything that happened on the internet, it was about things that happened at home.
(girl, 14–16, Portugal)

Given that for some older children in particular banning internet use meant denying them a significant form of access to their social networks, it is no wonder that some thought of it as a new form of "grounding" them (where previously the term referred to not letting them out of the house to meet their friends). One observation is pertinent for the later section on why children do not tell parents about problematic experiences. Whether seen as a punishment for internet misuse or for some other behaviour, the fear of this particular punishment, the knowledge that it is a real and serious possibility, may have a bearing on children's willingness to talk to parents about online experiences if they fear it might have negative consequences.

That said, in general there were far more examples of extra internet time being used as a reward for children than less time as a punishment. Hence, children were allowed to spend additional time online as a reward (often after doing homework) or if their activities online were seen as being positive – for example, some children were allowed additional time if they could demonstrate they were learning something (not just playing games). This also meant that while there might be general parental rules about how much time children spent online, these could be bent by parents to reward good behaviour.

Parental advice and children's responses

We saw in the section on awareness of risks (Chapter 5) that parents had an influence on children's risk perceptions. In fact, parents across the countries gave a good deal of practical advice about such things as hacking, fake competitions online and related misleading pop-ups. Some parents also warned their children about their own potential behaviour online. This covered, as we saw earlier, warnings that they should avoid putting personal information online that would lead to the family or the child being a victim (e.g., of theft). But it also covered conduct risks – that they should not say negative things online, or more generally be careful about what they said in online conversations, not post (certain types of) pictures of themselves, or be careful about which peers were added as friends.

It is clear from the children's reports that many parents had specifically explained the rational to their child: that giving out personal information might lead to the house being robbed or accounts being hacked, or that talking to strangers might lead to the child being abducted. However, not all parental views and rules are explicit – at least from the children's perspective. For example, one UK girl (11–13) reported how she was sure her mother would not like her to encounter bad language even though her mother had never said this. Another (11–13) said her mother had warned her not to watch violent things, but had not explained why. One Italian girl (9–10) reported that her mother had told her brother to avoid sharing pictures on Facebook because generally "bad things may happen." Meanwhile, a Greek boy's (9) parents had simply said, "it's bad to see such things" when warning him about seeing sexual content. The mother of another Greek boy (9) had said he could not have his own Skype account (he currently used his mother's) but had not explained why – he planned to ask her why not. Hence parents differed in the degree to which

they articulated why they were concerned about some behaviour, some providing a reason, some simply labelling something "bad."

As noted in the section on preventative measures (Chapter 6a), sometimes parents were embarrassed to talk about certain concerns, especially sexual matters, which in turn made children reluctant to raise the issue with them. Sometimes the parents were also unclear about what they actually wanted. The Italian girl below had approached her parents to ask to go on Facebook when she reached the age of 14, but so far her parents had not given an answer:

My parents start saying that they have to think it over and change subject. I mean how do you think I'll ever learn what to do and what not to do if you change subject? Tell me 'no' or 'yes' but argument it with me so that I can understand or to me it is a punishment. (girl, 11–13, Italy)

In some cases children's responses were either to take the view that their parents simply did not understand the technology, or to be critical of the manner which parents used, both illustrated in this Belgian example:

Boy: This morning. We were having a discussion with our mum that we didn't like it. She called us 'addicted losers', and yeah…I know we were online for too long. But she could also say just in a normal tone 'Time's up, you're online for too long, so you should stop now and you and play outside.' But she yells: 'Go play outside.' But it's raining…
Interviewer: [laughs]
Boy: Or like: 'Go and do something else.' But yeah, what should we do? So they don't understand. That's just all new things to them, Skype and other websites. It's just all new.
(boy, 9, Belgium)

One example illustrating this perception that parents do not really understand the online world came from an Italian girl (11–13) who was disappointed by her parents' perception that she was online all day long instead of studying, because she simply left the smartphone on for checking WhatsApp from time to time.

While many of the youngest children and slightly older ones might be more willing to accept the rationale for their parents' concerns, some of the older ones were beginning to question some claims about why things might be bad for children. For example, in a UK focus group the boys (11–13) felt parental advice was confusing because they were asked to avoid looking at violence online, but they saw it regularly on the TV news in war coverage, and were asked to avoid sexual material and yet could see pictures of topless women in some of the popular daily newspapers.

Other simply questioned their parents' evaluation, as when one parent of a UK girl (11–13) complained about her daughter illegally downloading television content (such as the Simpsons cartoon) and the girl responded: "[She's concerned] that I'll get a criminal record. I don't get why. I mean, I'm not…no one's getting killed or hurt."

Yet others thought some advice was too universal:

My parent doesn't say this but some parents will say if you constantly play this game you'll be addicted and it will affect your mentality. And you'll try to copy what's happening in the game in real life. But to be honest I find that a bit… I don't really agree with that statement because it depends on who you are, and it depends on if you are smart enough to do it or not. And it also depends on parenting as well. (boy, 11–13, UK)

Some parents constantly say that the internet is bad or some websites are bad. But, these bad things will be on the internet forever. So constantly warning about bad things is a bit useless. It's better to just pay attention to what you post online. (boy, 9, Belgium)

Finally, other children thought they could use more refined strategies to protect themselves rather than the blanket bans proposed by parents. For example, one UK boy (11–13) had been warned by parents about communicating with people he did not know when online in multiplayer games, but had decided that it was safe enough as long as he talked about innocuous subjects, like the game itself, and that he would stop communicating if those online asked for personal information.

Inviting and resisting parental mediation

Many of the younger children (9–10) simply accepted what their parents wanted. If they were unsure about a website, the might ask a parent to check it for them before continuing. This sometimes included asking parents to check URLs that their peers had recommended, where they trusted their parents' judgement more than those of their peers. This is checking before the child encounters something online, and was by and large unproblematic. In fact, some children were even more proactive, inviting parents to see what they were doing online, and some were not so much following parental rules as trying themselves to avoid certain online experiences. This was illustrated by one boy (9–10) from the UK who wanted his parents to intervene and vet sites for him to see if they had dead animals, since he did not want to see these.

Another form of checking up on the child was to ask them, or ask them to show the parents now and again, what they were doing online. For example, one UK boy (10–11) had to let his parents know whenever he was watching YouTube and indicate what he was watching. (In fact, he found this so tedious that he gave up watching YouTube.) Many children were happy with this "light" degree of monitoring and complied, although occasionally some thought their parents were gullible and lied about what they did online. This helps explain the EU Kids Online survey results where 68% of children had said that parents knew a lot or quite a bit in general about what they did online.

When we now turn to the question of why children check in less with their parents, occasionally the issue was that they felt they had reached an age when they should be more independent, and hence it was not always appropriate to check with the parents that they were doing the right thing, even if they admitted that it was still difficult to make judgements about the online world.

Interviewer: Do you think you're going to get more adventurous in the future…try more things out or…?
Boy: Yeah. Because when I'm older I'll become more… like…brave. Not like I'll try everything…because you've got to be safe on the internet. And the internet's like…tough for someone like me, a 12-year-old.
Interviewer: Why…you mean it's complicated or what?
Boy: You don't know about stuff and you don't really want to ask your parents at that time, like when you're like 12, 13.You want to try and do stuff on your own. But when you're older you can try and just figure it out for yourself. 'Cos you're older, you're more wiser.
(boy, 11–13, UK)

Among these older children we also found more examples of resentment about parents monitoring what they were doing. For example, one UK (11–13) boy sometimes felt this was not because he was doing anything that his parents would not like – for instance, he might be watching cartoons – but he simply valued his privacy: "It's my personal time." One specific form of intervention mentioned by children of all ages was the monitoring whereby parents checked the histories of the websites that they had visited (and

sometimes the YouTube sites visited and games they might play, more so for younger children). This occurred across countries, and while, by and large, younger children (and even some older children) did not mind, it was sometimes starting to become an issue for older ones.

However, several children mentioned the dilemma that they might not like it in principle, but if they protested it would look as if they had something to hide. In one discussion a group of 11- to 13-year-old UK girls thought that their parents were more protective than they needed to be, but it illustrates the mixed feelings children can have about parental interventions, acknowledging that it is sometimes desirable and indeed a parent's responsibility.

> *Interviewer: Is this an issue, or are you quite happy for your parents to check?*
> *Girl 1: It's an issue because…you want your life to be private. Everybody butts in to your life, and that kind of gets annoying at times.*
> *Girl 2: Yeah.*
> *Girl 3: But at the same time, you don't want it to seem like you're hiding something, because you've done nothing wrong.*
> *Girls 4: Yeah.*
> *Girl 3: You're just talking to your friends and families, but obviously they might have heard from someone else that someone did this and that. And after they worry and they want to check your profile.*
> *Girl 5: Yes, but then sometimes it could be good, because sometimes if you're struggling...something's going on on Facebook, like you maybe added a friend that's trying to bully you. Your parents should see it, because if you keep quiet your parents don't bother to check about it, then…*
> *Girl 1: It's going to hurt you.*
> *Girl 5: It's going to hurt you or cause you problems. Yes. But a lot of times you do need your parents to see.*
> *Interviewer: So, what you might call a mixed blessing, then, isn't it? Alright. Would you say would you say your parents get it right, or that they're more worried than you think they should be?*
> *Girl 2: They're more worried than they should be.*
> *Girls 1: Yeah. But maybe they don't think they're worrying too much.*
> *Girl 3: Because they're parents, they probably have a duty to worry, as well.*
> *Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What, because your parents' parents worried about them when they were young, so they've got to do it now?*
> *All: Yeah. [nod agreement]*
> *(girls, 11–13 UK)*

In fact, the oldest children were articulate about wanting privacy from their parents not so much because they were doing anything dubious (or "dodgy" in the discussion below), but because interactions with peers were different in nature from interactions with parents, and these young people wanted to keep the two social worlds apart.

> *Girl 1: First rule of Facebook, I got told by everyone, was, never add your parents as your friends, because then they'll see everything you're up to!*
> *Interviewer: Are there things that you don't want them to see?*
> *Girl 1: No, it's just like, it's a bit more private. It's you and your friends.*
> *Girl 2: Yes, because the way you act around your friends isn't always how you act around your parents, even if it's not anything that would be…*
> *Interviewer: Dodgy.*
> *Girl 2: Yes, dodgy or anything like that. And still, you know, it's different to how you act around them.*
> *(girls, 14–16, UK)*

Boy 1: Because I don't want anyone checking my Twitter, like, what I'm saying to my friends or my text, what I'm saying.
Boy 2: There's a couple of things you say to your friends you would never dream about saying to your parents.
(boys, 14–16, UK)

Hence, it is not surprising that some of the young people went out of their way to conceal what they were doing. For example, one UK boy (11–13) regularly deleted histories and replaced them with more "respectable" ones by doing a few quick searches – he had been playing games when he should have been studying. A Portuguese boy (12) generally did not mind his father checking what he did, and had nothing to hide – nevertheless, when he wanted a more private conversation with peers, he used Skype because his father did not have the Skype password. Sometimes when parents demanded to know the child's SNS password, the children initially gave it to them, then changed it. And a number of UK children mentioned that even though their parents had not necessarily asked for their children's passwords, they knew that their parents were secretly trying to find out what they were. Overall, in some households there appeared to be a guerrilla war going on where parents were secretly trying to find out what their children were doing, while the children tried to prevent this.

Not telling parents about problematic experiences

The EU Kids Online survey had shown that although children often told parents what they did online, this was less so for sensitive risk issues. For example, of the children who had seen sexual images online, only 35% of parents knew of this, and the equivalent figures for being cyberbullied, receiving sexting messages and meeting face-to-face with a stranger previously met online were 29%, 21% and 28% respectively. The section on coping (Chapter 6b) also noted instances of reluctance to talk to parents – could the qualitative interviews also cast some light on why this was the case?

First, it is worth pointing out that some children may be mortified by the thought that their parents would see something inappropriate on their screen, even if it was there by accident (as noted in Chapter 4), and blame them – for some, like the Portuguese (9–10) girl below, this was the thing that most "bothered" her about the internet rather than what she actually encountered there:

Interviewer: If you think about girls and boys your age, what do you think are the most unpleasant that can happen online?
Girl: It can get all ruined and sometimes when that happens that, like that sex thing, when you can't remove it and it stays a long time. Then sometimes when people get there, they see that and think it's because I wanted to see that, but it's not! And then they blame me and I have to be grounded, and that's a lie, but I can't talk to explain what happened…
(girl, 9–10, Portugal)

For some the problem was that if they reported some experience online, even if not initiated by them, their general relations with their parents were such that they anticipated they would not be believed. Indeed, some noted that since their parents were less internet-savvy, they would not appreciate that sexual pop-ups or links that unexpectedly took you to sexual sites did happen. Hence, it was best not to risk telling their parents.

Interviewer: If something that came on the internet that you thought was wrong or problematic, would you tell them…if they're not very good with technology?

Boy: Well, you could have, say you accidentally you went on to inappropriate site and then your parents suddenly start questioning you about this because maybe they saw you. And straight away they're going to judge you. Because even if you say by accident they're probably not even going to believe you.
(boy, 11–13, UK)

We saw earlier how some parents used withdrawal of the internet as a punishment, but they also threatened other punishments, as in the case of the Spanish boy (10), whose parents had told him that if he watched certain things on the internet he would not be allowed to play on his Nintendo for a month. Certainly some children indicated they would not tell their parents of some experiences in case of such punishment in one form or another.

For other children it was the immediate anticipated reactions of the parent that they most feared, for example, that their parents would be angry with them.

Girl 1: It is also a problem with parents, anything you do they will tell you off. So, if you fear you may be told off, or punished, or something you don't tell them and that's when things happen.
Interviewer: Because maybe it seems as if you have gone looking for it, or…I don't know…
Girl 1: If someone started saying those [bullying] things to me I don't know if I could tell my mother, because she would just say to me 'and what are you doing talking with this person or this person?…' And I would feel worse, and things would be worse, if someone was reminding me all the time that I had done something wrong the last thing I need is someone shouting at me or telling me off. What I need is for someone to understand me, to listen to me and help me.
Girl 2: Better a friend than your parents…although maybe she wouldn't be able to do much either.
Girl 3: Or a friend's parents.
(girls, 11–13, Spain)

A variation of this is the fear that parents would be critical of them.

I would tell my sister, not my parents. Because they would say 'why do you use the webcam?' That's exactly what they would say, or 'you are stupid'. (girl, 14–16, Spain)

But a different type of concern, mostly voiced by UK children, was over fear of losing their parents' trust if they told them of their experiences online.

Interviewer: So what type of things would you not want to ask your parents about? Would it be things where they would think you're not so competent if you ask them? Or what?
Boy: Like…stuff where I go on it. It could be like they don't trust me on some sites. And then they start checking my history and all that.
Interviewer: So if you like…the dilemma is how not to lose your parents trust?
Boy: [quickly] Yeah, like you've got to stay on a safe website so you don't lose your parents' trust. Really…that's all it is.
(boy, 11–13, UK)

In fact, some children proudly noted that when they were younger they were monitored more, but as they got older they had behaved in such a way that they had earned more trust in general, and this applied to what they did online. Similarly, in a Greek interview one girl (14) talked of being allowed to have her own email account because she had behaved well when sharing her parents' email account for a number of years. Clearly trust was, for some children, precious, and although one might think a trusting relationship between parents and children encouraged openness – which it sometimes did – this was not always the case, and could lead to an inhibition in talking about sensitive internet issues.

136

Finally, a number of children mentioned the sheer embarrassment of talking about some things with parents, as in the case of the Italian (9–10) girl who accidently came across sexual images:

Interviewer: Do you happen to tell your parents what you have seen?
Girl: I prefer not to talk about it.
Interview: Why?
Girl: I don't like talking about these issues, it's bad. I mean...also because it is normal to find this kinds of things nowadays, I think.
(girl, 9–10, Italy)

Mediation by siblings and other relatives

Lorleen Farrugia & Leslie Haddon

Introduction

Although there is no literature on the mediating role of other family members, children's siblings and other relatives can also play an important role in mediating their online experiences. Although the instances where these relatives were are not as frequent as parental, peer and school mediation, they were actually mentioned in all countries, and remind us that when we think of the influence of families we need to look beyond the parents.

Siblings

Some of the children mentioned how they had to share devices with their siblings, sometimes according to their ages, or based on what work they would have to do on the computer or tablet. Siblings also participated in various online activities together such as playing games, homework and watching things online. More importantly, older siblings had a role in teaching, helping and showing their younger siblings what to do and how to behave online. Children described how their older siblings helped them or how they themselves helped their younger siblings to set privacy settings, download things safely, remove pop-ups and be aware of risks, among other things. Sometimes it was the younger siblings who asked older ones for help or asked them to do things together online when they felt they lacked knowledge, as illustrated by a 10-year-old girl from Italy who watched videos with her older brother because she did not know where to find them herself.

However, occasionally it was the brothers and sisters themselves who exposed the younger sibling to risky material. For example, a 10-year-old boy from Portugal explained how his 13-year-old sister had helped him create a Facebook account. In other instances, siblings exposed each other to inappropriate content such as scary material, or the younger ones used their older siblings' accounts to get to material that they would not have access to otherwise.

Some children preferred talking to their siblings rather than their parents about issues related to the internet – for example, in the section on coping (Chapter 6b), we saw how older children were more comfortable with talking with siblings about sexual content online. There are several general reasons for preferring to confide in siblings. Apart from mentioning that they could talk to their siblings about anything they wanted, some noted that their siblings knew more than their parents about the internet, or some particular aspect of it, or felt that their siblings would not scold them or impose any rules in the same way that their parents might.

Interviewer: So you only came across this twice [shocking content]. And did you talk about this with your parents?
Boy: Hmm, no.
Interviewer: Do you sometimes talk about this at home?
Boy: No, but there are things that my brother and I say to each other. That's like our 'brocode'. Then he says: 'Come, you should see this', and then I say: 'No, turn it off'. Or at school, we also talked about these things at school.
Interviewer: Yes? You seem to talk pretty easy about these things. That's good.
Boy: Yes, because if you would keep it for yourself, you're worried and you feel bad
(boy, 9, Belgium)

On the other hand, sometimes it was the siblings that convinced the children to speak to their parents when there were things that bothered them online.

Children occasionally took responsibility for younger siblings, as in the case of a girl (12–13) from Belgium who felt she had to keep her younger brother in the dark about the hate mail he was receiving. In the UK, children who have younger siblings often said that they felt obliged to check up on them, for example, because they did not fully understand what they were doing online and sometimes attempted to buy things. Every now and then it was the parents themselves who asked the siblings check up on the younger children, which could raise the same issues of invasion of privacy as when parents did the checking directly. But in other instances, siblings formed alliances against parents, and they used this to avoid parental controls, for example, playing games that were rated for older children. Sometimes they refused to check on each other out of mutual respect for their privacy:

My mum told me once to look after my older brother...because he's almost 18 now, so I have to be looking to see just what he's doing. So then she told me to be aware and just look at him…but we both know...we've been asked to look at each other, but yes, we just keep quiet. (girl, 11–13, UK)

Cousins

Cousins seem to have a similar role. Often they gave children advice on how to avoid risks such as fraud and viruses, and taught them what to do online. Some cousins also wanted or tried to control their younger cousin's online behaviour and felt somewhat responsible for them. The section on coping (Chapter 6b) noted the example of a cousin providing "instrumental support" to deal with things like viruses. Younger children in particular seemed to attribute an expert status to relatives such as cousins who helped them with sticky situations online, as in the case of this Maltese 12-year-old girl:

Interviewer: Okay, okay. And did you tell anything...anyone, about this?
Girl: I told my cousin, because my cousin she goes to IT, she's 15 years old.
Interviewer: Okay.
Girl: And then…'cos she's an expert at computers and…cos, for example, once my computer started getting slow and she fixed it for me.

As in the case of siblings, some children also saw in their cousins as people with whom they could talk more comfortably, rather than speaking to their parents. However, as with siblings, it was also cousins who sometimes exposed younger children to inappropriate content such as insults or scary videos.

Other relatives

Among the other relatives mentioned, grandparents also have role in children's online experiences. A number of children mentioned how grandparents often imparted information about risks or the use of SNS. For example, a Belgian 11-year-old girl was taught about paedophiles by her grandmother. Relatives intervened when there were problems, for instance, when relatives collaborated with other family members to help put a stop to bullying. At times it was the parents who actually asked relatives to keep an eye on their children's behaviour on SNSs: as a 14-year-old girl from Belgian explained, her parents insisted that her aunt should be able to monitor her Facebook account as a precondition for her having that account.

Children sometimes turn to aunts and uncles when they have to deal or cope with something problematic online. For example, one Spanish girl (11–13) showed her aunt the unpleasant sexual messages she received online. Often children asked for advice and got information about security, especially if they later worked in the industry or in the field of IT – in which case, children perceived them as experts – or as the section on coping (Chapter 6b) showed, they turned to them for the "instrumental support" noted above, when the computer had to be fixed. Some relatives replaced parents when the latter did not have enough time to teach their children, as when a 12-year-old Portuguese boy described how his uncle was the one who taught him and gave him online advice since his parents were too busy.

School mediation

Anca Velicu & Catherine Blaya

Introduction

While the internet offers numerous opportunities for schoolwork (Jalal & Zaidieh, 2012), schools also need to address the risks faced by their students. Moreover, some of the time risks encountered outside of school can impact school. For example, research shows a strong overlap between traditional bullying and online bullying, and that what happens on school grounds is affected by what goes on online and reciprocally (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Li, 2006). Some recent research has also shown a significant link between cyberbullying and general school climate (Blaya, 2013).

Although they have responsibility for providing a safe and supportive environment that ensures the psychological and physical well-being of students and staff, schools were reluctant to be involved in eSafety matters and to regulate eSafety problems and incidents until the early 2000s. Some argued that what was happening in cyberspace was not within school walls, and that as a consequence, it was not up to them to deal with it. This position, although varying according to country, reflected two issues: the role of schools itself needed to be clarified in terms of responsibilities (both legal and educational), and many school staff did not know how to handle IT or eSafety issues themselves. Young people tended not to report the incidents to teachers, and showed some reluctance in trusting them to solve the problems – they seemed to think that school would be of little help (Cross et al., 2009). This section reflects the way students perceive school mediation now.

As regards quantitative data, although there are great differences across countries, the EU Kids Online II survey showed evidence that 81% of the European children have benefited from at least one form of teacher mediation (ranging from 97% in Norway and 65% in Italy) (Livingstone et al., 2011). The most frequent kind was active mediation of internet safety (73% of children mentioned one or more forms of

guidance), followed by restrictive mediation (62% said that teachers made rules about what they could do on the internet at school). The less common form of mediation, mentioned by around half of European children, was general active mediation. What the research did not say at that moment was: what are the actual concerns related to eSafety that teachers care about? How exactly does this engagement appear: is it proactive or reactive? How do young people perceive this engagement? Are they happy with it, or do they consider that there are still gaps that should be filled in teachers' mediation or things that should be changed due to lack of propriety or ethical slippage? We have tried to answer all of these questions in the qualitative part of this research.

An overview of school mediation

In line with the results of the EU Kids Online II survey, the most common form of school engagement was eSafety lessons and awareness-raising campaigns. Thus, whether they had been advised or warned about cyberbullying, privacy settings, grooming, sexual issues or the dangers of meeting strangers online, children in most countries reported they had had some kind of information about online risks and ways to protect themselves and to avoid negative experiences.

Another topic frequently mentioned by children related to the opportunities that the internet could bring to the educational process, namely, the internet as a "big library" (it is commonplace to refer to the internet as being "information at your fingertips"). Although not all teachers promote and encourage their students' use of the internet for homework or for schoolwork, in general this practice seems to be broadly spread at cross-national level, Wikipedia being quoted as a resource by children from almost every country. However, in this respect the internet also brings some new challenges into the classroom, the most visible of them being the problem of plagiarism (Velicu, 2008). There were significant differences between countries, some teachers from Romania being comfortable with copy/paste practices while others reject and penalize them.

With respect to who is in charge of eSafety education, the situation differs consistently across countries. Some countries resort to external agencies while others ask their staff to take care of it. UK children frequently refer to "eSafety classes," while in Romania, for example, these classes are not part of the school curriculum whatever the grade (neither in primary, nor in secondary education). Still, in Romania, as well as in Spain, there were some police information sessions, while in Spain, some information was provided by lawyers. In other countries, class or IT teachers tend to deal with the eSafety issue, and Portugal was an example of a country where school librarians seem to take on this role as well as in providing children with safe URLs for games.

However, some teacher mediation merely consists of providing some technical advice such as how to design a PowerPoint presentation or how to set up software, and are not related to risk prevention or information on possible negative experiences on the internet.

School mediation can also relate to opportunities on the internet. As a matter of fact, quite a few participants in the research (from Belgium, Spain, the UK and other countries) mentioned that teachers were providing advice on how to search for information or how to use some specific software programs. This seems rather important in the sense that this approach does not focus solely on dangers, feeding some sort of moral panic, but opens up new perspectives for young people at the same time as providing them with the proper information to protect themselves.

Lastly, there is the issue of rules concerning the use of the internet in school. In general children acknowledge restrictions on visiting some sites (SNSs in particular) from school computers, and rules about using their own mobile devices to go online at specific times (especially during class). Still, in the absence of a technical system that imposes these rules, they are not always strictly complied with, the use of mobile devices being quite popular during lessons in Greece. This questions the relevance of efforts to ban some practices compared with educating children about them. Moreover, where the system allows them, teachers tend to spy on the children's online activities. As we will see below, this could raise some ethical problems related to children's privacy.

This research also indicates that some schools still do not provide any mediation of children's internet use, and that access to the internet or use of electronic devices is poorly supervised. Children are sometimes left alone to deal with possible risk-taking and incidents. This suggests that further information and awareness-raising is required at the whole school community level in some cases.

eSafety lessons and school campaigns for raising awareness

Prevention in schools often deals with the risks of sexual abuse, grooming and sexting through providing information about the consequences of disclosing personal data online or uploading private and intimate pictures. Cyberbullying is also covered:

> *Interviewer: Okay, so you were in the school project about cyberbullying twice. So what have they told you to do?*
> *Girl: They have told us we should protect our pictures, so not everybody can see them.*
> *Interviewer: And your settings, are they on 'friends only' or 'friends-of-friends'?*
> *Girl: Friends only.*
> *Interviewer: Friends only, okay. And what have they told more?*
> *Girl: That you always have to make sure to change the icon with the globe. You must put it on 'friends'.*
> *Interviewer: Yes.*
> *Girl: Yeah, because Facebook can change this automatically.*
> *(girl, 14, Belgium)*

Children sometimes perceive risks as being gendered. For example, in Spain, where the practice of sending pictures of oneself naked was mentioned more than in other countries, a 15-year-old girl complained:

> *It's more risky for girls! Boys usually don't care if somebody makes a picture of them public, but girls should be more aware of this; these pictures can be more harmful for them.*

In some countries students are taught to ask for permission to upload pictures of others onto a public network, "because if you don't you can get a fine... Like a damage claim. That what they've told us," explained a 14-year-old girl from Belgium.

The reasons given in schools for not disclosing personal data varied. In Romania, for instance, the police stressed the danger of becoming an offline victim of thieves, while in Belgium the risk was receiving unwished messages or spam and being the target of phishing.

> *At school were learn that when you go to a website that says 'you have won something', that you shouldn't fill out any information. Because otherwise you will get lot of adverts. (girl, 11, Belgium)*

One of the most commonly mentioned concerns was about meeting strangers. Teachers tend to illustrate their lessons showing the children videos with grooming situations (reported in Malta, Belgium, Portugal, Romania, Italy, etc.). What is notable is that all the children who talked about it recalled seeing "a video about a girl who talks on the internet with an older man," in a situation that ends badly. This kind of video genders the risk of meeting strangers, making it a "girl's problem." Such videos also frighten some of the children:

> I am scared of that happening to me. (girl, 13, Spain)

> Interviewer: And how did you feel when you saw this video?
> Girl: I was very scared, and she [the girl on the video] was home alone. And now, sometimes, even when my mother goes for groceries, even – I don't put on my computer.
> (girl, 12, Malta)

As noted previously in the section on parental mediation (Chapter 7), the risk of meeting strangers alongside bullying are more longstanding concerns of adults (teachers and parents in particular) that have been adapted to the online environment. In some countries that have already had school policies against traditional bullying (face to face), cyberbullying has been spontaneously included in school safety policies and eSafety lessons – as noted by children from the UK, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal, and to a lesser extent, from Italy. Moreover, in the UK, some teachers consider that the online bullying that occurs through SNSs is more serious than traditional bullying, because of the features of such networks (Boyd, 2007), namely, the "persistence" of what one has been said or posted, and "the invisible audience":

> I suppose on Twitter everyone can hear it; if you just saying it to your mate then that's I suppose acceptable but if you've got like hundreds of followers then… (boy, 14–16, UK)

However, this is not the case in all the countries. In Romania, for instance, bullying has been little discussed in schools up to now. In fact, the most common term is "'violence' in school and not 'bullying' as a specific form of aggression" (Olweus, 1993). This lack of school awareness of the problem (even though the EU Kids Online II survey showed that the problem is widespread in Romania) goes hand in hand with the lack of willingness on Romanian children's part to talk to teachers about this experience. Some advice for non-aggressive behaviour has been provided by Romanian teachers to the young people, but in the form of "being polite and not rude," or advising them not to talk with strangers. However, no support seems to be provided when a child is actually a victim of cyberbullying:

> Interviewer: The teachers, do they ever talk about this?
> Boy: Yes, they tell us to be very careful.
> Interviewer: So they've told you...
> Boy: Yes [interrupting], not to...not to get in an argument with other…strangers...and even if we know them and they're older...
> Interviewer: Speaking of the internet? Not to get into arguments in general or online?
> Boy: Yes, online too...during counselling classes a lot.
> Interviewer: Aha...
> Boy: Because my class master knows some of us are passionate about the internet…
> (boy, 14, Romania)

When school staff provide some prevention advice, they tend to refer to real-life incidents that were covered by the media and that were known by most of the children. For example, in Spain some 11- to 13-year-old girls mentioned an awareness-raising campaign by the police in school in which they told

children about Amanda Todd's case. Likewise, an older Belgian boy (15) said that they discussed in class incidents that were disseminated in the media.

Beyond the preventive advice related to cyberbullying, there were also cases in which schools had had to react to such problems. The interventions mentioned by children were detention (Belgium) and the expelling of the aggressor from school for a month (Spain).

Children often expressed the view that schools should be involved in promoting internet safety. "They [the school] must prevent us about risks on the internet," said one 15-year-old Spanish girl, while a UK boy, about the same age, answered:

> *Yes. I do think it's right for schools to do that, because if you didn't know how to do that you could have a load of strangers and people you don't know, and, like, you can meet up with them and you honestly just don't know who they are, and you could get, like, scared or taken away...stuff like that. So I think it's a good idea for schools to do that. (boy, 14–16, UK)*

However, opinions were more diverse about whether such school interventions were effective. Referring to a project to prevent cyberbullying, some Belgian girls (14–16) doubted whether this worked, arguing that reading or even writing a poster with some slogans against cyberbullying would not stop any bully. Instead, the girls proposed another approach in which real victims of bullying were invited in front of the class to talk about their experience. The girls considered that this kind of testimonial would increase the empathy for the victims and could have an effect.

> *Interviewer: And do you believe such a thing [campaign against cyberbullying] has an effect?*
> *Girl 1: Yeah, maybe it has.*
> *Girl 2: Yes.*
> *Girl 3: I'm not sure.*
> *Girl 4: You won't stop cyberbullying because you see a poster, come on.*
> *Girl 3: Yeah, that's true.*
> *Girl 1: Yes, okay.*
> *Girl 5: No, [the perpetrator] won't stop because of it. [instead of "the perpetrator", Girl 5 named a specific colleague who had cyberbullied other colleague]*
> *Girl 2: If you really don't like the person, then not.*
> *Girl 3: It depends on the situation.*
> *Interviewer: Hmm, hmm. So do you think something can be done against cyberbullying?*
> *Girl: No.*
> *Girl 1: Maybe.*
> *Girl 3: It's difficult.*
> *Girl 2: Yeah, difficult.*
> *Girl 3: I mean, there will always be bullies…*
> *Girl 4: Yes.*
> *(girls, 14–16, Belgium)*

Another critical view came from Belgian boys (12–13), who considered that the school's reaction to cyberbullying could be excessive and inappropriate. At the opposite pole we find the culture of "tell to an adult" that seems to be common in the UK and Spain, for example. Here the children, no matter their age or their sex, are likely to ask for some help from a teacher in the event of (cyber)bullying. This kind of trust in teachers' mediation and openness to talk with them in the case of a problematic situation goes together with a very positive perception on the effectiveness of eSafety lessons.

School rules related to use of the internet

Some schools find it easier to prohibit the use of electronic devices rather than provide support. Quite a few students stated that access to the internet was prohibited, and that use of mobile phones was not permitted.

Some teachers confiscate phones being misused, others tell students to put them away. (girl, 13–14, UK)

This deprives young people of access to information tools that are considered more and more indispensable for facilitating autonomy and supporting the education process. In fact, prohibition seems to be rather ineffective since the children reported that they found a way to get around it – which means that they are deprived as far as educational purposes are concerned but not for communication ones. This is especially true for Romania, where children are not allowed tablets but hide them and use them anyway, or for Greece where, as a 14-year-old girl reported*: "mobile use is against school regulations, but nobody pays any attention to this."*

Girl 1: Good, you're lucky because you're allowed to have them in school.
Girl 2: No, we're not allowed, but we hide them.
Girl 3: Yes.
Interviewer: So there's a ban on bringing tablets to school?
Girl 4: Yes.
Girl 2: Um…for phones.
Girl 3: Yes.
Girl 4: Tablets are completely out of the questions.
Interviewer: Wait just a second so I'm sure I understand. Um, you're not even allowed to have them with you while it's turned off?
Girl 4: Having it with us is only allowed from 5–8 on, but for 1–4 it's not [this means that is not allowed for pupils aged 6–10, but only those aged 11–14]
Girl 3: No, but we bring them anyway.
Girl 2: Yes, exactly... How do they expect us to be without our phones.
Girl 4: So we bring them with us but we turn it off and on...
Girl 2: Because our class master allows them only if they're off.
Girl 4: Or during breaks or in the bathroom [laughs].
(girls, 9–10, Romania)

Some of the prohibition measures mentioned by students proved to be as a reaction to some previous incidents:

Facebook blocked on all computers in the school – because of cyberbullying accident three years ago. (boy, 13–14, Czech Republic)

After the cyberbullying incident, headmaster blocked Facebook. (girl, 13–14, UK)

In fact, some children said that teachers knew that they had mobile phones with them but there was a tacit agreement that they could have their mobile phone at school if it was turned off, as in the Romanian case quoted above. When the rules are not applied by the very agents who are supposed to enforce them, one can wonder about the relevancy of these rules.

Family/school collaboration to resolve problematic situations

School/family communication and collaboration are two key elements to prevent and cope with cyberbullying. Interviews show that some teachers also informed the parents when they thought that the child had behaved in a bad or risky way online.

Interviewer: How about your classmates in general...do they accept friend requests from strangers?
Girl: Yes. They usually do. Or the chat on Skype or Viber...the boys in my class…and now their parents have scolded them...because my teacher sent an email with what they wrote and then they had their phones, computers and TVs taken away.
(girl, 10, Romania)

Although cyberbullying does not always start at school, it can have negative effects not only on the victim but also on the witness, perpetrators and the whole school climate. Hence we have examples of schools and parents working together to deal with this issue.

His parents went to talk to other parents. It was a mess. The principal called all of the families involved and he had to be rather firm, since the parents were saying that their children had done nothing. They were shown the pictures and showed evidence that [the children] had misbehaved. They apologized and promised to talk to their sons. They said this would never happen again and that if they happened to learn that they had been bullying the boy again, they would take measures against them. (girl, 15, Spain)

Children reported that some staff, either teachers or school principals, were themselves the target of nasty comments on SNSs. In this context, the children agreed that it was sometimes legitimate for teachers to check their SNS account (e.g., Twitter), although there remained a problem of invasion of privacy.

Boy 1: Early on in like last year what happened, some people they, like, said something nasty about a teacher on Twitter and for some reason the school found out and…
Boy 2: They find everything out.
Boy 3: I do understand when they can't do it and kind of tell them off because they said something nasty about another teacher but it is a bit of invasion of space because we do have our own social lives away from school…
(boys, 14–16, UK)

This can help us to understand some negative reactions to intrusion from teachers as some school staff spy on the children's activities – which in turn reflects a lack of trust in children and also a failure to promote their autonomy. This could also represent an impediment to young people reporting problems to teachers for fear of being sanctioned, or due to a relationship that is not based on trust and dialogue. As shown below, the young people resented this behaviour by adults. Moreover, spying on young people's activities raises some ethical issues, given that adults should act as role models. This behaviour might itself be due to lack of self-confidence among some school staff, who might benefit from some specific training.

Trust in the mediation skills of teachers

Previous research has shown that among the coping strategies students adopt when faced with problems like cyberbullying, telling teachers is not the most frequent option (Cross et al., 2009). While the section on coping (Chapter 6b) provided some examples of when children were willing to turn to their teachers for support in the case of cyberbullying, other young people from the research clearly stated that they would not ask for their teachers' intervention.

One of the greatest worries mentioned by students was the teacher worsening the situation rather than helping to solve it, since some of them had experienced poor mediation from teachers in the past. The example below illustrates how much some inappropriate intervention can impact negatively on the victim and the witness:

…the school project was about showing/putting up examples of cyber bullying on posters. It was supposed to be anonymous, but everybody recognized this example of online bullying. So it was not anonymous anymore, and quite painful for the victim. So the friends of the victim and the teachers decided to remove the posters. (girl, 14–16, Belgium)

This might be due to a lack of skills among adults on how to deal with cyberbullying situations, or fear of what the teachers would think:

No, I think that although it happened in school, the teachers did not become aware of it. She did not report it because she feared that the teachers would have a bad opinion of her. But if this photograph were to be disseminated, the first thing I would do would be to tell my parents, 'I have sent a picture of myself to my boyfriend and he disseminated it to all his friends'… (girl, 15, Spain)

It is important to note that research suggests that young people who think that school staff are supportive are more prone to seek help from an adult in the case of cyberbullying. Willingness to ask for help depends on several factors (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2009). One is a feeling of safety and belonging: the young people who have developed some attachment to their school comply better with school rules. A second is adults' perceived IT skills – the lack of teachers' knowledge about IT issues can represent an impediment to children asking for help when in trouble, as one boy (11) from Belgium noted: "The teacher doesn't know anything about computer and internet." The third barrier to talking to teachers is the fear of being banned from using the internet. The EU Kids Online II survey shows that when facing problems, students tend to talk to their friends, their parents and finally to their teachers.

School staff are often unaware of which students are being victimized and when to provide support or assistance. To try and overcome this lack of awareness, it is important to encourage victimized students to seek help and report incidents. Some schools did indeed manage to set up a trusting relationship between students and staff, and some of the children made it clear that they would turn to a teacher in case of cyberbullying:

Boy: …they don't really tell me what happened but they tell the teacher…they know how to…like say if it somebody in school being aggressive to them outside school and the teachers didn't know about it…and then my friend went into the teachers room and said: 'Right somebody is being aggressive to me' and they'd tell the name…say someone in year six…and the teacher would go and tell the headteacher.
Interviewer: That does happen?
Boy: Only occasionally…sometimes.
Interviewer: Hm, hm. And you're advised to do that…if there's a problem.
Boy: Yeah, like if somebody in the school was being nasty to a child then…go and tell somebody.
(boy, 9–10, UK)

Sometimes there was also a clear lack of willingness to have a dialogue, from both children and teachers, and a few young people mentioned not wanting to talk about this type of issues to school staff:

Interviewer: If you were to report it to someone apart from your parents, whom would you confide in, some friends, the teachers?
Boy: I know, I would tell my best friend.

Interviewer: And the teachers?
Boy: No, no, no
Interviewer: Why, they are with you every day and thus are supposed to know about the kind of problems you meet? They know about the internet, how social networks work and how to help you?
Boy: I guess so
Interviewer: You would not rely on them?
Boy: No, I don't know
(boy, 11–13, Spain)

On the young people's side, this could also be explained by their need to develop autonomy from adults. During adolescence, the group of peers takes over and they need to feel that they can negotiate their own boundaries.

Technical support from teachers

Not all teacher mediation happens in school. Although not frequent, some teachers go to the children's home in order to help them with the technological aspects of digital world. This happened in a school in the countryside in Romania, where some boys (9–10) mentioned that their technology teacher had reinstalled the system (Windows) and antivirus software on their home computers. While this situation could be quite rare, the context in which it appears is definitely not. There are cases in which children, especially from rural or socially deprived areas, do not have any digital support from home, and could be deprived of access to the internet because of a (sometimes small) technical problem with the computer. This kind of problem is very difficult to be solved by parents because (1) they are not too digital-savvy so they do not know what to do; (2) in general there is no IT service in the countryside; and (3) people in the countryside could be more indigent than urban people. In this type of situation, the openness of teachers to help and support the children in the digital world even beyond the walls of the school could be a solution.

SNSs: a new challenge for the student–teacher relationship

The great popularity of SNSs among children, who start using them at ever earlier ages, raises new challenges for teachers: should they use them as an educational tool or at least as a communication tool to keep in touch with their students? Should they keep their distance and introduce a split between private life and professional life? There may be no universal answer, and it might depend on the teacher's feelings, on the age of the students or on the student–teacher relationship.

According to the children who were interviewed, a variety of answers proved that the situation is complex. For example, an Italian teacher did not allow children to befriend her via Facebook due to some privacy issues – she did not want them "to nose into her profile" – but she still wanted to benefit from the channel as a way of keeping in touch (she asked them to share some pictures with her). These concerns proved to be valid. Children do dig into teachers' profiles if they are not set to private (in Italy, for example), and do talk badly about teachers on SNSs, as seen previously in the case of some Spanish boys. Interestingly enough, these Spanish boys stressed the split between private and public, and based on this, they did not perceive their behaviour to be problematic since, in their view, on SNSs the teacher is just "another person" and you should only be afraid of him when actually in school. In Romania, on the other hand, it is quite common to have some teachers as "friends" on Facebook.

As we have seen, some teachers monitor and dig into students' profiles, claiming that they mean well. For example, in the case mentioned by some 9- to 10-year-old boys from the Czech Republic, a teacher checked that students were not online at a late hour. Meanwhile one UK teacher checked the students' accounts on Facebook to see if they were set on private. Even though the intention was good and protective or justified by a previous incident, as was the case in the UK example quoted above, the children considered it as being too intrusive in their "social space."

Still, SNSs could be useful to keep in touch with all the students, and some of them mentioned that Facebook was used for this very reason (the class page).

I use the Yahoo Messenger, it is classical. I don't like Facebook. I have a profile because of my classmates, because we have a group, and I want to see the messages, for example, that we need to bring this or that to school, and so on. (girl, 16, Romania)

The Internet as an educational tool

It is commonly accepted that the internet could represent an enormous resource for the educational process. But is this resource equally appreciated by students and teachers alike? In this part of the report we want to go beyond the raw percentage of 85% children who said that they "use the internet for schoolwork" (Livingstone et al., 2011) to see how exactly this happens.

If some teachers provide children with safe website URLs (e.g., the UK, Portugal), others encourage them to search by themselves. They encourage them to go beyond the easy solution of going straight to Wikipedia and to look for more reliable sites. In some other countries, however, it seems that Wikipedia is perfectly acceptable, as the quotes below illustrate.

Girl 1: We have to write…for example, to do a project for history. And we take it from the internet.
Interviewer: How? Do you take it like that: copy and paste? Or…?
Girl 1: …we select.
Interviewer: What do you select?
Girl 2: Wikipedia is the most trustful source and…
Interviewer: And what do teachers say about this? Is it okay for them or…?
Girls: Yes.
Girl 3: Yes, as long as they know what we are doing.
Girl 1: Most of them agree [with the practice], but not all of them.
Girl 2: Yeah, because other teachers would want that the project to be made only by you without any source of inspiration.
Girl 4: Or at least that you take inspiration from several sources. Yeah, it depends on the teacher. I mean, there are some teachers who don't agree that you just take the whole thing from Wikipedia and present it in front of the class. They don't give you a 10 for this…you should, at least, to copy a paragraph from Wikipedia, but add at least two or three more from other sites…
Girl 2: And you should mention the name…
(girls, 14–16, Romania)

Although not encouraged by teachers, and despite the fact that they consider Wikipedia to have "too much information, or contains too difficult or too scientific words," Italian students still use it. But, in order to hide this fact, they had developed some strategies:

You need to select a few important points, because if you copy and paste all that you can find on Wikipedia the teachers will realize it. (boy, 14–16, Italy)

As a general finding, teachers seem to encourage students to use the internet (at least for educational purposes), as mentioned by an Italian boy (11–13) who started to use the internet following the suggestion of teachers to search for some information for school online. A 10-year-old Portuguese girl was advised by her teacher to have an email account to send an assignment. Nevertheless, some teachers are still reluctant to enable their students to do some work with the help of the internet. These teachers need to be trained on the perspectives the digital world opens up for teaching and learning at both their level and the students' level.

Peer mediation

Leslie Haddon & Lorleen Farrugia

Introduction

The role of peers in mediating young people's online experience of risks has received far less attention than parental mediation, although it was examined in the EU Kids Online survey (Kalmus et al., 2012; Pasquier et al., 1212). After setting the scene by examining the general online support that peers provide for each other, this section looks at the safety advice they offer each other. The final part focuses on the different types of support in the particular cases of meeting strangers first encountered online and being cyberbullied.

Peers and general internet support

Setting aside the area of risk for the moment to take a wider view, peers influence each other's internet experience in a variety of ways. They show each other how to use different parts of the internet (some children claiming they learn more from peers than adults) and what can be found for them to use (e.g., smartphone applications, certain types of website, Instagram, how to use bookmarks). Peers also sometimes compare results of searches, partly to evaluate which information to believe (e.g., when searching for homework purposes) or to check whether a download link is reliable. In general many share things they find interesting and also make recommendations about sites, online games etc., although some of the younger children in particular can be a bit cautious in this respect, trusting their parents' judgements more and asking them to check out any peer suggestions. There is also a fashion element at work as, for example, some young people become interested in getting an SNS profile because their peers have them. One Italian boy (14–16) was not sure if he was interested in getting a Tumblr account, and so checked out peers' pages before deciding to go ahead. Others feel pressured by their peers to join such sites, as in the case of the Spanish boy (14–16) who joined a SNS because his friends told him to do so. Sometimes peers even set up the profile for them.

> *Interviewer: Before you said that you have been on Tuenti for four years, so this was from when you were about 11. You know that you are not allowed to join until you are 14?*
> *Girl: Yes but, my mother knew I had Tuenti and allowed me, but she didn't know I needed to be at least 14 at least. Neither did I, but some friends opened my profile for me.*
> *(girl, 14–16, Spain)*

Peers and online risks

The wider literature on childhood stresses the importance of peer relationships, especially among older children (Boyd, 2008; Kahne et al., 2012), so it is not surprising to find a variety of ways in which peers are also important in relation to general experiences of the internet. The EU Kids Online survey also showed that they mediated each other's experience of various risk area – for example, 44% had suggested ways to use the internet safely, 41% had explained why the internet was good or bad, 37% had suggested ways to behave towards other people and 28% had helped when something bothered peers in the past. Older children and girls were slightly more likely to have received such support from peers, but the difference was not great.

However, before we see how this is manifested in the qualitative data, this helping behaviour needs to be both contextualized and expanded. Peers are also the source of negative experiences, as the various sections of this report commenting on degrees of cyberbullying show. They can introduce children to risks, as when some Romanian boys (9–10) discussed a mutual friend who searched for porn and was willing to tell them where to find it. And while peers may sometimes advise their friends to talk to parents, we saw in the parental mediation section how they sometimes actually advised against this (e.g., because it could make a problematic situation worse). Meanwhile some peers helped their friends to avoid the intrusions of and prohibitions from parents, as in the case of one girl (15) from Greece who asked a friend to post things for her online when her parents did not allow her to use a SNS.

Children also learn from their peers' experiences, not only because the peers actually advised them, but because of what went wrong for those peers – as noted at several points in the section discussing the origins of awareness of different risks. In fact, across the countries there were at various times discussions in the focus groups of particular examples where lessons were learned – where they could, in retrospect, discuss what the various parties in a situation should or should not have done, and what they would (now) do in those circumstances. This process appears to help children become more aware of the implications of certain risks (as opposed to the more formal eSafety lessons they might have, for example).

Advice on preventative measures and general responses

It is clear that some of the peer discussions were about preventative measures, such as younger Italian girls (9–10) discussing what websites to avoid because of potential negative experiences or unwanted content, or older Italian girls (14–16) talking about how to avoid viruses and hackers, how to deal with pop-ups and how to behave with strangers. Another example of such advice to be careful was when one Maltese girl (14–16) suggested to her friend that she remove her ask.fm account because of awkward questions people could ask.

Sometimes the advice was about what to do generally in the case of problems, as when one Maltese girl (9–10) had advised her friend either to talk to someone about the approach from a stranger, or block them or use a helpline. Here we see specific examples about how to use the technical facilities available. For instance, in a focus group of Italian girls (11–13), one participant explained how someone had published photos of a friend online that the latter did not appreciate. When the girl who had been photographed had asked for the photos to be taken down and had been refused, the focus group member recounted how she had pointed out to the victim that on Facebook you could flag the pictures as "inappropriate." Facebook would then send a message asking why these were inappropriate, asking for clarification of the problem, and if the answer was accepted, the perpetrator would be given notification to take them down. In other words, such advice explained how the report system worked and could be used.

The other point to make about the above is that, in general, the EU kids Online survey had shown that most advice about internet safety comes from parents, then teachers and only then peers, and we saw in the parental mediation section that this could include preventative measures – which is also true for peers. But the other finding from the survey was that in the case of problematic areas such as bullying, sexting, seeing sexual images and meeting strangers – as well as the Italian photo case above – children were more likely to discuss this with peers than parents, also noted in Chapter 6b of this report, partly for some of the reasons listed in the parental mediation section. Several children also mentioned that they felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences online, sometimes even the negative ones, with their peers, in particular with their "close" or "best" friends, indicating they decided what to share according to the level of trust in the friendship.

Strangers

Although the statistics did not show major gender differences, most of the examples of peer support in the qualitative data came from girls. However, there are some male examples, as when one Romanian boy (14) advised a friend not to meet face to face with a particular stranger he had met online, or that if he did go ahead, he should at least take some older friends with him. Meanwhile, an Italian boy (11–13) had advised his friend not to accept "friend" requests from strangers in a competition among peers to see who could acquire the most friends.

As noted in the section on preventative measures, one of the key ways that peers are influential in such requests to be a "friend" (e.g., on Facebook) is in terms of whether they can vouch for the person, that is, whether the person making the request is a "friend of a friend":

Interviewer: So do you also share advice on how to behave with contacts or friendship requests on Facebook?
Girl: One might come at school and say 'I've been added by this guy' and so the others may tell you 'I know him' and 'How is he?' 'He's nice, you can add him.' But then if you never heard of him you suggest 'Don't add him'...
(girl, 14–16, Italy)

Peers could also accompany a friend to any meetings with strangers or at least be informed that the meeting was taking place.

Interviewer: And do you tell anyone that you are meeting someone you met online?
Girl 1: Yes.
Girl 2: Yes. My friends.
Interviewer: So your friends would know that for instance today Melanie [fictional name] is meeting up with someone whom she met online?
Girl 2: They would come with me.
Interviewer: I see so you wouldn't be alone, they would accompany you. And in your case Olivia [fictional name]?
Girl 3: It's the same.
Interviewer: You go with friends as well. What about you?
Girl 4: With my friends.
Interviewer: But not you? You go alone?
Girl 1: If my friends see me going out with someone and I tell them: 'I am meeting that guy', they would say: 'Just be careful'. If something happens to me, they would notice. I would have agree to meet them say at 9, and they would figure out something happened and they contact me. But if I do not intrude in their stories with boys, they wouldn't intrude in mine. (girls, 14–16, Malta)

To avoid giving the impression that all such meetings have bad outcomes, one Romanian girl (15), like a number of others, would only consider meeting a boy who contacted her online if he was a known friend of a friend, and even then would go to the meeting with her girlfriends. But she gave the example of how this worked out well when they met up with someone for a New Year's Eve celebration.

Cyberbullying

One chief way in which peers mediate is in terms of supporting a victim against an aggressor. For example, one UK girl (11–13) reported how her friends rallied to her side by posting things online against an unknown person who had first posted nasty things about her. Meanwhile, a Maltese boy (14–16) appreciated the support of peers when someone had been critical of him online. But sometimes the situation is a little complex, as when one Italian girl described how she had been cyberbullied in her last school – in fact, it got so bad she thought about committing suicide at one point. Eventually her parents and then teachers got involved to sort it out, but, as indicated below, peers were willing to give her some support in private, though not in public.

Interviewer: And what did your other classmates do…the ones you were more intimate with?
Girl: They were scared too. They supported me when we were not at school, when we were at my place or out, but at school they were afraid of being mocked too.
(girl, 14–16, Italy)

The other intervention could be not from friends of the victim so much as from third party peers who simply decide some behaviour is not appropriate, as discussed in the section on coping (Chapter 6b) when "bystander" peers intervene. For example, one Belgian boy (9) had, along with friends, told a girl who was bullying other people to stop it. They then used the report "acts of bullying" option to officially report her. Meanwhile the UK boy (11–13) below acted out of compassion for a victim:

Interviewer: Or perhaps you know of people in your year who've suffered [cyberbullying]?
Boy: Yes. It's not so much cyberbullying but it's like on BBM, what you just said earlier has happened in the school, I know that. Someone took a picture of someone in a pose and then they edited the picture making a small comment and then…he was pretty sad about it. Then I told everyone to delete the photo because I just told them, if that was you, how would you feel, so they deleted the photo and everything's fine now.
(boy, 11–13, UK)

Lastly we have the intervention of an Italian girl (14–16) who thought the way two other girls were behaving was not right, and it was affecting the class atmosphere.

Girl: I am not the kind of person that goes there and starts a quarrel, I mean, when something happens the first time I don't care, the second time... But I prefer to discuss it face to face: 'That's enough'. But taking part in discussions of this kind happened last year. Two classmates carried on insulting one another.
Interviewer: On Facebook?
Girl: Yes…I mean, one girl kept on insulting the other one on Facebook, but then at school they didn't say a single word…
Interviewer: And what did you tell her?
Girl: I ended up saying her 'Why don't you talk to each other? Because you insult her on Facebook and then in class you behave as if she weren't there – it's not fair. So talk to each other and end it'. Because the atmosphere in class was so...
Interviewer: So what happened?
Girl: They ended up resolving it...and now everything is it has been before more or less. (girl, 14–16, Italy)

Age and gender perspectives

This qualitative analysis highlights various processes at work relating to mediation, and sometimes these apply to children of different ages and to both boys and girls. It may well be that if these processes were subsequently examined through a more qualitative approach, differences in age and gender statistics would appear – for example, more older children experience this aspect, more boys that one. But here we only note age and gender differences if there is a striking pattern (and sometimes an understandable reason for that pattern) within the relatively small and not necessarily representative national samples examined here.

As regards age and parental mediation, while some concerns can apply to children of any age, such as about whether their use is excessive or distracting from other (potential) activities, there are clear parental concerns about age appropriateness – for example, when children can access certain content or when they have to be protected from it and when they are considered responsible or mature enough to use certain devices, services or applications. The other area where age is clearly pertinent is in relation to parents checking on what children do online. For the most part younger children aged 9–10 have no objection to this, some welcoming the protection it affords from certain experiences. By 11–13 there are signs of more ambiguity, with some children expecting some privacy, feeling ambivalent that they might lose trust that had been built up as they had grown older. While older children can still appreciate the concerns of parents that motivate this monitoring behaviour, they are the ones most likely to articulate discomfort at the invasion of their privacy, and indeed, their right to privacy. As regards the particular processes examined here, age was not such an obvious factor emerging from the interviews in relation to mediation by other relatives, the school and peers.

In contrast, gender was not such a major issue in relation to the themes explored under parental mediation – hence we often tried to supply examples and quotations from both boys and girls where possible. In the section on school mediation it was clear that some risks, such as sending naked pictures of oneself, were more associated with girls. The eSafety lessons were also reported as identifying grooming as more of a potential risk for girls, making it appear to be a "girls' problem." Finally, in relation to peer mediation, most, though by no means all, of the examples of peer support came from girls.

Summary

The first section on parental mediation indicated how many, though not all, parental worries about the online world are based on long-standing concerns about other media, other ICTs and how children experience the offline world. Some concerns are age-related, although the examples demonstrate how parents can be flexible about age thresholds. And we saw how some parents are more explicit about the rationale for their concerns, and others less so. Apart from trying to control children's online experiences because of these concerns, granting children access to the internet or particular parts of it can also be part of a more general system of rewards and punishments, meaning parents sometimes bend their own rules. We saw how children's response to parental interventions can be positive, even welcomed, especially by younger children, or at least understood as being part of parents' "duties." But various examples demonstrated how children can also be critical of the concerns expressed by parents, they can be ambivalent about the interventions or even resent and resist them, especially on the grounds that it invades their privacy as (older) children try to keep the social world of parents and peers apart. Last, we saw how, while many will tell their parents about problematic experiences online, others do not, out of embarrassment, out of a fear of losing trust, being criticized, or otherwise punished.

The section on the mediating role of siblings and other relatives helped to establish the central point that the mediating role of others in the family besides parents is worthy of attention. Siblings and cousins provide both general support in using the internet, and also protect (especially younger) children, and can be the relatives that children will turn to when faced with problems that they do not want to discuss with parents. But sometimes we saw how both siblings and cousins can introduce children to risks and when siblings check up on each other. Usually when siblings check up on each other it is instigated by their parents; this can also be seen as an invasion of privacy. Other relatives, aunts and uncles and grandparents can all be sources of support and advice children can turn to with problems, though like siblings and cousins, they can also be invited by parents to monitor what children do online.

As regards school mediation, many schools are involved in prevention and mediation of online risk, although strategies differ from one place to another depending on the school culture and, apparently, on the teachers' digital skills and knowledge. Mediation, although sometimes provided by some external agencies that come to the schools to inform about internet risks, is mainly part of the teachers' classroom activities. Although restrictive and controlling forms of mediation are quite common, some teachers provide not only advice on eSafety issues, but also on how to use the internet positively for schoolwork. Some ethical issues were raised here. They reflect the fact that it is not only the children who need some information on how to use the internet and digital devices positively and how to avoid risks, but also the teachers and the whole school community. The young people who participated in this study seldom reported "whole school activities," whereas research has shown evidence that preventing experiences like bullying and cyberbullying is more effective when it is part of the whole school culture and where it is comprehensively implemented. This last point leads us to emphasize the importance of the school climate for preventing and tackling such issues.

Last, the chapter examined mediation by peers, although this has been touched on numerous times in this report. Although peers can support each other in the face of negative experiences online, as noted elsewhere, young people also learn from their peers' mistakes, as was evident in anecdotal discussions in many focus groups across countries. And, of course, peers can also introduce children to risks. That said, the interviews provide many examples that fit the survey evidence showing when children prefer to talk to peers rather than parents. In addition to providing advice, this section illustrates how peers had other mediating roles, vouching for "friend" requests (or not) in the case of online contact from strangers, and accompanying children to meetings and in the case of cyberbullying, supporting friends against bullies or intervening in disputes.

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8. CONCLUSIONS

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This section reveals:

1. Linkages between online problematic situations and children's developmental contexts

2. Children's awareness of the possible online problematic situations they might encounter

3. Preventive measures and coping strategies employed to deal with the multitude of online problematic situations

4. The mediating role of others in children's usage of the internet and other technologies

5. A new classification of online problematic situations

Types of online problematic situations

Children's experiences of online problematic situations occur within various contexts of their development, regarding peer relationships, parent–child relationships, schools, sexuality, identity, health, and morality. Findings from some online problematic situations reveal that these experiences also varied by age and gender. Overall the most common online problematic situation included sending content that was violent, vulgar, or sexual. Other problematic situations included perpetrating, experiencing, and/or witnessing hateful, vulgar, or nasty messages. Although less covered in the risk literature, some involved being killed, cursed, excluded, and/or verbally assaulted in online games. Lastly, some included meeting online peers offline, sending friend requests or communicating with strangers who were not their own age.

The older age group reported more stories of aggressive communication, cyberbullying, and harassment, with these behaviors occurring most often through SNSs for girls and games for boys. While older children met online peers offline more often than younger children, there were no age or gender differences found for communicating with or receiving friend requests from strangers their age.

Although children were bothered by vulgar content displayed in dating site advertisements, some posted attractive or sexual content, usually through pictures, to attract their peers. Other children engaged in revenge porn, the sharing of private, naked pictures of someone without the owner's permission. This activity was mostly perpetrated by boys. Revenge porn has been under-studied among children – additional research should be undertaken to understand more about this behaviour.

In the school context, online problematic situations involved children using incorrect information for school assignments, and perpetrating or knowing about the cyberbullying of teachers. These findings indicate the importance of educating children concerning the credibility of the information that they encounter on the internet. In addition, attention should focus on understanding more about children's motivations for targeting their teachers for online bullying.

Exposure to pornography and other sexual materials was almost inevitable, and it was sometimes perceived as bothersome by the children. Some reported sexualized communication with their peers, and sharing sexual pictures or videos to receive "likes." All of the children had found sexual content by mistake,

but sometimes they sought this content out intentionally, in particular older children. Younger children had mostly negative feelings towards sexual content, whereas older children's feelings ranged from the negative to the positive. Girls experienced more sexual communication and posted sexy or provocative pictures to receive "likes."

Children shared personal information online as well as their passwords for Facebook or game accounts with family members and friends, but they did not perceive this activity as being risky, even if someone had misused their personal information. Many children perceived sharing passwords as "cool," representing just how close they were to the other person. No age or gender differences were found for this activity.

The health consequences and symptoms of internet addiction, such as losing contact with reality and losing interest in activities, were recognized by the children. After spending too much time online, some reported headaches, eye problems, sleep problems, and losing friends.

The downloading of illegal games, software, videos, and music were common, as was encountering racist or hateful content on the internet. Children were often aware that they were also exposed to false information through online commercials, pop-ups, and emails. They perceived these situations as bothersome.

Awareness

Some risky online situations were perceived as more dangerous than others. Among these situations, online bullying and harassment, risky contact with strangers online and offline, and the misuse of personal information topped the list of children's concerns. Younger children's vocabularies and frameworks mirrored those from the media and their parents. In contrast, older children's awareness drew more on personal experience or the experience of their peers. The way children frame online problematic situations differed from their parents and adults in the case of online bullying. They distinguished bullying from other forms of online conflicts (i.e., "drama"), which they perceived as less serious and as occurring more frequently. The difference between online bullying and online conflicts is that the latter implied a reciprocal conflict (e.g., when friends fall out and argue), whereas the former included an imbalance of power (Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

Dealing with problematic situations online: preventive measures and coping strategies

The children favoured different types of preventive measures, most often based on their perception of the seriousness and the potential harm of the online problematic situations. Many children actively controlled content risks to avoid potential harm. This self-monitoring strategy is perceived as the most helpful at protecting oneself from content risks, such as unwanted communication with strangers or the misuse of personal information. These strategies might include planning, strategizing, and reflecting as ways to avoid risky online problematic situations.

Proactive strategies were usually used to deal with online bullying, and used more frequently than support-seeking strategies. Online bullying is perceived as more harmful than content risk. Girls were more communicative in both prevention and reactive contents compared to boys. They were also more likely to seek social support when faced with online problematic situations.

The usage of preventive strategies not only varied by age but also by the type of online activities most popular with a particular age group. In particular, preventive coping strategies became more

elaborate as children got older. This older age group (14–16) used more preventive behaviour. Furthermore, preventive proactive behaviours intensified for SNS usage as children grew older because usage of SNS increased the risk of problematic situations occurring while engaged in this activity.

Similar to preventive actions, children's reactions to actual problems encountered online varied according to the complexity and perceived controllability of the situation, the perceived seriousness and harm experienced, and also according to their previous experience and level of digital competence.

Younger children were more likely to rely on the support of others (especially parents or older peers) when they encountered problems, whereas self-reliant measures were more frequent as they gained more autonomy and experience with the online environment. However, since their digital competences were still rather limited, they often asked for instrumental support when encountering problems online (e.g., dealing with viruses or unwanted content).

Young adolescents (11–12) reported a wider range of responses to online problems, as they were the ones dealing with the growing complexity of their digital (and social) world (e.g., they had started using SNSs), often requiring a combination of digital, critical thinking, and social skills.

Mediation

The mediation of online activities occurs among various individuals in children's lives. Mediation can occur among parents, siblings, and other relatives, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Schools also have a role in mediation.

Many concerns that parents expressed about the online world stemmed from ones they had about the media or more general experiences in the offline world (e.g., about content encountered, time spent on a particular activity, or talking to strangers). Hence even parents who were not so familiar with the details of the internet were usually able to provide some guidance,

The consistency of parental mediation varied, with some parents being explicit about concerns while others failed to clarify why they saw some online experiences as being bad or risky. Parents' mediation is flexible, adjusting with their children's age. Some parents bent their rules when it came to granting children access to the internet or parts of it as a reward for good behaviour in others spheres of life (e.g., allowing more time online if they child had done well in school).

Younger children often viewed parental intervention as positive, or at least did not mind it, whereas older children were more ambivalent and often preferred to talk with peers. They often saw parents as invading their privacy, in particular when they checked the devices they were using. This is an issue because it can cause tensions in the family and make it less likely (along with punishing or being critical of children) that the children will confide in parents when problematic situations emerge.

Other family members have a role in mediation. Siblings and cousins provided support to children when using the internet, as well as served a protective role in terms of preventing risks, especially for younger children. When children did not want to discuss a problem with their parents, they usually turned to their siblings and cousins for advice and support. However, siblings and cousins could introduce children to risks as well as create additional conflicts by spying on children, usually at the request of parents or other adults. Aunts, uncles, and grandparents also provided advice for children, but they might also be asked to monitor what the children did online by the children's parents.

Children's peers provided another source of mediation by supporting each other, including through sharing negative online experiences. Sharing their experiences allowed children to learn from their peers' mistakes. Some children felt uncomfortable about discussing online problematic situations with their parents, especially if they felt that their parents did not trust them, that their parents would be critical of them, or that their parents would punish them. However, older children in particular reported that they feel more comfortable talking to their peers about such risks. One downside to the sharing of their activities is that peers had the potential to introduce children to online risks as well.

Schools' involvement in preventing and mediating of online risks varied considerably, depending on the school culture, and teachers' digital skills and knowledge. Some schools provided children with the best practices and strategies for dealing with online risks. This might include teachers incorporating this information in classroom activities or having an outside agency to inform children about internet risks. The range of mediation might include restrictive and controlling strategies to teachers discussing the positives of the internet for schoolwork and other activities (e.g., communication). Ultimately, schools provided a variety of prevention and mediation, with some teachers choosing to inform children about prevention. Although better than no mediation, this strategy often lacked a whole school approach.

A new classification of online problematic situations

Based on our findings, we propose a new classification of online problematic situations to enrich and simplify the content-contact-conduct (CCC) model (Hasebrink, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2009) (see Table 3). In the CCC model, the aim was to categorize, conceptualize, and understand children's online risks, framing these risks according to children's communicative motivations and the role(s) they have when encountering such risks. The axes include content (children as recipients of unwelcomed or inappropriate mass communication), contact (children as participants in adult-initiated online activity), and conduct (children as perpetrators or victims in peer-to-peer exchanges) (see Livingstone et al., 2011). We simplified the axes to content and communication in our new model, because children did not often differentiate between online problematic situations involving communication with adults (contact) and communication with peers (conduct). Many times children were unsure about the age of individuals whom they communicated with online. Children differentiated between unknown individuals (i.e., strangers) and people whom they knew from the offline world. Similar to the CCC model, our model also distinguishes between different types of risks. To enrich this classification, we linked children's developmental contexts to their experiences of online problematic situations (for details read also Smahel, Wright, & Cernikova, 2014). We acknowledge that this model has some limitations. In particular, some boundaries are blurred (e.g., romantic relationships and sexuality are sometimes interconnected), and several problematic situations impact various developmental contexts (e.g., sexualized comments from a peer can impact the developmental contexts of peer relationships, romantic relationships, and sexuality).

To understand the new classification of online problematic situations (see Table 3), we describe below children's developmental contexts as linked to their experience of online problematic relationships.

- *Relationships with peers and friends:* children frequently reported online problematic situations that involved their peers and friends. These usually included cyberbullying, hacking, and the sharing of sexual material via SNSs, email, mobile phones, or YouTube links.

- *Relationships with romantic partners:* problematic situations in this context included children viewing advertisements for dating sites, with sexual or vulgar content, and posting attractive or sexual pictures. Sometimes children published unwanted or sexual pictures of previous partners as revenge.

- *Relationships with parents:* conflicts between children and parents occurred over their internet usage, especially if they were online too long, and having their parents restrict their activities on the internet by not allowing them to create SNS profiles. Another source of conflict was parents spying on their children's SNS profiles.

- *School:* the context of school was affected when children experienced technical problems with school computers, or found and used untrue information for a school assignment. Children were also involved, either directly or indirectly, with targeting their teachers for negative online behaviours, such as posting offensive comments about a teacher if they received a bad grade.

- *Sexuality:* children encountered sexual content on the internet by viewing pornographic or sexual material through videos, pictures, or texts. Some situations also involved posting attractive pictures to receive "likes," and receiving sexual, private pictures of other children, without the permission of this child.

- *Identity and personal data:* children reported stealing or inappropriately sharing personal data, pretending to be someone else online, and sharing their passwords for their SNS or game accounts with friends or family members. They were also bothered by emails or pop-ups that tried to get their personal information.

- *Health and well-being:* in this context, children described addiction to SNS and online games. They explained that "addiction" was losing interest in other activities, spending a lot of time online, losing contact with reality, and as experiencing headaches, sleep problems, and the loss of friends.

- *Morality:* exposure to online problematic situations in the context of morality involved children seeing racist content in videos, images, and comments. It also included children downloading games, videos, and music illegally.

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Table 3: Classification of children's online problematic situations

Context of development	Content	Communication
Relationships – Peers and friendship	Vulgar content shared with peers Viruses automatically sending spam emails or viruses to friends	Hate, vulgar and nasty messages Bullying by peers or strangers Creating fake SNS profile about somebody Exclusion from a group in games Being killed or cursed in games Hacked SNS or games profile by peers
Relationships – Romantic relationships	Advertisements for dating sites (including sexual or vulgar content)	Reporting fake romantic relationships Publishing sexual pictures of previous partner as "revenge" Publishing attractive pictures to attract peers
Relationships – Parents	Seeing inappropriate content without parents' permission	Parent–child conflicts because of the internet Parents force child to be offline because of addiction
School	Untrue information from the internet used for school assignments School problems because of technology (i.e., viruses, slow internet)	Offensive comments about teachers or creating fake profiles of teachers School problems after being online too much
Sexuality	Commercials with sexual content (YouTube, games, web, pop-ups, email) Pornographic material Sexual pictures or videos on the web (ask.fm) Watching live pornography Viruses put pornography on computers	Sexual communication, requests and comments Bullying with sexual content Intentional publishing of sexual pictures to attract peers in order to get "likes" Shared revenge porn or virtual sex
Identity and personal data	Pop-ups or web pages asking for personal data Viruses automatically sending emails, or posting stuff or messages on Facebook	Stolen/sharing virtual identity (email, SNS profile, avatar) Hacked or hijacked account and posting untrue or private information Pretending to be someone else (e.g., celebrities, not existing people) Lying about personal data Sharing personal data (e.g., address, phone number, photos) or too many private details Requests for personal information from strangers Meeting online strangers offline
Health and well-being (including addiction)	Over-use or addiction problems, including headaches, reduced eating, reduced sleeping, losing friends, eye problems Seeing pro-anorexia websites Preoccupation by sexual videos or gaming	Emotional problems after bullying or bothering contact Losing contact with reality
Morality	Racist content Illegal activities, like downloading programs, movies, and music Finding untrue or false information Commercials telling you to buy, download, or win something Vulgar, nasty, hate websites, images, videos	Racist messages Sharing illegal materials (e.g., programs, movies, music) in P2P networks Fake emails telling you that you could win something Commercial emails

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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This section describes policy implications that emerged from our analyses.

Online problematic situations and awareness

Awareness of online problematic situations informs choices and practices that children adopt to prevent encountering such situations on the internet. Therefore, how children make sense of specific risks has relevant policy implications for the acquisition of both digital skills and empowering risk awareness, which could help children develop efficient preventive measures. As we have seen, children draw on a variety of sources in the process of *sense-making* of online problematic situations, depending on the age of the child and the type of problematic situation – children's own or their peers' experiences, parental concerns, eSafety education in schools and media discourses all contribute to shape risk awareness. While younger children are generally more likely to draw on parents and the media in their discourses on online risks, older children mobilize peer experiences, or media representations appropriated and transformed into peers' experiences. Moreover, representations of certain problematic situations such as meeting strangers are particularly vulnerable to media repertoires. Therefore, some questions arise regarding the effects of the sensationalist tone and the "child as a victim" frame usually employed in media coverage. Do media representations operate at the detriment of eSafety education and the development of effective preventive strategies? How, conversely, can media representations contribute to children's empowerment? These issues are particularly pressing for, as we have seen, the influence of global and sensationalist news stories is particularly strong, opening several policy-related questions. We propose the following policy implications for awareness of online problematic experiences:

- As shown in the report, children experience a variety of online problematic situations. However, we believe that most of the current prevention programmes are narrowly focused, usually on cyberbullying, personal data protection, and meeting online strangers offline (i.e., paedophiles). But children need more thorough and broader education about the online world to help them to better evaluate and deal with a broad assortment of problematic situations. More education for children is also needed for areas of exposure to sexual material and sexual communication, online addiction, and commercial problems.

- We revealed and explained that online problematic situations are related to developmental contexts. Therefore, these associations should be included in relevant educational programmes that should be ongoing and have different curriculum based on children's ages. Younger and older children need specific approaches to their education about internet usage.

- But the emphases in educational programmes should also vary among countries to adjust to particular circumstances and practices. The report revealed, for example, that children's perceptions of illegal downloading is different in post-communistic countries and Western countries. For example, children in the Czech Republic and Romania perceived illegal downloading as standard behaviour, but children in the UK were already made more aware that it was against the law and were more likely to consider it as something "inappropriate."

- The report demonstrates the complexity of online problematic experiences and reveals that not every online problematic situation is risky or causes harm to children. Online opportunities and risks are interconnected. If children continue to use the internet and digital technologies, they will probably encounter some online problematic situations. Therefore, it is not wise to forbid children from online activities, for example, searching for romantic partners online, because it is a developmental need and can potentially bring something positive to their lives. We discuss implications for mediation of parents and school in the next section.

- Since, as we have seen, children's discourses about online problematic situations are influenced by media representations, children should be encouraged to adopt a critical engagement with media frames of online risks. This goal should be achieved through valorization of peers' own experiences and knowledge.

- Lastly, children share with adults frustrations about the commercial material they encounter, often in the form of disruptive and misleading pop-ups – as well as some of the technical shortcomings of the internet, these are often the first things that come to mind when reflecting on negative experiences online.

Dealing with problematic situations online: preventive measures and coping

The development of risk-specific preventive measures and coping typologies is helpful for awareness-raising efforts, whether these are nationwide campaigns, school-based initiatives or personal discussions between children and adults on how to avoid unpleasant situations online. It helps the stakeholders to allocate resources and efforts. For researchers, these insights into how children deal with problematic situations online are valuable for the development of scales for preventive measures and coping strategies to be used in quantitative surveys.

Particular instances of children's risk-specific coping deserve further policy attention, namely:

- With regards to aggressive communication, children's, especially boys', attitudes include disengagement with the situations and minimizing the problem with reasoning that aggression between boys "just happens." These attitudes lead to an atmosphere of the normalization of peer aggression. Such an atmosphere increases serious cases of harassment and online bullying. Increased awareness of how acts that start as "just teasing" can escalate into serious and harmful incidents can motivate young people to take up preventive measures to neutralize the situation in time.

- Although children reported non-violent responses to aggressive acts in many cases, they sometimes chose to respond by verbal retaliation, threats or even physical violence. Attention should be given to cases where children choose to bully others in response to other offenses of their peers (e.g., peers hacking their accounts). Awareness-raising about the interconnection of online problems/risks, ending the circle of violence, teaching children non-violent conflict management, and presenting solutions for interpersonal problems should continue to be included in anti-bullying campaigns, online and offline.

- In several cases, children reported the usefulness of bystander support, instances of collective coping with online bullies, and peer intervention for mediating conflicts. A particular case of collective coping and bystander support was the repeated reporting of young girls keeping each other safe while communicating with boys or unknown people online, with strategies such as

"never talk to them alone." In other cases, peers had an active role in deflating sexting incidents and taking proactive measures to ensure that further victimization of their friends did not occur. The power of the peer group, as one of the insufficiently tackled resources for combating cyberbullying, and other types of online victimization, should be used in awareness-raising measures.

- When dealing with unpleasant situations involving sexual content or communications, children were more comfortable talking to their peers, friends, or siblings, than they were with their parents. Creating a space where children feel comfortable confiding in their parents about unpleasant situations they face online is crucial for effective parental mediation of children's complex use of digital technologies.

- By far the fastest rising online problems are related to privacy and misuse of personal information online, usually occurring among peers (which is against the common trope that privacy issues are mostly related to commercial entities gathering and exploiting personal information for profit). Children described a variety of unpleasant situations involving hacked accounts, theirs or their peers', used to disseminate rude messages and damage to their reputation. In many cases, children reported that simple technical measures were not sufficient, with many other resources being needed to solve the situation. Parents, teachers, and other adults should be made aware of the struggles of children with various privacy issues in order to step up into a more active and helpful mediating role. Children themselves should be informed about privacy issues and (preventive) measures they can take, both as victims of misuse of private information or as bystanders through school-based campaigns. Increased knowledge and skills on which preventive measures are helpful in protecting their privacy and to prevent misuse of personal information is required. Children in elementary and secondary school need extra support in acquiring these (technical) skills, such as changing privacy settings, installing (spam) filters, password protection, reporting abuse, etc. Schools can take up a valuable role in this matter.

Mediation

Parental concerns about online behaviour are often grounded in concerns about what children might experience offline (e.g., certain media content). So even parents with a limited knowledge of the internet can often provide guidelines, offer advice and otherwise try to mediate their children's internet experience. Often the basis of concern is well explained by parents, but sometimes parents are more vague about why something online is "bad." Parents should be advised to clarify their concerns if their child is to understand why something is risky.

- Policy-makers need to recognize that although they give guidelines, the reality is that parents may make other decisions for other reasons, for example, judging when their child is mature enough to use SNSs, even though under-age, or providing them with access to SNSs to avoid social exclusion from their peer networks. Since parents also use control of internet access as part of a more general system of rewards and punishments, they sometimes bend their own rules (e.g., providing more access as reward for good behaviour).

- Parents checking up on what children do (e.g., checking their histories) can be problematic. Younger children may accept this more and older children understand parental motivations, but this can be a point of tension, particularly for older children. Therefore rather than offering blanket advice to parents that they should check up on their children (as a parental "right" or "duty"), this

should be handled with some sensitivity and maybe negotiation to mitigate negative consequences for parent–child relations, and indeed leads to more concealment by children.

- Parents are often encouraged to talk to their children, especially about potentially problematic situations encountered online. This is still generally sound advice, but less likely to succeed if the child thinks they are going to be disbelieved, criticized or even punished.

- Parents need to appreciate how some aspects of the internet work in more detail – for example, that some sexual adverts/pops-ups may not be initiated by the child or may even be difficult to remove. Otherwise they can create tensions or even anxiety on the part of children that they will be criticized for something that is not their fault.

- While mediation within the family is often associated with parents, it is important to recognize that siblings, cousins and other older relatives can also play a part. Specifically, children sometimes talk to these other relatives when encountering something problematic online rather than talking to parents.

- While many schools across the countries taking part in this research appeared to offer eSafety advice, others did not, or provide any form of support in the event of problematic online experiences. The role of schools in providing eSafety advice and offering forms of support should be encouraged. In terms of eSafety teaching, this also means highlighting good points about the internet to avoid creating a moral panic by overstressing that the online world is a dangerous and misleading place. In regards to support, children should be encouraged to report problematic online experiences to their teachers, but this depends on cultivating good relations between teachers and their students.

- Concerning media panic, parents and schools should help their children to make sense of online risky situations by promoting a critical engagement with media representations of these very risks. This would also provide an opportunity for parents to discuss online experiences with their children. News stories should not be the online interpretative framework that parents and schools rely on.

- eSafety education should avoid the sensationalist tone adopted by most media coverage, and aim at empowering children. In other words, awareness-raising should be directed towards the development of effective skills and preventive measures. Providing practical advice through the valorization of other peers' experiences should be preferred to interventions adopting a moral panic frame on online risks.

- Schools should be careful when selecting eSafety programmes. It seems that in some countries (i.e., the Czech Republic, Belgium) there are programmes that create more media panic (i.e., showing children only worst cases of meetings with paedophiles) than real media education. Schools should be aware that not all online safety education material is of good quality. Government should provide support to schools, such as evaluating eSafety programmes by specialists.

- Schools should make decisions about how to manage mobile devices that can access the internet (e.g., smartphones, tablets). Practice rules vary across schools and countries (as do the degrees to which rules are enforced). While it may be desirable to have this local autonomy in such decision-making, some higher-level policy guidance, and advice or even discussions of the pros and cons of

different approaches to regulate the use of these devices, to which schools could refer would mean that such decisions are not taken in a vacuum.

- When devising awareness-raising materials or eSafety lessons it is important to make sure that some risks are not gendered – for example, avoiding the perception that potentially problematic encounters with strangers first met online is only a risk for girls.

- Parent–school collaboration in relation to eSafety should be encouraged. For example, in the case of cyberbullying incidents parents should inform the school and get some support when needed. Parents need to be informed of the policies and measures that schools implement to promote positive uses of the internet and ensure safety including cybersafety.

- It was noted earlier that when parents check up on children it may have adverse implications for parent–child trust, and children's sense of privacy and willingness to communicate about online problems. The same is true for teachers secretly checking up on children's internet use in school, and hence this also needs to be handled with some sensitivity.

- The importance of peers mediating each other's online experiences, for example, giving advice and warnings, means that eSafety is not simply a matter of a teacher or someone else giving messages to individuals in a classroom. Rather, it is a matter of creating a culture of support, where school peers can turn to and help each other. For example, this might include the advice that if there is an online problem it is best to talk to someone about it, to share it, even if the person concerned is reluctant to talk (directly) to an adult, such as a parent or teacher.

Annex 1: EU Kids Online

Overview

In its first phase (2006-09), as a thematic network of 21 countries, EU Kids Online identified and critically evaluated the findings of nearly 400 research studies, drawing substantive, methodological and policy-relevant conclusions. In its second phase (2009-11), as a knowledge enhancement project across 25 countries, the network surveyed children and parents to produce original, rigorous data on their internet use, risk experiences and safety mediation.

In its third phase (2011-14), the EU Kids Online network will provide a focal point for timely findings and critical analyses of new media uses and associated risks among children across Europe, drawing on these to sustain an active dialogue with stakeholders about priority areas of concern for child online safety.

Specifically, the network will widen its work by including all member states, by undertaking international comparisons with selected findings from countries outside the European Community, and extending its engagement – both proactively and responsively – with policy stakeholders and internet safety initiatives.

It will deepen its work through new and targeted hypothesis testing of the pan-European dataset, focused on strengthening insights into both the risk environment and strategies of safety mediation, by pilot testing new and innovative research methodologies for the nature, meaning and consequences of children's online risk experiences, and conducting longitudinal comparisons of findings where available over time.

Last, it will update its work through a rolling programme to maintain the online database of available findings, and by producing timely updates on the latest knowledge about new and emerging issues (e.g. social networking, mobile platforms, privacy, personal data protection, safety and awareness-raising practices in schools, digital literacy and citizenship, geo-location services, and so forth).

Work packages

WP1: Project management and evaluation
WP2: European evidence base
WP3: Hypotheses and comparisons
WP4: Exploring children's understanding of risk
WP5: Dissemination of project results

WP4 objectives

- To identify and stimulate the use of innovative qualitative methods for exploring difficult contextual and ethical issues that arise when researching children's understandings of and responses to online risk.

- To explore the qualitative meanings of risk for children, drawing on innovative methods where possible, to exploit the value of such approaches and explicate their potential for comparable findings.

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