

Chapter 1

Young People and Online Risk

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ABSTRACT

The authors suspect that the young perspective has been left out when online risk and safety are discussed in contemporary research. The aim of this chapter is to give a critical approach to this matter and question fear as a driving force for protecting young people online. Interviews with children about their views of internet use (Dunkels, 2007) and a study of safe use guides from European countries conducted in 2008 (Lüders et al, 2009) form the empirical base. The discussion in the chapter is underpinned by ideas of childhood as a social construction, emerging ideas of power relations pertaining to age and theories of technology reception. The authors also introduce a metaphor, the layer cake, to better understand how the same action can be viewed from different vantage points.

INTRODUCTION

but I dont want you to tell anyone, not even my mum and dad!

The above quote comes from a 12-year old girl (Dunkels, 2007) who had just told the researcher how she handles a situation that was part of her everyday life – unknown men making dirty comments about pictures she had posted online. She

explained that she had sufficient control over the situation but that she was worried that her parents would get troubled and perhaps restrict her internet use as a consequence.

This is a crucial instance that urges us to propose a critical approach to online risk and safety and question fear as a driving force for protecting young people online. The interviewed girl makes a valuable point when she assumes that her parents will not be able to handle her online reality; this might be interpreted as fear paralyzing her parents. In the following we will present alternative views

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of what constitutes risk and how online safety might be shaped.

Internet use has gone through substantial change since the mid 1990's when the internet mass use began (Findahl, 2009). One change is how the social network sites differ from the early internet days' virtual communities (Larsen, 2009). One main difference is that the early meeting places aimed at helping users find new relations while today's social networking sites mainly help users organize existing relationships. Virtual communities as described by among others Rheingold (1993) build upon their users' common interests while social network sites are constructed around the users' personalities. Another difference is the use of open chat rooms that peaked around the millennial and a phenomenon that to a great extent is marginalized today. Applications that require identification are more common today than when the first safe use guides were written. The level of openness, i.e. how much of the interaction is public and how much is private differs greatly among these different applications as shown in the Table 1.

Also, the research approach has changed. Early research on computer mediated communication was predominantly focused on the differences between online and offline. Words like *virtual* and *cyber* were used to mark this distinc-

tion. There were studies showing that online interaction lacks the ability to convey social information (Yao & Flanagin, 2006). Furthermore, studies were often exoticizing youth and their internet communication, describing the young and their activities as greatly different from earlier generations (Herring, 2008).

The trilogy of the prevailing discourse of fear, what we know about contemporary online interaction and young peoples' experiences seem asymmetrical. There is a growing suspicion that we might have left out the young perspective when we discuss online risk and safety.

EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Empirically this chapter is based upon interviews with children about their views of internet use (Dunkels, 2007) and a study of safe use guides from European countries conducted in 2008 (Lüders et al, 2009).

Theoretically the chapter is underpinned by ideas of childhood as a social construction (Eriksson, 2008), emerging ideas of power relations pertaining to age (Alderson, 2005) and theories of technology reception (Dunkels, 2007). Childhood as a social construction has been developed mainly

Table 1. The table shows different levels of openness, i.e. how much of the interaction is public and how much is private, in some of the most used interactive applications among young people (Dunkels, 2007)

Application	Open chat rooms	Net communities	Instant messaging applications
Degree of openness	Public (Open)	Public and private (Both open and closed)	Private (Closed)
Description	Authentication is not compulsory. You enter a chat room to see who else is there and start communicating. The conversation is public.	Membership is required. Many net communities offer different levels of openness within the community. Some interaction is public - often friends' comments and blogs - and some is closed - often e-mail and instant messages.	Relationships are approved by both parties. Creating a buddy list is one of the central functions. Contact attempts can be accepted or declined. If both parties agree they can monitor each other when on line. All interaction is private.
Examples	http://www.teenchat.com	Facebook Myspace.com	MSN Messenger ICQ (E-mail)

in a sociological context, describing patterns where a child is constructed not only in relation to her age but also in relation to parameters connected to age. Hence, a child can be described as dependent on adults, in need of care and guidance, not fully developed physically and mentally, etc. Some of these traits can be ascribed to age while some can be seen as mere construction - something we have agreed upon in our common definition of the concept *child* (Eriksson, 2008).

During the first phases of mass use of the internet there was a strong focus on generational aspects (e.g. Buckingham, 2002; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001, 2006; Tapscott, 1998). This approach has later been criticized by Bennett et al. (2008), Bayne & Ross (2007) and Herring (2008), among others, for its one-dimensional view on generations; not everyone born in the same era has equal experiences or living conditions. However vital it is to make the matter more complex, giving weight to gender, ethnicity, social class among other intersecting perspectives, we find age interesting as a viewpoint when addressing online safety issues. Age can be seen as one of many parameters constructing and upholding power structures in modern society. In the same way that we have learned to recognize power structures built on gender and ethnicity, we can also identify structures that build on age. This structure has been called *childism* (Alderson, 2005). To develop knowledge about this structure in order to unveil and explain the stereotyping and discrimination of young people is urgently needed (Dunkels, 2007). Childism is not as straightforward as sexism or racism, since there does exist a natural, and probably desired, power relation between adults and children. Adults can thus both use and abuse their power advantage.

The political weakness of childhood (Qvortrup, 2003) is that as soon as their members reach the age when they potentially may be strong enough to establish conscious actions, they are no longer children and the incitement to act against existing power structures disappears. Another complica-

tion for children's self organization is according to Qvortrup (2003) the fact that children are divided into small groups, usually families, and thus not organized generationally. This complicates the solidarity bonds. Qvortrup (2003) also points out that the introduction of a generational perspective is not an attempt to reduce other relations, such as class, gender and ethnicity.

Dunkels (2007) attempts to explain the discrepancies between adults' and young people's views of contemporary technology use. The explanation model uses historical technology shifts, as described by Drotner (1999) among others, to describe how technology itself stands in the way of adults understanding problems connected with young people's media use. In short, adults focus on the technology and connect its use to the development of unwanted phenomena. Instead of focusing on the use of technology, which is more common among young people, adults blame technology and look for technological solutions to the problems that arise. This model helps our understanding of society's negative reception of media-related new phenomena among the young. Emotional responses to new technologies are what Drotner (1999) calls *media panics* and Marwick (2008) calls *technopanics*. These responses have some common traits. They typically pathologize young people's use of the medium in question and this concern leads to attempts to change, or control, young people's use of the medium. Herring (2008, p. 74) claims that media often describe young internet users as being "vulnerable and in need of societal protection and direction".

In the next section we will discuss safe use guides, i.e. tips for parents and children on how to keep safe on the internet.

SAFE USE GUIDES

Safe use guides aimed at adults and children are strikingly similar even though they may be published in different countries (Lüders et al,

2009). The first sightings of these guidelines are from the 1990's and they have changed very little since then, even though internet use has changed significantly. In fact, safe use guides can be traced as far back as 1995 (Safe Surf, 2007) and many of the safety tips are the same today (Lüders et al, 2009). Thus it seems that today's tips have been reproduced from guides as old as 15 years. If this is the case then it is crucial that we make sure that original guides were based upon relevant information regarding what constitutes risk.

If the safe use guides circulated today were once written in a media landscape that has changed, but the guides themselves in most part have been reproduced, this calls for some discussion. Which of these recycled tips are meaningful in a contemporary media setting?

A study of European safe use guides (Lüders et al, 2009) shows that these guides typically recommend that children be anonymous online. Most safe use guides contain advice not to give out any personal information online, arguing that anonymity can serve as protection against online dangers. But what assumptions underpin this advice? And what does current research say about online anonymity?

This advice has to be contextualized in relation to the fact that most young people socialize online with people they already know (cf. Larsen, 2009). In a context where you know the other parties, anonymity loses its possible protective power. In many of the current online environments, such as social networking sites it is not an option to leave out your real name or your physical location. Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social network sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". This would then mean that identifying oneself is in fact a vital part of online social networking. If, then, the users

are not allowed to identify themselves then the interaction can be seen as partly meaningless. A 12-year old girl in Dunkels' study (2008) replied to the question if she ever visited open chat rooms:

a yeh, one time but only 4 bout 10 min.
elza why only for 10 minutes?
a there was nuthin 2 talk bout

Also Moinian (2007) found that most of her informants were not interested in being anonymous online, since this would inhibit the interaction.

Most of Dunkels' (2008) informants said that they would tell their parents if anything unsettling happened online, but some of the children said that they would never tell their parents. Revealing what they themselves considered to be quite ordinary situations such as getting dirty comments about posted pictures, they all had counter strategies. These strategies were for instance blocking people, avoiding certain web sites and net communities, only adding friends who could prove some kind of connection – a friend of a friend or having met in real life at some point (Dunkels, 2008).

As the opening quote of this chapter reveals the informant was worried that if her parents found out about her online experiences they would cut her off the internet. She knew that her parents would do this out of concern for her but she felt that she could handle the situation herself. When discussing this further it turned out that the informant herself was not particularly worried about these contact attempts because she knew how to block these people out. In view of this informant's reasoning, it can be argued that safety tips impossible to follow might create a more dangerous situation than if she had not been given that particular piece of advice.

In Sweden Shannon (2007) conducted a study of 315 reports to the police concerning sex crimes where the victim was under the age of 18 and where some of the contact had been online. The study shows that most victims had a troubled real life situation. They were members of a dysfunctional

family or were being bullied at school and had no adult they could rely on. These children have proved more vulnerable to the kind of manipulative relations that online perpetrators often try to build with possible victims. This is an example of a substantiated risk that is not covered by the standard safety tips that are circulated. In fact, if the most common risk factor is having a troubled life, one solution is to make sure that every child feels good about herself and that she has adults to rely on. This would then be a task for the surrounding world and not for the child herself to arrange. Furthermore, this piece of information does not fit into a safe use guide. In fact, omitting this very important information in communication with children can be seen as yet another way of letting children down. It could, however, be argued that the individual also needs to take responsibility for her actions and that the safety tips may serve a purpose guiding children in this respect. However important it is to develop personal safety strategies, it is crucial that the main strategy on a societal level is not aimed at simply placing responsibility on the young users themselves. One argument against focusing on personal safety strategies is that these risk placing the blame on the individual should something unwanted occur. This could be interpreted as an escape route for adults, and we risk transferring blame from adults to children instead of the other way around.

Rules that are not possible to follow because they do not take into consideration all the contextual components that surround them can thus create a situation where the child chooses to hide her actions from adults. If that happens we have created more dangerous conditions for young people's online activities, rather than, as intended, reducing the dangers.

In the following section we will discuss how the views on risk and danger can be seen as culturally determined.

CULTURE AND RISK

Some researchers have pointed out that there can be a significant difference between adults' and children's views of internet use and that this difference may be the cause of some current problems (Larsen, 2009; Dunkels, 2008).

Larsen (2008) uses Scollon's Geographies of Discourses to describe different levels of actions: local discourses describe our daily lives and every-day activities, and global discourses are the mediated or public descriptions of our activities. Larsen claims that most young people act on a local discourse level, i.e. when communicating with friends, be it offline or online. Larsen (2008) exemplifies by describing a young girl who publishes a self-portrait on a social web site. This activity is mostly aimed at her friends and contemporaries, although adults in general and media in particular on their hand interpret her action in a global discourse. In this discourse the girl's action ends up in a context where pedophiles and others constitute potential threats. Larsen presents this as an explanation to the differing views on risk between generations when it comes to the internet, claiming that negative experiences on the internet are not normally part of young people's daily lives. This matches Dunkels' (2007) conclusions that young people are aware of the dangers of the internet but that the negative sides are not very prominent when children talk about their internet use.

In contradistinction to what children express, adults tend to talk about online interactions and children in terms of uncertainty and anxiety. Dunkels (2007) outlines how some openness is promoted by the internet and how the older generation sometimes expresses concern regarding this. Raynes-Goldie (2010, p. 4) describes how attitudes towards social privacy has changed since the dawn of social media; there is a big increase in privacy pragmatists – "people who are concerned about their privacy but are willing to trade some of it for something beneficial". Madden et al (2007)

also reach the conclusion that most people are not very concerned about their information being public online.

Altheide & Michalowski (1999) point out that it is important to separate danger from fear. Danger is the actual threat; "we can deal with danger, we can be educated about it, take steps to avoid it or minimize its impact." (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999, p. 501) Fear, however, does not come as a necessary response to danger but as a part of "the risky society" (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999, p. 476). In fact, Altheide & Michalowski show that fear has increased even in periods of decreasing crime rate, so there seems to be no correlation between increased fear and more crime. They also point out that the discourse of fear can be used to justify more formal control. In fact, many politicians use children in their rhetoric to rationalize control; when the aim is to protect children the means may be justified by this indisputably good goal. The European Data Retention Directive (Directive 2006/24/EC) and its associated debates, may serve as a recent example of how the protection of children's vulnerability is used politically, in this case as an argument to enforce access to and storage of individual communication data. Qvortrup (2003) also encourages us to discuss status offence with reference to age. He uses the curfew rules to illustrate status offences; how children can be put in house arrest merely on account of their young age, with their good as objective.

So it seems that views on risk can be seen as varying with culture. The discourse of risk and safety may also be employed in political contexts. If we widen the concept of culture so that it also embraces generations we might find tools to think of risk from the vantage points of both adults and children.

With this as a starting point, what does current research tell us about online risk? In the following sections we will discuss sex crimes against young people and bullying among and against young people.

SEX CRIMES

Wolak et al (2008) point out that sex crimes initiated over the internet in reality are more complex than media reports imply. There is no simple link between a child's actions and her vulnerability to offenders and therefore practitioners need to have accurate information since they may encounter these crimes in many different contexts. In Wolak et al's (2006) study there was no evidence that personal information posted online led to victims being stalked or abducted. Still, one of the most persistent online safety tips is not leaving out personal information online (Lüders et al, 2009).

Internet has indeed changed the arena for child molesters considerably. According to Wolak et al (2008) online communication allows for private conversations that can take place very often and sometimes round the clock. Furthermore, Suler (2005) describes psychological differences between online and offline communication. One difference is that our thoughts have a tendency to merge with others when we communicate in writing. Suler (2005) calls this *solipsistic introjection* and this phenomenon occurs because we need to read the words to ourselves and in that process we use our own voice if the other person's voice is not known to us. The fact that our own voice generally does not pose a threat to us makes us a little less on our guard and the words we read make a little more sense than they might do if we were talking face to face to a stranger. This and other factors deriving from traits in computer mediated communication affect conditions online.

The Online Safety and Technology Working Group's report from 2010 shows that sexual predation is not as widespread as once believed (OSTWG, 2010). Another American study shows that both offline and online stranger crimes against girls have declined since the mid 1990's (Cassell & Cramer, 2008). However, monitoring media reports during the same period of time gives a completely different picture of young people's lives; bottomless danger and a constant threat to

every child who goes online. And perhaps most of all, an increasing risk. One possible explanation to the inconsistency between adults' views and statistical facts is lack of information. Adults in general have very little information about young people's activities online and the information they do have often comes from media. Media on their side have an interest in presenting this information in a spectacular way, as they need to capture the readers' interest. Media in general does not make a distinction between likely risk and worst-case risk, something Sharples et al (2009) point out we need to do. Wolak et al (2006, 2008) remark that internet initiated sex offences are a small portion of all sex crimes against children. Cassell & Cramer (2008) also point out that when it comes to assaults on girls aged 0 to 17 years old in 98 per cent of the cases the offender is a family member or an acquaintance. This means that the walled gardens that are created as a safety measure can in fact be a trap for some children.

According to Wolak et al. (2008) only five % of the offenders actually pretended to be teenagers. The rest were truthful about their age. Also, many offenders accurately confess their intention to have sex with the victim and as much as 73% of the victims in one study (Wolak et al., 2008) met their offender more than once. In a report from a three year project with young people who have been abused online Jonsson et al (2009) show that it is unusual that perpetrators lie about their age or their agenda to have sex with the child. Furthermore, Jonsson et al (2009) found that sexual curiosity had been a driving force among many of the victims in their study. Many of the children were insecure about their sexual identity and used the internet to find answers to questions about normality, etc. Seeing children as sexual beings is a theme that is rarely found in the literature concerning online safety in an educational setting. Neither is it visible in media reporting. This fact is important and raises questions about how we construct children and how we construct victims. Does a victim need to behave in a certain way to

retain her position as a victim? Do we generally have problems with adding sexuality as a parameter in our construction of the child? Monitoring the media debate about young people as victims of sexual offences we sense that there might be a terminology problem, or rather a question of what is associated with terms like victim and offender. Defining a child as a sexual being is often done from an adult perspective and used by people who want to sexualize the child to justify their abuse of children or teenagers. This strong association to abusive practices makes it hard for people who condemn adults' criminal actions to recognize the youth perspective of sexuality. Also, this terminology problem could have other long withstanding roots such as the image of the child as being innocent, as a pure being for the adults to mould, etc. Jonsson et al. (2009) claim that it is an exception that perpetrators lie about their age or their intention to have sex with the child. Only recently, research has taken interest in looking at children as active in sexual abuse situations. The absence of early research on this theme may be explained by the subject bordering on taboo subjects; if the child is active, is the adult still to be seen as a criminal? A consequence of our tendency not to recognize children's sexual development and not discussing children's own actions in sexual abuse is that children might blame themselves for what happened.

BULLYING

Most teachers and students are aware of bullying as a problematic phenomenon difficult to handle and this has severe consequences. Schools are also taking actions against bullying in different more or less successful ways (Frånberg, 2009). The fact that many students are being harassed through electronic communication is an increasing problem that adults feel even more uncertain about (Li, 2006, Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). First; adults know less about young people's

internet use and second; they are also uncertain about how serious cyber bullying is and how grave cyber threats actually are. To be able to deal with this problem, we require more knowledge about the issue.

Willard (2007, p. 265) defines cyber bullying as "sending or posting harmful or cruel material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the internet or other digital technologies". The division into traditional bullying and cyber bullying can be seen as an expression of our lingering idea that the online and the offline are two different worlds. However, not all young people embrace this thought (Dunkels, 2009). Instead, the online and the offline can be seen as different rooms or different dimensions of the same. Policy makers and researchers have made some effort trying to identify certain characteristics that are specific to bullying taking place on the internet and we would like to critically examine some of these characteristics. One distinguishing characteristics of cyber bullying, according to Shariff (2008) and Kiriakidis & Kavoura (2010), is anonymity; the internet allows targeting of victims without being easily detected. The perpetrator's identity can for instance be protected by screen names. Another feature is the infinite audience, referring to the fact that the internet supports great numbers of perpetrators and bystanders to get involved in the abuse. Thirdly, Shariff (2008) lists permanence of expression as a distinguishing factor; once posted online abusive material about a person is difficult to remove.

It is however possible to problematize these characteristics. The concept of anonymity is not as straightforward as it might seem. Often when we talk of online anonymity we actually refer to pseudonymity which means that the person has taken on a screen name. These two forms can in fact be present at the same time but occasionally the parties in a computer mediated communication are known to each other even though they may use screen names (Zhao et al, 2008). So this anonymity trait may not be of such great importance

as it seems to be on a superficial level. In fact, as pointed out earlier most online connections occur between people who also know each other from real life. However, according to psychologist Suler (2005) the possibility to be invisible to the other party amplifies the *online disinhibition effect*, the fact that we act in a less inhibited fashion online. Zhao et al (2008) use the expression *anonymity* to describe online relationships that are anchored offline; family members, co-workers, class mates, etc.

The idea of an infinite audience is also possible to problematize. There have in fact been media reports of grave bullying incidents where nearly the whole world has been involved or silent bystanders. One such incident is known as the Star Wars Kid (Globe & Mail, 2007) where a young boy was severely harassed subsequent to a film of him was widely circulated on the internet. Still, we cannot conclude from these unusual, albeit horrifying, events that this is a typical characteristics of online bullying. The fact that the audience is possibly infinite does not automatically mean that it is in effect infinite. In many cases there has to be an incitement involved in order to catch the interest of the audience. There also needs to be a connection between the victim and the perpetrator to make the bullying interesting for the bully.

The third attribute of cyber bullying according to Shariff (2008), the permanence of expression, is perhaps not as easy to problematize. The information we have today indicates that we can expect most of the information posted online to remain public under the foreseeable future. However, we might think about how we conceive of this fact. Today's adults were raised in a world where it was not only possible but also desirable to separate the public from the private and this is likely to affect how we look upon the permanence of expression online. Children, who were raised with the greater agreement between private and public that the internet allows, are likely to view this in another way. The permanence of expression can also be seen as abuse in itself because the abusive

incident is repeated every time someone watches it again. Again, this can be interpreted as one of the internet's affordances that can be used and abused. The fact that most bullying incidents that occur online constitute their own documentation can be exploited by the educational and law systems in order to follow up the incident or prosecute the perpetrator.

It is also important to nuance a fourth attribute used to separate cyber bullying from traditional bullying, the idea of the constant presence; that cyber bullying has the potential to go on the whole day and follow the child in school as well as in their homes (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). This theory argues that victims of online bullying have no place to hide and can be targeted anytime and anywhere (Tippet et al, 2009). This is in fact what some victims of cyber bullying claim but we need to question if this really is a distinguishing factor. Even traditional bullying follows the victim home although it is perhaps not as visible to the bystander. In fact, research on bullying shows that it has serious and lifelong consequences for the victim. By adding the constant presence as a distinguishing parameter, we risk devaluating bullying as a phenomenon.

It might even be interesting to discuss who might benefit from these distinguishing parameters. What is hidden in the will to focus on the dissimilarities rather than considering bullying as a whole? There is an apparent risk that this division into cyber bullying and traditional bullying is yet another escape route from having to take informed responsibility as adults.

TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

For technological solutions to work there needs to be a classification of the content in order to give the technological tool parameters to work with. Traditional classification of content, such as video ratings, for example, has been undertaken by humans (Oswell, 1999). Today's technological

solutions are in fact the first attempts at carrying out this task with the help of machines. To date we have not constructed machines as complex as the human mind and this fact alone can be seen as a reason not to attempt to use technological solutions to this kind of social problems. But there are other problems as well. The monitoring and regulating of a child's internet use is underpinned by the construction of the relationship between children and adults. Consequently this construction needs to be discussed. In Oswell's (1999, p. 57) words, "the panopticon of the living room" is created if the relation between child and parents is seen as a relation of supervision.

All technological solutions have some basic problems according to Price & Verhulst (2005). The user will always have to set parameters from a list that the constructor provides. This list will need to be very long if the software is to fit all kinds of family structures, cultures, ideologies, etc. If the list is not long, the user will have to trust the constructor's choice of parameters. In fact, according to Price & Verhulst (2005) this is the second problem, the fact that the choice of what content is filtered out is subject to ideological biases. This bias is however not visible to the user. Oswell (1999) argues that video classifications "are derived from particular normative (and normalizing) discourses of the child and family" which is important to consider if these classifications are to be used as recommendations for parents.

A study of 35 schools by the British Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2010) shows that 13 schools chose to lock down their system, making certain websites inaccessible. The study found two main problems with this procedure in these schools. Firstly, it took up valuable learning time and secondly, it did not encourage pupils to feel accountable for their actions.

There is also the risk that the practical managing of the technological solution, such as setting the parameters, takes up valuable face-to-face time

in families or schools. Tynes (2007) suggests that young people be helped to develop an "exit strategy", using blocking, reporting to trusted persons or to a cyber tip line. The development of such exit strategies can be done in collaboration with the young internet users and consequently helps us in creating partnership rather than top-down rules. Furthermore, developing strategies does not require any expensive technological tool.

LAYER CAKE METAPHOR

The apparent discrepancy between media coverage and young people's own narratives of the risk and safety phenomena can be interpreted as a clash between different vantage points. Speaking with Scollon (2007) the discrepancy could also depend on adults and young people thinking about the world from different geographical locations of discourses. To expand this line of reasoning we have developed a metaphor that aims at understanding and explaining the above described clash.

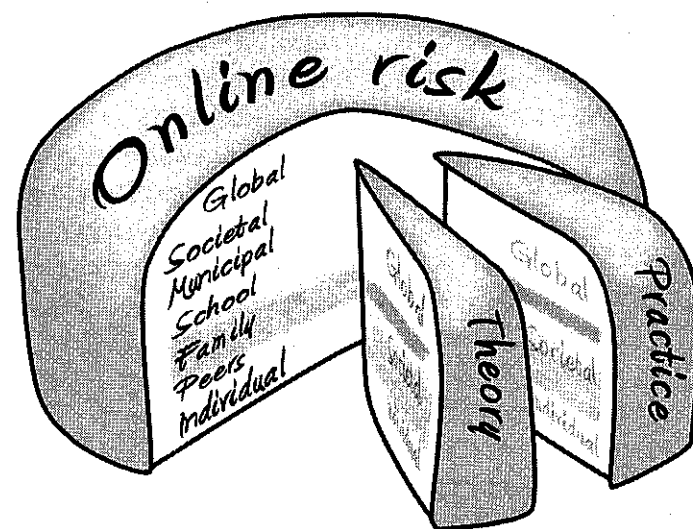
We are inspired by Larsens (2008) way to use Scollon's geographies of discourse when we try to understand the discrepancy between different

perspectives on the same phenomena and associated consequences of this gap. We argue that it is possible to simultaneously theorize and act on different levels; we claim that these levels can be symbolized by a layer cake (Figure 1). Further, we suggest that acting and theorizing from separate perspectives might be pictured as two different pieces of this cake of discourses.

When talking about young people's internet use there are a number of levels to consider. There is the personal level where for instance many young people act when publishing images on the internet, communicating online, etc. There is also the societal level where Government authorities act and reason about young people's internet use; laws are passed, strategic decisions are made, etc. Between these layers there might also be several layers such as the municipal level, the school level, the family level and different group levels.

At the societal level there is an expectation to abide by rules and values that are common to society as a whole. It will not be considered appropriate to pass a law that is in clear conflict with agreed upon strives for equity, for instance. At the personal level, however, it might be relevant to act in a way that contradicts social values in order to

Figure 1. Layer cake metaphor



achieve personal goals. This way of thinking may provide us with tools to interpret young people's online actions not as acting against social values but as the ability to move between layers and adjust their practice accordingly. If we look at a young girl publishing sexually explicit self-portraits on a social networking site, we may view them from the societal and adult level and interpret her actions as undesirable. However, her actions do not in any way prove that she fails to embrace the values she contradicts, rather her actions reveal her ability to move between the layers as she sees fit. The ability to move between the layers can be seen as a skill equivalent to the way we adjust our language depending on who we address (Trousdale, 2010). While she is acting at the personal or local layer of the cake, her actions are interpreted and judged from a societal layer. Instead of viewing her as naive we use the layer cake metaphor and suggest that she is a competent navigator of several layers of discourses, maybe even that she is discourse sensitive. Furthermore, in the same way as it is possible to act at different levels it is likely that we may theorize on different levels.

We believe that actions and thoughts at different layers of the discourse cake illustrate tensions and asymmetries in human relations. The conflicts that this chapter has outlined might be explained by the fact that we lack terminology to describe the conflict that arises around phenomena such as online risk and safety. We might use the layer cake metaphor to understand this particular conflict. We also think the metaphor is useful to us in order to find new questions to ask when outlining research and developing policy. Furthermore, we believe that the layer cake metaphor is useful in everyday interaction with young people. It may prove fruitful to critically question whether a description or an explanation makes sense on all levels before moving on to decisions based upon the description.

POLICY MAKING

This chapter has outlined some problematizations regarding young people and online risk. We argue that there is too little research on these important and widely discussed issues. Furthermore, we have found that some of the present research may in fact have started out with biased assumptions and therefore the results may not be relevant. Is there, however, some knowledge that research today agrees upon? Is there a lowest common denominator that can be found in online victims or perpetrators? Jonsson et al. (2009) found that most children were well informed about online dangers and yet they displayed risky conduct online. Should this be a general situation, then we must ask ourselves if information about online risks really is the solution. Jonsson et al.'s observation implies that something else is at play and that the problem is not that young people are naïve or ill informed. Also, the claims that one common denominator among victims is that many have a troubled social situation, i.e. their offline situation is problematic; imply that the solution is to be found elsewhere. Jonsson et al. conclude that we need to discuss how to protect children without judging their actions. Norwegian Social Research (NOVA, 2006) issued guidelines for counselors handling youth who have been selling or trading sex. They point out that it is vital not to show disgust or dismay when young people inform adults about sexual abuse. Furthermore, they stress the importance of not placing guilt upon the child and of avoiding moralizing. The non-moralizing approach can be seen as one way of keeping the information channels open between adults and children. If, in fact, the only thing we know for certain is that children who are troubled offline also are in the danger zone online, then this information exchange is vital. We need to create an atmosphere of trust, in which young people feel comfortable enough to tell us if anything bad happens. This may actually be our only way to

protect children, given the fact that technological solutions seem to be crude instruments.

Oswell (1999) argues that policy rarely places the child in the position of an agent, but mostly as the object of regulation. Dunkels (2007) agrees and calls attention to the need to contextualize policy, i.e. taking on the perspective of the young internet user as one way of ensuring the policy's validity.

As Sharples et al (2009, p. 73) point out, policy makers have two different approaches to choose from when developing an internet safety strategy. One is to set out to protect against the worst case scenario and the other is to base policy on "continually assessed levels of acceptable risk". This chapter has argued that basing strategies on a worst case scenario may not protect as much as we might hope. Instead it may create an unsafe environment for children in the sense that they become afraid to tell adults about unsettling experiences.

Ybarra et al (2008) conclude from their extensive research into the internet safety field that the most important is not to restrict access to different interaction tools. Instead, we need "mental health interventions for vulnerable youth" and provide internet safety education that takes into consideration all types of online communications (Ybarra et al, 2008, p. 356). Jonsson et al. (2009) request more research into the area as well as laws that are adjusted to the contemporary media situation.

O'Connell et al. (2004, p.29) point out that it may not be such a good idea to advise young people to report incidents to their parents since "teenagers are hardly renowned at sharing personal experiences with their parents". Instead, they urge us to acknowledge the learners' existing knowledge and their capacity to develop and use strategies for safe use.

The Ofsted (2010) report concludes that the schools that were judged "outstanding for e-safety" all had adjusted their e-safety strategies to their own situation. This strengthens the thought that there can be no one-size-fit-all solution to the

online safety issue. Instead, the work to develop solutions should be seen as a continuous process involving everyone; students, parents, school staff at all levels and policy makers.

Sharples et al (2008) put risk in a historical perspective pointing out the fact that we do not forbid our children to walk home from school even though they can in fact be abducted or injured. Neither do we prevent access to the school playground even though it is a renowned area for bullying.

In these areas, policy has evolved over time to balance the likely risks against the benefits to children of exercise and creative play, also taking account of pragmatic issues such as difficulty of prevention and the value of getting children out of the school buildings over break time. (Sharples et al, 2008, p. 33)

As Hinduja & Patchin (2008) point out, having a private profile is not a guarantee for the child's safety. Since most child abuse and sexual assault is committed by family members or other people the child should be able to trust and only a few percent of these crimes actually are committed by strangers, a private profile may instead be a trap. Just like the walled garden is not really a protection against burglars, since the wall also protects the criminal from being spotted from the outside, the private profile can be in the way of someone discovering the child's situation.

Ybarra et al (2008), who are heavily cited because of their extensive research on online risk, conclude that technologies will continue to evolve into new applications. Therefore we should focus on children's online conduct and their psychosocial situation rather than on a certain technological tool. O'Connell et al. (2004) claim that online safety programs must draw upon evidence-based practice and research that take into consideration the different ways in which young people use the internet for their recreation, and, just as important,

the ways in which perpetrators use the internet as an instrument of abuse. Furthermore, they argue that because technology constantly evolves, it is vital that any advice on internet safety be updated regularly, perhaps as often as every six months.

Marwick (2008) describes how researchers tend to deny problems connected to moral panics regarding new media, in attempts to level the emotional outbursts. This is probably not helping the matter. Academia needs to find ways of expounding facts and interpretations of situations that are likely to be subject to emotional reactions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has attempted to critically examine safety measures aimed at protecting children and young people online. In this process we have looked at the concepts of risk, danger and safety as well as the rhetoric concerning children and adults. We conclude that even though an entire generation has passed since the early days of internet massification much remains to be done. We need more research into the area – research that contextualizes internet use and systematically seeks the vantage points of the young users. We also need to increase the philosophical and pedagogical debate about children, danger, risk and safety. Even if this chapter deals with online risk the debate does have general implications that in fact go beyond internet use.

Young people and online risk is indeed a complex area. A complex problem calls for complex solutions and it is our responsibility as researchers to seek these complex solutions and not fall into the pitfall of simple solutions of remedies to cure all ills. A recurring theme among the cited research in this chapter has been communication; communication between the young internet users and the adults that surround them. However, we have not in any detail touched upon what must be done meanwhile, while we are busy creating a world where young people communicate their

troubles to adults. Young people are in fact being abused as a result of their being online, even though these cases clearly are not as many as once believed. Now, the simple fact is that every victim is one too many and therefore it is important that no efforts are spared in order to ensure that every child is safe, offline as well as online. It is, however, not within our professional knowledge to give detailed advice on this. Instead, we end this chapter repeating, and agreeing with, what the Norwegian Social Research (NOVA, 2006) points out in their guidelines for counselors. They stress the importance of adults not panicking when young people choose to let them know that they are being abused and that it is the adults' responsibility not to moralize.

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