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Sonia Livingstone

Children's Privacy Online

Experimenting with Boundaries within and Beyond the Family

The Internet in Everyday Life

The Internet is playing an ever-greater role in the economy, in the workplace, in education, and in our private lives. This still-diversifying bundle of technologies—including e-mail, the World Wide Web, Intranets, multiplayer games, message boards, and so forth—increasingly mediates communication, information, organization, entertainment, learning, and commerce on a global as well as a local scale. Across many industrialized countries, recent years have witnessed a rapid expansion in the domestic market as well as a significant educational market for the Internet: recent figures in the United Kingdom put domestic access at 49%, though figures for households with children are considerably higher (Office of National Statistics, 2004). The rate of Internet diffusion in the United States is such that it took just 7 years to reach 30% of households, a level of penetration that took 17 years for television and 38 years for the telephone (Rice, 2002).

What are the consequences of Internet access and use for the social practices, relations, and contexts of everyday life? One line of speculation concerns the supposed blurring of a series of traditionally important distinctions in society—between work and leisure, public and private, education and entertainment, citizenship and consumerism, local and global, print and visual culture, and so forth. This chapter focuses on children and young people—a segment of society associated with perhaps the most speculation but only recently with a body of research (Livingstone, 2003)—and it explores their use of the Internet in relation to one of these themes—the relation between public and private.

Drawing mainly on the findings of an in-depth ethnographic-style project exploring children and young people's use of the Internet at home, supplemented with material from focus group interviews with children (Livingstone and Bober, 2003, 2005), this chapter focuses particularly on the experiences and practices of privacy in everyday life. Although in principle privacy is valued and protected in society, in historical and social terms children's privacy is increasingly restricted. It is argued that the media—especially the Internet—provide some key opportunities for privacy, yet policy initiatives designed to keep children safe online are (for good reasons) constraining even these opportunities.

Findings reveal how children and young people understand and exercise their notions of privacy, including the range of everyday tactics by which children micromanage their privacy online.

A Matter of Privacy

The concept of privacy has been defined in many ways across many contexts. Sheehan (2002) reviews the range of conceptions of privacy evident in Western culture, which are, in some cases, instantiated in legal frameworks as rights. These include privacy as the right to be left alone, to be able to keep one's personal information out of the public domain, to be protected from control by others, to decide what personal information to share with others, to know what personal information is being collected by others, and to access one's personal data held by others. Underlying these varying definitions lies a division between definitions centered on keeping information out of the public domain and definitions centered on determining (or controlling, or knowing) which personal information is available to whom. Stein and Sinha (2002, p. 414) combine both principles when they observe that

though conceptions of privacy vary from country to country, privacy is frequently linked to the rights of individuals to enjoy autonomy, to be left alone, and to determine whether and how information about one's self is revealed to others . . . [and, once revealed] to access and control how their personal information is used by others.

Privacy policy and regulation face some significant tensions. In reviewing the recent literacy on privacy and new information technologies, Perri 6 (1998, p. 9) locates the origin of present struggles over privacy in what he describes as

a central fault line around which societies in the developed world are shaped. This is the continuing, and perhaps growing, tension between the impulses of economic liberalization, with its commitments to removing constraints upon trade and exchange, and of political liberalism, with its impulse to construct and then protect a conception of individual or family life from unfettered openness to trade or governance.

These regulatory debates are now being extended to the Internet. Indeed, within these long-standing tensions between private versus public, between individuals' rights to privacy versus to freedom of expression, and between freeing up the market versus protecting consumers, the Internet poses some particular challenges to the management and regulation of privacy.² Increasingly, it seems, "the ability of computers to collect, search and exchange data feeds a growing market for personal information and harbors the potential to erode personal privacy" (Stein and Sinha, 2002, p. 413). Or, as 6 argues, "what is distinctive about informational capitalism is that *personal information* has become the basic fuel on which modern business and government run" (6, 1998, p. 23).

Hence, across industrial societies, governments are consulting, debating, and ultimately attempting to regulate the shifting boundaries of who can and should know what about whom and for what purpose. Cross-national differences are already apparent, for example, with the United States placing relatively more stress on economic liberalization and the European Union giving comparatively more weight to cultural rights and protection.³

A growing literature seeks to inform debate by examining the parallels and differences in public and policy conceptions of privacy between the offline and online worlds (Regan, 2002; Turow and Ribak, 2003). Both on and offline, it would appear that, as Sheehan (2002) notes, the adult population varies considerably in its level of concern over privacy. For the most part, the public is widely seen as being highly concerned, but often equally ignorant, about privacy issues. For example, in the U.K. public opinion polls, “privacy has consistently ranked above freedom of speech, inflation and equal rights for women or minorities as a public concern” (6, 1998, p. 26). Yet comparatively few people read Web site privacy policies, check for cookies, or attempt to understand, or take precautionary measures against, the various threats to their privacy on the Internet (Lyon, 1994; Turow and Ribak, 2003).

However, this discussion of policy regarding online privacy rights and protection has mobilized just part of the philosophical and ethical debates over privacy, for the concern has been solely focused on external threats to privacy—indeed, mainly on state and commercial threats to individual privacy—rather than examining privacy issues in the round. Particularly, privacy as conceptualized by Internet users in their everyday lives has been considered only in relation to external threats (e.g., Regan, 2002; Turow, 2001). Important though such threats undoubtedly are, in everyday discussion it becomes clear that people are often most concerned with maintaining their privacy in relation to others within their social network. This includes peers (where the issues are those of identity and networks), parents or responsible others (where the issue is that of the balance of intimacy and independence between adult and child), and those from whom privacy is actively sought (intrusive, worrying, or even abusive adults). Moreover, although as already observed, there is only a weak relation between people’s principles or beliefs and their privacy-related practices in relation to external threats to privacy, our empirical observations indicate that in relation to local or familial threats to privacy, a much closer relation exists between beliefs and practices.

Children’s Privacy Online

Children and young people are usually among the earliest and most enthusiastic users of information and communication technologies, and households with children generally lead the diffusion process. Furthermore, it is often argued that children are more flexible, creative users than adults, having fewer established routines or habits and being oriented toward development, innovation, and change. Interestingly, as young people make the transition from their family of origin toward a wider peer culture, they find that the media

offer a key resource for constructing their identity and for mediating social relationships. However, although research on children, young people, and use of the Internet is still in its early stages, a broad and challenging research agenda is now being mapped out (Livingstone, 2003).

Such research is best located within the now growing body of work on domestic contexts of media use, though for children connections must also be made with research on information and communication technologies in educational settings and with both developmental psychology and the sociology of childhood. Research on children and the Internet is distinctive in a further way, for although the wider literature on domestic media use tends to stress the active appropriation of media within the meanings and practices of family life, a focus on children gives rise to a strong set of anxieties among the public, policy-makers, and the research community regarding their passivity, vulnerability, and need for protection. The outcome is a field of research structured around a strong tension between two very different, often-competing conceptions of childhood.⁴

In one view, children are seen as vulnerable, undergoing a crucial but fragile process of cognitive and social development to which the media tend to pose a risk by introducing potential harms into the social conditions for development and necessitating, in turn, a protectionist regulatory environment. In the contrary view, children are seen as competent and creative agents in their own right whose “media-savvy” skills tend to be underestimated by the adults around them, with the consequence being that society may fail to provide a sufficiently rich environment for them. Although a balance between these two positions would seem to be optimal, each position tends to be mobilized by opposing factions (protectionist vs. laissez-faire, with goals of consensus or diversity) in the public policy debates over Internet regulation and use. These in turn draw on, and take questions of children’s Internet use into, the hotly fought debates regarding freedom of expression (whether defended in terms of the market or democracy) versus shared public norms (defended in terms of values and morals). Those who wish to argue for a balanced view of children’s abilities and vulnerabilities can therefore seem to those in the thick of the policy debates to compromise on some crucial principles. One way forward, I suggest, is to include children’s own experiences in debates about the Internet.

These broad debates are played out specifically in relation to the issue of privacy. Indeed, notwithstanding the many hopes held out for the Internet—that it will offer children new and wonderful possibilities for education, communication, and participation—there is considerable public concern over whether the Internet is, at the same time, mediating the increasing invasion of children’s privacy. Concern currently centers on two external sources of risk or threat, both of which access a distinct if overlapping version of the “vulnerability” discourse about children and young people. One construes the child as naïve consumer whose privacy may be exploited by commercial bodies.⁵ The second construes the child as sexual innocent whose privacy may be corrupted by harmful content or pedophilic predators (Internet Crime Forum, 2000; Livingstone, 2001). Both

are serious concerns, and both are receiving considerable attention in terms of safety awareness campaigns and information and communication technology literacy training directed at consumers, as well as legislation or softer forms of regulation directed at state and commercial bodies.

In this chapter I consider a third threat to children's privacy; namely, that from parents who, generally in a well-intentioned and responsible manner, but occasionally in a less benign fashion, respond to anxieties over external threats by instituting a new, internal threat, one that risks the crucial relationship of trust between parents and children. My concern may be illustrated by the poignant observation that in a small but significant proportion of families, children need privacy from their parents precisely because their parents pose the threat through their physically or sexually abusive behavior (Russell, 1980). This makes private channels for communication—to ask for help and advice—of crucial importance, a need that conflicts with the widespread advice, and indeed policy, to devolve regulatory responsibility for children's Internet use to parents.⁶ Although these cases are in the minority, the threat to children from within the family remains statistically far greater than any threat to them from outside,⁷ thereby suggesting that privacy within the family is at least as important an issue as protection from external threats.⁸ And as I shall hope to show below, in the vast majority of cases, and in the happiest of families, children will routinely and systematically seek to maintain their privacy from their parents (and other members of their personal network), through microlevel practices, which have the potential to shape the unfolding nature of "Internet use" more generally.

Child-Centered Investigation

Children's ideas about privacy, and especially their practices designed to maintain privacy, are not readily amenable to investigation through surveys, particularly when little qualitative work has been conducted to scope the issue from their perspective. Hence the research presented here sought to develop a child-centered approach to understanding media use (Livingstone, 1998), following Corsaro's (1977) microsociological analysis, which shows how, through daily actions unnoticed by adults, children contribute to the construction of social structures that have consequences for social relations within the family and peer group, for media use, and for the space-time patterning of leisure (see also Qvortrup, 1995; James et al., 1998). A child-centered approach to Internet use, therefore, explores how the domestic environment affords opportunities for certain kinds of activities, including Internet-related activities, depending on social arrangements of time, space, cultural norms and values, and personal preferences and lifestyle. Crucially, it invites us to be open to the ways in which children and young people construct their own local contexts, rendering media use meaningful in specific ways, and so not only respond to but also influence their immediate environment, including their mediated environment.

In this chapter I draw first on a quasi-ethnographic project, *Families and the Internet*, which aimed to open up the “black box” of the home and explore what the Internet means to children and their families at the start of the 21st century (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). The project was guided by a series of broadly ethnographic principles.⁹ Specifically, 30 families, who varied in socioeconomic status, family type, and geographic location, and who had a child between 8 and 16 years old who uses the Internet, were visited on several occasions over one or more months.¹⁰ Semistructured interviews were combined with observations of Internet use at home to explore the nature and contexts of domestic Internet use. Rather than seeking to make claims to representativeness, the research sought to “look behind” and so interpret the widely reported statistics on Internet access and use.¹¹ Through a series of visits, time was spent informally sitting with children while they went online, observing their decisions about what to do and where to go, as well as noting their skills in achieving their aims and the nature of the social situation thereby generated—interruptions from siblings, chatting with friends, advice from parents, the simultaneous monitoring of a favorite television program, and so forth. The analysis included both the discursive and material aspects of appropriation—what was said about going online and how this was managed in practice.

It is worth noting that, as is consistent with ethnographic methodology, the theme of privacy emerged from the attempt to make sense of children’s understandings and, especially, their practices. Only once I began to recognize that questions of privacy were running through an eclectically diverse range of activities did I turn to the literature on children and privacy online, and only then did I realize that the debates are framed entirely in terms of external threats to privacy, in sharp contrast with the privacy concerns of children themselves. In what follows, I offer a portrait, doubtless selective and perhaps haphazard, of the variety of actions that reveal children’s considerable concern with questions of privacy.

Interwoven with this account, I include some of the findings from a subsequent project, *UK Children Go Online*, which began with a series of focus group interviews with children and young people. Fourteen group interviews of around 1 hour in length were held with mostly same-sex groups of approximately four children or young people in each (a total of 55 children). These interviews were held in schools, which had been selected in turn so as to cover a range of background factors, including socioeconomic status, geographic spread, ethnicity, and school type. Each school organized two groups (usually one with boys and one with girls) of the same age from the same class, apart from one school, which provided two groups of boys and two groups of girls. The five age groups interviewed were 10–11, 12–13, 14–15, 16–17, and 17–19 years.¹² Interview topics included Internet literacy/expertise; use of different types of communication technologies, participation in global and local human networks with the help of the Internet, downloading files (e.g., music or games), undesirable online content (spam, advertising, pornography), Internet safety awareness and rules for using the Internet, Internet monitoring and filtering software, privacy online and offline, Internet nonuse and

exclusion, and the role of the Internet in education (see Livingstone and Bober, 2003, in press-a).

In methodological terms, what is interesting is that children and young people turned out to be willing—indeed keen—to explain their concerns about privacy. This was interesting both because such a sensitive topic might perhaps have proved inappropriate in a group discussion format and because without the preceding observational research, it would not have occurred to me to ask about privacy, particularly in relation to internal or familial threats to privacy. On the basis of this research trajectory, and encouraged by children’s articulate and enthusiastic discussions, the next phase of UK Children Go Online has translated at least some of these concerns into survey questions, administered to a national sample of 1500 9–19-year-old kids (Livingstone and Bober, 2004).

What Children Say and Do Online

Metaphors from familiar domains help make something unfamiliar or elusive comprehensible and stable. Some metaphors used for the Internet reveal great expectations—“it’s just like life . . . you can do anything really,” “a giant book about everything,” “a world of opportunities,” and “the future.” Younger children tend to conceive of the Internet as a “place”—effectively, a new place to play—applying a spatial anchor that is comfortably familiar and appropriate to often narrow or bounded experience as users. Older children use more complex metaphors, such as “a link” or “a system,” that explain the Internet’s function or organization in terms of networks. Crucially, they see it as a means of connecting with others. Whether play or social relationships are foregrounded, it is worth noting that both have always been conducted in both public and private and that the very distinction between these—the choices involved, the ways in which the context frames the activity—has surely always mattered to children and young people.

Children seek privacy, but as a means to an end not an end in itself. Rather, as we shall see, they may use the opportunity of private spaces online to indulge in silly, rude, or naughty behavior; to experiment with new identities; to seek confidential advice on personal matters; to eavesdrop on the interactions of others; to meet people from far-off places or from the next street; and, most of all, to engage in uninterrupted, unobserved immersion in peer communication. Indeed, although online talk can appear spectacularly vacuous to the adult observer, for young people it is a highly social activity much valued by their peers—after all, this is “the constant contact generation” (Clark, 2003). Crucial to our present purposes, we should recognize that offline, all of these activities are customarily conducted with some conscious degree of privacy—there is no *a priori* reason, therefore, for things to be any different online.

Consider one particular instance, taken verbatim from our observational fieldwork notes, of a 13-year-old girl at home flirting in <http://www.teenchat.com>.

Candy scans the chat room options (Teen Flirt, Teen Party, The Crib, etc.) and chooses the one with most users. This room has 20 people, including London Lad, RIMO CORELONE, Majestic, 1 bubbly gal, 1 chick wanna cat, 1 fit lad, babe 2000, BIG BOY 69, Big will, Bristol_GUY, Bubbles, CHAD, Chick with attitude, Ninnie, and Cute Babe.

London Lad is in the process of insulting Big will. He writes, “big will iz gay.” Babe 2000 says, “here all the guys take a <inserts 9 red roses>.” RIMO CORELONE tries to get in by hitting two lines worth of unconnected letters. CHAD replies “so r u,” presumably to London Lad, while Majestic asks, “is he really?” CHAD says “yes” and London Lad retorts “he asked about my dick!”

After following this for a while, Candy tries to get a private one-to-one conversation going—her opening line is: “Hi r there any fit guys on here??? pm me if interested.” Just after her entry, Bubbles writes “giz uz a snog” and RIMO CORELONE replies “BUBBLES YOUR A FAT SLAG.” Ninnie then comes in with “ne 1 wanna chat press 123 or pm me.” RIMO CORELONE is obviously trying to get a fight going and replies “**** OFF BITCH” London Lad replies “not 2day,” but Silva responds to Ninnie with “123.”

However, no one takes up Candy’s bid for attention, and after 12 minutes, perhaps a little uncomfortable given the researcher’s presence, she says she is bored and leaves the chat room.

Many things are going on here, offering some clues regarding children and young people’s interest in private interactions online: the importance of identity play, their desire to push the boundaries of acceptability, the contrast with offline behavior, and the deployment of a distinctive online interaction style. I consider these in turn below.

What Privacy Means to Children

The management of private spaces involves considerable skills, and these are widely valued by young people. For example, it is commonplace to contribute to several private message conversations while also keeping an eye on what is going on in the main chat room. Young people may also retain a presence in a number of other chat rooms, minimizing some screens and only returning to them if a flash indicates that someone wishes to speak to them. In all, some keep five or six conversations going simultaneously. Thus, even when contributions seem trite, interest is retained by the often-demanding business of sustaining multiple conversations simultaneously; something exciting, interesting, or shocking may always happen; someone you want to talk to may come online at any minute. In addition, the skills displayed in managing the business of online communication convey the affirming message to both the child him- or herself and to observers that this is a competent individual with valued expertise.

Such competence is not so evident for teenagers in face-to-face or traditional communication, serving to add to the perceived value of online communication. Online, children feel not only private but also in control. Asked, “if you wanted to talk about something really private what would you do?” Mark, age 14 years, answers, “I don’t know really. It depends what you want to do . . . my friend Nick he asked me quite a lot of times to meet him on chat at a certain time and I’d just go on there and we’d just talk and stuff like that and sometimes we phone each other or send an e-mail. It just depends really what type of mood you’re in.”

Online communication offers a means of managing, or avoiding, the potentially embarrassing challenges of face-to-face conversation and so of retaining control. In chat rooms, young people feel themselves to be the key node in the network—they feel themselves to be in charge—and when they feel themselves to be losing control, they can simply leave. Gus, age 13 years, compared chat room conversation with the telephone:

On the telephone like you can be speaking but then if you don’t know what to say you’ll be just standing there not doing anything but with that [chat room] em it’s like OK to be a bit late not be saying anything because it’s not like you’re waiting for them to . . . on the other end of a telephone . . . it’s not so much of a rush. . . . You’re not like confronted to someone. ’Cos if you say something they might not agree with they can’t like hit you or say something back to you that’s going to make you do something that—if they’ll stand in front of you.

The Importance of Identity Play

The development of identity is not a singular or linear process—identities are performed and experimented with across a range of places. The boundaries between those spaces matter: We all act differently with different people, in different situations. Children and young people especially use the media to mark the boundaries of these different aspects of identity. As I have argued elsewhere in relation to young people’s bedroom culture (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001), their use of the Walkman to block out the family, their management of multiple e-mail addresses to evade parental scrutiny, their fondness for passwords on the computer, their insistence on having a television in their bedroom, their facility with minimizing and maximizing windows—these all represent boundary marking tactics, technological updates on the injunction taped to the child’s door: “Parents, keep out!!!”

The most obvious, but far from the only, way in which young people experiment with identity online is through e-mail or screen names. Although younger children tend to use their parents’ or a family e-mail address, teenagers demand greater privacy and scope for self-expression. This can lead to the acquisition of a number of e-mail addresses and burgeoning communication.

On our first visit, 12-year-old Neil and his younger brother Euan, aged 10 years, had just started sending e-mails, using the family e-mail address. Their mother would open the e-mail account and call them if there was anything for them. By the second observational

session, both boys had set up new, private e-mail accounts for themselves—Neil with Yahoo and Euan with <http://another.com>. Neil explains they are sending more e-mails now that they have privacy. Both brothers are anxious to hide their pin numbers from each other, and there is a lot of teasing over this as they try to peek over each other's shoulders. Neil now checks his mail every time he goes on the Internet, sending and receiving about three messages a week among his circle of 5–10 correspondents, all school friends.

As they get older, teens explicitly manage their interactions through different online identities. Some teens we talked to have as many as eight e-mail addresses. Some seem to keep a number in play at once, others have lost count of how many they have or have lost track of the names they have used, and others are more systematic. As Mark (age 14, middle class), says, “I normally give my own personal e-mail address out and not just—not—we’ve got a family one like Ted’s got and I’ve got my own personal one so I just give that one to my friends, not the family one.” Jane keeps one e-mail address for her correspondence with friends, and the other, which she uses much less often, is the one she uses when asked to provide such information on a Web site to protect herself against unwelcome junk mail, it all being directed to one site, where she deletes it when she has time.

Fourteen-year-old Manu uses both the family e-mail address and his own private Hotmail address for different purposes. He explains that he uses Hotmail not because it is his individual address but because he can access it at both at home and in school, and as he moves between these places he prefers to receive e-mail, which is available in both places. However, he admits that some of his friends can be very silly, sending rude messages to him about teachers, or insulting messages about friends, or sending him URL’s to inappropriate sites, and so on. These messages he reads and then deletes straightaway, maintaining his inbox as a “clean” place for parents to see. When he accesses his Hotmail address on our first observational visit, there are two messages from a local friend. Another five are from his uncle—sent from “somewhere in Africa, don’t know quite where he is, he sends messages from his laptop” (a few of these are in fact written by his aunt). His uncle e-mailed him a colorful Divali card, addressed to the whole family. Among the other e-mails, one is from a girl friend to his older brother, who does not have his own account.

For teenagers in particular, e-mail correspondence becomes part of their social construction of identity. Adopted names in chat rooms, even more than e-mail addresses, allow the trying-out of new roles as sexual beings or otherwise desirable, dynamic personalities. Consider, for example, the names of an American/English e-mail circle of 12–13 year olds: Littlelover, pixel_117, applesauce128, fireball318, actingurl, and fuel_chick. Sites such as <http://another.com> make it a selling point to combine anonymity with fun pseudonyms. Candy chose Kissmequick@yahoo.com, saying, “it’s quite fun having a jokey name but it’s privacy as well. I don’t like my mum and dad reading all the e-mails I send because I write quite dodgy stuff. And when he writes back mum and dad

usually read 'em and some of the things he writes are quite rude.” She retaliates by reading her parents’ e-mails—but “they aren’t very interesting.” Similarly, Manu and his older brother share seven chat room identities (the maximum allowed on the system) and alternate between them or modify them as the mood takes them. Having shown the researcher all his profiles and how to edit them, he explains that the people in the chat room “won’t know who I am because I keep on changing my name. . . . It depends who I’m talking to. Say if I want to annoy someone, then I want to remain anonymous, then I’ll change my name and they won’t realize who it is. It’s quite good.”

Although this is all done in a light-hearted fashion, identity management depends on the consistency of one’s self-presentation and the impression of sincerity conveyed (Goffman, 1959). Although establishing a grown-up identity offline is therefore fraught with difficulties and embarrassments, the anonymity of chat rooms and the rules of the game (where experimenting and fooling around is expected) license the trying out of new roles. There, young people, without compromising their everyday identity, can play around with the crucial boundaries between truth and fantasy, information and imagination, the real and the unreal.

Privacy is integral to the communication of identity, for identity is partly enacted through managing who knows what about us and who does not. In sustaining multiple interaction contexts online, not only are distinct aspects of identity performed (and so constituted), but they are also knowingly bounded rather than indiscriminate in their anticipated audience—intended for the eyes of certain people, for the communication of certain contents, for the revelation of certain kinds of experience. That which is made public to some is simultaneously kept private from others. When young people talk about their communication with peers, it seems that the skill and the fun stems precisely from playing with the possibilities of who knows what, taking risks with who is told what. Where Goffman (1959) wrote about the ambiguous thrill of overhearing, today’s young people exploit the ambiguous thrills and puzzles of forwarding on and blind copying in of messages; the shift from chat room to private chat; the use of anonymity to construct cheeky, witty, or rude online identities; and so forth.

Pushing the Bounds of Acceptability

Although Candy, earlier, was chatting on her own, it is common practice for several friends to gather in front of the screen. When Mark and his brothers come to visit, Ted describes a lively scene in which they all shout out—“No, don’t write that, write this.’ That’s what we do when all his brothers are there . . . taking different turns to type in stuff.” On one of our visits, we watch while these 14-year-old friends try to disrupt the adult Yahoo chat room for police and fire officers (Police and Fire), pretending to be a blind orphan in a home with abusive carers. They type in lines like “Help!” “They’re coming to get me!” Someone replies and asks if they are blind how come they can type? Mark replies “Braille keyboard” and gets the retort, “And braille screen?” They see their cover is blown and are a bit disappointed.

Similarly, Manu, also 14 years old, talks with enthusiasm about how rude he and his friends get, trading insults with each other or with other people. Particularly, they like to pretend to be other people when chatting online with friends they know from school, insulting them and then teasing at school the next day until the friends catch on as to the identity of those unknown others. One game is for the participant to be so annoying to people in chat rooms that he (or she) forces them to leave. As Manu says proudly, “I drive people out all the time, it’s my speciality. When the room is empty, I feel really content with myself. . . . I just sit there and wallow in my glory and then I leave. I might go to another room.”

The boundaries being pushed depend on the boundaries established by adults. Hence, as an increasing number of chat rooms are moderated, this is seen by some young people as a challenge—the game becomes seeing how far one can go before being thrown off (even in monitored chat rooms, such as those on AOL, gate-crashers can appear and create havoc before they are detected and thrown off).

Given that online information, communication, and entertainment variously blur boundaries between public and private, adult and child, normative and deviant, legitimate and illegitimate, it is unsurprising that young people enjoy using the Internet to push, to explore, to transgress boundaries that are perhaps better policed in the offline world.

Secret Language

The flexibility of e-mails allows for a customization of the correspondence, which teens use to their advantage—drawing on the icons or themes of youth culture. Where writing letters can often be seen as a chore, e-mailing is enjoyable. Among peers, e-mail has its own linguistic code, which owes much to street talk and the abbreviated language of chat rooms. Young people vary the style of their online communications according to the recipient. In e-mails, grandparents will be written to in one style (public, formal) and friends in another (private, informal). The contrast between 11-year-old Susie’s e-mails to her friend Hannah and to her grandmother reveals the control children deliberately exercise in such communicative styles. Compare

----- Original Message -----

From: Susie J <mailto:f****@ukgateway.net>

To: Hannah M <mailto:f*****@yahoo.co.uk>

Sent: 28 July 2000 19:04

Subject: howd it go?

howd the move go? i cant wate 2 c yor new howse come round when you can!!

from Devilduck

P.S. y didn't u tell me Alison had 2 dalmations?they're coming on monday i hope you'll be there to see them

With

----- Original Message -----

From: "Susie J" <f****@ukgateway.net>

To: <m****@talk21.com>

Sent: 03 September 2000 20:33

Subject: Thanks

- > To Gran and Grandad,
- > We arrived home safe and well. Helen is really pleased with her necklace and
- > sends her thanks. Thank You for having us we really enjoyed ourselves.
- > Thanks again for having us, love from Susie xxxx
- > P.S. I found a fossilised slipper limpet on the beach in Middlesborough

The language of online communication, as with text (SMS) language, is clearly designed both to facilitate communication among peers and to impede overseeing (the screen equivalent of Goffman's focus on overhearing) by parents, supporting the view of privacy, which stresses control over the sharing of personal information rather than, more simply, keeping personal information to oneself. As Greenfield et al. (chapter 13) note, adults are frequently floored in their attempt to follow the conversational flow in online interactions, the point being that children maintain their privacy not necessarily by keeping information out of the physical space but by rendering it symbolically inaccessible.

Relating On- and Offline

What does the online environment offer? Children come from diverse backgrounds of course, but we were struck by the contrast between one boy's online life and his offline life. Stephen, age 14 years, from a working-class home, seemed to live a tidy, organized, dutiful life offline while engaging in entertaining and slightly risqué youth culture on line. He was a good boy, working hard at school, with a very tidy bedroom containing, for example, a much prized six-volume encyclopedia from his grandmother and a shelf of computer games that he prefers not to swap with friends, as they return scratched. Outside, he plays sports, teaches karate, and swims competitively. Watching over this orderly child is a careful mother, who casually passes by several times to check on him (or on the observer) during the research—has he shown us his school work on the Internet?—perhaps compensating for a rarely present father away at work.

In one observational session, our field notes record the following. Like most young people, he checks his e-mails first (he has none). Then he briefly does what his mother told him to (6 minutes showing the researcher his homework on <http://www.gnvqict.com>). Next, typing in URLs from memory (suggesting this is his regular repertoire), he has fun, spending time on sites, which are culturally disorderly, rule or taboo breaking, and mildly improper. These include <http://www.napster.com> (2 minutes), laughing at the cartoons (frog in a blender, etc.), on <http://www.joecartoons.com> (10 minutes), downloading a game from the South Park site (<http://www.spelementary.com>) and looking at pictures on the site (Cartman dressed as

Hitler, etc.; 19 minutes), and last, checking the music charts and jokes on <http://www.mtv.co.uk>, trying to download a song (19 minutes). Maybe he hopes to shock the researcher, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that although life off the screen is heavily circumscribed for Stephen, he reacts by finding some modest privacy and freedom online.

Accessing Porn Sites

When using the Internet, young people may be physically in a private domestic space but, like television before it, the Internet brings the outside world inside. This allows in a range of unwanted intrusions—in the sense that they are judged undesirable by parents and children, although on occasion, children (and parents) deliberately seek them out—most notably, pornographic content. It is difficult to obtain reliable estimates of risk in this area—clearly, exposure to pornography online is increasing (Wigley and Clarke, 2000)—and many children have, accidentally or purposefully, encountered online pornography (Livingstone and Bober, 2004). There are good reasons to suspect their answers of both under- and overreporting, and research ethics make persistent questioning inadvisable. Whether or not these experiences are actually harmful is, of course, subject to considerable debate. For our present purposes, the point is that the belief that pornographic content harms children is the primary driver of regulation in this field, both at the national and domestic level. Let us consider, therefore, the nature and the experience of such encounters—do they appear to infringe on children’s privacy, and how can this be balanced against the infringement of privacy, which occurs through attempts to prevent such encounters? We came across the following:

One 11-year-old girl, trying to find pictures of Adolf Hitler for a school project during one of our visits, innocently accessed a site labeled “Adolf Hitler pictures.” She failed to note the rubric “gaysexfreepics” and found herself face to face with a porn site. As is common with such sites, it was very difficult to shut down, with the first few attempts merely producing other similar sites. She claimed not to have been upset by the site, saying that she had not found anything like it before but if she had would do as she did on this occasion—get rid of it and ignore it.

Fourteen-year-old Sally, rather than being shocked when she comes across a prostitution site at school, laughingly describes it to the interviewer as one of her “funniest experiences.” She says, “one time we were going to this site where you’re supposed to improve your money skills, like money dot credit UK [but] went to money dot com which [is] a prostitution site (laughs). . . . And another time I was on a Rocky Horror site. . . . There was a picture of Frank in the suspenders, not in the dress just in the suspenders and corset and sort of looking at Rocky rather admiringly and Rocky’s sitting there going . . . and my IT teacher’s is like . . . and now what’s this? Is the sort of thing you should be looking at in school? Oh God.”

Even among the youngest girls, there was some evidence that being unshockable was socially desirable. Thus, 10-year-old Anna, who confesses to have seen some “pretty rude

pictures” when she inadvertently opened an e-mail of her father’s, resists any suggestion that she may have been shocked: “I’m quite grown up, I know all about everything, sex life and stuff. . . . Sometimes I read stories that some people my age wouldn’t be like, would be like (deep intake of breath), and I’m just like cool.” These turn out to be “Buffy Angel stories, they’re rated PG, 13, or R, but I just read them anyway because I like them.” Clearly some of this material is pornographic, by common standards, although some is much milder. Reactions depend on the age and maturity of the child, expectations among the peer group, ease of discussion with parents, and so forth.

The Significance of Children’s Privacy Online

The Uses of Privacy

Interviewer: What do you write to them [your friends]?

Sally (11): Sort of secrets and stuff.

Interviewer: And why do you write secrets on e-mail and not just tell them when you see them?

Sally: ’Cause they can make their mind up. When they’ve got people there, they don’t always say what—when they’ve got people there.

Ellen (11): And sometimes if you’ve got the e-mail address of the person you fancy, write it to them.

Our findings on what children say and do online indicate a series of “uses of privacy.” These include feeling in control—being master of the situation—something they may experience less when under the surveillance of an adult gaze. They may use a private moment to find advice regarding, or manage the potential embarrassment of, a particular personal issue or encounter. Beatrice (13) says, “when you’re like talking to them face-to-face, you’re like—you’ve got other people around you, and they can’t tell you what they really think. So like instant messaging, you can.” Cameron (13) tells us, “I once dumped my old girlfriend by e-mail.” When asked why, he explains, “well, it was cowardly really. I couldn’t say it face-to-face.” As we have seen, being children, they may wish to engage in silly, rude, or naughty behavior, experimenting with or pushing the boundaries of normatively defined expectations or identities. And they play with who knows what about them, as in Perri 6’s definition of privacy, through simultaneous communications (text messaging while instant messaging, private chat while also in a chat room, etc.)—precisely exploring their control over personal information.

Age matters considerably, for it is younger teens who may find face-to-face communication particularly difficult to negotiate. In our focus groups, older teenagers tended to prefer to hold private conversations face-to-face, which they think is more secure than online communication (Livingstone and Bober, 2003). They are concerned about the possibility of someone “spying” on online conversations, revealing their growing awareness of online privacy issues. As Hazel, age 17 years, points out, “if you wanted to have a private conversation, then I’m sure you’d talk to them face-to-face

rather than using the Internet, because if you know they can be listened to, or someone else can see what you're doing, then I wouldn't have thought that you'd want that to happen. So you'd therefore talk to them, meet up and talk to them face-to-face."

The Value of Privacy

One may ask why the online environment is particularly important for children as a private domain. The reasons, I suggest, lie in part with the changing conditions of childhood itself (Livingstone, 2002). Consider the increasing caution parents exercise in allowing their children to go out, thus precluding access to the street corner where teens used to hang out. Consider also the introduction of central heating and the growing availability of media and consumer goods, resulting in a comfortable, safe, and private bedroom. Add to these, most importantly, the lengthening period of adolescence itself, according to which children are said to be getting older earlier in terms of consumerism, sexual experimentation, and independence of lifestyle, while simultaneously they are getting older later in terms of financial independence and entry into employment (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Whether or not they change childhood, the computer and Internet provide a flexible resource with which new freedoms can be found, new risks run, new experiments embarked on, new innocence exploited, and new expertise enjoyed, all without leaving home. Because children do live increasingly constrained lives, in terms of their freedoms in physical space, while simultaneously having greater access to images and ideas circulated by the media than ever before, it is not surprising that we are finding that children turn to the media, and increasingly to the Internet, to create private spaces for themselves. In contrast, given social tensions over changes in childhood and adolescence, it is not surprising that the means by which youth culture now finds expression—online—becomes caught up in these social and moral tensions.

The Risks and Regulatory Challenges of Online Privacy

In the eyes of parents and policy makers, children's activities online are seen as being sufficiently risky to legitimate, often thoughtlessly or unwittingly, an intrusion into these private activities. When we asked parents about their concerns over their children's Internet use, the majority mentioned pornography, bad language, junk mail, and viruses (see also Turow and Nir, 2000). Giving out personal information, sometimes coupled with anxieties about chat rooms, was also mentioned. As Candy's mother said, "she's very happy to give her address or telephone number to any Tom, Dick, or Harry and you just think 'Oh no! Don't do that darling.' . . . She's a bit too trusting."

The research literature on parental mediation of media use identifies several strategies in common use in relation to television. In Livingstone and Bovill, 1999, we characterized these as restrictive guidance, evaluative guidance, and conversational guidance. Whereas for television regulation we found that parents most often claim evaluative guidance, followed by conversational guidance, both strategies that rest on sharing media use with their child, it would seem that a different approach is emerging for the Internet because

parents do not share the same expertise or interest with their children (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001; Livingstone and Bober, in press-b). Instead, they seem to prefer strategies of restrictive guidance (e.g., limiting time spent online, installing filtering software, keeping the password secret, and banning or blocking certain activities, most commonly young people's favorites—e-mail and chat), unobtrusive monitoring (e.g., positioning the computer in a public place, spot checking from time to time what the child is doing, and checking the history or the cache for sites visited),¹³ or what we may term “benign neglect” (meaning that parents, although often well-intentioned, show a distinct lack of monitoring or engagement with their child over their Internet use, claiming a comparative lack of expertise and so, in practice, paying little attention to what their children do or what sites they access).¹⁴

In seeking to act responsibly, parents may or may not be aided by the market. Consider the rhetoric directed at parents by the promotional materials of Internet filtering software.¹⁵ This conveys a message of parental concern, even fear, but not one of trust in or openness with children, and nor does it leave space for children's privacy—as is apparent in the naming of *Cybersnoop*, for example. *Cybersitter*, to take another example, “works by secretly monitoring all computer activity” so as to close the door on “unrestricted cybersmut” including, interestingly, that stored in parental files on the computer, whereas *Childsafe* allows parents to “see exactly what your children have been viewing online . . . [and to] monitor chat room sessions, instant messaging, email.” Features highly valued by children, such as exercising control in choosing personal, cheeky, or flirtatious screen names, are ruled out by America Online's invitation to parents to gain control themselves by creating a screen name or e-mail name for their child.¹⁶

In our focus group interviews, young people reacted strongly against such practices. Anonymity and playfulness, privacy and deception, have always been vital to childhood—it is ironic that these are not only central to what children value about the Internet but also to what gives rise to parental fears for children's safety. Children and young people do not like their parents and teachers monitoring their Internet use, seeing it as an invasion of their privacy. To explain why they object to having their Internet use monitored, children use metaphors such as having one's bag searched, having one's personal space invaded, or being stalked, which is ironic given that parental monitoring is partly aimed at precluding stalking online by strangers. In contrast, with the software named *Cybersnoop*, for example, young people's strongly expressed view that they too have privacy rights should be more clearly heard.

My parents don't ask me “ooh, what did you go on?” because I wouldn't like it if I came from school, came home, and they search my pockets. I'd say “what are you doing—that's personal.” What if I had something I didn't want them to see? Just like I wouldn't search my mum's bedroom. (Amir, 15)

You just like don't want your mum spying on you and knowing everything about you. (Nina, 17)

Because you want your independence, really, you don't want your mum looking over your shoulder checking what you're doing all the time. (Steve, 17)

To maintain their privacy, young people engage in a variety of tactics for evading parental or school monitoring and controls, and some clearly enjoy the challenge of outwitting adults, capitalizing on their comparatively greater Internet-related expertise. They hide folders on the computer where parents cannot find them, and they minimize or switch between screens when parents are looking over their shoulder. They are aided in these evasions by being often more expert in the use of computers and the Internet than their parents. One wonders what chance 10-year-old Anna's mother has of monitoring her Internet use when she can barely follow what her daughter is doing:

I'll have to come up to a level because otherwise I will, I'll be a dinosaur, and the children, when children laugh at you and sort of say "Blimey, mum, don't you even know that?" . . . Already now I might do something and I say "Anna, Anna, what is it I've got to do here?" and she'll go "Oh mum, you've just got to click the" . . . "Don't do it Anna, show me what you're doing!" and she'll be whizzing, whizzing, dreadfully.¹⁷

This group of 14–16-year-old London schoolboys claim that they can always find a way around the school's filter—always find things they want—and they clearly enjoy engaging in this forbidden activity. On their home computers, these boys do not have filtering software because, they say, their parents would not know how to install it.

Amir: The technical things there, the kids nowadays—they just know how to go onto new sites.

Prince: This goes back to what you said earlier, like we know the computer, we're the generation of computers.

Amir: We know how to go on something else if it isn't there, 'cause we always know how to search for things.

Interviewer: So it's not that you can break the filter, but you can find a way round it to get—

Amir: Yeah, to find a way around it. It's not about breaking, it's about—there's always plan B.

Prince: There are always other options.

Although unobtrusive (sometimes secret) monitoring risks infringing children's privacy, and hence the relation of trust between parent and child, more overtly restrictive strategies may undermine children's ability to pursue the many benefits of Internet access. Hence, parents need guidance on finding a way to balance risks and opportunities, minimizing the former and maximizing the latter so that children can use the Internet

safely and constructively (Livingstone, 2001). Certainly, there is something curious in the fact that, although governments have not previously advised parents to listen in on their children's phone calls or read their diary or letters, this is precisely what advice is now being given, as parents are encouraged to look over their children's shoulders as they go online and to install software to check on sites visited, e-mails sent, or chat rooms visited. Indeed, one may argue that there are many ways in which society is trading off children's freedom against protection with, it seems, a stronger sense of the dangers against which they should be protected than of the costs of such protection in terms of their privacy or freedom of expression. For example, parents advise children (and governments advise parents to advise their children) not to do precisely the things they most enjoy doing online—contacting strangers, pretending to be someone else, sending photographs of themselves. Worried parents often ban even more routine things like downloading, answering pop-ups, and visiting chat rooms.¹⁸

Conclusions

Fahey (1995) addresses the blurring of the boundary between public and private in relation to the family by arguing that “instead of speaking of a single public/private boundary, it may be more accurate to speak of a more complex re-structuring in a series of zones of privacy, not all of which fit easily with our standard images of what the public/private boundary is” (Fahey, 1995, p. 688). Some of these “zones of privacy,” this chapter has suggested, are now to be found online, raising new challenges for parents, children, and governments alike.

I hope to have shown that children value privacy, seek privacy, and given the new possibilities afforded by the Internet, relish the chance to carve out private spaces and activities on the Internet. However, we should avoid polarizing public and private in any simple way. It is not that young people use the Internet to withdraw from public participation (and for the few that do, the reasons are more likely to be found in their lives rather than the technology). Nor do they simply use the Internet as a private medium as one thinks of reading a book in private, for the key feature of the Internet is connection not isolation. Rather, they use it to manage the boundary between public and private in such a way as to allow them to experiment with identity, with communication, with peer culture—in short, with growing up (Turkle, 1995; see also Livingstone, 2005).

In charging parents with the responsibility to regulate that which the state itself prefers not to regulate,¹⁹ policy risks infringing not only children's privacy²⁰ but also children's relations with their parents. For, as part of the longer-term cultural shifts in the conditions of childhood, we are witnessing what Giddens has termed “the transformation of intimacy” within the home. According to Giddens (1993, p. 184), intimate relationships are undergoing a historical transformation, “a democratization of the private sphere,” being ever less defined according to kinship, obligation, or other traditional structures and instead being increasingly dependent on the intrinsic quality of the “pure relationship.” In consequence, children—like any other participants in a relationship—have gained the

right to “determine and regulate the conditions of their association” (p. 185), and parents have gained the duty not only to protect them from coercion but also to ensure their involvement in key decisions, to be accountable to them and others, and to respect as well as expect respect. This new model of parent–child relations, based on equality, respect, and rights, is difficult enough for parents without adding to the difficulty by introducing a policing role in relation to their children’s online activities.

In seeking a new approach to privacy in the information age, Perri 6 invites a move away from the legalistic approach toward one focused on dignity, reframing privacy in terms of risk: “privacy can best be understood as a protection against certain kinds of risks—risks of injustice through such things as unfair inference, risks of loss of control over personal information, and risks of indignity through exposure and embarrassment” (6, 1998, p. 13). The advantage of this formulation is that one can then seek to balance risks. In other words, we need to move away from addressing the problem of privacy through balancing the protection of children against the protection of adult rights to freedom of expression. This opposes two goods for which society can brook no compromise on either, and it casts children and adults in a mutual opposition according to which protecting children infringes adult freedom. As a result of this legalistic approach, children have become a pawn in the hotly fought—even hostile—struggle between advocates of civil liberties and of censorship, and parents are being recruited as society’s police in checking up on children.²¹ It is this tendency against which I hope a child-centered approach effectively warns us. Instead, this chapter has proposed an alternative approach, one that balances the risks to children from unrestricted Internet use against the risks of invading their privacy when restricting their Internet use. In other words, a child-centered approach seeks a balance between children’s safety and privacy.

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Notes

1. The Electronic Privacy Information Centre (<http://www.epic.org/>) presents a strong defense of freedom of information and freedom of speech in relation to the Internet, particularly following a recent law in some states of the United States requiring the institutional adoption of filtering systems (e.g., in schools). Because the basis for such filtering is proprietary, it is difficult even to determine whether freedom of information is thereby threatened (see also Oswell, 1999).

2. As Castells (2002, p. 184) notes, “the European Union’s regulation of data gathered by dot.com companies from their users protects privacy to a much greater extent than the laissez-faire environment in the United States.” Note also that the EU’s 1995 Data Protection Directive contrasts with the more fragmented, nonfederalized, approach to privacy in the United States (Stein and Sinha, 2002).
3. See Bingham, Valentine, and Holloway (1999), Livingstone (1998), and Oswell (1998).
4. In the United States, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) came into effect in April 2000, ensuring that commercial Web sites and online services directed at children cannot collect, use, or disclose personally identifiable information from children under age 13 years without a parent’s permission. In April 2001, reporting on COPPA’s first year, the Center for Media Education (Montgomery, 2001; see also Turow, 2001) noted that the law has significantly affected many of the marketing and business practices of commercial Web sites, but that some violations of both the spirit and the letter of the law continue.
5. Oswell (1999) critically analyzes the European Commission’s “Illegal and Harmful Content on the Internet” (see European Parliament, 1997) for its policy “to delegate responsibility and authority downwards” (p. 48), in this case, making parents responsible for children’s domestic Internet use. By construing “a singular vision of ‘good parenting’, ‘appropriate children’s conduct’ and so on” (Oswell, 1999, p. 52), a shift is effected from direct control by government to governance through “action at a distance” (and thus presenting a solution to the challenge of pan-European policy that permits cultural variation in its implementation).
6. Hill and Tisdall (1997) review evidence for the incidence of child abuse within the family that, although difficult to measure, is far more common than abuse by strangers.
7. This concern is rendered invisible by a legalistic, rather than a moral, approach to privacy. As Perri 6 stresses, “dignity, though important to most people in every society, is not well articulated in moral languages that stress only rights and justice,” for although invasions of privacy commonly undermine dignity and so matter to people, only rarely do they involve an actual injustice against which redress can be sought in law (1998, p. 36). Dignity may matter little in the relation between individuals and commercial organizations, but together with trust and respect, it is crucial to the relation between parents and children.
8. Namely, that the nature of media use is best researched more or less unobtrusively within its everyday context; the research process should be open to meanings salient to or expressed by respondents rather than those presumed by the researcher; user engagement is intimately related to the social context before, during, and after media use; a contextual approach should identify the distinctions and practices routinely performed by respondents in responding to circumstances; and last, a diversity of responses to media should be anticipated, both across individuals and for any one user over time or context (Schroder, Drotner, Kline, & Murray, 2003).
9. Specifically, 30 families were recruited, each with a child between 8 and 16 years of age who uses the Internet at home at least once a fortnight. The families were selected to represent a spread of social grades (11 AB (upper/middle class), 11 C1 (lower

middle/class), 8 C2DE (working class)). Families also represented a range of ethnic origins, family types (nuclear, single parent), and geographic locations (urban, suburban, rural) across the Southeast of England. The sample contained 16 boys and 14 girls, of whom 11 were of primary school age and 19 of secondary school age (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). The research team made four visits over a period of 1–2 months, resulting in 114 interviews/observations.

10. The methods used include both interviews and ethnographic-style observations, revealing some interesting discrepancies between self-report and observed practice. However, it should be noted that our ability to check on children's (and parents') honesty or dissembling was limited. Insofar as was practical, we checked claims about Internet use by asking to read e-mails listed in the inbox, noting which URLs came most readily to the child's mind or were listed as recently used in the drop-down address box. Any bias, therefore, is largely one-way: We saw what children showed us and drew our own conclusions; what they did not show us, we might guess at but could not see.

11. The teachers were asked to select the children at random (every fourth or fifth girl or boy from the register). The children were all asked for their written consent to participate in the group discussions, and for children under the age of 16 years, written parental consent was sought in addition.

12. Much depends on age, of course. Father of Nell (15), is sanguine about providing a private space for Internet use: "this box room, what we call study, is a communal room. . . . So everybody can use it, and is useful in that maybe perhaps 2 years ago Gill was at home, she spent a lot of time doing homework, project work, on the computer, and now Nell is doing the same, and occasionally Chris uses the computer, and in the evening, the weekend, I use computer as well. So everyone can have their own privacy in their own little room, and yet we've got this little box room that everyone can go to."

13. The missing strategy here is, of course, the one on which more attention and resources is required; namely, safety awareness and education (Livingstone, 2001). But the problems here are considerable. Recall Euan, 10 years old, unexpectedly encountering an image of anal penetration. Which parents regard it as their role to prepare children of this age for such material? And which teacher, engaged in a lesson on history or German, is ready to drop everything to address such an interruption to the lesson? For such children, parents and teachers, a technical fix is just what is wanted.

14. Online safety software is not the only technology being developed for parents to check on their children—consider the growing use of video cameras at home, even in the child's bedroom; the use of GIS software to track children's movements through their cell phone; and more recently, the development of a computer chip to be inserted under the skin to monitor where they go outside. In seeking to protect children's safety, it is evident that we risk undermining their privacy.

15. Indeed, few filtering programs flag up the value of discussing such monitoring with children (*Childsafe* being one exception that displays an optimal "Acceptable Use" policy to communicate parental rules to the child), leaving one to presume that unobtrusive monitoring, conveying little trust in the child, is generally deemed crucial. See <http://www.pearlsw.com/home/index.com> (for *Cybersnoop*), <http://www.netnanny.com>, <http://www.cyberpatrol.com>, <http://www.aol.com/info/parentcontrol.html>,

<http://www.surfcontrol.com>, <http://www.webroot.com/wb/products/childsafe/index.php> (retrieved May 29, 2003).

16. In a way that was not the case for media hitherto, many parents are learning about computers and the Internet alongside their children, and they tend to express amazement at their children's facility with the new technology. Indeed, children often find themselves much valued within the family, admired for their skills on the Internet, the use of which is an occasion for approval and expertise that—significantly—may not have otherwise have come their way (Livingstone and Bober, 2003).

17. See Livingstone (2001). Consider also the U.K. government's recent reversal of its decision to provide every pupil with an e-mail address, having realized the risks of listing these on the school Web site (indeed, the risks of making public any information about particular children—the school photo, cup winners, etc.). Children's lost opportunities—although in some cases justified—should be recognized.

18. After all, the same factors that make the media environment difficult to regulate nationally—as it becomes more complex, diversified, commercialized, and globalized, including more potentially harmful contents—also make it difficult to regulate domestically, within the home. Yet a key strategy of the present U.K. government, notwithstanding parents' avowed preference for top-down media regulation in the public interest rather than being “empowered” to regulate difficult-to-implement technology in their own homes, is to devolve responsibility for accessing and using media from the state to individual members of the public, this being framed in policy terms as a matter of media literacy (Livingstone, 2004).

19. Article 16 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that “no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy.”

20. As *Cybersitter*'s promotional materials elaborate, “parents, not censorship can help to make Cyberspace a safe place to play.” (<http://www.solidoak.com/>, Retrieved September 12, 2005).