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Risk communication in the Internet Age: Parental challenges in monitoring the Internet use of adolescents

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Risk communication in the Internet Age:
Parental challenges in monitoring the internet use of adolescents

by

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LIST OF FIGURES

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ABSTRACT

Today's experts encourage serious conversations between parents and children about the risks of online activities, including sexual predators, identity theft, and bullying. This study gathers qualitative data regarding effective communication strategies parents have adopted to alert and educate their adolescent children about personal safety risks online. To what extent do parents and children agree about house rules regarding Internet use? Are there discrepancies in these two parties' views regarding what are unsafe and acceptable online habits? This study tests the tenets of social learning theory to discern the impact of parental modeling behaviors such as effective rule making and punishments. It also examined the extent to which parent and child views are congruent and are in agreement over Internet use rules and practices at home. To gather data, ten mother-adolescent child dyads were interviewed face-to-face.

The participants report a number of Internet safety practices at home. These include large doses of anecdotes and lessons from parents, the integration of lesson learned from public school programs into house rules, and parental access to children's online accounts. Parents also report using filtering and blocking software, setting children's online accounts for maximum privacy, acting as "friends" on social networking sites, and children's participation in extra-curricular activities. Suggestions to improve parental monitoring practices are offered.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A Legitimate Threat

We live in an age where cyber-stalking, online predators and identity theft have become legitimate threats. Law enforcement officers at all levels, Internet crime experts, child psychologists, and other authority figures are increasingly urging parents to monitor the online activities of their children as well as communicate to them the importance of safeguarding their online presence. In a letter posted on the US Department of Justice's website, Louis J. Freech, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), outlines the dangers children face online if parents are not watchful. He writes:

> Our children are our nation's most valuable assets. They represent the bright future of our country and hold our hopes for a better nation. Our children are also the most vulnerable members of society. Protecting them against criminals must be a national priority.

> Unfortunately, the same advances in computer and telecommunication technology that allow our children to reach out to new sources of knowledge and cultural experiences are also leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and harm by sex offenders.

> I hope this pamphlet helps you to understand the complexities of on-line child exploitation. For further information, please contact your local FBI office or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-567 (p. 1).

The letter also instructs parents how to search the FBI's website for tips on how to determine if children are being solicited online, and offers talking points on Internet safety,

among other information items. The FBI also suggests that parents should maintain access to their children's online and e-mail accounts, have their children identify the websites they visit often, look into the parental control tools provided by Internet service providers, or employ some software to block suspicious sites (US Department of Justice, 2009).

While these suggestions seem to be logical, they do not take into account the extent to which parents and their children trust each other, ethical issues about privacy, or why children hesitate to orient their elders to their online activities. The use of filtering software can also be problematic in that they may reject safe material without curtailing the flow of questionable content. Advise on how to protect children from sexual predators often fails to mention other dangers such as online bullying, identity theft or cyber-stalking.

In their book *So Sexy, So Soon,* authors Diane Levin and Jean Kilbourne, experts on early childhood development and media advertising, respectively, address the various ways in which unmonitored exposure to media, including online sources, have exposed children to sex and risky sexual behaviors at an increasingly younger age. To offset this, Levin and Kilbourne (2008) recommend that parents situate computers in high traffic locations in the home instead of lodging them in children's bedrooms. They also suggest that parents join social networks to understand how to better monitor their children's online activities. Talking to children about what information about themselves is acceptable for online posting is another tip the authors offer.

These guidelines are important because they are not readily available to many. Unless parents are actively monitoring online habits, they often accidentally stumble upon objectionable content and practices. Many are therefore not aware of the need for, or even how to take, proper precautions.

Not Enough Attention

A study conducted by the Departments of Communications and Psychology at California State University in 2006 examined the correlation between parenting styles and how adolescents use the social networking site MySpace. The researchers collected data from 266 teen users and their parents using separate online questionnaires. The results showed that 38% of parents had never looked at their child's MySpace site, 14% had rarely viewed it, and only 16% reported checking on it once a week. Also, 38% of the parent-respondents said they had never talked to their children about MySpace. Parents estimated that their children spent 9.5 hours per week on the site while teens reported spending 11 hours per week on it. Parents were also found to be more likely to limit the Internet use of pre-teens than teenagers (Rosen et al., 2008).

Those whose parenting style was labeled "more strict" (authoritarian or authoritative) were more likely to monitor their child's MySpace site and less likely to have children who disclose personal information online. The study concluded that while parents had high concerns about dangerous online situations, they did not step up their monitoring activities. Neither did they limit their teenager's online activities (Rosen et al., 2008).

Unanswered Questions

Rosen et al.'s (2008) study presented more questions than answers about parental monitoring of children's Internet use. Their parent-participants failed to describe their monitoring practices, and children were not able to elaborate on how they spend their time online. If concerns about negative online situations are high, why are parents not seemingly more vigilant about their supervision? Rosen et al. observed that adolescents and their

parents reported different amounts of time children spend online. Are there other discrepancies between parent and child in terms of children's Internet use? What exactly are parents doing to monitor how their children employ the Internet? What do children consider to be the most effective action taken by parents help keep them safe online?

In a 2005 study that examined teenagers' Internet use and family rules, Wang et al. (2005) found that while 61% of their parent-respondents (out of the 749 dyad responders) reported setting rules regarding Internet use, their children claimed they were not aware of such rules. In contrast, 8% of the children who reported they had Internet rules had parents who reported otherwise. Their recommendations for further research include investigating pare and children's views about Internet rules.

While many parents may think they are doing an adequate job of monitoring their child's Internet use or outlining for them what activities are acceptable to engage in online, many have observed that children take parental warnings for granted. These warnings do not hold much water, many say, when kids use the Internet freely outside of the home environment, especially in situations where effective supervision is limited or is not possible. This study extends the previous works that capitalized on parent-child dyads to arrive at workable measures to ensure that children can have access to an important communication medium while keeping them aware of the risks such medium may pose. To arrive at more behaviorally realistic measures to keep children safe while indulging in Internet activities and to educate them about how to become more thoughtful Internet users, experts suggest examining the "mental models" of these two groups to reveal knowledge gaps and areas of incongruence in terms of their perspectives regarding acceptable online behavior.

The current study uses Chaffee and McLeod's (1973) coorientation approach to examine what happens when two separate groups are "simultaneously co-oriented to an object of communication" (p. 474). When two groups have different views about an issue, the theory proposes that psychological tension develops between them and that this tension may be reduced in any of three ways: the tension is resolved if a group changes its attitude toward the issue or object, if a group persuades the other to change its attitude, or if both groups stop communicating with each other.

The coorientation model also addresses the agreement, congruency and accuracy of perspectives, perceptions, and understandings of both subjects in relation to each other and to the problem or issue at hand (McLeod and Chaffee, 1973). This model enables the examination of the thoughts and actions of children and parents regarding the children's Internet use. The goal is to understand what methods parents apply to supervise their children's Internet behaviors and what resources, if any, were utilized to perform this function. The parents' evaluations of the utility of these resources will also be assessed.

This study is necessary to determine successful and failed parental monitoring tactics from the viewpoint of adolescents. This information may be of great value to law enforcement officers and those who are charged with designing social networking policy. The findings can be used by these two sectors to better understand the parent-child divide and how to make online spaces safe. Child psychologists, educators, and parents can also develop more successful approaches toward enhancing the online literacy of children based on how children perceive parental rules. Approaches that cater to adolescents would help them develop a deeper awareness and appreciation of dangerous and acceptable behavior

online. More dialogue between adults and their children is expected lead to a heightened awareness of each other's expectations and greater online safety.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The cyber world has come to have real beneficial and harmful effects on those who access it often. Among the detrimental effects, perhaps nothing is more troublesome than the dangers posed to children by scrupulous users. In his book, *Should Social Networking Be Banned?,* Espejo (2008) details one of the most serious of these consequences—the use of the Internet by child predators:

> In July 2007, the social network service MySpace identified and removed 29,000 known sex offenders' profiles from its website. This figure, however, only includes members who used their real names to register on MySpace and is more than quadruple the number that MySpace had estimated earlier. Also, by that time, around 100 cases of members using MySpace to commit crimes was publicly reported (p. 7).

Not only have children been exposed or fallen prey to online predators; they also succumb to the dangers of cyber-stalking, harassment, and identity theft. This often occurs because many Internet users are too trusting or are simply not aware of the dangers present in the online world. Some parents believe the easiest and most effective solution to these online dangers is to prohibit children's use of the Internet (Espejo 2008; Aftab, 2000; Internet Safety, 2009). Yet experts argue that not exposing children to the beneficial utilities of the Internet—social networking sites included—does more harm than good. After all, these sites help young people create and maintain life-long connections with others and give them a sense of community. Additionally, while children and teenagers on MySpace and similar networking websites face potential risks, most use online communities to develop real-life friendships, and not to merely communicate with strangers (Espejo, 2008).

Indeed, according to Aftab (2000), to deny children Internet access is to "deny them the tools they need to succeed. The Internet isn't optional anymore—it's essential to our children's future. There are so many ways parents can make sure that their children are armed against the darker side of the Internet without unplugging them completely" (p. 1).

Rather than secluding children from the Internet, the website KidsHealth.com (2008) suggests that getting involved in children's Internet use is a far more effective tool in protecting them: "Taking an active role in your kids' Internet activities will help ensure that they benefit from the wealth of valuable information it offers without being exposed to potential dangers" (para.18).

The Importance of Parental Guidance

Potential online threats have understandably led to intensified research efforts to keep children safe. These investigations span a range of subjects, including the amount of time spent online, the sites children visit, the kinds of information they disclose, the use of online filtering software, what behaviors are predominant among children who are solicited, and parent-child communication. This broad range of variables examined reflects the varied online dangers as well as the importance of keeping kids safe online.

United States lawmakers have taken action in an attempt to make the Internet a safer place for children. Toward this end, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) was enacted to prevent any party from requesting a child's personal information without a parent's consent. For example, the Act mandates that for children to play games online, they do not have to divulge their name (Internet Safety, 2008). However, COPPA only applies to operators of commercial websites and services, and only limits what kind and how much

information they can collect from minors under the age of 13. The Act also stipulates that the

collection of any information must be optional, that parents must be able to access the

information in case they want to delete it, and that personal information remains private and

will not be disclosed to third parties (FTC, 2009).

While these laws do work to some degree to keep information about children safe,

they cannot limit the information children give out freely. In a letter addressed to parents,

former FBI director Louis Freeh states, "There are dangers in every part of our society. By

educating children to these dangers and taking appropriate steps to protect them, they can

benefit from the wealth of information now available online" (US Department of Justice,

2009). The government and child psychology experts agree that parents are the most

important safeguards against Internet misuse and abuse.

Parry Aftab, a cyberspace lawyer, CNN correspondent on online child protection, and

former executive director of Cyberangels (an online community of cyber neighborhood

watchers), wrote *The Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace* (2000). In

that volume, she offers methods for parents to keep their kids safe online. Her best piece of

advice is for parents to educate their children about Internet dangers:

> Of all the tools and tips I share with you, the most important one, more important than any software or hardware device you can buy, is that the first and best line of defense is Internet education. You have to teach your children to be aware and careful in cyberspace. Even if you use every technology protection available, unless your children know what to expect and how to react when they run into something less than perfect online, they are at risk. We can't filter life. So arming them means teaching them well (p. 183).

Diane Levin and Jean Kilbourne, experts on childhood development and the media,

also emphasize in their book *So Sexy, So Soon* (2008) that parents need to communicate to

their children what constitutes acceptable Internet behavior and interactions. Children should also be encouraged to alert their parents of any online content that make them feel uncomfortable, and then to engage parents in discussions about such matters.

Kidshealth.com says the Internet can be a wonderful resource for kids; however, it can also be dangerous. For example, if a search for "Legos" is mistyped as "Legs" the results could contain pornographic material. According to this website, the best way to handle this type of situation is to address it before it occurs. "Just like any safety issue, it's wise to talk with your kids about your concerns, take advantage of resources to protect them, and keep a close eye on their activities" (para. 4).

In his book, *Youth, Identity & Digital Media,* Buckingham (2008) notes that "technology and networked publics are not going away. As a society, we need to figure out how to educate teens to navigate social structures that are unfamiliar to us…it is in our best interest to figure out how to help them" (p. 138).

With government organizations, child psychology experts, and Internet watchdog groups advocating parental communication as the key to educating children on Internet safety procedures, it comes as no surprise that many studies regarding child Internet use also mention the role of parents.

In a 2001 study of 56,000 US households concerning computer and Internet use by children and adolescents, DeBell and Chapman (2003) found that 59% of children and adolescents 5-17 years old (31 million people) use the Internet. Among children in the high school age bracket, 15-17 years old, the number of users increased to 75%. Older adolescents were found to be 50% more likely to use the Internet than younger children. Children from

higher income families and those who live outside of central cities also are more likely to use the Internet; 78% of those 31 million children use the Internet at home.

This study also indicates that older children use the Internet—and broader applications of it— more often than younger children. Also, Internet access is more likely to be available to children in homes where parents have higher education and incomes and who are White or Asian. The present study on parent-child Internet communication solicits the perspectives of parents and children from these households because they are most likely to have Internet access.

Ybarra and Mitchell (2008) found that most children who say they have been sexually solicited or harassed online report that the incident did not happen on social networking sites as many had originally suspected. Instead, the majority of the predators used instant messaging services or chat rooms. The study concludes that the drive to ban social networking sites, popular among teenagers, is thus ill founded. Researchers suggest that the prevention of Internet dangers should then focus on children's online behaviors and their psychological profiles as opposed to the technologies they use. In other words, children's behavior places them at risk, not the technology they employ (pp. 354-355).

Ybarra and Mitchell (2008) suggest that future research ought to examine whether specific characteristics of youth, such as bonds with a parent or loneliness, work to increase or decrease the likelihood of acting in a safe manner or engaging in risky behaviors while online. Acting in a safe or "self-proactive" manner is defined as "limiting profiles online to only known friends and not engaging in conversations with unknown persons." Risky behavior is defined as "revealing or sharing personal information through a profile or another method, and discussing sex with unknown individuals." Furthermore, this type of study

enables pediatricians to help parents understand what characteristics can make children more at risk for detrimental online behaviors (p. 356).

Wang, Bianci, and Raley (2005) found that out of the 749 parent-teen dyads they surveyed, 61% of parents say they have rules about Internet usage, while 32% of the kids say they think there are no rules at all. The researchers note that this discrepancy could be due to the fact that parents and their children do not have the same definition of what constitutes a rule, and that a barrier for the enforcement of these rules exists (p. 1257).

Factors such as the quality of parent-child relationship could be intertwined with Internet rule-setting and parent-child disagreement. Further, the nature of the rules (e.g., their flexibility and consistency of enforcement) could also be intervening factors. Further research on family rules needs to consider this shared experience element in parental monitoring of children's behavior. Parents' own and shared Internet experiences with their children are also strongly associated with a more constrained home environment for teens' Internet use (Wang, Bianci and Raley, 2005).

The current study examines comparisons of what constitutes a rule and what constitutes rule enforcement from the perspective of both the parent and the child. Also, the study observes the frequency with which parents recall sharing their own Internet experiences with their children.

Factors that Exacerbate Risks

Ybarra et al. (2007) found that when children engage in four or more risky online behaviors, the chance of online interpersonal victimization increases. Risky online behaviors include "disclosing personal information, engaging in conversation with someone met online,

harassing behavior, sexual behavior, pornography seeking, and downloading files from a file sharing program" (p. 143). Other factors for high risk include past physical or sexual abuse, high parental conflict, and offline interpersonal victimization. The study concludes that "pediatricians should help parents assess their children's overall Internet use and behaviors as well as identify rules that reduce the total number of types of online behaviors in addition to rules about specific behaviors" (pp. 143-144).

The researchers also recommend that children who have high conflict relationships with parents need other stable relationships to engage them and reduce their risky tendencies. The present study continues this examination of communication in parent-child relationships.

The Threat to Children's Privacy

Livingstone (2004) notes the general agreement that children are naïve consumers and are sexual innocents, both of which are the primary reasons why children are preyed upon. She suggests that a third yet rarely discussed threat is parental invasion of children's privacy. That is, well-intentioned parents may, 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. The author believes there are alternatives to parent policing and constant invasion of privacy that does not erode the parent-child relationship.

An alternative to parent policing is one that balances the risks to children from unrestricted Internet use against the risks of invading their privacy when restricting their access to the Internet. In other words, a child-centered approach seeks a balance between children's safety and privacy (Livingstone, 2004). The child-centered approach to parenting

is defined as "allowing the child some input in regard to rules, allowing a degree of privacy, yet the parent can still set limits to which the child must abide" (p. 32).

Livingstone, in her 2008 study, finds that the social networking site Facebook is increasingly threatening the privacy of teen users. While parents may be comforted by Facebook's so-called high level options for privacy settings, Livingstone points out that teens have a much different sense of what information should be private, and who should be privy to such information. Further, teens seem to have troubles explaining how to change or where to find privacy settings on their social networking pages, demonstrating that the perceived Internet literacy of some teens is inaccurate and confirming that site settings are poorly designed so that users have a hard time locating them (p. 410-411).

In a telephone survey of 1,501 parent-child dyads regarding child Internet usage, Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005) found an interesting discrepancy. Thirty three percent of their parent-respondents reported they used either Internet filtering or blocking software in their homes, yet 84% of the parents felt that adults should be extremely concerned about the potential exposure of youth to sexual material on the Internet. A substantial number of parents indicated they only used filtering software as a secondary or alternative safety measure.

Ybarra, Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak (2009) report that while blocking and filtering software is far from eradicating all exposure to sexual material online, caregivers should include the use of such preventative software in their Internet safety practices. This recommendation is due to the fact that Internet users ages 10–15 reported a 59% lower odds of exposure to sexual content than young web users who live in homes that did not use such software (p. 863).

Family Dynamics

Following their survey of parents who used filtering or blocking software, Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005) suggest that the dynamics of a family as a whole need to be taken into account before any specific means of prevention is recommended. It is likely that the most effective strategies will vary depending on such variables as the age of the children, parents' Internet knowledge, and the relationships between and among family members. The current study aims to analyze the dynamics of the family in regards to parent examples, parent-child relationships, and quality of parent-child communication regarding Internet habits.

Rosen, Cheever and Carrier (2008), studying the behavior of teenagers on MySpace and parent Internet monitoring practices, found that teens had healthy behaviors towards unhealthy advances. They found a discrepancy between parent perceptions and their actual monitoring measures, much like what Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005) uncovered. That is, parents were highly concerned about Internet dangers, but parental monitoring or imposed limits did not reflect this concern.

Parenting Style

Rosen, Cheever and Carrier also measured teen disclosure of personal information compared with parent perceptions of such. The results displayed parental underestimation. The findings showed that parenting style strongly correlates with not only parent behavior towards the Internet but also with teen online behavior. The authoritative parenting style exhibited the lowest level of teens that behaved "counterproductively" online.

Counterproductive behavior was operationally defined as "giving out personal information, talking to strangers, or talking about sexual topics," among other actions (p. 470).

Parenting methods has been the subject of previous studies about child Internet use. In his book *Me, MySpace, and I,* Larry Rosen (2007) elaborates on parenting methods and how they contribute to the study of online child behavior. Rosen uses the four parenting styles as defined by Baumrind and associates (1991) at the University of California. These four main parenting styles are authoritarian, indulgent, authoritative, and neglectful.

Authoritarian parents are strict rule setters who impose severe punishments and do not solicit input from their children. *Indulgent* parents set few rules and rarely punish; established rules are often not enforced. *Authoritative* parents set rules and limits but allow their child to give input and engage in discussions about the rules. Rules are enforced and violations are punished, but also discussed with the child. These parents use positive reinforcement to reward good behaviors (pp. 181-182).

According to Rosen (2007), authoritative parenting usually produces the strongest bond between parent and child and is the most influential in eliciting proactive online behavior in children. Parents who practice the neglectful style often ignore their children and participate as little as possible in rule making or interaction. Rosen notes the effects each parenting style can have: "Children with authoritative parents are the most psychologically healthy…when compared with other parenting styles that either lacked warmth and responsiveness (authoritarian), limit setting and rules (indulgent), or both (neglectful)" (p. 183).

Rosen's (2007) comprehensive study of over 4,000 teens (aged 14-18) found that 32% reported that their parents were authoritative, 37% said their parents were neglectful,

15% said they were authoritarian, and 15% found their parents indulgent. Teens who indicated they have indulgent parents spent 15 hours per week on MySpace compared to those with neglectful parents (11 hours), authoritative parents (9 hours) and authoritarian parents (6 hours). Adolescents who reported their parents as authoritative also felt they had more parent-teen intimacy, were more socially confident, and trusted and communicated with their parents more (p. 183).

Teens who reported indulgent, neglectful, or authoritarian parents were found to be more likely to have low self-esteem, behavioral problems, and have a greater risk for depression. These children were also more likely to reach out or be vulnerable to strangers online. Such results show that "clearly, parents can make a lasting effect on their children simply by following an authoritative parenting style" (p. 183). The current study also evaluates the impact of parenting style on children's perceptions of how they should behave online.

A study of 7th and 10th graders in the California public schools from 2000-2001 found that most online social interaction involves chatting with friends or sharing gossip (Gross, 2004). Gross also reported that most 10th grade boys had an online presence longer than girls, but at the 7th grade level, males and females go online for the same amount of time. Thus, the author suggested the need for "qualitative data to illustrate findings, but also to illuminate critical, subjective aspects of adolescent Internet use…that may be difficult to capture in fixed-response measures at such a preliminary point in the domain of investigation" (pp. 645-646).

Buckingham (2008) says that adults define youth according to their own perceptions and rarely take the perspectives of children into consideration. At the same time, "there is

evidence that many young people are aware of adult representations of their generation and orient to them, while simultaneously orienting to their own experiences…this double awareness or 'dual consciousness' is particularly characteristic of the so-called Internet Generation" (p. 78). In other words, children make decisions about their online use in consideration of their parents' position and expectations.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory operates on the idea that the role of parents is to establish their child's inhibitory controls. The way a person develops social responses is an example of social learning. "Those who control the child's environment (i.e., parents) have the power to reward morally acceptable behaviors while punishing transgressions. In doing so, parents and other powerful figures are said to shape the moral conduct of young children" (Henderson, 1981, p. 87).

Social learning theory, as applied to parent-child relationships, posits various ways by which parents or adult role models can affect how their children learn and develop particular behaviors. Parents can shape their child's behavior by rewarding positive practices with affection or praise; or they can punish unpleasant behaviors. Children can also pick up on the basic social responses of their parents and then adapt those same moral standards to avoid parental rejection. This adaptation method is called "the dependency drive" (Henderson, 1981, p. 87). Critics of this version of the social learning model caution that it does not take the cognitive abilities of the child into account; neither does it elucidate how the children's active thinking allows them to decide which behaviors to adopt.

Bandura's (1977) social learning model states that social behavior is learned by observing the behavior of models, such as parents. This, in effect, is observational, "no-trial" learning, meaning that children can learn just by watching parents' behavior instead of learning from their own experience. The model states that the child's cognitive abilities allow him or her to understand the significance of the modeled sequence or situation happening in front of them, and then file that information in memory for use at a later date. Through social learning, "children can develop moral standards through their interactions with parent and many other agents of socialization" (Henderson, 1981, p. 88).

The propositions of social learning theory are applicable in determining whether children are conditioned about their online behaviors by the rewards or punishments meted out by parents. A lack of praise or limitations on the part of the parent may then signify a negligent or indulgent parenting style. Specifically, Bandura's model is applicable in determining whether children learned their online behaviors from a source other than a parent, instead of adopting similar online behaviors of another adult, peer, or sibling. The model can also be instrumental in determining what type of cognitive process lead children to choose a particular behavior over another.

Coorientation Theory

Coorientation theory was first introduced in Theodore Newcomb's book, *The Acquaintance Process* (1961) in which orientation is broadly defined as how individuals relate themselves to things in their environment. Coorientation is the interpersonal communication process that occurs when two groups or persons are both oriented to the same topic of communication. Newcomb explains that "participants, however familiar with one

another they may already be, acquire information about each other, assess one another's attitudes, and either reinforce existing states of orientation toward each other and toward the common world, change them, or develop new ones" (p. 259).

McLeod and Chaffee (1973) elaborate on the assumptions and uses of the coorientation approach:

> The key assumption underlying this approach is that a person's behavior is not based simply upon his private cognitive construction of his world; it is also a function of his perception of the orientations held by others around him and of his orientation to them. A further assumption is that under certain conditions of interaction, the actual cognitions and perception of others will also affect his behavior. Finally, it is possible to assume that the small social system functions partly as a unit on the basis of inter-cognitive relations within it—without the individual member necessarily being aware of these factors (p. 470).

In this study, this approach will help to discern the thoughts of parents and their children and elicit from both parties how they communicate with each other about Internet rules and limitations of online use, and to determine the extent to which parents and children agree on certain issues related to how young people should use the Internet and how they conduct themselves online. McLeod and Chaffee's coorientation model suggests three measures that can be elicited from the parent-teen dyad:

"1. Agreement (also called mutuality), or the similarity of feelings between two persons, such as reciprocated liking or disliking.

2. Congruency, the similarity between the perception of the other person's feelings and one's own feelings.

3. Accuracy, the correctness of one's perception of the other person's feelings compared with the other person's actual feelings about a person, object or event" (p. 475).

In the current study, the relationships between these variables considering a parent-child dyad are diagrammed in Figure 1.
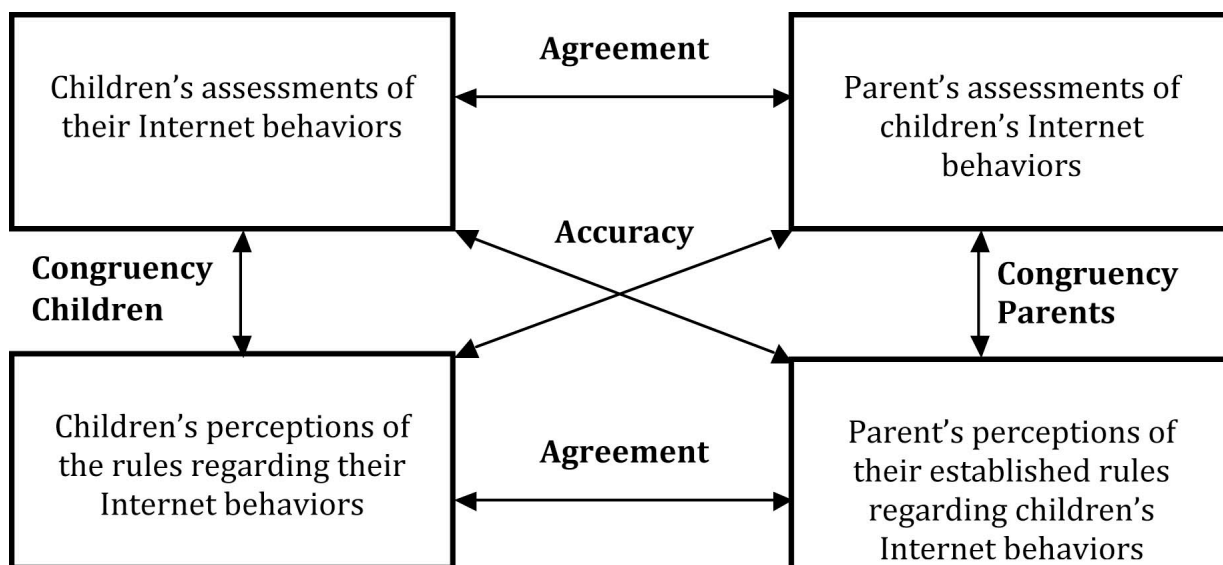
Figure 1. The study's coorientation model as adapted from Chaffee and McLeod, 1973

Research Questions

Based on the foregoing literature as well as the tenets of social learning and coorientation theories, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What rules do parents have regarding Internet use? What rules do children perceive are in force? To what extent do parents and children differ in their perceptions of these rules?

RQ2: To what extent do parents communicate about safety and privacy protocols regarding Internet use? In what ways are these protocols made known to adolescents? To what extent do parents reinforce these rules?

RQ3: To what extent do children follow their parent's guidelines? Do children discuss their concerns with parents? To what extent do parents think their children follow their guidelines? To what extent do parents discuss their concerns with their children?

RQ4: What practices were considered by participants to be most effective in reducing risky online behaviors?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

In order to reveal the points of view adolescents and parents hold regarding how children should use the Internet at home or elsewhere, a qualitative inquiry was conducted.

Interpretive qualitative research examines people in their natural settings and works to understand how they create meaning and understanding in their everyday lives (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). Personal stories obtained from one-on-one interviews help to discover the boundaries that parents set for their children and how both parties regard these boundaries. Interviewing these two groups separately is expected to reveal the parameters parents set for their children and the measures they have taken so that children become more thoughtful Internet users.

Research Design

Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews. This method allows interviewees to elaborate on responses and allot time for their recollections, opinions, motivations, experiences and other thoughts that add to the richness of the study. During these interviews, the researcher can also take note of non-verbal responses. Also, questions can be personalized based on the participants' answers, allowing the researcher to prompt the interviewee to elaborate on important points (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).

The questions asked during these interviews seek to separately elicit parent and child perceptions to find similarities and discrepancies in their orientations toward Internet use and household rules regarding the use of this medium. In this study, the researcher acts as both moderator and observer.

Ten pairs of parent-child participants were interviewed. All interviews, except for one[1], took place in neutral locations, such as libraries, coffee shops, or community centers to allow the researcher to observe parent-child relationship in natural settings. The semi-structured questionnaire used during the interviews was divided into two parts for each parent-child dyad. All interviews were completed over a six-month time period.

Sampling

Each dyad in this sample consisted of the female parent and a pre-teen or a teenage child. The mothers were targeted for interviews because of the following reasons:

1. Mothers generally spend more time with their children than fathers. Married mothers in the US spend an average of 12.9 hours per week caring for their children compared to the 6.5 hours per week fathers spend on the same activity. Single mothers devote an average of 11.8 hours per week caring for their kids (Bianchi, 2006).

2. Most families have a mother in the household. On the national scale, out of 12.9 million single-parent families, 10.4 million are headed by single mothers (US Census Bureau, 2006).

3. Mothers are more likely to be the parent who monitors children's media use (Valkenburg 1999; van der Voort, 1992; Bybee, 1982) and do so almost 70% of the time in the specific case of Internet monitoring (Mitchell et al., 2005).

The adolescent participants were pre-teens and teens between the ages of 11-14. They were selected for the interviews because most children at this age spend more time on the

[1] This interview was to take place at the local library, which was closed for unknown reasons upon the investigator's arrival. The interview was then moved to the participants' home at their invitation.

computer to enhance peer connections and do homework and school assignments. Older teens do not make ideal participants because, with part-time jobs and driver's licenses, they have already attained some degree of independence. Other activities reduce the amount of time they spend at home, and consequently, the need for parental guidance regarding Internet use (Mitchell et al., 2005).

Thus, mothers with adolescent children between the ages 11-14 were the target respondents for this qualitative study. To arrive at this purposive sample, volunteers who lived within a 100-mile radius of Ames, Iowa were recruited using fliers. Fliers were posted at public locations in the Ames area, including grocery stores, coffee shops, libraries, and other retailers. Contacts with the Boone Public Schools system resulted in the fliers being posted at the Boone Middle School.

To expand the sample, volunteers were asked to name potential respondents in a snowball sampling technique. Initial participants were asked to recommend other possible participants until ten parent-child dyads were recruited. These new referrals were initially contacted by telephone to request their participation, followed by an e-mail message with more information about the study and a request for interview dates. A copy of the flier can be found in Appendix B. The telephone and e-mail scripts are detailed in Appendix C.

The Study Instrument

The instrument used for these in-depth interviews was a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of pretested questions. There is a separate questionnaire for parents and the children.

The first portion of the questionnaire consists of basic questions regarding Internet access, parenting style, and parenting attitudes. The second portion was composed of questions regarding rules about Internet use, what kind of enforcement practices exist for these rules, parents' expectations of the children's Internet use, and the child's self described Internet behaviors.

The questionnaire was pretested on a convenience sample of mothers and teens to ensure clarity and appropriateness of questions. The questionnaire also was subjected to the review of and approval by the university's Institutional Review Board for research projects that deal with human subjects before the start of data gathering. The IRB approval is attached in Appendix A. A copy of the study's Parent Questionnaire can be found in Appendix F, and the Adolescent Questionnaire can be found in Appendix G.

Conducting the Interview

The in-depth interviews of mother-child pairs were done face-to-face in a neutral location. Each respondent was interviewed privately and separately to ensure that his or her answers are truthful and are not influenced by the other member of the dyad. Prior to the interviews, the mothers were asked to sign a consent form indicating that she and her child are voluntarily and freely participating in the research sessions.

The interview style was conversational and relaxed. Prompts were used to aid the flow of the discussion. The participants were told that at any time during the process, they could request to end the interview or stop the recording. The investigator explained the purpose of the study and the rights of participants at the beginning of each interview. At each instance, both adult and adolescent participants were asked to indicate that they understood

and agreed to the parameters of the study. The adult consent form is attached in Appendix D; the adolescent assent form is shown in Appendix E.

Analyzing the Data

The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Extensive notes taken during the interviews supplemented the transcribed materials. The interview transcripts, the audio recordings, and the notes were for the researcher's use only and are otherwise completely confidential. Following each interview, the conversations were transferred into a text document to be used for the remainder of the study. These conversations were analyzed to identify common themes and incongruent responses. The recordings and other materials were destroyed at the completion of the study.

The participants' open-ended responses were analyzed to identify common themes according to the tenets of the social learning and coorientation theories. The person perception tests provide measurements of the interpersonal variables involved in coorientation theory. They specify three variables related to the cognitions and perceptions of two persons that constitute a dyad: *mutuality,* the similarity of feelings between the two persons, such as reciprocated liking or disliking; *congruency,* the similarity between the perception of the other person's feelings and one's own; and *accuracy,* the correctness of one's perception of the other person's feelings and compared with that person's actual feelings about the individual (McLeod and Chafee, 1973, p. 475). In summary, the model helped determine the degree to which the parent and child are in agreement, are congruent in their perception of safe Internet practices, and how accurately they assess each other's sentiments.

The responses to the open-ended questions regarding parenting style elicited from the child and the mother were used to determine which parenting style is enforced in the household. According to Baumrind et al. (1991), there are four parenting style groups based on two dimensions of parental behavior. These two dimensions are control/"demandingness" and warmth/responsiveness. The four parenting styles are (1) authoritarian (high control and low warmth), (2) indulgent (low control and high warmth), (3) authoritative (high control and high warmth), and (4) neglectful (low control and low warmth). Parent-participants were evaluated according to interview responses and each dyad was assigned the parenting style closest to the answers elicited. Operationally, the study adopts the definition of parenting styles offered by Rosen (2007):

Authoritarian parents are strict rule setters who impose severe punishments and do not solicit input from their children. *Indulgent* parents set few rules and rarely punish; those rules that are established are often not enforced. *Authoritative* parents set rules and limits but allow their child to give input and engage in discussions about the rules. Rules are enforced and violations are punished, but also discussed with the child. These parents use positive reinforcement to reward good behaviors. Finally, *neglectful* parents are classified as those who rarely, if ever, make any rules and actually provide little to no guidance for their children (pp. 181-182).

Enhancing Validity

The validity of the responses was enhanced by interviewing parents and children separately to maintain confidentiality. The backup recordings of interviews supplemented copious written notes. Data were collected from the conversations with participants as well as

the researcher's observation of the mother-child relationship at home. Member checks and audit trails, techniques that allow the researcher to re-interview participants to confirm their responses, were other ways by which the results were validated.

The researcher's program of study committee members also served as research team members who previewed the research methods and made the researcher aware of misinterpretations and/or biases. Also, the committee approved each step of the inquiry and was consulted during the data gathering and analysis phases.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the ways parents communicate to their children the personal safety risks that accompany regular Internet use by analyzing the interview responses and accounts of parent-child dyads. The open-ended discourse of adolescent and adult participants were examined to gather insights on the problems or difficulties parents encounter in monitoring and providing guidance regarding their children's Internet use, and the measures they have taken to offset these problems and constraints.

The Participants

Ten pairs, each composed of a mother and an adolescent child who use the Internet at home, participated in in-depth interviews. Mothers were specifically chosen in adherence to the findings of previous studies that they were more likely to monitor their children's media use and were the designated Internet monitors in households 70% of the time (Mitchell et al., 2005). Children between the ages of 11 to 14 were interviewed in recognition of the fact that Internet use at this stage is heightened both for schoolwork and for maintaining peer relationships (Mitchell et al., 2005). It was assumed that older children have already passed the crucial stage for becoming aware of and learning about Internet risks.

The age range for the mothers in this study was 32–47 years, with an average age of 39 years. Levels of education for the adult participants ranged from high school to a master's degree. Two of the parent-respondents reported obtaining two master's degrees. Occupations varied widely and were included in each parent-child profile.

The age range for adolescents in this study was 12-15 years,[2] with an average age of 13 years. Years in school ranged from 7th to 9th grade, with three each in the 7th grade and 9th grade, and four in the 8th grade.

All participants identified themselves as Caucasian, an expected outcome considering the geographic location of the study. The study included nine families from across Iowa and one family from Nebraska. These participants were identified using the snowball sampling method in which a family referred other families for potential interviews.

The following section describes the demographic profile of each mother and child tandem, the children's pattern of Internet use, the household rules regarding Internet use as the children and the parents understood them to be, and the points of convergence and divergence in the child's and the parent's perspectives and practices regarding acceptable Internet behavior. The section also elaborates on the ways mother and child negotiate how the family should manage the children's Internet habits.

Ella and Erin

Ella is in eighth grade, the oldest of four kids, and feels particularly close to her mother. She and her mother, Erin, a childcare provider, demonstrated strong agreement in their responses to questions regarding household rules, parenting style, and types of punishment for Internet use violations.

At home, they have agreed to treat each other with respect, abstain from verbal and physical fights with siblings, and follow a daily chore checklist. Both were aware that gross

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2 A male participant was 14 years old when his mother was first contacted about their participation. By the time the interviews were held, he had celebrated his 15th birthday. At the time of the interview, he was just two weeks past his birthday and in the same school grade as the other participants.

violation of rules leads to a loss of privileges for any combination of TV, computer or Wii time.

Although Ella is involved in three extra-curricular activities, she reports spending between 90-120 minutes per day on the Internet; most or all of that time is dedicated to the social networking site, Facebook. Erin, on the other hand, estimates that Ella is online only 30-60 minutes per day, the only major discrepancy in their accounts. Ella's favorite activity on Facebook is participating in a game called *What to Wear* in which she is given an event and must design a "cute" outfit for her character to wear. Other participants then vote for the best attires for any given event. She enjoys this game because many of her friends also join in the play.

Erin says she rarely has to discipline Ella whom she found to be very responsible and obedient. She believes mutual interests strengthen her relationship with her daughter; they often view websites or play games on Facebook together. Erin says there are no Internet time limits for her kids as long as they do not neglect their responsibilities. She occasionally checks browser history to see what sites her kids have been visiting, but she is fairly sure the children are not aware that she does so. Indeed, Ella does not think her parents do any checking at all.

Ella discussed at length an instance when she felt uneasy on the web:

I went to some ad featured at the top of the site…and found it was for lesbians. I thought that's kind of weird. It was right on top of the page. I felt uncomfortable [when I saw the ad]. I changed websites because I didn't want to look at it. They could have just shown the ad with words…instead of showing [a picture of] two girls.

Ella was dismayed that this type of content was being delivered in such a blatant manner.

Words, instead of a photo, would have been less offensive to her. Erin was unaware of this

incident, but explains how she screens sites for inappropriate images before the kids

encounter them:

> I think flat out searches can be risky just because you don't know what's going to pop up. That's why the Google Kids site is helpful…I have to approve the handful of websites they go to. Parental controls are a wonderful thing. I have to put in my password so that they cannot get on sites I have not approved.

Erin explains that each family member has his or her own profile on the computer and

that she controls the settings as the main administrator. She admits adjusting the restrictions

for Ella, making them less stringent and allowing her to access more sites because her

daughter has proven to be a responsible Internet user. Ella demonstrates a discriminating

sensibility by evaluating the offending ad as inappropriate for young audiences like her.

Ella discloses that she is more careful now about the information she shares online:

> Well, I used to put on Facebook that I was babysitting kids. [My mother] told me to be careful with saying things like that on my status page…because people can pull it up. So now, I just say "I'm going to watch a movie with the kids" instead of saying that I'm babysitting. I'm more careful now. It's good that on Facebook, you can mark things as "private" so only certain people can see them.

Asked if she has ever disciplined Ella about any offending online behavior, Erin says,

> We've talked to her about some of her postings. She has the tendency to put too much information there—things like "mother and father are gone." So we told her, "Don't do it!" But those incidents are rare.

> Nevertheless, we created a new rule for the kids: They shouldn't divulge too much personal information...We have to know who their friends are on Facebook. They should know the person before they accept requests to be friends. As for Ella, only those she KNOWS can see her personal information. Her privacy settings are set up like that.

Aside from using a blocking software, Erin says she addresses problems as they occur, part of what she calls her "live and learn attitude." This mother-daughter dyad clearly demonstrates how open communication lines and real-time learning can help the child become more mindful about how to use the Internet safely.

Davey and Donna

Davey is an eighth grader who has three younger siblings. He says that despite occasional arguments with his mother, Donna, they are very close. "Our relationship is really good, I think. Sometimes, but not very often really, we'll argue over stuff. She always ends up being right."

Donna is a part-time customer service representative who stays home with her youngest kids during the daytime. As with Erin and Ella, discrepancies in the views of mother and child are few and far between. At home, Donna insists on an assignment of chores, no rough housing, and some rules regarding Internet and Xbox use. Davey notes that the rules about fighting and noise levels are "extra important" because of his toddler and infant siblings.

Donna explains that the older kids are expected to share with their parents their passwords for all Internet accounts. These include passwords for MySpace, Facebook, and e-mail. They are not allowed to erase text messages. Having this access allows her to spot-check their communications, which she does every couple of months mainly to ensure that the children are not disclosing personal information.

Rule offenders are punished with suspension of electronic privileges such as videogames or visitation rights to friends' houses. Donna says she rarely punishes Davey

since he has gotten older and more responsible. Indeed, it has been over a year since the last time he was grounded.

Davey says his father, who is more computer savvy, does more of the Internet monitoring at home. Donna, however, does not reference her husband as specifically responsible for this task.

Davey estimates that he spends approximately 60 minutes per day online while Donna says her son uses the computer about 30–45 minutes per day. Time spent online may be longer if he has homework that requires using the web.

Davey is very active in sports aside from being a member of the school band, activities that keep him fairly busy throughout the school year. His favorite sites are Xbox.com and Facebook. He spends 10-15 minutes per day looking at new games or guides for his Xbox and at least 15 minutes per day on Facebook where he updates his profile and communicates with school friends or family members. On Facebook, he also plays a game called *Farmville.*

Donna feels it is her job to be a parent and not a friend. That is why she admits being surprised by just how open Davey is with her at times:

> I wouldn't say we are friends because I don't believe parents should be friends with their kids, but we have a good time together. There are things we enjoy doing together. There is this show we both like and we talk about it often. He's pretty open with stuff that happens at school; I'm a bit surprised at the things he shares with me. You'd think he might be embarrassed, but he's really open.

There are no rules specifying how long Davey can be online as long as his homework and other duties are completed and no one else is in line to use the computer. Donna has parental blocks set up on the computer, and asks that the kids do not download anything

without parental permission. When Davey began using the Internet frequently a couple of years back, both she and her husband had frequent conversations with him about things he should be careful with—"We share stories we've heard on the news or from other Internet users so Davey can learn from them." Donna says she monitors the Internet use of her younger (middle) son more closely.

Donna recalls an instance when they had to remind Davey to be wary of sharing personal information with strangers.

> At the beginning, we let him know there are people out there who pretend to be kids. Later, I found that while he was playing Xbox Live (in which you can play videogames with others from around the world in real-time), he was telling someone where we live. We told him there would be no more Xbox if that happens again. I know he thought the other player must be ok because he sounded just like a kid.

Davey says he posts on his Facebook account his birth date, but not the year he was born. He also has his school and town listed on his profile, but not his home address or phone number. He says his privacy settings are high and that he only befriends people he knows. Davey feels pretty conservative with the information he discloses online. His mother thinks he is a fairly cautious kid and feels secure knowing that she can check his accounts any time.

However, Davey describes some actions that mother and child do not seem to consider risky. For instance, Davey has "friended" on Facebook several high school alumni who ostensibly graduated many years ahead of him, but whom he does not really know. He explains, "Most of my Facebook friends are from school, but some are people who graduated already." In another instance, when his family was planning on going out of town,

> I'll say I'm going on vacation or going some place to celebrate Christmas. That way, my friends will know [I'm not home] so they know not to call me and ask me to do stuff with them.

Pennie and Patricia

Pennie is an eighth grader and the oldest of three girls. Pennie's mother, Patricia, is a freelancer in a creative field. Both describe their relationship as close and trusting because they converse at length. Patricia says the two of them watch a movie or shop once a week. Their responses are the same regarding how long Pennie spends online per day.

In their household, there are assigned chores and rules regarding fighting and being respectful of each other. The children need to obtain permission to go online. Offenses are punished with loss of allowance, going to bed early, and in serious cases, loss of television privileges or cancellation of fun activities. Patricia notes, however, that she rarely punishes the kids; threats often suffice to correct bad behavior. She explains that of her children, Pennie rarely gets into trouble with the rules; she gets reprimanded at the most.

Pennie's involvement in seven extracurricular activities, ranging from athletics to fine arts to religious education, limits the amount of time she spends surfing the web. She estimates this at about one-half to a whole hour per day. Patricia agrees with that estimate.

Pennie visits Facebook often. Over the course of a week, she says she spends around three to three and a half hours on it. Facebook, she says, lets her keep up with her best friend whom she no longer sees everyday. She also uses it to communicate with cousins who live across the country, and with other friends over school breaks and summer months.

Her mother helped Pennie set up a Facebook account following her last birthday. In it, she has the maximum privacy settings. Pennie notes her mother keeps the password to her Facebook and e-mail accounts so she can occasionally check them, a protocol she does not mind. She is more concerned about her mother discovering the things her friends post online.

Her mother discusses with her the information items she finds in Pennie's Facebook account. Patricia notes she does so to monitor potential bullying and to scrutinize whether mean comments are being said so Pennie is made aware of how such practices can be hurtful to others.

> My mother will say to me sometimes, "I saw what so and so said… It's not very nice that she makes fun of those people just to have a laugh, and, you know, others can see that. I hope you won't do what this person did."
> Well, I've hidden or blocked some people, because I just wasn't comfortable with the things they were putting on [my Facebook page]…For instance, some quizzes will have stuff about sex.

Patricia believes her relationship with Pennie is solid. They spend quality time together and she lets Pennie know that her current social experiences are similar to what she went through in middle school. She believes that because of the high parental controls on their computer and Pennie's usually strict adherence to rules, her daughter is fairly safe online.

Patricia is not sure if Pennie knows of the parental controls on both their family computer and the television sets, but she does tell Pennie that she is checking up on her. She feels Pennie is appreciative of this open communication. For example, Pennie asked her help to block a Facebook "friend" who was posting quizzes that contained sexual content that made her uncomfortable.

In Pennie's Computer Exploratory class, a group made a presentation on Internet use, including a portion on online safety. Pennie says some schoolmates volunteered to have their own profiles evaluated for safety levels. Following this presentation, Pennie admits she made changes to her Facebook page. She thinks there were recommendations in the presentation she already practices, such as not posting the year of her birth or photos, particularly of her in

a swimsuit. Pennie recalls that a friend had posted such a photo. "My mother and I were talking about it. It's kind of weird that people take photos just so that they can add them to their Facebook."

Patricia explains why she monitors her daughter's e-mail and Facebook accounts:

> When I was a kid…photos were taken to mark special events. Now…you can take a photo whenever you want. I've pointed out to my daughter that postings or photos can be used on Facebook to exclude people. For instance, they may see photos of a group of kids doing something and wonder, "Why wasn't I invited?" We talk a lot about popularity and exclusion. She knows what's inappropriate or mean-spirited.

Thus, mother and daughter showed high sensitivity regarding how social media can influence social standing and how bad practices can have adverse effects on peers. Having experienced the struggle of removing an unwanted Facebook friend, Pennie has adopted Patricia's concern for others, even in online situations.

Patricia elaborates on her approach to talking to her kids about risks online:

> I think parents have to sit down and talk about various risks, but you have to back it up with examples. Parents have to talk about their own experiences to help their kids avoid the same mistakes. I like to use real-life examples, my own or those of others, to show how something can be really dangerous. I told Pennie about a scam, and then she was really mad with herself because she had fallen for one. But then she knew I could help her change her password and recognize fraud online.

Joren and Jean

Joren is in seventh grade and has a younger sister. He says he is closer to his mother than to his father because his mother spends more time taking care of him and his sister.

His mother, Jean, works from home as a transcriptionist and is a part-time student. Jean confirms the close relationship with her son, saying he frequently comes to her with

questions or for advice. Recently, she noticed, he voices stronger opinions about issues and events as expected of people in their "teenage phase."

Joren and his sister pick up after themselves and balance time devoted to electronics (TV, Internet, videogames) and homework. They are required to practice their music instruments daily, and are strongly encouraged to read each day. Jean and Joren agree that punishments for violating the rules include loss of TV, Internet, or Xbox privileges, and depending on the severity of the offense, can result in a ban on attending social gatherings and other social events. Jean says she has occasionally punished her son for various offenses, including a poor report card, by rescinding his Internet privileges for several days. This, however, does not happen often. She thinks that with school and other outside activities, her son does not have much time to get into trouble.

Joren is involved in six extracurricular activities throughout the school year, including athletics, music, and church groups. He reports spending about 60 minutes per day online, which he splits equally between homework and other activities. He is on Facebook, his favorite site, about a half hour per day.

 Jean thinks his son is a Facebook fan because it allows him to see what his friends are doing, and he enjoys the games. She also estimates that her son spends around 30 minutes per day on this site, and that total daily use is about 60 minutes. Jean says she is always around while her son surfs the Internet. "The computer is in the office where I work, so I can hear him and I can turn around any time to see what he's doing. It's not like he's all by himself." She also has stipulated that he could join Facebook only if he befriended her as well as other adult friends of their family. This way, they can keep watch without being intrusive:

I do check the browser to see what he's been looking at, but I have a lot of trust in him. The only way I would let him into Facebook is if he promises to make me his "friend." I have a couple of friends who are his Facebook "friends," too.

Jean also uses a filtering software to block pop-ups and adult images, but she does not block any particular site. Joren is certain his mom has blocked pornographic sites because he knows how worried she is that such content can come up just by accident. He is not sure, though, if his mother checks the history of their web browser or if she even knows how to do so.

Joren recalls that once, when visiting a friend's house,

I found him looking at some bad stuff, [pornography]…He was searching for something and it came up in the Google results…so he clicked on it. I told him, "Turn that off or I'm going home"…I knew my mom wouldn't like that, and his parents would be mad, too.

This case indicates how Jean's safety instructions can transcend the boundaries of home, even in the absence of parents. According to Jean,

I don't think Joren would do anything wrong…just because he fears I would eventually find out. All that stuff out there won't be hard to get to. The schools tell them, and I tell them [what to avoid]. There are repercussions for violating the rules, and the fear factor works wonders.

Even if kids are alone, a trail of the sites they have visited keeps them aware that unwanted actions could be discovered easily.

Joren says his mom has laid down the rule that he should not accept friendship requests on Facebook from people he does not know. Jean has in fact mentioned to Joren that she had not accepted such a request before and had subsequently blocked the person from seeing her own profile. Joren is sure she told him this experience so he knows what to do when it happens to him.

At Joren's school, students are required to sign a form about Internet safety guidelines before they are allowed to use the computer labs. This is partly how he learned not to share too much personal information online. On his Facebook account, he has his birth date displayed, but not the year. He also has the highest privacy options, one of the reasons his mother allows him to be on Facebook. "Facebook is set up better; it's more manageable [than other social sites]…and has all the privacy settings."

Jean does not seem overly concerned about Joren's information disclosures. She does, however, worry about her young daughter:

> My other child was on this Letters to Santa website…and she was typing in ALL kinds of personal information…I said "No! You're not doing that," but if I had not been home to catch it…who knows?

Joren, however, may also be giving away information that may subject him and his family to unwanted risk. For instance, he occasionally posts that he is going somewhere or that his family is going on an outing. At some point, he even posted his paper route.

Miranda and Michelle

Miranda is a seventh grader with a younger brother. She finds her relationship with her mom to be close, and says they talk about almost anything. However, she does not share all of her concerns with her mother. For example, she prefers to talk about her romantic relationships with a trusted older girlfriend who often "house sits" [her mom calls this person the babysitter] when her parents are out.

> I don't really tell my mom about the guy I'm dating unless she asks. I'll discuss problems with my high school friend because she knows what it's like to be in middle school and in high school. She and I have stuff in common. So, I go to my mom for help most of the time, but not always.

Miranda's mom, Michelle, is an office assistant for an agricultural company. Michelle's husband and Miranda's stepfather, Mark, drives a semi truck and is often away from home. Michelle says these circumstances have brought her closer to Miranda because they have to work as a team while he is away. "Our relationship is strong because we have to work together. We have to be a team so we can get stuff done…and then we can be laid back."

Miranda and Michelle agree that everyone in the household must observe good behavior, there are assigned chores, home works must be completed on time, and the children must observe curfews. Violations mean loss of iPod, cell phone, or television privileges. Michelle reports rarely revoking these privileges; threats of reduced privileges are enough to keep the kids in line.

While they both report having a close relationship, many of Miranda's accounts differ markedly from those of her mother's. For instance, Miranda reports spending 30-45 minutes per day online while Michelle estimates that her daughter is online at least an hour each day. Michelle often asks Miranda to check on the weather or other things in the morning before school and work, requests that Miranda does not mention at all.

Outside of school, Miranda is involved in athletics and a reading club. She frequently uses the Internet to get in touch with her reading group, but she mainly enjoys being at Facebook and YouTube, the latter being her favorite site. On YouTube, she spends around 20 minutes per day listening to music. Sometimes, she watches the video portions, but often minimizes the window and exclusively listens to YouTube music while on Facebook, checking her e-mail, or playing solitaire.

Michelle thinks Miranda's favorite website is Facebook where her daughter chats (an instant messaging option) with her cousins who live across the country as well as with friends from school. Michelle is happy that her daughter abides by her expectations regarding good Internet behavior. Michelle thinks she and Miranda can be closer, but her son, who is a lot younger and has different interests, also needs her attention. Miranda also spends several weekends per month at her father's house.

Michelle frequently visits the computer room, which is also the laundry room, to check on her daughter. She has never seen her quickly close anything in her presence, so she feels Miranda is not being secretive about her Internet habits. Other than these frequent check-ups, she does not monitor Miranda's online activities, but she volunteers that her husband has software blockers in effect and checks on Miranda's online activities once a month. He has also set up user accounts for each member of the family. Mainly, however, he ensures that the computer is not getting viruses from downloads. After all, they had asked Miranda to stop using a gaming site before after their computer caught a virus. Michelle thinks Miranda is unaware of the site-blocking software on their computer or that her stepfather is conducting periodic checks. Miranda also thinks her parents do not monitor her online visits.

Miranda recalls that at one point, she was harassed online, an incident of which Michelle was apparently unaware. Miranda never informed her parents about this instance, believing that she had taken care of the problem on her own. She did, however, tell her friends who also play the game to avoid this particular user. It turned out that she was an avid player of a game called *Runescape* where the player chooses an avatar and participates in quests. In this game, avatars communicate by typing messages. In one of those quests, a

player repeatedly asked how old she was. When she consistently refused to divulge her age, he began following her avatar to other parts of the game. "He wouldn't leave me alone, so I had to report him." Miranda describes how to report someone displaying bad behavior on *Runescape:*

> [First] you click on "Report"…and then it'll ask for the username and what the user was doing. It asks you whether that user is "Asking for personal information? Harassing or teasing you?" You click on the ones that apply and you have to put in exactly what was said. Then the company did something about it.

A company representative sent her an e-mail saying the user had been removed from the game and that his/her IP address has been blocked. Although the situation was resolved, this incident spoiled Miranda's enthusiasm for the game. She no longer uses the site.

Michelle says she is yet to discuss with her daughter the dangers of sharing personal information online because she thinks Miranda has learned not to do so at school:

> Every year, students and parents have to sign something acknowledging the school's guidelines before she can use the Internet…I'm comfortable with the rules the school has laid down. I don't think she'll stretch those rules.

Miranda tries to keep her posts very general, knowing that strangers may have access to them. For example, she may alert friends that she is visiting her grandparents, but she does not specify where her grandparents live. The precautions Miranda takes, including her handling of the *Runescape* experience, validate her parents' trust.

Nate and Nola

Nate is the middle child in a family of three; he has an older and a younger sister. He is a seventh grader and is involved in athletics, band and chorus, and his church's youth

group. Nola, Nate's mother, holds a college degree and works as a homemaker. She is also active in church where her husband is the pastor.

Nate and Nola agree that their family holds a premium on good behavior, respect for others, specific times and duration for computer use, and clear-cut schedules for practicing musical instruments. Disobeying the rules, Nate explains, means he could be sent to his room or grounded from taking part in events or activities with friends. This may also mean the loss of privileges for electronic gadgets such as the computer or PlayStation. Nola rarely punishes him for misbehavior.

Nate primarily uses the Internet to conduct research and to strengthen his vocabulary for school assignments. He also visits the kid-friendly sites Millsberry and Webkins that offer a variety of games and learning tools without the need to input all sorts of personal information. Nate plays games on these sites when he has nothing else to do.

Nola estimates that her son spends around 90 minutes per week, mostly to play games, on Millsberry.com. These games often involve devising strategies using soldiers at war. Nate, she observes, truly enjoys this "boy stuff." Nate approximates spending between 90 and 120 minutes per week online, but does not specifically mention what he does on the websites he visits.

Nate describes spending much quality time with his mother. Their relationship "is a pretty strong one; we like to be around each other. We go out bowling, swimming, shopping in the mall, watching movies. I talk about most of my problems with my mom." He spends very little time online. Nola also describes her relationship with Nate as being "healthy" and "close-knit."

Nola and her husband have not allowed their children to create profiles on social networking sites because they feel they are too time-consuming, addictive, and dangerous. Nola herself has not joined any social networking site, but her husband, a pastor, has a Facebook page he uses to keep in touch with parishioners.

Although her children do not participate in Facebook or other social networking sites, Nola still uses the highest level of parental blocking controls on the family computer, a fact that is not a secret to her children. However, Nate is unaware of any blocking programs in their computer.

According to Nate, his mother "doesn't want us to talk to other people on Facebook or any site like that because she's afraid people can read private information about you, such as where you live." Nola says the "no Facebook" rule has not met any resistance from her children:

> We've asked the kids to stay out of those sites…and they haven't really complained about it…I think they see how time can be wasted in those sites, and that they can get addicted. We have talked to them about predators out there although those sites swear they are safe. I don't believe all that! I've heard too many stories…it's too risky. So we don't encourage our kids to communicate with people they don't know. Thankfully, they haven't felt cheated and have not insisted on a Facebook account. We might have to deal with that later, but so far, it's working out.

Lacking any experience on what can happen online, Nate cannot specify dangerous habits or how to effectively refrain from them. His case demonstrates that simply restricting access to technology runs the risk of contributing to a technological knowledge gap that may become more obvious as Nate gets older.

Sophia and Sherri

Sophia is a high school freshman with a younger brother in elementary school. While she occasionally "butts heads" with her mother, Sherri, she says they are very close and usually think the same way about things.

Sherri is a high school educator in a school district different from where her children are enrolled. She teaches courses on computer use, including how to make students savvy about staying safe online. Sophia laments the "many rules" at home. The top ones include completing assigned chores, and safety rules regarding online practices. Sherri confirms such expectations, including timely homework completion and practicing with musical instruments.

Sophia says she is rarely punished for offenses, but when this happens, her punishments include a loss of privileges with the cell phone or inability to visit friends' houses. Sherri is in consonance with these assessments, saying that Sophia is more likely to receive warnings for bad attitude or for her lack of "social graces."

Sophia is involved in seven different activities, including being part of the band, choir, other fine arts activities, and her church's youth group. She estimates being online around an hour per day, about 50 minutes of which are spent at her favorite site, Facebook. She accesses Facebook mostly for the games, but also because she enjoys finding out what her friends are doing. Sherri estimates that Sophia spends around an hour online each day, and correctly identifies Sophia's favorite website. She knows her daughter plays games and communicates with friends and family members through Facebook.

Sherri also describes her relationship with Sophia as close, and admits being surprised by how much Sophia shares with her.

She solicits my opinion…she's willing to tell me things. She's always been very independent, which as a high school teacher I find very different…because she's not really too worried about what her peers think. She has been that way for a long time…she always feels free to ask me what I think or what she should do.

Her high level of trust on Sophia precludes her checking on the sites she visits. She has not noticed anything that may cause concern when she clears the computer's history menu. Sherri has not installed parental blockers in the family computer, but she speaks frequently with her son about the sites she wants him to avoid. Sophia does not think site-blocking controls are enabled in the family computer.

The two independently volunteered that they have a very slow Internet connection at their rural home, which does not encourage spending a lot of time online. Sherri recalls how she has been very reluctant to give Sophia the go ahead to open a Facebook account:

When she was younger, I did not want her to be on Facebook. I said, "I don't think you need to be on Facebook. I'm not naïve, I know how kids use it at a friend's house so I hope you don't do that." When she was in the sixth grade, her cousins and others were going online and posting all sorts of pictures. I just don't see the need for that. She was kind of down sometimes. She'd say, "All my friends have it and I don't, so I am completely left out of what is happening." So I ask, "Can't you all just look at each other and talk?" I told her to wait until high school for Facebook. She was pretty good about waiting. My sister and a couple of relatives helped her [set it up] over Thanksgiving this year.

Sophia narrates how difficult it was to convince her mother to let her join Facebook:

Facebook lets us see a whole new side to people because there's so much stuff out there. I use it mostly for entertainment. I really wanted [to have a Facebook account] badly because everyone else has it; my friends always talk about what they've read there. They often say, "Did you see such and such on Facebook?" I feel I am left out of the conversations. I did nag my mom about it, and she hates it when I pull that card—the "everybody else has it" card…. I've had Facebook only for a few months now, maybe three months. My aunts helped me get it started because my mom was worried I would just throw it together and do something wrong with the privacy

settings. So, yes, she allowed me to have one as long as the privacy settings were up in full force.

Despite her mother's regulations, Sophia confesses she goes online when her parents are not home in direct violation of regulations:

> I think Mom's fairly aware [of my online activities], but sometimes, without their knowledge, I do get on Facebook when they're not home. It's not that I want to hide something from my parents; I just want to get on and off without getting the third degree about whether homework and stuff have been done. And because our Internet takes such a long time to load, it's just easier that way.

Sophia says this behavior is just to compensate for their slow Internet connection at home. Her parents may think she spends the same amount of time on online activities as before, but Sophia feels she accomplishes less because their Internet connection is much slower than it was when they lived in town.

That she occasionally discloses general personal information on Facebook does not bother her so much because she is confident about her high privacy settings and because she gets in touch only with real life friends and family members:

> I post messages that are not very specific. For instance, I'd just say "I'm going to get a haircut" or something general like that. I don't say I'm getting a haircut at this place and at this time.

As an educator, Sherri is very much aware that young people should be smart about the information they share online, a subject she frequently discusses with her children and her students.

> The sites that are dangerous include any place where you have to put any personal information. I always take the kids to this MySpace site. It's a fake one, but it looks very real. It has a quiz over these 10 things that shouldn't be on there. I have my classes take this quiz. I tell them to look at the site and then start picking it apart. They see that you don't want your

name as your domain name. They understand they should not be posting photos in which they are shown wearing a sports jersey with the name of their school on it. They learn they should not say they're going to the movies with friends at 7 tonight. So, I think having a MySpace or Facebook page isn't dangerous by itself… it's what's on it, it's the content that can trip you. You should know the people you're communicating with.

Sophia lists the same kinds of information she thinks should not be shared. Her Facebook profile may contain many photos but access to these pictures is limited to "friends." She would not even consider posting pictures of herself in a swimsuit. Sophia is clearly well educated about online safety protocols.

Sherri is confident that continuous education and instruction regarding risks has negated her need for a blocking software. Sophia knows how to use age-appropriate technology effectively and what to avoid. She feels relatively safe without feeling secluded.

Cael and Carmen

Cael was set to start the eighth grade just a few weeks after the interview. He is the youngest in the family, with four sisters. His mother, Carmen, has just been laid off from her factory job. She provides occasional childcare at home, and has recently started a degree program at a local college.

Cael describes his relationship with Carmen and his father as pretty close. His dad talks to him every night about school. Carmen agrees with this assessment:

Most of the time, our relationship is really good although sometimes I think I am extra hard on him. I see how much his dad babies him or fails to correct his bad behavior because he's the only boy. So I probably over-compensate.

Cael does not think one parent is tougher than the other, but frequently talks about activities he does just with his dad.

Household rules consist of specific bed times, assigned chores, and no cell phones after 10 p.m. Since his mother started college, the rules regarding bedtime and cell phone use have been more strictly enforced because she has to get up very early to travel to school. Carmen adds that the children also all have curfews and that Cael, specifically, has an hour maximum limit on any electronic device, including the Internet, per day. She says he has the most trouble following the time limit regarding Xbox use because he gets too engrossed in the games.

Disobedience, according to Cael, is punished by being grounded from activities or having his phone taken away. He suffers from any of these punishments every couple of weeks. Carmen says Cael's cell phone, computer, and Xbox use has been previously curtailed, but he heeds warnings and loses privileges only for a day.

Although Cael is involved in a wide range of athletics that span all seasons, he still spends around two hours per day online. He divides his time online between Facebook and YouTube. Carmen estimates that her son spends about an hour online per day, but also thinks he goes online when she is not home. Cael volunteers that he frequently logs on to Facebook and leaves it open while he does his chores or plays Xbox games:

> I have a computer in my room. Sometimes I get on Facebook and leave it on, so I could be logged anywhere from five minutes to a few hours depending on the day. If I didn't have anything to do, I would be on it all day. I periodically check Facebook for updates.

Cael's favorite websites are Facebook and YouTube, but he leans more toward YouTube, which he frequently uses to view music videos and for background music while he examines other websites. He and his father watch YouTube videos that help him improve his baseball pitching techniques. Carmen observes the same activities:

> Cael and his dad watch YouTube videos together a lot. They're like two teenagers; everything they watch makes them laugh like crazy. They see stuff, like pranks, and then they try it on each other. They think everything on those videos is funny!

Carmen observes her son is not much of a verbal communicator, perhaps the reason why he prefers to either use Facebook or exchange text messages with friends and classmates.

Cael's father checks their computer's history archive and has installed parental blocks and tracking software, something Carmen is unsure her children are aware of. Cael knows, however, that his mother checks the history on the computer, but that his father does so more frequently. Viruses had attacked the family computer so the children have been asked to refrain from visiting sites that require software to be downloaded. Music sharing sites also are to be avoided. In addition, the children are required to be "friends" with Carmen on Facebook:

> We teach the kids to be smart…to be careful. I always ask Cael what he's doing and who he's talking to online. I look over his shoulders to see. His dad always checks to see what sites the kids have been on.

Husband and wife share news reports with their children to caution them about the consequences of disclosing too much personal information in online venues:

> We see on the news how kids have been abducted or bullied, especially the incident in which the mother pretended to be another kid and the girl was bullied [to the point that] the girl committed suicide. This is just an example of how things can go haywire because of bad behavior. A lot of things can go wrong on Facebook. We tell them, "You know, so and so's friend, someone you don't know or get along with, could get your number [and subject you to real risks]."

Cael says his mother most recently shared a story about someone who was robbed because of information that inadvertently leaked out on Facebook:

> My mom told us about a story she heard on the news. Apparently, this girl posted that she was going to a concert. Someone who was on her friends list saw that [information] and broke into her house while she was gone.

The almost instantaneous way Cael recalled this incident indicates that Carmen's case examples have been fairly effective learning tools.

Alina and Ann

Alina is a high school freshman with a much younger brother. Her activities include involvement in a band, choirs, athletics, and the church youth group. Alina describes her relationship with her mother, Ann, as very close due to their shared love for reading. Mother and daughter spend a lot of time going on walks or shopping.

Ann, a manager at an athletic center and a substitute teacher, agrees that her relationship with her daughter is particularly close:

> We talk a lot and we do spend quite a bit of time together. I often find myself thinking that because she was an only child for eight years and because we are so similar in our interests that I have to make sure I'm still being the parent and not the friend…She already has friends who will become more important as she gets older. But for now, she likes hanging out with her family.

Ann knows their mother-daughter dynamic may change soon, so she tries to enjoy their time together while it lasts.

Alina says her parents expect no roughhousing at home. There are appropriate times for television and the computer. Ann says there are also rules about chores, eating habits, bedtime, and general safety protocols, such as wearing shoes outside and helmets when biking.

Alina thinks she rarely breaks the rules; she is hardly aware of the consequences of going against household regulations because she cannot remember the last time she was

punished. She thinks, however, that should that happen, the punishment may entail reduced Internet access for a specific period of time.

Ann says rule violations are met by the loss of an electronic device or the cancellation of a fun activity, but says Alina is harder on herself when she does something wrong.

Alina spends around two hours a week online doing research for school assignments, using Facebook, or searching for information about topics of interest. Ann says Alina's time online varies depending on her tasks. Alina is a budding writer and has recently received her own personal laptop as a gift from her parents. Ann estimates that her daughter is usually online around one-and-a-half hours per day, but that she might spend more time online doing research for a story or for schoolwork.

Alina does not have a favorite site although she may stay longer on Facebook where she socializes with friends and where she takes advantage of the messenger feature. On it, she and her friends enjoy a game in which they send each other little "gifts," images of things they like. Alina spends around 30 minutes per day on Facebook, but this depends on other activities she has lined up for the day.

Ann is unsure about her daughter's favorite website, but guesses it is one with games in it or one that features a Spanish word of the day. Whatever the site, she doubts Alina spends more than an hour there because school activities keep her busy.

Alina is required to use the Internet in a common area in the house, even when on her personal laptop. Ann also checks the history on Alina's and the family's computer, a practice her daughter may not know as being done on a regular basis. Her husband has installed a blocking software in the family computer and in Alina's laptop.

Alina indeed does not know that her mother checks the history archive on her computer, which she occasionally clears out to make it easier to locate the most recent sites she visited:

> If my history gets really big, I clear it out so I can find things easier, not because I wouldn't want Mom or anyone to see the sites I've visited. Sometimes I just need to find a certain page…and there are so many sites I've gone through [that it gets to be confusing].

She is certain that parental blocks are on the family computer and her laptop to protect them from viruses.

Alina is very careful about the information she posts online. Her Facebook account is set to the highest privacy settings. Like many respondents her age in this sample, she has her birth date posted, but not the year. She has not joined any Facebook network, including that of her school, which makes it more difficult for people to find her. She might post something she enjoyed doing, but only after the fact. She did post a photo of herself in a bathing suit, but in an album of family vacation photos to which only designated friends had access.

Ann uses examples from the news or from others' accounts to show her daughter what can happen when too much personal information is made available to strangers:

> There are real dangers, so if there's a newspaper article, we'll talk about that. We talk about how private information is easily disclosed on Facebook. People around the world could get that information and that makes me nervous. I tell her, "I know you can't see yourself in that situation, but I'm just reminding you that it can happen even to good people." As a parent, I think you have to stay on top of what kids are doing and be ready to say, "Have you thought of this?" and "This is why I'm concerned about this." I'd rather we sit down together to examine the site and talk about my concerns. Otherwise, it may just sound like a lecture.

Apparently, Alina had secretly set up a Facebook account. Ann found out about it from a family member. She patiently waited for Alina to tell her. Once, while chatting about a

relative at a family gathering, Ann casually remarked that Alina should look up that person on Facebook. Alina promptly denied having an account, and Ann played along until the family gathering was over. Alina was not punished for lying in consideration of a particularly rough year. She had been moved a grade ahead in school and was encountering some difficulties as a result. They compromised that Alina must "friend" her on Facebook; Ann should have her password as well. Ann describes how she dealt with the situation:

> She never asked if she could have a Facebook account, so it never came up. When she decided to set up one and did not bother telling me, I thought, "Oh, well, that's interesting." I wasn't ready to confront her then…we'll just see when she'll tell us. But when she denied she has one, that became a big issue. I was not angry about her having an account; I got mad because she lied about it. So I confronted her about my concerns. She said, "Mom, you know I wouldn't do anything bad," but we still had to talk through a LOT…So, now I'm her "friend" and I can see what she's doing. I also know her password because I have to keep her safe.

> It's still a trust game, and she's really a pretty good kid. She does have one e-mail account she uses with friends. I don't have the password for that. I really struggled with it for a while, but then I decided I could be a super-protective parent. She should know how to be responsible to gain more independence.

Grant and Greta

Grant was about to start high school and had just turned 15. He has a younger brother. Grant is involved in an athletic activity, his church youth group, and is highly active as a Boy Scout.

Grant describes his relationship with his mom as "close," but does not elaborate on it. "We spend a lot of time together in the summer." His mother, Greta, is a self-described full-time mom, part-time fitness instructor. She says she and her son are very close and that she is very protective of her children:

I will do almost all activities they want…except camping. Grant likes to do that with his dad. I think he likes to have me around as long as I'm not embarrassing him. I am VERY protective, and I think that's why they (the kids) don't challenge me too much.

Greta was serious about being protective. She requested that the interview be conducted where she could keep watch on the boys—a study room with a glass window at a local library. She repeatedly paused during the conversation to make sure her boys stay put at a nearby table.

According to Grant, there are limits on activities when the parents are not at home, especially regarding Internet use and chore assignments. The house rule specifies that the Internet cannot be used for non-school activities and only on Mondays through Thursdays during the school year. This includes the use of electronic devices such as iPods. Greta says this particular rule applies to all media, including the television. Computer use for schoolwork is allowed, but not for web surfing. During the week, she wants the boys to study, read freely, or get involved in fitness activities.

Grant thinks he and his brother are very unlikely to get into trouble for disobeying the rules, but if they did, they are likely to be punished with limited electronic privileges. They are also likely to be grounded from activities. Greta thinks her children are good rule followers because

If they break the rules, we would probably take away their privileges. More importantly, we would discuss our disappointment with them; that would be worse [on them] than any other punishment we could inflict.

Greta does not let her children use social networking sites and limits their web use. In the summer and on weekends during the school year, Grant spends around 45 minutes per

day online. However, in some days, he does not go online at all, preferring other activities instead.

Greta is not sure whether Grant has a favorite website. He is very interested in technology and gadgets, and is an avid reader of *Popular Science* magazine. He uses the computer to learn more about these interests. She guesses he spends about two hours per week online, and that he probably divides that time between research and checking his e-mail. Her estimates are very close to Grant's who reports being online 45 minutes per day on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Greta expounds on the safety precautions she has laid down regarding the use of their home computers:

> Our SafeEyes software will block pornography, gambling, drugs, weapons and other topics we don't want the children to have access to. The SafeEyes program is on every computer in the house and on the boys' iPod Touches. We don't allow online gaming because a lot of dangerous computer viruses can come from that, and I don't like the violence. I don't let them do social networking because I feel it's a huge waste of time and can be dangerous. No chat rooms either… Those are the sites I have blocked on SafeEyes.

Greta finds chat rooms and gaming sites particularly dangerous because of adult "creeps" who pose as kids. She also finds a lot of adult content on Facebook to which children can have access:

> I think Facebook can damage people's reputation. It has content that is just inappropriate for kids, whether it is pornography or other things that kids don't need to be looking at.

Greta says her children are aware that SafeEyes is on all of their computers, that she gets weekly reports of what sites they have visited, and that she can determine if they

attempted to access any blocked sites. So far, she is glad to report her kids have never done so.

Grant knows his parents have installed SafeEyes. Although he does not use social networking sites, he understands the restrictions regarding disclosing private information. He learned how dangerous this practice is when a group made a very persuasive presentation in school:

> Now, I know better about that stuff. Someone came to school and did a presentation on it…in fourth or fifth grade, maybe. They said to be careful about talking to people you don't know. If you are going to talk with someone you know, use a private messaging service so others can't read it. And, if you see something bad, just shut it off. Also, don't tell anyone your address.

Much like Nate, Grant demonstrates that restricted access to technology does limit the child's ability to handle dangerous situations. Greta admits her decision to keep her children away from social networking sites was galvanized when she attended a seminar by a local law enforcement group, which included Internet safety for children.

Summary of Observations

A closer inspection of the discourse of ten mothers and their children reveal several recurring themes. These themes are as follows.

Importance of Offline Social Relationships

The preponderance of responses indicates that the adolescent participants are involved in extracurricular activities that limit the extent to which they use computers to go online. The more extra-curricular activities the children are involved with, the less time is allocated for Internet use. This echoes previous findings (e.g., Hunt, 2005 and Fredricks, 2006) which indicate that kids who are involved in a number of activities are less likely to

develop behavioral problems and are more likely to perform well academically. Children with well-rounded activities have also been known to enjoy more positive peer group experiences, and be more psychologically competent. These non-virtual interactions are important to socialize children into the real world with real social relationships. A variety of after school activities, therefore, are effective ways of reducing children's over-exposure to the Internet.

Ill-Perceived Safeguards of Privacy Settings

In general, the children were unaware that their computers are equipped with some kind of parental blocking software or that their parents regularly check the history of site visits. Six child participants reported not knowing if their parents use any software to check up on their online use patterns and behavior. In most instances, the parents deliberately did not disclose installing online filtering or blocking software in the family computers. This may be because parents want their children to have a sense of privacy while keeping an eye on their online habits. They may also wish to keep tabs on the children even when they are away.

The parents' over-reliance on blocking software suggests a re-examination of how effective these applications are. Children with Facebook accounts on maximum privacy settings are not necessarily safe. Known for being technologically astute, kids can change privacy settings any time, especially if parents do not frequently check their accounts. Those who run Facebook also frequently change privacy settings to test new and potent ways to restrict access to accounts, but children are not likely to check if these new options are available. On Facebook, although prescribed settings can restrict access to "friends only," a

user's "friends" may include even casual acquaintances (Livingstone, 2008). The social networking site has yet to develop a way to select levels of access for different groups without doing so on an individual basis, which may be time consuming if a user has many "friends." No matter how high the level of restrictions, a user who fails to log out properly can instantly jeopardize privacy.

Fathers as Media Monitors

While past studies have found that mothers are more likely to be the "media monitors" in the households (e.g., Sayer, 2004 and Valkenburg, 1999), the participants' open-ended responses suggest that the fathers are in change of web monitoring, as is the case in Davey's, Cael's, and Alina's household. In these families, the fathers installed the tracking and blocking software, determined the appropriate settings, and monitored the history of site visits. This appears to be a more convenient way of preventing exposure to unwanted content as filtering and blocking software for home computers has become more sophisticated (Ybarra et al., 2009).

Divided Attention

Only one parent overestimated the amount of time her child spends online. Half of the parents interviewed underestimated the amount of time their child spends on the Internet. Of those who did, four out of five underestimated the length of Internet use by 30 minutes or more. This finding suggests that parents are not as attentive or aware of the extent of their children's online exposure.

Limited "Rules," Common Punishments

All of the mothers interviewed were able to point to some existing family guidelines, rules and regulations regarding their children's Internet use, but these do not go beyond specific rules outside of the sites allowed for access or the appropriate times to use the Internet.

All participants were aware of some form of punishment for infringing on household rules. Many commonly invoke the loss of electronic privileges and being banned from participating in activities outside the home. The lack of resistance to these rules suggests that parents were clear about their expectations for proper Internet behavior, another good practice that many households should consider.

Influential Programs

Both children and parents were made more aware of online dangers due to school policies on Internet use, classroom presentations or programs on Internet safety, and local community learning activities. This was specifically mentioned by five adolescents and two mothers interviewed, suggesting that these programs should receive continuous support and must be strengthened because they serve as springboards with which parents can begin more earnest conversations with their children regarding proper Internet use protocols.

Relationships and Maternal Doubt

All adolescent participants were quick to describe their relationship with their mothers as strong and healthy, emphasizing their closeness. The parents, however, were more hesitant to characterize their relationship with their children in the same fashion. Some thought they have a fairly close relationship with their child, but that this could be better in

the absence of so many other obligations. Despite reports of quality communication from all participating dyads, parents still felt they lack the time to develop stronger relationships with their children. This sentiment is not surprising considering that parental guilt is said to be higher today when more mothers are working outside the home and both fathers and mothers are working more hours (Bianchi, 2006 and Sayer, 2004).

The implications of these results are discussed in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to gather qualitative data regarding effective communication strategies parents have adopted to alert and educate their adolescent children about personal safety risks online. To what extent do parents and children agree about house rules regarding Internet use? Are there discrepancies in these two parties' views regarding what are unsafe and acceptable online habits? To gather data for this study, ten parent-adolescent dyads were interviewed face-to-face. Their accounts were expected to provide insights regarding household rules, incentives and punishments, and children's online habits.

Coorientation Measures Regarding Household Internet Use Rules

Most parent-participants share requirements and rules that govern how their children should use the Internet at home. These rules include appropriate times of day to access the web, limits on time spent online, restrictions on downloading software and/or any files from outside sources, and the setting of privacy levels in social networking sites. For the most part, the adolescent-participants reported they were aware of such rules and that these rules do not run afoul of their reasons for accessing the Internet and their expectations for online interactions.

In terms of the coorientation approach, therefore, the level of accuracy regarding the two parties' responses to this topic can be described as very high. A high level of agreement was found in the dyads' reports concerning punishments for violating rules. The majority agreed that some form of punishment or disincentive exists for infringing upon household regulations. These disincentives range from the less serious loss of electronic privileges to

the more serious loss of social privileges. Many parents reported that often, just the threat of losing privileges was enough to correct bad behavior, suggesting a clear understanding between parents and children regarding rules and rule enforcement.

Social Learning

The mutual understanding the two parties exhibited with respect to rules and rule enforcement suggests that parents have shaped their children's online behaviors in a significant way. This method of controlling the child's environment to achieve a desired outcome is a technique of social learning called conditioning. The teen participants in this study appear to have adapted what is known in the social learning approach as the "dependency drive," which occurs when children detect and adopt social practices and moral standards similar to those of their parents. According to Henderson (1981), children emulate their parents to avoid parental rejection. How teen participant Joren rejected a friend's viewing of pornography in consideration of how his mother would react in the same situation is a manifestation of observational learning that leads to dependency drive (Bandura, 1986 and Henderson, 1981).

The findings also show that children learn about what online behaviors to adopt from the stories parents share with them so they can avoid risky situations. Indeed, many said these stories made them more cautious web users.

Safety Communication

While past studies have found the mothers to be the family's media monitors, a small majority of mothers and adolescents in this study indicated that the fathers were in fact responsible for monitoring computer and Internet use at home. The male parent was often

described as the one who installs monitoring and blocking software, and regularly checks on the history archives of family computers. This implies, therefore, that fathers are also actively engaged in setting up and enforcing house rules regarding Internet use and safety protocols.

Each mother interviewed indicated that some safety guidelines are already in place at their households, but these are specific to the sites allowed for child access, time limits on Internet exposure, how to avoid contracting computer viruses, and using high privacy settings on social networking sites. Parents should consider additional guidelines, including teaching younger family members how to avoid using third party applications on Facebook. Parents may also consider regularly updating their children's Facebook privacy settings to keep pace with the changes instituted by that social networking site.

Adolescents clearly had different takes on who is safe to befriend on Facebook compared to the parents. This finding suggests that parents need to have more in-depth discussions with their children about appropriate online friends. Practices such as adding the "friends of friends" and "older alumni" who are not even casual acquaintances in their Facebook circle exposes teenagers to dangerous characters who may be posing as kids.

The practice of encouraging children to accept as "friends" only those whom their child was familiar with in real-life masks an important problem. Perpetrators of cyberbullying or harassment usually target someone they know (Cassidy, et al. 2009). Indeed, the same friends may be the ones who can burglarize one's house because of their intimate knowledge of a child's activity posted online. Thus, parents may want to modify their message to encourage children to only befriend only those they know and consider to be trustworthy.

Several dyads mentioned participating in lessons on how to keep young people safe through the public schools. Often, the lessons learned in these sessions serve as the cornerstone for their beliefs and practices regarding online safety. For example, the moms said the school's Internet regulations serve as the basis for their household rules. Adolescents also consider exposure to school programs as the main source of knowledge regarding what constitutes risky practices.

None of the participants indicated belonging to any social networking site but Facebook. It is clear from the dyads' discourse that parents and children see little risk associated with Facebook use so long as the highest level of privacy settings was in place and only when real-life acquaintances were admitted as "friends." Parents made these stipulations known when their children were setting up Facebook accounts. Most parents whose children joined Facebook also signed up for the network themselves to keep a watchful eye on their children's interactions, ensure that strangers are denied access to private information, and to keep tabs on the children's disclosure of private information that can put them in harm's way.

To remind children of the need to be vigilant while online, many parents share with them stories and anecdotes, culled from their own experiences or from the news, of how careless behavior placed people at risk. Additionally, a few have had to initiate conversations with their children about the dangers of disclosing too much information specific to their whereabouts.

Many parents, however, were overly reliant that Facebook's privacy settings, when programmed to the highest limits, can confine the spread of information to a small circle of close friends and family members. This is particularly problematic because, as recent

incidences of privacy breaches suggest, Facebook's settings are not that safe. Social networking sites frequently change their settings options. However, users do not update theirs on a regular basis. Additionally, Facebook allows third party applications on the site, including games such as *FarmVille* of which several adolescent-participants in this study were avid users. These "apps," made by independent software developers, transform Facebook into a hub for all kinds of activity for its more than 500 million users—from playing games to setting up a family tree. These applications, however, do not have to abide by Facebook users' privacy settings and can, in fact, gather data about those users (Axon, 2010).

Recently, many of the most popular applications have been found to be transmitting identifying information—in effect, providing access to people's names and, in some cases, their friends' names—to dozens of advertising and Internet tracking companies, according to a *Wall Street Journal* report (Steele and Fowler, 2010). This problem has ties to the growing field of companies that build detailed databases on people in order to track them online. The issue affects tens of millions of Facebook "app" users, including people who set their profiles to the strictest privacy settings. It remains unclear how long the breach was in place.[3]

Parents require their children to adopt high-level privacy settings when first joining the social networking site to lessen the risk of cyber-predators gleaning information from the

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[3] The information being transmitted is one of Facebook's basic building blocks: the unique "Facebook ID" number assigned to each user on the site. Since a Facebook user ID is a public part of any Facebook profile, anyone can use an ID number to look up a person's name, using a standard Web browser, even if that person has set all of his or her Facebook information to "Private" settings. For other users, the Facebook ID reveals information they have set to share with "everyone," including age, residence, occupation and photos. The apps reviewed by the *Journal* were sending Facebook ID numbers to at least 25 advertising and data firms, several of which use the information to build profiles of Internet users by tracking their online activities (Steele and Fowler, 2010).

child's profile. But this practice is only effective if the parent frequently checks the child's settings to make sure they have not been altered. The probability of privacy breaches increases each time Facebook changes its privacy settings because every time it does so, the users' settings subsequently need to be adjusted.

In addition to borrowing the school's Internet use policies, and using stories and anecdotes as a social learning method, many parents said they use some type of software to block or filter unwanted content. The majority of those who installed such devices did not inform their children that they did so. Most of the adolescent participants were either unaware or unsure if their parents had these types of software in place.

The blocking software works by detecting certain texts and then filtering those sites or images out of a results page so that the information does not reach the person who is browsing. While filtering and blocking utilities can provide an initial and effective line of defense, it is also very important for children to know what to do if and when they encounter such content (Livingstone, 2008).

Blocking and filtering software is ineffective in the case of websites with advertisements, and most webpages have them. The site's main content may be mild, but its ads can include graphic images and information that can slip past the software. This is especially true for third party applications such as games or quizzes.

Risky Online Behavior

Significant differences were apparent between parental estimations of adolescents' time spent online and the children's own self-reports of the amount of time they devote on the web. This suggests that parents are not as aware of their children's online activities than

they may believe. This idea is supported by children's reports of their own deviation from certain house rules such as being online when they should not, or staying online past the time limits.

Some adolescent participants said they did not always abide by the rules and admit going online when their parents are away and being online longer than they are supposed to. They also think their parents are unaware of these "rogue" practices, which they do not consider dangerous. These accounts demonstrate incongruencies between the child and the parent's perspectives on certain house rules governing Internet use.

The majority of the participants were acutely aware of the risks posed by the disclosure of private information. However, very few—parents and children alike—think that the children are making a habit of revealing private data. The children's reports that they befriend people they do not know and alert their peers about their family's vacation plans do not support this level of confidence.

Parenting Style and its Impact on Reducing Risky Online Behavior

To enhance children's awareness of online risks, the dyads commonly report the parental practice of discussing real life stories that narrate the dangerous outcomes of unsafe habits. The teen participants indicate that such conversations prompt them to use more discretion when choosing "friends" or determining what and how much information to share online.

The findings also suggest the benefits accruing from a trusting parent-child relationship. Parents who trust their children to behave responsibly on Facebook, but also enact safety protocols, report much success in dealing with this aspect of parenting.

Protocols, including mandating that a parent should be part of the child's network of acquaintances on Facebook and that the parent must know the password to the child's social networking and e-mail accounts, allow children to have some freedom while holding them to standards of good behavior.

Indeed, the majority of the adult participants can be considered as adopting the authoritative style of parenting in which the household is infused with a high level of warmth (trusting and open relationship) and a high level of control (firm rules and guidelines with consequences). Parents who strictly forbid their teens to access certain sites and participate in social networks in cyberspace can be said to be practicing the authoritarian style of parenting. Judging by the responses, their children appear less prepared to handle Internet risks such as scams, unintentional encounters with explicit material, or harassment due to their limited exposure to the online environment.

Another stream of responses points to the value of engaging in extra-curricular activities in mitigating risky online behavior. Obviously, active children have little time to spend online. Besides, their strong interpersonal peer relationships can translate into healthy online behaviors.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Using the snowball sampling technique to find willing participants for this study seems to have produced respondents with similar backgrounds and attitudes. That is, the initial respondents referred the researcher to potential participants who are similar to them in race, socioeconomic status and values, among other characteristics. For instance, those who

volunteered for this study seem to come from highly communicative families. A more diverse sample may have produced different results.

This study purposely sought out mothers as participants due to their documented role as monitors of television use. It is now apparent that many fathers are responsible for the surveillance of their children's Internet use. This may be because men in professional jobs work with computers more and may thus be the expert in their household on the subject (Bianci et al., 2006). Future studies should therefore seek the viewpoints of this important family member.

All but two of the adolescent participants were the oldest children. This unintentional skew may be affected by the observation that levels of responsibility and parental expectations of responsibility may differ according to birth order. The next round of studies should test this hypothesis.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of school programs regarding online safety in reducing risky behavior. While this study offers very rich qualitative data, the small sample size and lack of diversity in the participants themselves do not allow these findings to be generalized for all families in the US, or even families in the Midwest. Instead, insights obtained from qualitative inquiries such as this can be used as a launching point for more targeted research questions that can be investigated using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Future research should identify and recommend ways by which school and community programs that educate the public regarding safe Internet practices can be strengthened, expanded and sustained. Education experts can also explore convenient ways

by which parents can be involved in these school programs considering that they are already interacting with the material in a second hand fashion.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: 26 October 2009

TO: Kristin Hopper-Losenicky
3517 Tripp Street
Ames, IA 50014

CC: Lulu Rodriguez
214 Hamilton Hall

FROM: Roxanne Bappe, IRB Coordinator
Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Risk Communication in the Internet Age

IRB ID: 09-440

Approval Date: 26 October 2009
Date for Continuing Review: 21 October 2010

The Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research

- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing <u>any</u> changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.

- **Immediately inform the IRB of** (1) **all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLIER

If you are a <u>mother</u> with a

child <u>11-14</u> years old,

AND you both use the <u>internet at home</u>,

Please consider participating in a study of
parent-child communication patterns
regarding children's internet use
being conducted this Fall.

For more information, please contact Kristin
at 319.899.3046 or at <u>khopper@iastate.edu</u>

Internet Study
Kristin @ 319.899.3046
Or khopper@iastate.edu

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APPENDIX C: SAMPLE PHONE/E-MAIL PARTICIPANT CONTACT SCRIPTS

Phone:

Hello, may I speak with _____?

Hi, my name is Kristin. _____ gave me your name as a parent who might be interested in participating in a study I am conducting on how parents and their children communicate about teenagers' Internet use and habits. I am conducting this study for my master's thesis.

In this study, I plan to interview you and your child separately. My intent is to set up two interview sessions with each of you. My questions will deal mainly with your child's Internet use and habits. I will also be asking questions regarding your household rules regarding children's Internet use and your parenting style.

Please be assured that you and your child will never be identified in this study and that your answers will be kept completely confidential. No names will be divulged. For your time, both you and your child will be given a $10 gift card from Target as a token of my appreciation for your participation.

Do you think you AND your son/daughter would be interested in participating?

If so, can we schedule a time to meet and review the consent and release forms?

If you would like to consider this, I can give you my contact information so you can get back to me regarding your preference.

Thank you very much for your time!

Good-bye.

Email:

Hi, my name is Kristin Hopper-Losenicky. _____ gave me your name as a parent who might be interested in participating in a study I am conducting on how parents and their children communicate about teenagers' Internet use and habits. I am conducting this study for my master's thesis at Iowa State University.

In this study, I plan to interview you and your child separately. My intent is to set up two interview sessions with each of you. My questions will deal mainly with your child's Internet use and habits. I will also be asking questions regarding your household rules regarding how children should use the Internet and your parenting style.

Please be assured that you and your child will never be identified as having participated in this study and that your answers and those of your child will be kept completely confidential. No names will be published. For your time, both you and your child will be given a $10 gift card from Target as a token of my appreciation for your participation.

If you think you AND your son/daughter would be interested in participating, please respond to me at this e-mail address. I will send more information so that we can schedule a time to meet and review the consent and release forms.

Thank you very much for your time!

Sincerely,
Kristin Hopper-Losenicky

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR MOTHERS

Informed Consent Form for Parent Participants:
"Risk communication in the Internet Age" Study Interviews

This form describes the research project "Risk communication in the Internet age." It has information to help you decide whether you will participate in this project. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation should be completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the principal investigator before deciding to participate. The following are questions often asked by research participants:

Who is conducting this study?
This study is being conducted by graduate student Kristin Hopper-Losenicky for a master's thesis in journalism and mass communication.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?
You are being asked to take part in this study because you fit the demographics of a parent with a child between the ages of 11-14 and you have Internet access at home.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to find out what parents and their children believe are risky online behaviors and to determine how parents communicate with their kids about avoiding these risks.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, each parent and child will be interviewed separately. You will be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The questions will ask about demographic information, your parenting style, and your views, concerns and practices relating to your child's Internet habits.

Topics for adolescent-participants will include how much time is spent online, what sites they visit, the utilities of these sites, and whether they have ever witnessed anything that made them uncomfortable, such as explicit content and inappropriate behavior online.

Topics for parent-participants will include rules regarding Internet use at home, Internet conversation topics with children, and opinions regarding online use surveillance.

Parent and child participants will NOT be made aware of each other's responses. HOWEVER, should either participant reveal situations or circumstances where their life or wellbeing are endangered, confidentiality will be broken so that the parent or the proper authorities can be notified.

The interviews are expected to be 45-60 minutes long and will be scheduled between December 2009 and June 2010. The interviews will take place in a neutral and private location.

What are the possible risks and benefits of my participation?
Risks – The possible risks related to your participation in this research could include feelings of discomfort due to sensitive or potentially embarrassing questions.

Benefits – You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. We hope this research will benefit society by deepening our understanding of parent-child communication patterns regarding Internet use and by providing insights on adolescent Internet activities and behaviors.

How will the information I provide be used?
The information you provide will be used as follows: It will be summarized and then analyzed based on communication and social theories to determine patterns of behavior. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data gathered. In the event of concern with the information collected, the research advisor may access the information only for verification.

What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken: During the research process, interview recordings and transcripts of the interview proceedings will be kept in the researcher's password-protected laptop. Only the researcher will have access to these files. Any recordings made of interviews and written records of these interviews will be destroyed following completion of the project. During the research, you will be assigned a research ID in order to avoid using your true name during interview recordings and notes. Names of all participants will be changed to conceal their identity in the published thesis and other works that may result from this project. When results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

While every step is taken to ensure participants' confidentiality, there may be a serious case where confidentiality cannot be maintained. Confidentiality may be broken only on the condition that the researcher notes that the participant's life or wellbeing may be in danger. These instances include, but are not limited to, the following situations:

Children and teens are always curious about pornographic cites, but the researcher will break confidentiality only when the respondent exhibits addictive behavior (i.e., the child no longer does homework but spends an inordinate amount of time in these sites).

If the participant has joined a group online that may endanger his/her wellbeing, the researcher will break confidentiality.

If the participant discloses persistent online conversations with potential predators (i.e., a person he/she does NOT know and who has been known to initiate or request actual meetings), the researcher will break confidentiality.

Will I incur any cost from participating or will I be compensated?
You will not incur any costs from participating in this study. You will be compensated for your time with a $10 gift card from Target. This gift card will be distributed before, during or after the interview sessions.

What are my rights as a human research participant?
Participating in this study should be completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. During the interview, you can skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Whom can I call if I have questions or problems?
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Kristin Hopper-Losenicky at 319-899-3046 or her academic adviser, Lulu Rodriguez, at 515-294-0484.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or if you have any research-related injury, please contact the Iowa State University IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or the Director of the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011 (515) 294-3115.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Parent: *I agree to participate and authorize my child (listed above) to participate in this study. I understand my child will not be made aware of my answers and that my identity will remain confidential at all times.*

(Parent Participant's Signature and Date)

Investigator Statement
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his/her questions has been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent and Date)

APPENDIX E: ASSENT FORM FOR TEEN PARTICIPANTS

Informed Assent Form for Pre-Teen/Teen Participants:
"Risk Communication in the Internet Age" Study Interviews

The researcher will go over the information on this form WITH the potential participant to ensure that he/she is aware of the goals of the study and the types of questions he/she will be asked during the interview process. If the teenager agrees to participate, signing the bottom of this form will demonstrate his/her understanding of the study and give documentation of his/her assent to participate.

This form describes the research project "Risk communication in the Internet age." It has information to help you decide whether you will participate in this project. Research studies should include only people who choose to take part—your participation should be completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the principal investigator before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?
This study is being conducted by graduate student Kristin Hopper-Losenicky for a master's thesis in journalism and mass communication.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?
You are being asked to take part in this study because you fit the demographics of adolescents between 11-14 years of age with Internet access at home.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to find out what parents and their children believe are risky online behaviors and to determine how parents communicate with their kids about avoiding these risks.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed separately from your parent. Some questions will be about your age and what grade you are in. Other questions will be about your household's rules regarding how you use the Internet, and the consequences of breaking those rules. Most of the questions will be about your online activities such as how long you go online, what types of sites you visit and why, and your "not too pleasant" experiences online.

Your answers will be kept confidential. This means that I will not tell your parents what you said or might reveal to me. If the study is published, your personal information or any information that will link the response to you will not be revealed. During the research, you will be assigned a research ID to avoid using your true name during interview recordings and notes. HOWEVER, if you do share with me information that shows me that you are in some

kind of danger, I MUST inform your parents or persons in authority so that we can keep you safe.

The interviews are expected to be 45-60 minutes long and will be scheduled between December 2009 and June 2010. You will be interviewed in a location in which you will feel comfortable.

What do I get for participating?
You will receive a $10 gift card from Target for your time. The interviewer will give you this gift card at the start of the interview.

What are my rights as a human research participant?
Participating in this study should be completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. During the interview, you can skip questions which, for one reason or another, you do not wish to answer.

Who can I call if I have questions or problems?
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study, please contact Kristin Hopper-Losenicky at 319-899-3046 or her academic adviser, Lulu Rodriguez, at 515-294-0484.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or if you have any research-related injury, please contact the Iowa State University IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or the Director of the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011 (515) 294-3115.

Assent and Authorization
Your signature means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that any questions you have have been answered.

Adolescent: I agree to participate in this study and understand that my parents will not be made aware of my answers and that my identity will remain confidential UNLESS I reveal information that indicates to the researcher that my life or wellbeing is in danger.

_____

(Adolescent Participant's Signature and Date)

Investigator Statement
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his/her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent and Date)

APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MOTHERS

Demographics

1. What is your age?

2. What is your occupation?

3. What is your level of education?

4. What is your race or ethnicity?

Parenting Style

5. Tell me about the kinds of rules for you have for your child.

6. Do you discuss what these rules mean with your child? Do you allow your child to give you their input about those rules?

7. How do you ensure that these rules are followed?

8. For the most part, does your child follow rules and guidelines set for them?

9. What kinds of consequences are there if the rules are broken? How often would you say you have to reprimand your child for disregarding these rules?

10. Please describe the type of relationship you have with your child.

11. How often does your child discuss problems with you one-on-one?

12. As a parent, do you feel you are well informed about how to protect your child about the dangers of Internet use?

13. Do you feel your child trusts you?

Internet Use

14. How well do you use the computer and the Internet?

15. How often do you use the Internet? What kinds of activities do you use the Internet for?

16. Do you feel that computers and and the Internet are useful for a child's learning?

17. Do you have rules about certain times that your child can go online? Do you have a limit on time per day/week that your child spends online?

18. Are there sites you have asked your child not to visit?

19. How often do you talk with your child about the Internet and how they use it?

20. Do you have rules about what activities your child may participate in while online?

21. If your child does not follow your rules regarding Internet use, what are the consequences? How often would you say rule violations occur?

22. Do you encourage your child to visit certain websites? What type of sites are these?

23. Do you ever sit with your child to look at websites? What types of websites do you view together?

24. Have you ever shared a story about your own online experience with your child? What was the story about?

25. Have you ever checked to see what sites your child has visited? Does your child know you do this? How do they feel about that?

26. What types of sites do you feel are risky for children to visit? What types of activities online do you think are not safe for your children to engage in? 27. Do you use any kind of software to track or block websites on your home computer?

28. Does you child know that you use this kind of software?

29. What other steps have you taken to monitor your children's online use? To what extent do you think these measures keep your child safe?

30. If your child encounters questionable material or someone was bothering them online, do you think they would approach you for help or advice?

31. What is you child's favorite website? How much time does he/she spend at this site per week? Why do you think your child enjoys this site?

32. Are there other ways you can suggest that can help parents educate their children regarding risks related to Internet use?

APPENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN

Demographics

1. How old are you?

2. What grade are you in school?

3. What is your gender?

Parenting Style

4. Tell me about your household rules regarding Internet use.

5. Did your parents sit down with you to explain those rules? Did they ask for your opinion

about any of those rules?

6. Do your parent(s) typically enforce these rules?

7. What kinds of consequences are there if those rules are broken?

8. How often would you say you follow the rules set by your parents?

9. If there are rules you don't follow, why do you not follow them?

10. How often would you say you get punished for not following the rules?

11. Please describe the relationship you have with your mom.

12. How often would you say you discuss problems with your mom? Do you discuss most of

your problems with her or just specific problems?

13. How much do you trust your mom?

Internet Use

14. How well does your mom know how to use the computer and the Internet?

15. How many hours per day do you use the Internet at home for non-school activities?

16. What kinds of activities do you use the Internet for? In what places do you use the Internet (e.g., home, school, friend's house, etc.)?

17. Do your parents have rules about the times you can go online? Do you have a limit on time per day/week you spend online? Do you follow these rules?

18. Are there any sites your parents have asked you not to visit?

19. How often does your mom talk to you about the way you should use the Internet?

20. Does your mom have rules about what activities you can participate in while online?

21. If you don't follow established rules regarding Internet use, what are the consequences? How often would you say you are punished for breaking these rules?

22. Does your mom encourage you to visit certain websites? What type of sites are these? Why do you think your mom wants you to visit these sites?

23. Does your mom e sit with you to look at websites? What types of websites do you view together?

24. Has your mom ever shared a story about her own Internet experience with you? What was the story about? Why do you think she shared this story with you?

25. Does your mom ever check to see what websites you have visited? If so, does she let you know she does this? How do you feel about her checking on you?

26. What types of sites or activities online have you done that you think your mom would not approve of? Why do you use these sites? Do you ever hide or clear away any of the websites you have visited online?

27. Does your family have any kind of software on your home computer that tracks or blocks certain websites? Do you ever try to get around this software? Are you successful in doing so?

28. If you saw or experience something online you thought was wrong, such as when someone bullies or harasses you, would you talk to your mom about it?

29. What kinds of online activities or websites do you think are dangerous for you or other kids to visit? Can you describe activities that you, or kids you know, do online that could be dangerous?

30. Have you ever seen anything online that upset or made you uncomfortable? How did you end up at this site? How did you feel about that incident? Do you have friends who have told you about such experiences?

31. How or where did you learn about Internet safety?

32. How aware is your mom is about your online activities?

33. Do you ever post private information online (such as your birth date, address, school, or phone number)? Do you ever post information about where you are going or what you will be doing during the day? Have you ever posted compromising photos of yourself?

34. What is your favorite website? How much time do you spend at this site per week? What are your favorite things about this website?

35. Tell me about the extra curricular activities you are involved in.