CHAPTER 14

Risks, Opportunities, and Risky Opportunities: How Children Make Sense of the Online Environment

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As homes, schools, and the wider society increasingly adopt and find ways to appropriate online, convergent, mobile, and networked media, children figure prominently in debates about the likely benefits and harms that will result. Children are the digital natives, say some, ahead in their understanding and uses of new technologies and thus leaving behind the adults who have, traditionally, supported and guided them. Children are the vulnerable victims of the digital age, say others, exploited for their innocence by commercial bodies and abusive adults alike. Children are the future, say a further group, and thus merit educational technologies so they can develop the 21-century skills that future employers will demand. And yet despite this abundance of claims about children's online experiences and potential, relatively few policy makers, practitioners, or journalists actually listen to children as they articulate their own views, concerns, hopes, and demands. This is the power of empirical research, for researchers do not just consult the "usual suspects" (the typically privileged children invited to participate in policy consultations). Nor do they refer to their own children as a touchstone for children's experiences in general. And nor do they conduct quick-and-dirty "polls" to gather dramatic claims for a media headline.

It is fortunate, then, that underpinning the growing edifice of policy and practice regarding children's online risks and opportunities, the research effort is also growing apace (Cortesi & Glasser, 2015; Livingstone, Mascheroni, & Staksrud, 2017; OECD, 2011; UNICEF, 2012), even if too easily overlooked by those who might make best use of the findings (Donoso, Verdoodt, van Mechelen, & Jasmontaite, 2016; O'Neill, Staksrud, & McLaughlin, 2013).

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Thus, as parents, teachers, and children are acquiring, learning how to use, and finding a purpose for the Internet within their daily lives, a range of stakeholders—governments, schools, industry, child welfare organizations, and families—are seeking more or less evidence-based ways to maximize online opportunities while minimizing the risk of harm associated with Internet use. However, research with children throws up challenges of its own. This chapter addresses the ways in which children work out what risks face them online. We show that they do not always agree with adults in the prioritization or even in the classification of risks and opportunities, as their experiences, opinions, and understandings do not fit neatly into such a seemingly obvious binary scheme.

Understanding children's perspectives is important because parents and teachers seek to prioritize online opportunities (after all, this is the reason why they invest in the technology in the first place) while trying to control or reduce the risk of harm as if they and the children they are responsible for see eye-to-eye about which is which. In the parental mediation literature, while it is sometimes acknowledged that children and parents have different motivations for using media, it seems not to be noticed that they may interpret risks and opportunities differently. Some simple examples can make the point: meeting a new person online is generally an opportunity as children see it but a risk to their parents; giving out personal information online enables children to pursue new opportunities but worries their parents; looking up sexual information is vital for many teenagers but can seem like an obsession with pornography, and something to be filtered or blocked, to many parents.

As danah boyd (2014) has shown, if parents and children do not agree, then children are likely to try to circumvent and undermine parental efforts at mediating the Internet. Children find benefits from activities that adults do not anticipate; for example, children wish—sometimes with good justification—to explore forms of knowledge forbidden to them, or they wish to test themselves against challenges that adults fear they cannot withstand (Willett & Burn, 2005). As the realization grows that adults cannot "wrap children in cotton wool" online but must, instead, find ways to build their resilience against possible adversity (Young Minds, 2016), it is important to examine how children themselves perceive online risks, opportunities and, somewhere in between, "risky opportunities" (Livingstone, 2008). This will help to understand how children themselves find ways—and may be better supported in finding ways—to cope with them (Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Segers, 2012; Weinstein et al., 2016). For, as research has shown over and again, children are unlikely to tell parents or, especially, teachers if something

untoward happens to them online precisely because they think adults do not understand the problem and will overreact in a punitive fashion (Haddon, 2015; Pasquier, Simões, & Kredens, 2012).

This chapter analyses how British children aged 9–16 discuss their online experiences more broadly, listening for their conceptions of online risk, opportunity, risky opportunity, and their thoughts on whether adult intervention or support is required and why. Specifically, our research questions are:

- In what forms do children encounter online risks and opportunities?
- How do they make sense of these experiences, for example, in terms of evaluating risks and contextualizing them in relation to their broader experiences?
- Beyond the normal risk agenda, what other online experiences do children regard as being negative and why?
- What strategies do they use to prevent or cope with potentially negative online experiences?

METHODOLOGY

The EU Kids Online project aimed to enhance the knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the Internet. After the EU Kids Online I project (2006–09) had reviewed existing European data in this field, the EU Kids Online II project (2009–11) conducted a pan-European survey (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011; see Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2010 specifically for the UK findings). Some of the same questions were asked in the Net Children Go Mobile survey in 2013 providing comparative data over time for the United Kingdom (Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni, & Ólafsson, 2014).

The follow-up EU Kids Online III (2011–14) project examined the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of children's online risks and opportunities as part of a network now encompassing researchers across 33 countries. This included a substantial qualitative study of children's perspectives, asking about risks but also other experiences online that children may perceive as problematic. The pan-European results (from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom) are reported in Smahel and Wright (2014).

This chapter looks specifically at the experiences of the UK children who took part in that wider European project. In the UK pilot, interviews were

conducted in January 2013 and the main interviews took place between March and September 2013 in four schools—two primary and two secondary. This consisted of interviews with two boys and two girls from each age group (9–10, 11–13, 14–16), and one boys' and one girls' focus group from each of the three age bands, with each group consisting of five people. There was one extra interview with a boy aged 9–10. This made a total of 13 interviews and 6 focus groups—with 43 children aged 9–16 years old in total. While this is a fairly modest study in terms of UK children, it gains strength from being part of the larger European study which, in all, encompassed 378 children aged 9–16, recruited through schools and youth centers, and interviewed in 56 focus groups and 114 individual interviews. In discussing the UK qualitative findings, we contextualize these in relation to the EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile survey findings.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

Sexual Content

The Net Children Go Mobile[1] survey found that UK children were less likely than the European average to have seen sexual images in general (17% vs. 28%) (Livingstone et al., 2014). What did children have to say about the possibility and reality of such experiences? In the qualitative study, most of the UK children interviewed, especially the younger ones, had learned to use the term "inappropriate" to describe the content that their parents had told them they were not supposed to view online. Sometimes this could mean violent content, mainly for games, and it could also mean bad language, but most commonly it referred to sexual images. Some of the youngest, the 9- to 10-year-olds, also characterized some of this material as "disgusting" (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, Staksrud, & the EU Kids Online Network, 2013; Smahel & Wright, 2014).

To put this into perspective, from the EU Kids Online survey data only 3% of children in the United Kingdom had both seen sexual images online and been bothered by this (Livingstone et al., 2010). This was reflected in many of the qualitative interviews, the main example of someone being bothered coming from one of the focus groups with younger boys:

[1] Where the Net Children Go Mobile UK report covered the same ground as the EU Kids Online I, the former's data are reported because they are more recent.

Joseph: There are some really disgusting adverts like the ladies in bikinis. It's so annoying. It's really inappropriate.
Interviewer: So, what type of things?
Joseph: Well, it's like…on YouTube…on [?] it's just a giant picture of ladies' boobs [Joseph puts his hand to his forehead, the other boys all laugh] …and next you see men staring at it…eyeballs like that [gestures to show eyes coming out of the head] …That's disgusting… [he buries his head in his arms, the others laugh] Switch off the laptop! That's just out of order! And that happened to my cousin once…and he called me…and I said 'Why did you call me for such a thing like that, that's disgusting'.

(Boy, 10)

For some of the children, it was clear that they personally might not be particularly worried by encountering "inappropriate" content, whatever their parents said, but they nevertheless thought that it was "inappropriate" for younger siblings and relatives such as cousins who might be adversely affected by the content. Some 14- to 16-year-olds might say this referring to relatives who could be 9–10, but 9- to 10-year-olds might say the very same thing about siblings even younger than them. It was clear that even young children understood the nature of sexual content. In fact, sometimes they expressed quite a sophisticated appreciation. For example, Lewis understood the principle that sexual images in adverts are used to sell products, but was mystified why they were used to sell this particular product.

Lewis: Sometimes they have adverts of these ladies around poles…you know those ladies who… [mimics rubbing up a pole in pole dancing] …like fashion models…advertising a pint of milk! And I was thinking [opens his eyes very wide] …basically what they did…all these ladies coming down the catwalk show [mimics them moving his thighs and with his hand behind his head] …and then suddenly one came along with a pint of milk [holds his two hands out in front, mimicking carrying the milk] And I was thinking 'Is that all! They're advertising milk!'… [moves his shoulders up and down as if walking down the catwalk] …'You milk' [imitates pouting and kissing the milk, others laugh]

(Boy, 10)

Slightly older children are often even more reflective and articulate about inappropriate content. Melanie talked about her encounter with sexual content starting when she was visiting a gaming site. Many children mentioned online gaming sites where the material "popped up." In fact, the EU Kids Online survey showed that pop-ups in general were the most common way of encountering such material—with 46% of children who saw online sexual images saying it happened in this way (Livingstone et al., 2010), and accidently encountering such material was frequently noted in the European qualitative report (Smahel & Wright, 2014). On the one hand, Melanie, like

Joseph, initially referred to the material as "disgusting," but then went on to ask why online sexual content should exist, not in terms of it being bad, but in terms of questioning why this would be interesting. This looks less like a view handed down from adults, but more a position she was trying to work out for herself.

> *Melanie: I went on this gaming site and it came up…like… 'Click here to see free [um] porn'. And I didn't want to click it…but then… it looked disgusting! Like, we've all got the same bodies, sort of. Maybe different skin colours, yeah…but that don't mean nothing. 'Cos, like…what's the point of putting, literally, a body on the Internet for other people with the same body to watch it?*
>
> ***(Girl, 12)***

For some of the boys, the particular area where they raised questions about the nature of sexual images was in relation to games, given the importance of gaming in boys' culture. So their comments would drift between the games offline for consoles and those played online. For example, one typical comment was to question whether something should be counted as, for example, a nude image since you would have to be looking very closely to see anything, and most of the time boys would be more engaged in game-play. Or, as Zyan noted:

> *Zyan: When it comes to nudity on that game, basically you can't even see them naked. They will be pixelated and you can't see any of their body parts. I don't know why they say there's nudity even though the body parts are pixelated. It doesn't make any difference, it's like they're still wearing clothes.*
>
> ***(Boy, 12)***

The other area of questioning was to argue that children can see forms of nudity in daily life in other media, like topless girls in newspapers, and that was "real life," as Shiv (Boy, 12) put it. So what was all the fuss about as regards much less ostentatious nudity in games? As Shiv put it, "*it doesn't really make sense, to be honest*."

As regards the rationale for their own reactions to sexual images, Candice (Girl, 12) talked about encountering sexual videos on YouTube, and why at this stage in her life she would consciously prefer to remain "relatively" innocent of these things, even if she had some formal knowledge of sexual matters:

> *Candice: It could get you thinking about all these things (…) that you don't really want to know, because I'm 12. I wouldn't want to know about inappropriate things (…) if there was a particular video about sex, for example, then I'd find that inappropriate, because I'm at the age, where I know what sex is, but if I want to find information, I'd probably ask my mum for starters. I don't know what these people are going to say, they could put the wrong ideas in my head.*
> *[Later, she continued…]*

Candice: Boys, especially my age, they seem to be very into videos that are not really for their age, but they come from particular websites. The things they watch are a man and a woman having sex, or a woman stripping. But I wouldn't really watch that, because it's not very interesting, it's not for my age. I don't want to grow up really fast, I like being 12. I wouldn't watch it because my mum wouldn't like it either.
Interviewer: How do you know the boys are watching this type of stuff?
Candice: Because they talk about it nearly all the time.
Interviewer: And they're quite willing to talk about it, when the girls are around them as well?
Candice: They don't care. (…) Sometimes, you can't help what you hear. Maybe you heard this person saying it to another boy or maybe they're talking loudly. Most of them will say this, when we're having a break. Most of them have videos on their phones that they have downloaded. Last year, there was a group of boys looking at one person's phone and I didn't know what they were looking at. One of the boys told me, it was actually a woman stripping.

Candice's observations about her male peers fit with the EU Kids Online survey data that UK boys were more likely than girls to have encountered sexual images online (14% vs. 8%; Livingstone et al., 2010). However, not all boys were so engaged in watching sexual content, and in the interviews, even older boys could take a moral view on why pornography should have age restrictions, and what effects it might have, in terms of influencing their perspectives of sexuality. Consider these boys, aged 15–16:

David: Hopefully none of us at school will have sex before a good age so we shouldn't really, no one should really be seeing pornography yet. But then there probably are those odd one or two people who are watching it and while getting kind of ideas or something in their heads which will then kind of ruin the rest of their lives.
Jack: They shouldn't really be watching it because they just get ideas because if you're 18 you wouldn't get such ideas as you would if you're 13.
Interviewer: You think it's too easily available, the pornography, or is it okay? Maybe it should be available, maybe that's also part of life?
Roland: Okay, when you're, like, 18 or something you've never done it before, then it could, I guess, make you more aware, but at this age it's just not right because everyone's too young.

In fact, sometimes the objection is that sexual content can be a distraction, taking time away from doing more worthwhile things, such as preparing for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams:

Logan: I think there should be an age limit on it, because it could distract you from your work. Like, you wouldn't get the right level…it could affect you when you're doing GCSEs

(Boy, 15)

The survey had asked whether sexual material "bothered" the children. The answers from Candice and from the older boys suggest that some young people might not go as far as to suggest it actually upset them (and so they would not be reflected in EU Kids Online findings specifically on self-reported harm). But nevertheless, they had a viewpoint on this material and might choose to avoid it. In sum, while some, especially younger, children might be bothered by sexual content, others were clearly not—although they thought it might be an issue for children younger than them. Some of their reflections showed that even younger children can have a sophisticated understanding of why sexual content exists online, they can raise questions about why it should exist, or they question why there should be so much adult concern about sexuality online considering the sexual content they encounter elsewhere.

Making and Posting Sexual Content

Apart from looking at encountering sexual content, the EU Kids Online survey had also examined the practices of "sending" and "receiving" sexual images and messages in order to throw light on contemporary discussions of the "sexting" practices of young people. The more recent Net Children Go Mobile survey data showed that few children and young people in the United Kingdom have received sexual messages or images (4%), which is lower than the European average (11%) (Livingstone et al., 2014). But most of the qualitative interviews generated some spontaneous examples of sexting practices among the peer group, if not necessarily by the young person being interviewed. This included often lively discussions of what happens when images start off being sent to a particular person but are then posted online for a wider audience to see or otherwise distributed person-to-person.

In the United Kingdom, some of the 14- to 16-year-olds in particular knew of examples of this from their own schools, or from their friends, including the type of situation sometimes cited in media reporting of sexting, where a boy had solicited a sexual image of a girlfriend and subsequently passed it on to male friends. But it is clear that practices relating to sending and receiving sexual content are a little more varied. For example, Elsie (Girl, 15) had received pictures from a boy posing in his underwear (which she judged to be narcissistic) while a friend had received a more revealing picture from another boy. Both Huzaifah's (Boy, 12) friend and cousin had received unsolicited topless pictures from girls.

As regards images posted online, the European qualitative study had noted that some girls posted provocative photos of themselves in order to receive "likes" on social networking sites (SNSs) (Smahel & Wright, 2014). In keeping with this, a group of girls aged 12–13 commented on the way some of their peers posted pictures of themselves with "make-up and few clothes" to win "Friends." Christine (Girl, 15) also introduced a critical note about her peers when observing that the pictures some girls posted of themselves (e.g., in bikinis) were a little too revealing. However, the example below shows another route to the posting of such images. Past research on mobile phones had shown how young people sometimes take pictures of their peers, often of their faces with unusual expressions (otherwise known as "mugshots") and post them in order to tease or embarrass the victims (Haddon & Vincent, 2009). Here we see that posting sexual images can be an extension of this practice of embarrassing peers, when in this case the perpetrator is actually a girlfriend rather than the boyfriend discussed in some of the sexting cases. Girls aged 12–13 told us:

Melanie: Once I stayed round my friend's house and like…I was…taking my top off [gestures to show what she means, imitates pulling it over her head] …in the bathroom to change into my pyjamas…and she come in and she took a picture of me like this [others laugh as Melanie poses] …and she posted it all over BBM…and I thought, like 'You really did that'. [Laughs]
Interviewer: So was that embarrassing?
Melanie: It was, yeah…it was (…)
Interviewer: So when you were on the receiving end of this, did you ask for this picture to be taken down?
Jane: You don't just say [in a polite voice] 'Can you take that picture down?' [Others laugh] Well, I wouldn't, but she might.
Melanie: All I said, yeah…you know, like when they looked at the picture, yeah…and I had a Blackberry at the time and everyone was saying, 'Oh Melanie, I saw that picture'. And I said like … 'Yeah, I know. You like my body'.

Apart from Melanie's ability to cope with the dissemination of the topless image by laughing it off, it is interesting to note that Jane's comment is typical of these discussions of managing embarrassing pictures—part of the tease is to resist the request to take down the image when the "victim" asks them to do so. Lastly, Mary cites the case of a male peer, revealing her judgement that those who create such content should have known better. Again, this is framed in terms of there being an embarrassing picture and this led to teasing:

> *Mary: There was an incident about a year ago, in which someone sent a rather revealing photograph of themselves to someone else. It was really, like, this poor guy had to endure teasing for ages about it. It was all over the place (…) That's happened a couple of times to people, and it's just really bad, because they should know, by now, what's going to happen (…) it's going to get shared and stuff. And what's quite lucky with this case is that everyone was quite sensible and didn't post it on Facebook, which is what they might have done. I wasn't really interested too much in it, but it is a very silly thing to do.*
>
> ***(Girl, 15)***

In this case, it looks as if the image was circulated more mobile to mobile, rather than being posted online. To sum up, reflecting the survey data we found that children's personal experience of sexting was limited, but their awareness of the practice and other people's experiences was more widespread. Sexting came in various forms with unsolicited pictures from boys and girls, as well as posting revealing pictures to win approval—although some of the girls were critical when their female peers did this. In one case, a victim reported that the perpetrator was actually another girl, but in this and other cases, perhaps the more interesting point is that the sexual images were framed in terms of the wider practice of taking, posting, or forwarding pictures as a tease or to embarrass.

"Bad Language" in Content

Sexual material was not the only form of inappropriate online content identified by the UK interviewees. Another was the use of bad language or swearing—and this was certainly content to which many parents objected, according to their children. This section differentiates this from swearing in interpersonal communication online, to be discussed in the next section. The younger children were more critical of such content, such as when Lewis (Boy, 10) had encountered the word "fuck" when looking up the "flag of Spain" on Google Image: *I don't think they should allow people to do really rude images or films…*

The word "rude" was also used to refer to this content, and so did not always mean sexual. As with Lewis, Shami (Girl, 10) questioned why this happened:

> *Shami: And also if you click on something, you think it's perfectly fine, but then it's…very rude (…) bad words. Swear words. I don't know why they do that but they just do… Which is strange. Because they don't need to.*

The older children were more likely to question whether it was possible to avoid such language given that it was present in the offline world, and hence,

as in the case of games and sexual images, they questioned the logic of parents trying to protect them from this just in the online world:

> *David: There's all these people telling my parents kind of: 'Oh, yes, you should make sure that your kids don't know any swearwords or anything until they're at an appropriate age.'*
> *Jack: It's hard to protect it from me because they go to school and the other kids there already know the stuff.*
> *David: Yes, the first time I ever came across the 'F' word (…) there was this bridge and I was just looking underneath it and someone had sprayed kind of the 'F' word along the wall.*
> *Jack: And just, like, staying out one night, one night really late, you just see so much stuff.*
>
> ***(Boys, 15–16)***

In fact, some, like Damien (Boy, 15), observed that even when he could watch versions of films on YouTube with the swearing beeped out, he preferred to watch the "normal" version, where it was retained.

It is generally clear from the children's accounts that bad language in online content is an issue for parents, perhaps more so for parents of younger children. While some, especially younger, children simply shy away from such content, we saw examples of how these same children can comment critically on this material. On the whole, the older children were more likely to view such language as being an inevitable part of offline life, and hence sometimes had doubts about parental attempts to single out bad language online as a problem.

Aggressive Communication, Harassment, and Cyberbullying

While the EU Kids Online survey had concentrated on cyberbullying as a key risk, following the literature on this topic, the EU Kids Online European qualitative study broadened the focus to cover a range of negative forms of online interaction, including various forms of aggression (Černíková & Smahel, 2014). The rationale for this was that children would talk about these experiences of aggression, which were important to them, but they did not necessarily think about the experiences as constituting "cyberbullying." For example, Mohammed was among a number of children who objected to others swearing at him and, like his European counterparts, he felt angry about this rather than upset.

> *Mohammed: It was from this kid on this game that I was playing… […] he was using bad language to me and towards my friends (…) so I reported him and we got him banned straightaway.*

Interviewer: So he was on this chat thing you can do when you're on games? Okay. Was it a surprise, or have you had things like that in the past?
Mohammed: Yes, it was a surprise to me because nobody had spoken to me like that. I wasn't upset. I was just like angry because he was being rude and I hadn't done anything to him.

(Boy, 10)

But also it is not just strangers who could be aggressive. Children can also be generally nasty and mean to each other (and in the examples below, threatening as well).

Jane: Or they'll say 'if you don't BC someone I will haunt you'…and then they'll say 'They'll be someone at the end of your bed and he will come and chop your head off'.
Linda: It's like on X-Factor [TV competition] …Jill wrote a BC…like if you don't vote for XXXX then this little girl's gonna come to your bed and kill you…or something like that.
Jane: Or 'You'll have bad luck'.
Melanie: And the 'You won't get a boyfriend' or something like that…how stupid!

(Girls, 12)

Sometimes the children felt this aggressive behavior occurred more online than offline precisely because it was not face-to-face, as when Josie (Girl, 12) noted*: Because you don't see the person's face, you don't see the person's reaction, so you just…and you're only typing…*

The EU Kids Online survey showed that only 8% of UK children who go online had received nasty or hurtful messages online, slightly above the European average (Livingstone et al., 2010). But as with the other risk areas, once the children were asked in the qualitative research to comment on cases of which they knew, quite a few could give examples, including those they identified as a form of cyberbullying. Sometimes incidents that were perhaps more thoughtless than intentionally harmful got out of hand in the online world. For example, several interviewees noted how comments made online were sometimes taken the wrong way: "*They don't think that they're saying anything mean but the other person finds it offensive*" (Pamela, Girl, 15). Others observed how something that started out as teasing—either in terms of a comment made or a picture posted—could easily "*escalate from being a joke to being quite abusive*" (Nathaniel, Boy, 12).

The European qualitative report also considered one particular case of online aggressive behavior—breaking into people's accounts and pretending to be them, then making nasty comments about other people, or sending nasty messages to friends of the victim while pretending to be them. In the Net Children Go Mobile Survey, this was covered in the section on the misuse of personal data, where 9% of children had experienced someone

breaking into their profile and pretending to be them. A few of those interviewed in the United Kingdom had experienced this themselves, or else knew people who had. This was indeed particularly awkward to deal with, as the victim had to try to repair the social damage by assuring friends that the message was not from them.

Overall, online aggression, wider and more common than cyberbullying, was experienced by a range of the children interviewed, and could come from peers as well as strangers. Several of those interviewed agreed with a theme from the cyberbullying literature that there might be more aggression online because of fewer inhibitions when social clues present in face-to-face action are removed. But it is equally clear that some incidents that do not start out as intentionally aggressive, and indeed may come from the teasing practices identified earlier, may escalate, reflecting previous research observations about the power of the Internet to amplify social dramas (boyd, 2010).

Strangers

Meeting strangers online is certainly something parents worry about and advise against. Many of the children, especially the younger ones, were very wary of this risk. For instance, there were many examples across all age groups of children declining an invitation to be a "Friend" from someone unknown. Hence, few children interviewed in this research had had "negative" experiences of strangers precisely because they had refused attempts at contact. There were no cases in this sample of someone going to meet an online contact. The main example of some negative outcome, noted earlier and mostly experienced by boys, was encountering someone in games who used bad language. The Net Children Go Mobile survey had shown that 17% of children in the United Kingdom (compared to the European average of 26%) had made contact with someone online that they had not met face-to-face (Livingstone et al., 2014). However, the question arises as to why there is even this degree of contact in the face of parental and teacher advice not to talk to strangers. There are some clues from the interviews with children.

One pattern more common with but not unique to boys is meeting people through games, usually chatting to them via a headset while playing. The aural aspect is important because it means the voice of the other person can be heard and a judgement made as to whether they sound like another child. Sometimes the discussion is more focused on commenting on the game, but others take the contact further. For example, Mohammed (Boy, 12) was one

of a number of boys who had met someone when playing; eventually they added each other as "Friends." Apart from talking about the game, they had chatted about such things as what they had done the day before, what they had watched on TV, and what they thought about various sports. They had kept in touch for some time and swapped email addresses, but then Mohammed had lost his "Friends'" details and they had lost contact.

In the early days of the Internet, one of the attractions sometimes cited for going online was to meet new people, and this is, to some extent, the same appeal for children. Most of Irene's (10) contacts were people she only encountered online, but she explained: *I know that might be dangerous, because my mum's warned me about it. But sometimes these people that have a lot in common with me. But I don't give all my personal details*. Meanwhile, Roland gave an example of talking to people from other countries, although like Irene, he was aware of the risks and was careful:

> *Roland: …they'll think that there's going to be like paedophiles and stuff on it. But it's actually quite nice people because it's sort of a lot of people your own age so you just talk to them because they, like, they want to hear your accent because you're from England and they're from, like, America so…yes.*
>
> ***(Boy, 15)***

To summarize, among the UK children interviewed there was little contact with strangers, in large part because of the awareness of risk and refusal to accept contacts online from people unknown. The notable exception, more so for boys, was contact made while gaming, and this often involved an aural element rather than text. The children were still careful, some more than others, but for the most part the often fleeting encounters were innocuous.

Rumor, Social Drama, and Unnecessary Communication

There are a whole set of practices related to the Internet that would not usually be termed "risks" but which, to varying degrees, irritated the children, or else they found the experiences to be problematic. For example, one of the points made about the Internet is that while social drama always exists among young people (as well as adults), it can be amplified when online (boyd, 2010). We saw this process of escalation in the discussion of aggressive behavior and cyberbullying, but arguably it occurs in other forms as well, for example, through the spread of rumor. For example, Rawan (Girl, 12) told her closest friend that she liked a boy and the information was passed on online until she felt as if the whole school knew about it. While the information was true, she would have preferred it if it had not spread to the extent

that it did and it was certainly embarrassing when the boy in question found out. In this second example below, the rumor was false, but it had major negative consequences that had to be sorted out. It started when Josie's friend, though not one of her really close friends, had just dyed her hair green:

> *Josie: I was online with one of the other girls, and I was like: 'Have you seen her hair?' And the girl was like, 'Yeah, I don't really like the colour'. I was like, 'Oh. It suited her a bit, but she went too far this time'. And then I think the other girl went to tell another girl that I said I didn't like the [friend's] hair, and I think she's ugly. Then the next day at school, everyone was giving me the certain look, and I went up to one of my other friends…and she was really close to me. And she was like, 'Is it true you said all of these things about [this friend]?' And I was like, 'No, I never said anything about [her].' And then the girl came…the girl who dyed her hair green. She came crying to me, and then she was like, 'Oh, I thought we were close, you were like one of my best friends, and I can't believe you'd say these things about another person. Why didn't you just come say it to me?' I was like, 'What did I say?' And she explained to me everything that's been going around. I was like, 'No, I didn't say that.' It got to the point where she wanted to slap me, but we sat in this room. The teacher was like, 'We have to settle this', and we sat in a room, and she literally won't talk to me. So I explained everything, and she was listening, but she wasn't saying anything. And then after, she was like, 'Okay, I believe you. If you say you never said it, I believe you, because you haven't lied to me before.'*
>
> ***(Girl, 12)***

There is clearly potential for distorting reports of what has been said online, perhaps sometimes maliciously, and broadcasting this, which can sour relationships. In the story above, this might have led to physical aggression had the teacher not intervened. Sometimes these rumors, accounts of what other people had done, are not even solicited, and young people like Ade below simply did not want to know these types of things, in the same way as some children are not interested in offline gossip:

> *Ade: Some people I might not even know…will just message me and say: 'Do you know someone's done this? And I'll just I'll ask them: 'Why do you need to tell me?' It's none of my business. And I just tell them 'Don't tell me any more secrets because I don't really need to know.'*
>
> ***(Boy, 12)***

Rumor is not the only type of communication that can come to be perceived in a negative light. Candice was among those children who got tired of Facebook because of the sheer amount of communication. At first she recounts a theme mentioned by others—that there was simply too much communication as people were supplying so many updates about themselves. But then she shifts to critically commenting on the nature of

communication, the gossip, speaking online behind other people's backs—that was putting her off because of its negative consequences:

> *Candice: At first, since everybody was going onto Facebook, when I wasn't allowed back in primary school, it was the most wonderful website ever. They were all using it and I wasn't allowed to and I didn't want to do it before my mum said that I could. At first it was really good, because I could see all my friends and photos and after a while, it's not very interesting. […] It's just that it gets annoying when you have people updating their status every two minutes (…) I don't really want to know your life that much. You can tell me this in person, not over the Internet (…) it was exciting at the beginning (…) (your profile) was something that's really personal, you can put your favourite singers. It didn't really interest me after a while I think they were using it for the wrong reasons. Friends of mine, reasons for bashing people (i.e. talking about someone behind their back). I think it's immature that you would do that (…) (also) if something happens in real life in school, it has to be said on Facebook. If somebody's seen this fight in school, they'll say, 'I've seen this fight with so-and-so'. And then more people see the status. If they didn't know about it, then they'll ask the particular person who was in that fight, about it the next day. That person won't be very happy.*
>
> ***(Girl, 12)***

Apart from the notifications from other status updates and the online backstabbing, the other issue identified here is that, in Candice's eyes, too much of the offline world can be reported online. Again, there is the potential for a negative experience offline to be amplified when broadcast online. Returning to the theme of there being simply too much communication, too many notifications, expressed by a number of those interviewed, the boys below give examples of what those communications might include, from emotional states to banal consumption—unnecessary and unwanted communications in their eyes:

> *Shiv: People just put anything up. They put unnecessary things up that people don't want to hear. They just put anything up if they're bored, they'll just write 'I'm bored'. On BBM they'll just write 'Eating pasta'…they'll probably take a picture of their food and put it under their picture.*
> *Interviewer: [Speaking to Nathaniel who was nodding] Same type of experience?*
> *Nathaniel: Yes, when people make statuses and they say random stuff. There's a button and you just type in what you want, pick an emoticon and it could be eating breakfast, and then they say 'Feeling hungry'. It's just like no one really wants to know, people keep bugging you and then more people do it.*
>
> ***(Boys, 12–13)***

And finally, there were the types of communication, not gossip, but nevertheless comments that people could more easily make because of anonymity

online which were in other senses inappropriate. For example, Abe (Boy, 12) thought that it was in very bad taste when "trollers" had made negative comments and jokes about someone who had died in an accident.

This section has outlined experiences, some associated with social drama, beyond those normally associated with more standard typologies of risks, that collectively appear to be far more common and which are perceived to be negative, to various degrees. One was rumor, which, whether based on truth or distortions, can be negative in its consequences. Indeed, some children try to avoid rumors or even feel negatively about SNSs because of the amount of (negative) rumors there. Then there are the other, sometimes distasteful, negative comments encountered online. Finally, adults sometimes see children's communications as banal when the children see them as being important. But here we see how even children sometimes find some of their peers' communications to be a waste of time and tedious, creating too much "traffic" online.

Excessive Use

In the Net Children Go Mobile survey, UK children were more likely than the European average to report various forms of excessive use (Livingstone et al., 2014). For example, 41% agreed that they have very or fairly often spent less time with family and friends or doing schoolwork than they should because of the time they spend on the Internet. In the qualitative study, most of those interviewed did not think their own use was problematic in this respect, but a few of the older children referred to the issue. Mary (15), like the other girls in the group interview, checked her Facebook every day, and had earlier mentioned that she missed Internet access and got annoyed when she could not go online while on holiday. However, she was also already worried that the time she spent on Facebook was affecting her schoolwork. Hence, she did not want to engage with any other forms of SNS since this would make things worse.

> *Mary: I won't let myself on Tumblr. From what I can gather it's like people who are just blogging and stuff, and you never, ever get out of it. And I'm already, sort of, in a pit with Facebook, and I'd rather not dig myself into a deeper hole, especially with my GSCEs coming up … (for example) last night, I was babysitting my little brother, and was, like, with him for about two hours, and I got, like, five minutes' worth of homework done. The rest was spent on Facebook or on my account. And if I was on Tumblr, that time would just double, so… (…) I know what the appeal is, but with my GCSEs and stuff coming up, I really can't afford to get sucked into anything else.*

In fact, it was not just schoolwork—she later noted that she would like to follow-up her other hobby of fan fiction writing, but social media were also taking time from that creative outlet:

> *I have an account on a writing website, and I post my work on there, and I get reviews and, like, stuff, and it's really interesting. And if I didn't have Facebook, I'd actually spend a lot of time on there, as well, just, like, reading through other people's work.*

Logan also saw it as a potential distraction, even referring to Facebook as potentially addictive. But like some of the other young people, this was more from observing others than from his own experience.

> *Logan: It distracts you a bit…because once you get on it, you can't really get off it. Because my cousin's got it and he's on it all the time. And you're sort of boring after a while because all you're doing is just uploading pictures and talking to people and doing stuff like that.*
>
> ***(Boy, 15)***

In this case, Logan was clearly critical of the type of "boring" person that SNSs use can lead to—something from which he wanted to distance himself.

In this section, we have seen examples of how older children can be reasonably reflective about the appeal of SNSs, they can understand it, and in one case have experienced becoming locked in to using it. But they also recognized that heavy use of social media has costs, in terms of schoolwork and other interests, and in terms of the type of person you become, or are seen to become.

Commercial Content

While the survey had sought information about a range of risks identified in the literature on children's use of the Internet, the qualitative research also asked about other things that were problematic from the child's perspective. As with their European counterparts, UK children were often frustrated and irritated by commercial material on the Internet, often citing it early in the interview and with some feeling—even if they were also willing to talk about some of more standard risk areas covered previously.

> *Francis: But the annoying things that come up are pop-ups. Say you want to click on that game. You click on it but before the game comes up…some big 'Sign up here and you get loads of money'…comes up. That's annoying (…) …and you have to wait ages for it to load before you can click the off button and close the window (…) And it takes forever!*
>
> ***(Boy, 12)***

Children, like many adults, do not like things that interrupt and waste their time. And Francis was not alone in being particularly peeved when commercial material suddenly appeared in the middle of playing a game, disrupting the flow. Pop-up adverts were the worst culprits. Some pop-ups did relate to risks areas, for example: "*I was typing what I wanted to listen to, and then suddenly this pop-up screen came up of like dating and naked ladies over there, and then I'm like 'What!*'" (Rawan, Girl, 12). Or "…the pop-up said '*Sign up for this website where you can talk to a woman and tell her to do anything you want. You can tell her to take off her clothes and stuff*'" (Huzaifah, Boy, 12). However, these were exceptions, and the more common complaint was that adverts were simply a distraction and/or inconvenience if they were difficult to get out of, or else if the children were redirected to a different site when they tried to close the pop-up down. "*Some of them, when you click on the X, it still ends up going on to the website*" (Shelley, Girl, 12).

Others resented the fact that adverts were often trying to mislead them, as in claims that they had won something (or could win something): "*They try to trick you, saying something is free and then saying it costs something*" (Cath, Girl, 10). In fact, some children noted that they could get into trouble with their parents if they did not read these adverts carefully (Robin, Girl, 10). Younger children in particular, but also older ones, could be indignant that people or companies online were trying to cheat them. For the younger ones, this was simply not fair, while older ones could be a little more worldly wise and cynical.

Other concerns were that adverts asking you to fill in something were trying to get hold of personal details, they might contain viruses, and there was a danger when typing quickly that an advert came up and it was easy to click on something inadvertently that would start a download. And some children were aware that if they did show an interest in some advert and clicked on it, the resultant cookie could attract yet more adverts. Lewis graphically characterized the experience of adverts below:

> *Lewis: It's a bit like if you're trying to walk down the road and all your friends are coming up to you and saying 'Have you heard of this'… [makes the gesture of trying to push them out of the way and push past them] 'Excuse me, out the way, I'm trying to get somewhere'. And then someone else comes along and says… [mimics the same 'have you heard of this'] …like that, in your face!*
>
> ***(Boy, 10)***

In this section, we have seen that children can be at least as annoyed as adults about unwanted commercial content, and for many of the same reasons. And compared to other risks, they clearly encountered disruptive, unsolicited

commercial content often. The interviews convey a sense that every child could complain about this if asked, and most, in practice, did, volunteering these as some of the first examples of negative experiences online. At the very least, they were irritating and sometimes offended their sensibilities that someone was intentionally lying to them, and they had to be careful in case mishandling them or inadvertently clicking at the wrong time could cost money and get them into trouble at home.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Reflecting the high degree of eSafety training[2] in the United Kingdom, the children interviewed were, in general, careful. When searching for something or checking out a peer's recommended websites, many of the younger children (aged 9–10) asked parents to check these out first. Younger children usually asked permission to download things. Since even the younger ones had had some digital literacy training, they were aware that some websites were misleading, they often checked them twice, evaluated the information online against what they had been told in school, searched several times and compared answers on several websites. When asked to supply personal information on a site they would usually ignore the request (reflecting the 87% in the EU Kids Online UK survey who said this) or else they would give false information, as in the case of Jane (Girl, 12), who imaginatively supplied names and addresses from the *Harry Potter* stories. Sometimes giving false names is associated with accessing an SNS under-age, but here it is a tactic used by children to protect themselves. In addition, some children developed their own strategies, as in the case of Lawrence (Boy, 10) who specifically used the platform *Spotify* to download music because it did not have the versions remixed with swearing. Meanwhile Robin had developed her own search procedure:

> *Robin: I always put 'For kids' (in the search) as well (…) If it either says in the title or in the little paragraph (afterwards), 'For kids,' I would click on it. I would probably check with my mum first of all.*
>
> ***(Girl, 10)***

Although the research provided a few examples of young people talking to strangers, on the whole the children did not talk to them, following school (and parental) advice. Most children, and all the younger children, did not communicate with people they did not know, and they turned down

[2] All those interviewed had had eSafety lessons, sometimes for several years.

Friend requests from strangers. Even those older children who were willing to make contact often took some precautions, as in the case of Roland who wanted to see via a webcam that he was actually talking to another young person, and tended to make contact when other friends were physically around:

> *Roland: Oh, no, I don't go on the one where you can't see them because it's then kind of dodgy.*
> *Interviewer: Right, so you can see who you're talking to?*
> *Roland: Yes, but I only go when I'm with mates because then I, it feels kind of weird when you're just on your own.*
>
> ***(Boy, 15)***

Again, some developed their own communication strategies, such as Robin (Girl, 10), who would send a text message to friends warning them in advance that she was going to email them. And as in the *Spotify* example, some chose certain platforms rather than others because they were safer in some way. Hence Cath (Girl, 9–10) chose to use Club Penguin because it had rules about swearing and threatening behavior, and Theo chose Twitter over Facebook for a related reason—because of their respective reputations:

> *Theo: The reason I chose Twitter over Facebook was I heard kind of people saying 'Oh, Facebook, so-and-so has said this about me'…and it kind of sounded as if people are using it on purpose to either bully people, other people or something. But on Twitter I haven't heard that much kind of criticism about it.*
>
> ***(Boy, 15)***

Lastly, even though they could describe cases when hasty comments had been made or teasing had led to a situation that had "got out of hand," a number of those interviewed indicated that they personally tried to be cautious and reflective, and not do something online that was going to create problems for others:

> *Ade: I don't want to put up something that's so bad that it can be harmful to other people, like something racist that can hurt other people's feelings, so I need to know where the limit is and where's the line to push the boundaries (…) If I'm not sure, I don't do it, just in case. So I just stay away from trouble.*
>
> ***(Boy, 12)***

In sum, although not claiming that all UK children are as careful as the ones in this research, their range of preventative measures was impressive, indeed sometimes inventive, and would make many of those who provide eSafety training proud. And while the previous sections on rumor and perhaps

aggression may reflect some children being insensitive when online, here we have examples, and they were by no means the only ones, demonstrating thoughtfulness and empathy.

COPING

As regards encountering unwanted websites or pop-ups, most of those over the age of 11 dealt with them by technical means—often, deleting the pop-ups or simply moving on. So, when Fahima (Girl, 12) encountered a pop-up for a dating website, she deleted it, and when the system then offered her an option to block pop-ups, she took it. Younger children sometimes did this: when Mohammed (Boy, 10) recognized the site was "trying to trick him," he left it. Meanwhile, Abe's (Boy, 12) brother installed some software that stopped his pop-ups. Sometimes pressing the X-button to close a pop-up did not work, which was itself frustrating, and a number of children mentioned that they had to resort to closing the computer down in those cases. However, others admitted that their patience was really being strained:

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

Incidents like this, when there is such a strong reaction that the child almost destroys the machine, make it understandable that when asked in an open-ended way "what bothers them" or "what is negative about the Internet," sometimes the first thing volunteered is not the higher profile risks identified in eSafety teaching. Those can sometimes seem distant from their own personal experience, albeit important, whereas something like the frustrations, built up over time, of pop-ups can feel really immediate.

If younger children (aged 9–10) received a communication that they were not sure about or decided was negative, they usually told a parent. As regards aggressive communication, it was clear that many children of different ages had been warned by parents and/or teachers to tell someone if this happened, but also not to reply in order to avoid escalating the problem. Most did exactly this, or else used the "report" mechanism (e.g., if someone was swearing at them). In the example below, where Jane was threatened,

not only did she report the case, but she also received social support from her friends.

> *Jane: There was the guy and he said that he was going to kill me and then all of my friends. So I reported him… All my friends were calling him names because of this.*
>
> ***(Girl, 12)***

We only had one UK example of what the coping section of the European qualitative report identified as a "retaliation" response, here responding to aggression with aggression:

> *Keith: Yes, and some kid on there, he called me a bad name and I sort of hacked his Penguin account (…) I kept on making the guy crash into walls, yes, and he got really annoyed and called me a name.*
>
> ***(Boy, 13)***

Apart from this case, the more mainstream and immediate response of ignoring aggression, or in the example below, virtually "walking away," can sometimes be followed up by measures to prevent this situation happening again. As the European qualitative report noted, additional new "preventative measures" can be a response to a previous negative experience. Here, Fahima's friend took an additional longer-term measure after an incident, no longer adding names she did not know to her Facebook account:

> *Fahima: I was talking to my friend on Facebook…and then all of a sudden…you know people sometimes invite themselves to a chat? (…) And me and my friend was talking, and they start saying rude things to her. And I was like, 'Just stop it'… I was like, 'You know, what. Don't reply back.' And we just both left the group chat. I think they just added her on her Facebook before that thing started. So then she went on her Facebook and she deleted all of them that she didn't know. So she got a lesson. She said that she never did it again…if she doesn't know anyone she never adds them.*
>
> ***(Girl, 12)***

As noted earlier in the section on aggressive communication, the case of hacked accounts could be a particular problematic case of aggressive behavior. Note in the story below how Elsie "freaked out" when she got messages from her friend Isadora's account because it had been hacked. In our small sample of interviews several children reported that their account had been hacked in this way, and that often it required a serious effort to try to apologize to friends, convince them they were not to blame, and to generally sort it out afterwards.

Isadora: I got a virus on my Twitter, and they were, like…
Elsie: And then they were…she was sending me, like, really horrible messages. I was, like: 'What the…?'
Isadora: Like, nasty messages. 'It wasn't me. It wasn't me'.
Interviewer: So it looked like Isadora was sending Elsie really horrible…
Isadora: Nasty messages, but I wasn't… I got the virus, so I deleted my account, but the virus reactivated it. […]
Elsie: I got really freaked out when I first got it.
Interviewer: And then you just have to close your whole account, and start all over?
Isadora: Yes, but then, because of the virus, it reactivated my account, so I can't make a new one on that email. So I just don't do Twitter anymore. I kind of gave up with it.

(Girls, 15–16)

The issue of how to deal with teasing that had the potential to escalate required more subtle social responses. The young people interviewed talked of mixed responses from peers when they asked them to remove posted photos that they were unhappy about. Below, Mary reports the case of two boys who had been photographed in such a way that it made it look like they were kissing. She was impressed by the way they successfully managed to deal with the teasing by laughing it off since she admitted that in their shoes, she might not have managed that coping response.

Mary: We lightly teased them about it, for about a few days, and it, sort of, just wore off. Like, the best part was, they were able to take the joke. If they hadn't…if it had been me, I might not have been able to take the joke, but they were able to, so it was all right.

(Girl, 15)

In general, it is clear that children do often heed much of the Internet safety advice to which they are exposed. In terms of content, they often dealt with content by technical means—deleting unwanted items, or if all else fails, turning the device off. However, unwanted content (which includes much commercial material, not just sexual content) was often one of the most frustrating and annoying experiences voiced by children, evoking some emotion. As regards communication, many children, especially younger ones, did tell parents about aggressive online contact, and tried not to escalate such confrontations. One of the most problematic of these to cope with was when the account was hacked, spoiling a child's reputation with peers. One other tricky situation to handle, which some managed better than others, was the posting of socially embarrassing (but not necessarily sexual) photos.

CONCLUSIONS

The value of research such as this lies in hearing children's voices directly. Thus, we have tried to capture just how children experience the online environment, including the clear risks of harm that adults (usually parents and teachers) have often warned them about and also the more ambiguous or contextual risky situations that they must navigate online. We have been most struck by the fact that children are indeed listening to adult advice but they are also struggling to make sense of it. The touchstone against which they judge the advice they receive is whether or not it illuminates their own experience. For example, if adults worry about online sexual content or swearing or rudeness while similar content is readily available and little noted offline, children are concerned at the discrepancy.

Then, children face a host of minor yet troublesome daily irritations and worries regarding their online experiences on which adults rarely comment or advise. These include commercial, technical, and interactional frustrations. Conversely, adults worry a good deal about rare albeit severe risks—by and large, it seems children have grasped these concerns loud and clear. However, children may not seem to act wisely in risky situations—at least as adults see it—because for children it can be difficult to match the advice given and the online situations they face. Online situations are often ambiguous or confusing. Clear rights and wrongs are difficult to determine, and children can find adult advice to be more confusing than clarifying. Moreover, the trickiest risks are posed not by strangers but by peers, complicating children's lives. For instance, it is striking that children are often concerned with the offline consequences of online interactions, finding it necessarily to put right or repair their or others' peer relationships face to face because of something that got misinterpreted online.

To conclude, we suggest three key implications for policy and practice that are supported by the evidence presented here. First, children are applying their intelligence in undertaking lively conversations among themselves in relation to online risks and safety. In seeking to guide and support them, parents and teachers would do well to recognize these conversations and, where possible, join in on occasion. They would necessarily be broaching new topics or raising new concerns with children, although children's level of understanding varies; rather, opening a conversation about online risks with children could recognize and validate their already-existing understanding, and thereby ease the task for parents and teachers of further

supporting the development of children's understanding and approaches to coping.

Second, online risk of harm to children is simultaneously widespread and rare. By this we mean that most if not all children are now aware of, thinking about and responding emotionally to the array of risks within their purview, if not their direct experience. This leads them to reflect, often critically, on the behavior of adults in general as well as their teachers, parents, and peers in particular. In addition to being exposed to a generally risky environment, many children, especially as they become teenagers, know of someone among their peers who has encountered or been adversely affected by online risks of one kind or another, and the peer conversations are often focused on what they know or heard of a particular incident in their school or wider circle, this incident (whether true, embellished or frankly mythical) serving to stimulate children's thinking about what can happen, and inviting them to rehearse how they might cope in such circumstances. As survey statistics show, the proportion of children directly affected by online risks is much smaller, and we suggest that this generalized conversation about online risks and coping is productive in helping to ensure that most direct experience of risk does not become personally harmful, though some does.

Third, children's responses to online risk run the full gamut from humor to horror. Sexual risks in particular occasion ambivalence disgust, curiosity, moral approbation, humor, and pleasure. In exploring their mixed feelings, children are working out how to understand the world, their peers, and themselves. In doing so, they are also working out what is a risk or an opportunity—a sexual threat or an opportunity for sexual expression, for instance. In their offline lives, children are significantly protected from visible expressions of sexuality, and thus it is unsurprising that they are curious to explore and discuss the much more visible expressions of sexuality online. Rather than penalizing such curiosity as "too old for them" or seeing this as motivated by personal sexual desire, parents and teachers might do better to regard this as a curiosity about the world, like any other except that it is the dimension of life that adults are the most reluctant to discuss with children. What is striking about the conversations we have presented in this chapter—in relation to sexual risks but also other risks—is that children are seeking to understand both *what is* (i.e., the range of behaviors that actually occur in the wider world) and *what should be* (i.e., how the wider world, and they and their reference group more particularly, will or should judge what occurs, in moral terms).

As suggested at the outset of this chapter, such insights are important because, provided children are not given to think that their Internet access might be either removed or intrusively monitored, it seemed to us that children are broadly accepting that their online activities will be subject to adult advice, supervision, and support. For the most part, they even welcome this and it is particularly encouraging that the youngest children welcome adult support and intervention. Perhaps, if adults can intervene and guide children when they first go online—at ever younger ages—their advice will be accepted, children will learn to act wisely, and a positive dynamic can be established between child and adult that will stand them in good stead as they become teenagers deserving of greater privacy and independence.

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