



# *Young Canadians in a Wired World*

Phase II

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## Focus Groups

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The *Young Canadians In A Wired World – Phase II Focus Groups* initiative received invaluable support from:

Alberta Learning

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Emerging Technologies (CITÉ), University of Montreal

National Film Board of Canada

The Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Film Classification

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a stylized serif font with a small crown above the 'a'.

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# ***Young Canadians In A Wired World – Phase II:*** **A Qualitative Research Report**

## **Key Findings**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

# ***Young Canadians In A Wired World – Phase II: A Qualitative Research Report***

## **Key Findings**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Media Awareness Network**

Media Awareness Network (MNet) is an incorporated Canadian not-for-profit organization, located in Ottawa, Ontario, with a regional office in Montreal, Quebec. MNet's mission is to support and encourage media education, and its widest possible integration into schools, homes and communities. MNet's media education resources, which focus primarily on children and youth, are designed as a public good.

MNet's philosophy builds on the enthusiasm and energy that young people bring to the media they love. Its media education programs are learner-centred and foster lifelong thinking skills. Innovative partnerships are critical to ensuring relevant content and effective delivery of MNet's programs. Responsibility for financial support to MNet, which assists in ensuring that MNet remains a vibrant and dynamic organization, is shared among the profit, not-for-profit and government sectors. MNet strives to establish media education as a cornerstone for informed and engaged media consumers and citizens. While international in reach, MNet remains rooted in, and shaped by, Canadian society and the cultural framework this provides.

#### **1.2 Background – Phase I of *Young Canadians In A Wired World***

In 2000-2001, the Media Awareness Network conducted a research project to measure the online use patterns of young Canadians. The project, called *Young Canadians In A Wired World Phase I (YCWW-I)*, comprised:

- a telephone survey of 1,080 Canadian parents with a home computer;
- focus groups of children (aged 9-17) and parents, in Toronto and Montreal; and
- a survey of 5,682 students in grades 4-11 across Canada.

*YCWW-I* explored:

- the extent to which Canadian young people engage in online activities that can involve personal risk;
- the strategies they use to deal with illegal and inappropriate content, interaction with strangers and online invasions of their personal privacy; and
- parents' awareness of, and competencies to address, the challenges their children face online.

The data from *YCWW-I* showed that Canadian young people are extremely

active online users, and that kids are ahead of their parents – and on their own – in their explorations of the Internet. There is also a substantial discrepancy between how parents see their children using the Internet, and what their children are actually doing online.

The analysis of the students' survey examined areas of risk for children and youth, such as: exploring private and adult-only chat rooms; meeting Internet acquaintances in person; being exposed to sexually-explicit and hateful material; and sharing personal information.

The data from *YCWW-I* was used in the development of Industry Canada's Cyberwise strategy and Child Find Manitoba's cybertip.ca hotline.

*YCWW-I* research findings have also been extensively referenced in the Internet literacy education programs produced by Media Awareness Network, including the *Web Awareness Canada* professional development workshops and classroom learning materials.

*YCWW-I*, which has set the benchmarks to measure changes in young Canadian's use of the Internet over time, was funded by Industry Canada (lead department), Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, Justice Canada, and the former Human Resources and Development Canada.

Key findings and related documents from Phase I of *Young Canadians In A Wired World* can be found on the MNet site at [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special\\_initiatives/surveys/index.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/surveys/index.cfm)

### **1.3 Young Canadians In A Wired World – Phase II**

Since 2001, the media landscape has changed significantly. Young Canadians are now using a wide variety of communications media, such as cell phones, camera phones and wireless devices that provide them with 24/7 access to the Net. Online activities are also changing. Kids have embraced instant messaging and online gaming, and schools are more likely to expect young people to have access to the Net for school work.

Phase II of *Young Canadians In A Wired World (YCWW-II)* was initiated to test the benchmarks set in 2001, and measure changes in both the use of, and attitudes about online technology. Specifically, *YCWW-II* seeks to explore young people's and parents' attitudes towards: privacy; ethical use; classifications systems/ratings on media content; and innovative, creative uses of online media.

This research is particularly timely, because it will enable MNet to begin to explore the meaning of these changes – what new media mean to kids and how they have affected kids' social relationships, their understanding of privacy, the ways they learn, how they interpret online information and become innovators and creators online.

This report constitutes the first step of *YCWW-II* – a series of Focus Groups held with Canadian parents and youth, which were conducted in November 2003 in three Canadian cities, Edmonton, Montreal and Toronto.

#### 1.4 YCWW-II Focus Groups: Priorities and Objectives

Media Awareness Network's priority for this research is to explore, through examining kids' participation in a range of on-line activities, what their real on-line lives look like. During this process, MNet seeks to also discover any innovative, creative uses that young people are making of the technology.

The objectives of *YCWW-II Focus Groups* are to gain an understanding of the range of opinions held about several key issues related to the use of the Internet by young people, and to explore parents' perceptions and attitudes regarding their children's on-line activities.

The issues explored in the Focus Groups were:

- young people's use of wireless technology
- attitudes about responsible use and accountability online
- attitudes about one's personal privacy
- impact of mainstreaming of pornography and hate in a converged media environment, and
- young people's innovative/creative uses of information and communication media specifically with regards to the Internet.

#### 1.5 Methodology

In total twelve (12) qualitative group sessions were conducted, four (4) in each of three urban Canadian centres,

Toronto, Edmonton and Montreal. The number of people participating in each group ranged from five (5) to eight (8).

Toronto:

- One among 11 to 12-year-old boys and girls
- One among 13 to 14-year-old boys and girls
- One among 15 to 17-year-old young men and women
- One among parents of young people between 11 and 17 years of age

Edmonton:

- One among 11 to 12-year-old boys and girls
- One among 13 to 14-year-old boys and girls
- One among 15 to 17-year-old young men and women
- One among parents of young people between 11 and 17 years of age

Montreal:

- One among 11 to 12-year-old boys and girls
- One among 13 to 14-year-old boys and girls
- One among 15 to 17-year-old young men and women
- One among parents of young people between 11 and 17 years of age

All of those between 11 and 17 years of age were required to have parental permission to participate.

All groups in Montreal were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.

All research work was conducted in accordance with the professional standards established by the Professional Marketing Research Society (PMRS) and the Canadian Association of Marketing Research Organizations (CAMRO).

## **1.6 Participant Profile**

A total of 81 people participated in this research, 62 young people and 19 parents participated.

In Edmonton, 21 young people and 7 parents participated.

In Montreal, 21 young people and 7 parents participated.

In Toronto, 20 young people and 5 parents participated.

In all centres, a wide range of residential areas were represented, including downtown, suburban areas and locations from outside the municipal boundaries. Participants came from homes with a wide range of family income, ranging from \$ 30,000 to \$150,000+. Parents had a good range of occupations, from labourer to executive/professional. The groups reflected the ethnic diversity of their community.

### **Youth Groups**

In all centres, all youth participants claimed to have access to a computer that they use on a regular basis. This access may be on their own computer or a family computer, at a friend's home, or at a public institution (school or library). All youth participants claim to have not only access but experience using the Internet, either on their own or in

supervised environments. All have access to a computer and to the Internet in their own home, and experience in using the Internet.

At least three youth participants in each group aged 12+ also have at least occasional use and access to wireless (cellphone or hand-held) connection to the Internet.

The young people all attended different schools. Both public and private schools were represented.

The age ranges were very narrow in the 11 to 12 and 13 to 14 age groups. The maturity level of the young people in these age categories is varied. To ensure that the young people participating were at a similar level of maturity, all were recruited to be within three months of a set date (either side) in age. By age 15, many young people are participating in activities with older teens. For this reason, we were able to recruit young people to participate with other teens across a broader age spectrum (15 to 17 years).

### **Parent Groups**

Among parents, all have children between 11 and 17 years of age; half of each parent group were parents of children aged nine to 12, half of each group were parents of children aged 13 to 17. In the parents' groups, half of the parents participating in each session have daughters in the appropriate age category and half have sons

At least three parents in each group (of age 12+ children) said that their young person has access to the Internet via sources in addition to a computer in the



family home. This would include hand-held devices, cellphone, Internet cafés, etc.

With respect to attitudes of parents toward their children's Internet use, a range of parents were recruited, from those who know that their children have Internet access, but are not involved in their Internet use, to those who feel that they are very involved in their children's use of the Internet.

Most parents said they had access to a computer in their own home. Some, but not all, are using a computer both at home and at work. All reported having access to the Internet, although not all use the Internet regularly.

### **1.7 Research Approach**

The research objectives for this phase of work were exploratory in nature, and therefore best addressed qualitatively.

A particular qualitative group method called Intensive Interaction Workshop was employed. This approach is based on the focus group approach but does have some key differences. The main advantage of the Workshop approach over more conventional round table discussion-style focus groups is that, in the Workshop method, the participants are not "caught off-guard" by issues and ideas with which they may not be particularly familiar, or perhaps have not give much thought. This approach allowed participants to quickly come to grips with various aspects of their own ideas and issues related to young people's use of the Internet and other communications technologies.

In the workshop approach, participants are, periodically, given "tasks" – paired or individual tasks – on which they work for a short time, much as those attending a conference or in a classroom might have "break out sessions." After the individuals or pairs have completed their "task," they then return to the discussion table to share their ideas, including the similarities and differences of their thought processes.

Through a public bidding process, Environics Research Group, one of Canada's leading marketing and social survey research consultancies, was selected by MNet to provide research expertise and lead as moderator in the focus group sessions.

### **1.8 Funding Partners**

The *Young Canadians In A Wired World – Phase II Focus Groups* initiative received invaluable support from:

Alberta Learning  
Centre for Interdisciplinary Research  
on Emerging Technologies (CITÉ),  
of the University of Montreal  
National Film Board of Canada  
The Provincial-Territorial Working  
Group on Film Classification

The logo for the Government of Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a stylized, serif font with a crown over the letter 'a'.

This project was made possible by a financial contribution from Industry Canada's SchoolNet Program.

An Advisory Committee ensured relevance to the Canadian context of the media and Internet environment. MNet is grateful for the participation of Alberta Learning, Canadian Heritage, CANARIE, Health Canada, Industry

Canada, National Film Board of Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Business Services, Treasury Board Secretariat/Chief Information Officer, and the CITÉ of the University of Montreal.

## **1.9 Statement of Limitations**

The objectives of this research initiative are exploratory and therefore best addressed qualitatively. Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable. The intent of this research is to provide insights into the range of issues and opinions, and not the weight of those issues, among the target population.

## **2.0 KEY FINDINGS**

## 2.0 KEY FINDINGS

### Priorities

*The main priority of this study is to explore, through examining kids' participation in a range of on-line activities, what their real on-line lives look like. During this process, MNet hopes to also discover any innovative, creative uses that young people are making of the technology.*

### *On-line Contexts*

Young people participating in this study talked about how they move seamlessly between real and virtual, on-line and off-line. For those young people who have been using computers from the time they were three or four, computers, the Internet and the Web are not new or different, they are part of their life's landscape. The Internet, for young people, is part of the pattern of their day and integrated into their sense of place and time.

The Internet just is.

Young people understand that there is a world that is bounded by physical realities and limitations, both physical and social. When they are using the Internet/Web, they are not constrained by these features, they can "try on" different identities" and take new "shape" at will. In the physical world, there are often "fixed consequences" to their behaviours, on-line they can try something and move away from it, fast.

Most of the parents participating in this study see computers and the Internet/Web as tools to be used for work, or as an expensive toy that allows the user to play games. Most parents

think of the Internet from a very narrow and often negative perspective, and even users of the technology often are not aware of the opportunities, both positive and negative, that it provides and that their children use it without thought or consideration.

For most parents, the technology is a bit like "magic," whereas young people can't imagine what the world must have been like before the technology was available.

### *The Internet and Personal Relationships*

Young people don't believe that the Net has affected personal relationships and indeed from their perspective it hasn't changed anything, as it has been part of the lifescape for the whole of their lives. When they think about what it might have been like before the technology, it is akin to a person being born after the widespread use of cars being asked to think about how life might have been experienced in the age of horse and buggy. They can imagine it, but it isn't a "change." Most feel that one of the greatest impacts and improvements that the Internet has made in the world is that it has made the physical world a "smaller place" It is possible, and usual, for families to communicate with distant friends/relatives.

Many parents are distressed that the relationship that they have with their teens is not what they imagined. Among those who are most disturbed by the difference between the reality of their interactions with their teens and what they had "planned" are many parents who speak about troubled relationships with their own parents when they were teens. Among these parents, many have

worked very hard to have a good relationship with their children. They reported that things changed when their young people discovered the Internet; some parents feel that the use of the Internet has “stolen time” from the parent/child relationship.

It is important to remember that most of the young people participating in this study said that between the ages of 13 and 14, young people develop sufficient computer/keyboarding skills to use the Internet in more sophisticated ways. These same young people told us that around the same age, many young people want to “test their wings” outside the family zone. Most young people said they would not centre their social lives on their parents even if there were no Net, because their parents “don’t understand,” that they have “their own life to explore.” Most feel that being a teenager is a time to move outside the family circle, to explore new ideas and begin to consider what it will mean to be an adult.

Many, but not all, young people feel that they know more about the Internet/Web than do their parents. Some feel that their parents still know more about the computer and computer technology than they do. Only a very few young people are even interested in the machine technology, they are much more interested in mastering the Net technology.

Most see nothing at all unusual about their interest and many are content to let someone else be the machine master.

Parents often express frustration that their children know more than they do. Many parents said that not knowing more than their children makes their

children more powerful. Only a few feel that this is of benefit to their children. Most want to have more, not less, control over their children’s activities. This is somewhat confusing for young people, because they learn about Net technology from using it, and they can’t really understand “what the deal is” with their parents’ concern about controlling their experiences. Most feel that the Internet makes it impossible for anyone to actually hold control over their opportunities to experience new and different aspects of information. The world of the Internet/Web doesn’t work on principles of censorship and controls, but rather, they told us, it works on a principle of responsible decision-making and calculated risk-taking.

### ***Informed Choices or Patronizing Restrictions***

Many, but not all, parents believe that the maturity of a person is linked to their age, and fear that kids will not choose to avoid material that is disturbing to them. They are concerned that their children will be exposed to material with violent or sexual content that is beyond their capacity to understand and interpret, and seek ways of preventing exposure to material that they fear will harm their children.

Such an attempt to protect children from the “evils” of the world is patronizing, young people told us. It shows a lack of respect for the abilities of young people to make responsible decisions and choices. Young people told us that they are exposed to material all the time that they must choose to reject. They don’t find this decision process difficult and they explain that it isn’t as if they have to “sneak a peek” at a rare find of

pornography or games of violence – rather, they must fend off material that they choose to avoid for their own reasons. Many young people feel that their parents have not been confronted with the kinds of choices that they make every time they go on-line. For this reason, many are not surprised that their parents “don’t get it.”

Rather than spending time, money and energy to try the impossible – keeping children away from material that is not suitable to their maturity or nature – young people said that efforts should be made to develop opportunities, particularly for young children, to learn how to think about choices, and to gain decision-making skills.

The current age-based rating system doesn’t work, because it doesn’t give kids the content information that they need to make informed choices. Young people said that they need content-based ratings or descriptions that make it possible for them to make their own choices to avoid material they personally do not want to encounter. Most feel that age ratings are useless on the Internet because they don’t give anyone real information about content.

Some are concerned that content rating is also problematic, because the language used to describe content doesn’t tell enough to make an informed decision. This invites all people, not just young people, to choose to watch/participate in an activity that might not be something that they would choose if they know more about the content.

Young people do talk about some material being age-inappropriate for

children under ten. They explained that as children go on-line at a younger and younger age, they will be exposed to material that could make them uncomfortable. So, they suggest that, for young children, parents exercise close personal supervision and that they employ “Internet nannies” to block material. They also suggest that, realistically, parents should know that by the age of 11 or 12, at least one of their children’s friends will know how to remove the “blocks,” so at that time their children should be prepared to make good decisions about content for themselves.

### ***On-line Research***

The introduction to the technology that young people are receiving in schools is sufficient to “get them going.” They told us that the emphasis in teaching them about computers is placed on the computer itself and the technical skills that they need to make it work. Most feel that teachers don’t understand how the Internet/Web and search work well enough to design projects and assignments that challenge even a relatively new Internet user. Most young people feel that teachers don’t fully understand the technology and for that reason don’t understand that the assignments that they are giving students are far below the research skills of many, if not most, young people.

Young people, particularly in the 13 to 14 and 15 to 17 age segments, are using the knowledge-base aspect of the on-line world at a more sophisticated level than most parents/teachers realize. Most reported that their teachers don’t design projects that take into account how information is organized on the Net, and

don't make demands on kids' search skills. Young people understand intuitively or experientially how the Net is organized, and use their knowledge to investigate and explore topics that are of special interest to them. In fact, after chat and downloading music, "research" is tied with "playing games" as the third activity that young people say they most enjoy related to the Net.

Many young people reported that it is easier to complete homework assignments using a few books than it would be to narrow an Internet search to answer only the simple questions that they are given to explore. On average, young people in the two age segments 13 to 14 and 15 to 17 reported that their total time required for homework is about ten minutes a day outside school time. Most said that they have enough time in the school day to complete most day-to-day assignments. Only special assignments will require more time, and this only occasionally. They tell their parents that they are doing homework so that they can use the computer without interruption for chat, for games and for their own research. On the other hand, many young people participating in personal interest research (13 to 14 and 15 to 17 age segment) reported that they spend hours during the week researching topics that they find interesting.

Most of those in the 13 to 14 and 15 to 17 age segment indicated that they would like to have more and better school assignments that would let them practise their research skills. They would like to practise sorting out credible information from biased information in a safe environment. They want, and are interested in, improving their critical

thinking skills in a supportive environment.

Yet, parents worry that their children are wandering around the Net/Web in an aimless way. Parents feel that "kids are wasting time." These same parents often speak about how they have organized and scheduled the time and activities of their children, and they think it is their parental responsibility to do this. Some also believe that it is their responsibility to impose their own belief systems on their children.

Most young people carry the values that they learn from their parents, their families and their peers into their on-line experience, but many find it difficult to share their on-line experiences with parents without hearing criticism related to what they are seeing/reading/playing/doing.

### *Creativity*

Young people are using their computers and their access to the Internet/Web to enhance photographs, write stories – even attempt to write books – in their production of both on- and off-line art, to enhance their understanding of the technology, create music, learn to play a musical instrument, participate in global events, and understand world affairs.

While few have interest in using the technology creatively, they are using the technology to create. The technology aspect of the Internet is not even considered by most young people. The Internet is a way for them to get information both from individuals and from other sources. In turn, they use this information to move to the next level of their interests. Many of the young people

participating in this research are actively involved in creating things and then sharing them both on-line and off.

A girl interested in fashion is designing clothes using a combination of photo images and graphic skills. She says she likes to design clothes. Several are learning to play musical instruments, a few the guitar, and one the “fiddle” way of playing the violin. They are using audio and video technology, both to “see how to play” and also for feedback on how they are doing. They can compare their own skills to that of others that they experience on-line. They say they are just learning to play an instrument. Several are learning about photography and are using software to modify their photos or to alter them as a new art form. They say they like to learn about photography. Some are practising political skills, learning to “network” and to participate in the democratic process. They say that they are just being good citizens. Some are helping to develop fundraising campaigns for sports teams and not-for-profit organizations. They say that they are just sending out information to friends and then to their friends to raise money for a good cause.

There is significant evidence that young people are using the technology to develop and create new things, although only a very few are interested in thinking about the technology itself. When we asked young people what more they might like to learn about the technology, most felt that they knew enough of the basics to go ahead on their own. When they thought about what they wished that they could “do better” when they are on-line, faster keyboarding and “be a better speller” were mentioned by most in the 11 to 12 age segment and by some in the

13 to 14 age segment. By age 15 to 17, most have either learned to keyboard with more proficiency and to spell with greater ease or they have found ways to interact using different communications forms, including codes and “short word forms.” They have also worked their way through, and learned to use and modify the on-line tools that they need to work, play and create.

### ***Privacy, Intimacy, Security and Ethical Behaviour***

Use of the Net, especially MSN, is one way young people achieve privacy in communication – they can’t be overheard on-line by people off-line, and they can and do “block” people when they are communicating in small groups. Many young people find some forms of on-line communication more private and more intimate than off-line communication – they use MSN/IM to discuss personal problems, ask for advice from peers, etc. For very intimate issues (such as resolving conflicts that have developed on-line), they sometimes use e-mail.

Most young people feel that it is very important to keep personal data (address, etc.) private by giving false information when they think it is appropriate – they are concerned about identity theft more than they are about keeping private their feelings and thoughts. Most admit that they live “in the moment” and that what they think today will very likely change by tomorrow. Keeping track of their thoughts doesn’t seem to be of much interest to those in the age segments interviewed in this research.

For this reason, young people tend not to keep blogs or live journals, not because



of privacy issues, but because it doesn't occur to them that they might want to keep a log or record of their thoughts. Some thought that this might be an activity that someone older, in their 20s, might do. Only a few had seen a live journal. Most who had seen them thought that they were a bit boring.

It is usual and expected that, from time to time, most young people explore social interaction by creating personae either on the Net at large or in games, and try out different behaviours while wearing these personae.

While young people "know" and expect that on-line "everyone" creates alternate personae, they are often surprised when they discover, sometimes through meeting someone off-line, that someone has "lied" to them by creating a persona. They somehow expect that if they meet a person in the physical world, that person will be who they say they are. This even though they, themselves, have very likely presented themselves differently than they are in the physical world.

Most young people disapprove of bullying behaviour when they see it happening to someone else, but often do not recognize when they themselves engage in bullying.

For many reasons, many young people do not see anything wrong with downloading music. Some rationalize that celebrity musicians are rich anyway, or that CD manufacturers "rip off kids with their high prices." Some even feel that in downloading and sharing the music they are helping to promote a musician. They feel that the download is a small price for their effort to get music known by their friends.

Many also have parents who are downloading music. When a parent is downloading music and a young person is not, it is usually because the adult has a "rule" that maintains space on the computer hard drive to store "their music." Only a few young people indicate that their parents feel that downloading isn't ethical.

Both young people and their parents want to win contests. Most will give out personal data for contests, so they can get their prize if they win something. For many, this is easy as brand names have an aspect of "being a friend, not a stranger." They know the name, they know the products and they often feel that a "big company" wouldn't want to do harm to customers. Almost all trust brand name companies as they would those on their "friends list."

Young people know the language of "street smart kids." They are aware of the possible dangers that can come from communication with, or even meeting, "strangers" but their definition of who is a stranger can be problematic – they tend to think that anyone who is known by someone who they know is safe.

Young people are aware of on-line hoaxes and scams, but use the same parameters to decide what is reliable and what might be a hoax – friends of friends and brand names are trustworthy in their eyes. Individuals or things that they haven't yet heard about are suspect. If something "new" is introduced by someone who they feel they "know" or within a context of a brand, they are more than likely to trust that it is true and real.

### ***Social Interaction and Social Codes On-line***

Young people with only a short exposure to the possibilities of the Internet/Web are using the multiple arenas of social interaction on the Net to explore modes of communication, behaviours, attitudes and even personalities and selves in ways not possible off-line, and creating non-contiguous communities in cyberspace. They are learning on multiple levels both about things and about social interaction. They are also learning by leaps and bounds more fundamental writing, spelling and communications skills at the same time. They are learning these fundamentals not because they are being “taught” but rather because they need the skills to interact in new and different ways, and so work hard to improve in these areas.

Young people use different kinds of on-line communication for different things and in different ways, and adopt different social codes for each. MSN/IM is the mainstay of young people’s on-line communications – it provides intimacy and immediacy, has more control options that give them a sense of being “safer” using it, and can be used to connect with members of both their on-line and off-line communities. E-mail is used more for formal communication with teachers and distant relatives, or for solving interpersonal conflicts on-line. Chat rooms are used more for social experimentation and exploration.

There is no question that young people are deliberately constructing new identities so that they can “try on” different aspects of their humanity. Some make their creations older, or a different gender, or with very different

personality characteristics than they present at their school or in the physical world with their friends. This is not “new human behaviour.” Kids have been playing “dress-up” for centuries. The difference is that they can “play” among those who at least for a moment are prepared to accept that they are who they say they are. In the Internet environment, they can “test” the reactions and interaction that they receive when they are first one character, then another. They are not “playing” only with age peers, so they are not constrained by responses that they might get as “children” in an adult world. On-line, people are the age that they say they are, until of course they choose to change that age, or gender or other characteristic.

Most parents do not understand the kinds of socialization and personal discovery that their children are engaged in when they go on-line. Parents tend to look at their children using IM or chat rooms, and think kids are wasting time “chatting.” They discover that their children have created alternate personae and are engaging in behaviour that may seem outlandish and unlike their normal behaviour patterns, and worry that their children are “lying” and/or “getting themselves into trouble/danger.” They count the hours spent in personal research and in communication on-line, and worry about Internet addiction. What they often do not see is that their children are growing, playing and learning, but in a new medium that they themselves do not understand.

MSM/IM is used to socialize with people both in their off-line communities (friends from school, camp, extra-curricular activities) and their on-line

communities. On-line “friends” are not necessarily people they have direct contact with – they often include on-line friends of their own on-line friends in their list of contacts.

Some young people feel that they can be more direct and assertive on-line. Among these young people, some report that they have practised being more direct and assertive on-line and then “brought their new skill” to their school or in their communications with family and friends off-line.

The size of one’s contact list is a social status marker – the more people on your list, the better. Some will leave people on their lists just so that the list has some heft. Only a few talk about keeping their lists short and including only people that they actually know. Young people explain that they don’t actually talk to all of the people on their lists, some they exclude regularly, others they keep on their lists so that they can “keep track” of other conversations that others might have. They want to feel included and valued among those on their list.

Some young people use chat to explore and test new or alternate personae and behaviours, or to “try on” a different age, gender, sexual orientation or social role – they may even choose to be deliberately disruptive, rude or abusive in open chat forums.

### ***Parents: Issues of Monitoring and Control***

The research indicates that, with respect to their attitudes toward monitoring and control of young people on-line, parents can be grouped into three segments:

1. Those who want to control their kids’ behaviour on-line and are trying to find ways to do so;
2. Those who don’t want control but want to know what their kids are doing, and be there so they can help when it is needed;
3. Those who have given up on trying to monitor/control their kids on-line, and feel frustrated, angry or powerless because they have not been able to establish control.

Some parents blame the Net because they have not been able to establish the kind of relationship they seek with their children. Some parents project issues from their own relationship with their parents into the issues of monitoring, control and the scope of their children’s on-line lives. It is interesting that the parents who complain most about having overbearing parents when they were teens now feel frustrated that they don’t have enough “control” over their own children.

The parents who want to have more authority in their child’s life are also the most likely to feel that their children do not have enough maturity or common sense to make responsible decisions. In listening to their stories, it would seem that they are often repeating “patterns” of behaviour that reflect their own parent/child relationships. Many of those who are discomfited by issues of “losing control” are also the most likely to feel that their relationships are being negatively impacted by their young people’s use of the Internet.

Most parents don’t have any idea how to even begin to look for help in understanding more about the Internet or

more about their children's use of the technology. Many don't seem interested in learning to use the technology better themselves. They feel "left out" of their child's new experiences. Few understand the importance of "good decision-making" related to the Internet. Many would like to have mechanical controls that would protect their children from exposure to material that they themselves might find suspect. Some seem to feel that their children are deliberately seeking pornography and violence "behind their back." Few feel that their child will make responsible choices.

### ***Wireless/Cellphones***

Most, but not all, young people participating in this study have at least occasional access to cellphones. When the cellphone is "shared," it is most often used to allow parent/child communications, in most cases to arrange "pick-up" or to "check in with each other."

Among the 11 to 12 and 13 to 14 age segments, very few said they use the cellphone, except as a way of contacting their parents. Cellphone use among those in the 15 to 17 category is primarily to "check in with friends," "to let them know I am on my way," or to make arrangements to meet.

Only a few reported that they "talk about things" on their cells. It is a tool that they use to "stay in touch" and "make plans." Talking on cellphones isn't considered particularly "private" among teens who use them. Some said that they are concerned about being overheard when they are talking on the cell by others in the immediate area of where

they are when they are on the phone. They prefer instant messaging for privacy.

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