Trends and Recommendations

Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III
MediaSmarts © 2015

Written for MediaSmarts by Valerie Steeves, Ph.D.

Research Firm: Directions Evidence & Policy Research Group

950 Gladstone Avenue, Suite 120
Ottawa, ON Canada K1Y 3E6
T: 613-224-7721 F: 613-761-9024
info@mediasmarts.ca
mediasmarts.ca
@mediasmarts

Table of Contents

Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III:
TRENDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Anyone who has lived through the 14 years that have passed since we first launched the *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (*YCWW*) research project in 1999 knows that networked technologies have significantly changed how we learn, communicate, play and do business. *YCWW* has enabled us to track those changes and often get ahead of the curve so we can better support young people as they go about the business of growing up in a digital world.

For example, Phase I (2000-2001) was among the first research projects in the world to suggest that young people value their online privacy and use a number of strategies to protect it. Phase II (2003-2005) similarly broke new ground by providing strong evidence that digital life for young people is primarily a social affair and that although networked technologies do make it easier for children to access offensive content, household rules and parental involvement are strong protective factors.

Phase III (2011-2013) provides equally important insights into young people's engagement with all things digital. We began Phase III in 2011 when we interviewed ten key informant teachers from across the country about the impact of networked technologies on learning, the kinds of benefits and challenges they experienced in a wired classroom and best practices for promoting digital literacy. Later that year we spoke to 66 youth (ages 11 to 17) and 21 parents in Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa about young people's experiences with networked learning, civic engagement, social interactions, privacy, harassment, offensive content and safety. We used the results of the interviews and focus groups to inform the development of a survey that was administered to 5,436 students in grades 4-11 in all 10 provinces and 3 territories in 2013.

This rich collection of data has generated a series of individual *YCWW,* Phase III reports, including:

- *Teachers' Perspectives*
- *Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online*
- *Life Online*
- *Online Privacy, Online Publicity*

- *Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*
- *Experts or Amateurs? Gauging Young Canadians' Digital Literacy Skills*
- *Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in the Digital Age*
- *Encountering Racist and Sexist Content Online*

These individual reports are available on the MediaSmarts website: http://mediasmarts.ca/ycww

The purpose of this *Trends and Recommendations* report is to take a bird's-eye view, assess where we now stand and suggest directions for the future. We look at the good news and the challenges ahead and provide guidance on appropriate policy responses that will help young people make the best of the technologies that now shape their lives.

A Changing Landscape

When MediaSmarts first started the *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (*YCWW*) project in 1999, we set out to collect focus group and survey data to get a sense of how emerging communications technologies were affecting young people's daily lives. At the time, only 36 percent of Canadians were even connected to the Internet.[1] There was no Facebook, Skype or YouTube, and the first Blackberry wouldn't hit the market for another four years.[2] It was even challenging to recruit young people for our focus groups because so few had much experience with the online world.

Fourteen years later, in 2013, virtually all the students we surveyed have access to the Internet inside and outside of school. Social media is a ubiquitous feature of their lives, especially in high school, although it is perhaps more remarkable that one third of students in grades 4-6 have Facebook accounts even though the site's terms of use forbid anyone under the age of 13 from joining the network. YouTube is the single most popular site across all age groups, with the exception of girls in grades 7-11, who placed it second after Facebook. And for the first time, young people are getting more of their media from the Internet than from television.[3]

Clearly, things have changed since 1999, but in one sense the current interest in networked socializing and entertainment is consistent with the data we have collected over the life of the project. In 2000, chatrooms and email were popular among those kids with access to the Internet because they provided a platform where they could hang out with each other. In 2005, a growing number used online technologies to keep in touch with their friends over instant messaging and to play games. It then comes as no surprise that young people in 2013 continue to use networked technologies to talk to each other and play.

However, there are a number of significant differences in the 2013 data that change the networked landscape. First, although shared family desktops and personal computers are still common (particularly in the earlier grades), a majority of students now access the Internet through a variety of

> About half of students in Grade 4 go online through portable computers, MP3 players and gaming consoles; by Grade 11, three quarters of students are connecting through smartphones and other portable devices.
>
> *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online*

---

[1] http://www.cira.ca/factbook/2013/canada-online.html
[2] http://www.berryreview.com/2009/03/16/the-history-of-rim-the-blackberry-smartphone-part-3-the-evolution-of-color/
[3] Steeves. V. (2014). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

portable devices like laptops, netbooks, tablets and smartphones. Personal phones in particular have grown by leaps and bounds: not only has total ownership increased from 23 percent in 2005 to 59 percent in 2013, but over one quarter of students in Grade 4 now have their own phones. The numbers increase steadily until phone ownership hits 85 percent in Grade 11. This, combined with the prevalence of other portable devices, means that today's students are connected, whether or not they are sitting at a desktop, and they now use these portable tools to do the same things they have always done with technology — chat with each other, play games and access entertainment — from a variety of physical locations throughout the day.

The growing number of social media sites has also made it easier for more students to create an online presence or persona. Three quarters now have a social media profile or blog, which is a 250 percent increase over the number of students who had their own personal sites in 2005.

These sites have also made it easier for young people to publish their own content online. Some take the opportunity to express themselves creatively or get engaged in a political issue,[4] but most prefer to post photos and comments on social media. And many do this on a regular basis: 41 percent post on Facebook and 21 percent post on Twitter at least once a week or more. Young people are therefore active content creators, especially when that content focuses on their social lives.

> Roughly one third of students have posted their own artwork, stories or videos, posted comments on news sites or supported an activist group online, and about one fifth have posted mashups (a video they created using music or video clips they found online).
>
> *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online*

Top 10 Favourite Sites in 2005	Top 10 Favourite Sites in 2013
1. Addictinggames.com	1. YouTube.com
2. Miniclip.com	2. Facebook.com
3. Neopets.com	3. Google.ca
4. eBaumsworld.com	4. Twitter.com
5. Newgrounds.com	5. Tumblr.com
6. Runescape.com	6. Instagram.com
7. Candystand.com	7. Minecraft.com
8. Funnyjunk.com	8. Miniclip.com
9. YTV.com	9. Hotmail.com
10. Launch.com	10. Wikipedia.org

---

[4] However, the number of students who do so frequently is small.

The popularity of social media has also shifted the kinds of sites in which students prefer to hang out.

In 2005, half of the 10 most popular sites were game sites. Although the top 10 list in 2013 still contains two game sites, they no longer occupy the top two spots (instead coming in at numbers seven and eight), and the list is dominated instead by social media (taking four of the top 10 spots) and YouTube (at number 1).

But perhaps more significantly, *more* kids now congregate on the *same* sites than they did in 2005. Even though students filling out the 2013 survey listed over 3,000 favourite sites in total, the top 50 list suggests that they gravitate to social media and gaming sites in general, and to the same three or four sites in particular.

Top 50 Sites in 2013 — By Category

1. gaming (21 sites, 2 in the top 10)
2. social networking (6 sites, 3 in the top 10)
3. video or photo sharing (5 sites, 2 in the top 10)
4. microblogging (5 sites, 1 in the top 10)
5. media streaming/television (5 sites)
6. search engines (3 sites, 1 in the top 10)
7. sports (3 sites)
8. online stores (3 sites)
9. email (2 sites, 1 in the top 10)
10. Wikipedia (in the top 10)

(Note: this totals 53 sites, because 3 sites fit within 2 categories)

For example, let's compare the audience share of today's top 10 with the top 10 sites from 2005. Back in 2005, the top site, Addicting Games, was favoured by only 18 percent of students. YouTube, the top site in 2013, has the support of a remarkable 75 percent of students. Moreover, one quarter or more also agree on the next three sites on the list; even the tenth most popular website attracted five percent of the vote. This contrasts sharply with 2005, when none of the top 10 reached 20 percent, and more than half of them had less than five percent support. In addition, today's top 10 is dominated by sites owned by three corporations: Google (which also owns YouTube); Facebook (which also owns Instagram); and Twitter. This kind of corporate concentration was simply not present in 2005.

At the same time, the top 50 list includes a number of sites that explicitly encourage learning and creative expression. It is particularly noteworthy that Wikipedia, the non-profit online encyclopedia, placed 10th overall. Coolmath-games.com (no. 29) and Coolmath4kids.com (no. 36)[5] focus exclusively on teaching math skills, and Sumdog (no. 42) contains educational games of all sorts. GirlsGoGames.com (no. 32), which specifically targets girls, has a series of doctor games where players examine a patient, do blood tests and perform surgery. A surprising number of gaming sites enable young people to post games they create themselves giving them the opportunity to be media producers and not just media consumers.[6] Finally

---

[5] Both are owned by the same company.
[6] For example, Minecraft, which is no. 7 on the list, is an open world game site where players can build their own virtual environments and games, using textured cubes on a computer-generated 3D background.

YouTube, the top site overall, allows users to upload their own content – though it is much more popular as a source of entertainment than a creative outlet (just a third of students have ever posted a video of themselves and fewer than one in 20 do so on a regular basis).

Although many of the websites that are popular with youth enable creativity and provide access to a wealth of encyclopaedic information, there are still issues relating to some of the commercial web environments they prefer. For example, some of the sites students listed rely on stereotypes to make their messages more understandable and typically seek to embed commercial messages into a child's sense of identity.

Take, for example, one of the creative sites discussed above, GirlsGoGames.com (no. 32). Girls who want to learn more about surgery by playing any of the Doctor Games on the site are first greeted by a highly "pink" environment that also offers Cooking Games, Doll Games, Makeup Games, Makeover Games, Princess Games, and Hair Games. Once they click on one of the surgery games, they are first shown a video advertisement. The ad playing in November 2014 promoted Chatster Dolls (highly glamorized dolls wearing lots of makeup and trendy clothes). The ad tells girls that "With Chatsters, you can do everything best friends do!" and then, when the girl in the ad puts lipstick on the doll's lips, the doll responds, "Ooh la la! Lipstick!"

Another issue is the embedding of commerce into online activities. Returning again to GirlsGoGames.com, commerce becomes play through its series of Shopaholic Games where girls are given a $500 allowance and an opportunity to spend it on (very slender) clothes, makeup, shoes, jewelry and fast food in glamorous locations like Hawaii or Paris. Our aspiring doctors may want to visit the Pasteur Institute in Paris, but it looks like they'll be too busy shopping.

Commerce is also embedded into a child's sense of self through a variety of techniques that seek to naturalize marketing messages. For example, the Express Yourself section on GirlsGoGames.com contains a series of videos, all of which advertise the product Doh Vinci. Doh Vinci is used to decorate a variety of objects including a jewelry box, a picture frame, a flowerpot and a "canvass masterpiece".

As well, children playing on many of these sites are often exposed to advertising for materials aimed at teens or adults: children's videos on YouTube, for instance, frequently have "pre-roll" advertisements for M-rated games such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series.

▸ A Note on Wikipedia

Our focus group participants often talked about Wikipedia as a favourite source of information (Wikipedia and National Geographic's Animal Jam, were the only two non-profit sites on the top 50 list). When they did so, however, they typically placed a caveat that teachers tell them not to use the site because "anyone can change the information there." This suggests that Wikipedia presents both a challenge and a learning opportunity.

On the one hand, Wikipedia has a fully transparent editorial policy, enabling all its users to check the validity of the information posted by requiring links to supporting, credible sources of

information. While Wikipedia articles are edited by users, all changes to them are recorded and made visible and Wikipedia editors are encouraged to post links to sources for any information cited. As a result, Wikipedia can be a case-study in good online authentication. Especially because of its popularity among students, discussing its unique qualities in the classroom is an excellent way to illustrate the kinds of digital literacy that will help students navigate through the pitfalls of the highly commercialized online environment they find themselves in.

Wikipedia's transparent editorial policy also makes it relatively easy to determine a Wikipedia article's reliability. However, there is little evidence that students do so: studies elsewhere have shown that even university students often have a poor understanding of how Wikipedia articles are written and edited.[7] While Wikipedia compares favourably to other online encyclopedias in terms of average reliability[8], students need to understand that because of the process by which articles are created and edited, *each Wikipedia article is essentially a separate source and must be evaluated individually*. Since no other information source ranks anywhere among students' top 50 favourite websites, it seems likely that students are often using Wikipedia articles as their first and last source – meaning that they are not carrying out the essential authentication tasks of checking the reputation and credentials of sources and checking to see if the same information is found in other sources. Moreover, without specific instruction in how Wikipedia works, students are unable to determine how recently an article has been edited and by whom, making it difficult to detect bias (an article on the War of 1812, for instance, provided different interpretations of who won the war depending on the time and day that it was accessed.[9])

Given the attention drawn to its "crowd-sourced" writing and editing process, Wikipedia provides an opportunity to point out to students that *all* research sources are media constructions and require skepticism. At the same time, teachers need to recognize the fact that students *are* turning to Wikipedia and teach them the specific authentication habits and skills they need to authenticate each article they want to use as a source.

---

[7] Menchen-Trevino, E. & Hargittai, E. (2011). Young Adults' Credibility Assessment of Wikipedia. Information, Communication and Society. 14(1):24‐51.

[8] Casebourne, I., Davies, C., Fernandes, M., Norman, N. (2012) Assessing the accuracy and quality of Wikipedia entries compared to popular online encyclopaedias: A comparative preliminary study across disciplines in English, Spanish and Arabic. Epic, Brighton, UK. Retrieved from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EPIC_Oxford_report.pdf

[9] Jensen, Richard. Military History on the Electronic Frontier: Wikipedia Fights the War of 1812. The Journal of Military History 76 (October 2012): 523-556.

Resilient Kids and Strong Families

Although three quarters of students know that talking to strangers online could lead to harm, a majority see the Internet as a safe place for them and 89 percent are confident that they have the skills they need to protect themselves.

Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online

One thing hasn't changed since 1999 — adults continue to worry that their children are not safe online. As one of our focus group participants put it, "It's my father's greatest concern. He has to have my passwords for everything I do. He's afraid of cyberbullying so he has to have them at all times." The vast majority of parents we talked to agreed that connectivity comes with risks, especially from strangers. This comment from a mother in Ottawa was typical: "[E]veryone will know [what your child posts]. If someone who you don't want to, knows what your child is doing and reads [the child's posts], they'll know. Stalkers — all that stuff … I'm really afraid of that." Girls in particular are subjected to a higher number of household rules designed to protect them from harm and are more likely to share their passwords with watchful parents who are worried about offensive content, stranger danger and online harassment.

What can be seen as one of the pieces of good news from our Phase III data is that the vast majority of students we surveyed are aware of the potential risks of networked communication and have a number of strategies to deal with the problems they encounter. In like vein, 89 percent of students report that online meanness or cruelty is rarely or never a problem for them and when they do experience it, they are typically able to resolve it by ignoring it or by turning to parents and friends for help. Other behaviours that worry adults, like online threats and sexting, are also relatively rare.[10]

Although there are significant issues we need to address — especially for the small percent of kids that experience problems sometimes or often — it is equally important to remember that the vast majority of young people's online experiences are positive and that the problems adults often focus on, like cyberbullying and sexting, are less common and more nuanced than we often assume. Moreover, other research suggests that focusing on or exaggerating online risks

---

[10] Ninety-seven percent rarely or never have problems with online threats and only a small minority of students in grades 4-11 (8%) have sent a sext to someone. Less than that (4%) have forwarded a sext they received from someone else.

can limit the ability of young people to take full advantage of digital technology,[11] make them more likely to engage in negative online behaviours such as bullying[12] and sexting[13] and – ironically – prevent them from learning the skills they need to keep themselves safe online.[14]

In addition, our Phase III data indicates that young people use networked technologies such as social media and smart phones to keep in touch with their families, not just their friends, and that parents are the people they turn to first to learn about online issues: 68 percent of all age groups are willing to share their social media pages with family members.[15] Family tops friends in elementary school and although the trend reverses in middle school, more than half of Grade 11 students continue to want to keep in touch with family on social media, suggesting that family is still an important audience even as teens mature and begin to assert their independence. Students are also much more likely to want to share the GPS location of their cell phone with family members (69%) than with friends (39%), again underlining the importance that family plays in their lives (though in some cases parents may insist on being able to track students as a condition of them being allowed to have a phone).

Our focus groups suggested that this connectedness with family is particularly enjoyable when parents trust their children and don't use technology or other family members to "spy" on them online. This is especially true for pre-teens and teens, most of whom feel that parents shouldn't listen in on their online conversations, read their texts, ask them for their passwords or force their children to friend them on social

> "[Parents] have good intentions, but they annoy us [when they monitor us]."
> 17-year-old boy in Calgary
>
> *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online*

media. On the other hand, all of our focus group participants were sympathetic to parents who worry about them and — remarkably — 93 percent of all the students we surveyed report that their parents trust them to do the right thing online.

This trust is particularly important, because parents are almost always the first line of defence if students run into problems. Almost three quarters of students (72%) report that when someone

---

[11] Ofsted, *The Safe Use of New Technologies* (Ofsted, 2010), http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/t/The%20safe%20use%20of%20new%20technologies.pdf (accessed November 11, 2014).

[12] Craig, David W. and H. Wesley Perkins, *Assessing Bullying in New Jersey Secondary Schools: Applying the Social Norms Model to Adolescent Violence*, Presented at the 2008 National Conference on the Social Norms Approach, July 22, 2008. http://www.youthhealthsafety.org/BullyNJweb.pdf

[13] Rice, Eric, Rhoades, H., Winetrobe, H., Sanchez, M., Montoya, J., Plant A. and Kordic, T. *Sexually Explicit Cell Phone Messaging Associated With Sexual Risk Among Adolescents*. Pediatrics; originally published online September 17, 2012.

[14] Smahel, D. & Wright, M. F. (eds) (2014). *Meaning of online problematic situations for children. Results of qualitative cross-cultural investigation in nine European countries*. London: EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science.

[15] The exception is dealing with authentication of online information and cyberbullying, where parents come in a close second to teachers as sources of information.

sends them a photo that makes them feel uncomfortable or posts something hurtful about them, they can trust their parents to help them come up with a solution. Our focus group participants stressed that this trust was predicated on assurances that they wouldn't lose control of the situation if they talked to a parent. For example, one thirteen-year-old boy went to his mother when a girl posted sexual comments about him online. It was only when his mother assured him that she would respect his need to control the outcome that the boy opened up and told her about the problem. After talking about it, they jointly deleted the comments from his social media page. But the mother also agreed not to take any further actions out of respect for his concerns that any official intervention would embarrass him and make the situation worse.

This story illustrates one of the most important messages coming from Phase III data. Parental surveillance doesn't work for young people, especially teens. What does work is clearly communicating expectations about online behaviour, developing strong family relationships based on trust and creating an environment where young people feel they can turn to parents for help. This suggests that parents are best positioned when they are in the background, not necessarily watching everything their kids do online, but ready to come in when asked, with advice, caring and support. It also suggests we need to revisit our assumptions about how best to protect young people online.

Online Privacy, Online Publicity

Young people continue to tell us that privacy matters to them a great deal and they use a variety of strategies to protect it. However, our data suggests that young people think about privacy very differently than adults do and, because of this, existing legislation may not only fail to meet their needs but actually increase the kinds of vulnerabilities they face online.

The federal government has made privacy protection a keystone of its e-commerce agenda since 1999 with the passing of the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA). The government expressly passed this legislation to build trust in the online environment to encourage Canadians — especially young Canadians — to use networked technologies to innovate and learn more effectively.

Certainly young people have responded enthusiastically and are now actively engaged with all sorts of communications technologies. But they have been less likely to use them to improve their learning, arguably because they have yet to attain the kind of privacy they need to do so.

It is hard to innovate in an environment where social interaction and self-expression are so closely policed. Our focus group participants were particularly distressed by the online surveillance they routinely experience in school and recounted a number of situations where protective software, like filters or keystroke counters, either interfered with their ability to complete their school work or meant they were called to account for offhanded comments or joking. The teachers we interviewed had similar stories and recounted a number of incidents where school filters blocked them from educational sites and reduced the teachable moments where they could intervene and help students learn how to be critical thinkers and good digital citizens.

Eighty-five percent of students know how to use privacy settings to control their audiences.

Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Online Privacy, Online Publicity

Our focus group participants were equally concerned with the kinds of surveillance they experience on the Internet. Adults often advise them to "keep things private" by not posting them, in keeping with the approach behind PIPEDA which assumes that corporations and others can collect and use the information posted "publicly" online. But young people do not equate non-disclosure with privacy; instead, they seek both privacy *and* publicity at the same time by posting information and then seeking to control the various audiences that can access it. They also have a complex set of social norms around what different people should — and should not — look at.

From this perspective, posting something online is not the same thing as consenting to its collection. Contrary to the business model behind the websites they enjoy, 83 percent of the students we surveyed told us that the corporation that owns the site should *not* be able see

what they post there and 95 percent felt that marketers should not have access to it either. The numbers are even lower when it comes to corporations and marketers tracking their physical location through the GPS embedded in the electronic devices they carry.

Contrast this with the information practices on the top 50 sites students visit: all but one are commercial sites that use a variety of trackers to gather information from the young people that inhabit them so that information can be commoditized in some way. On average, there are five different trackers per site, although Miniclip, Addicting Games, NHL.com, Kizi, NBA.com, Armor Games and We Heart It have 10-15 trackers each on their home pages alone.[16] The most common trackers, by far, on the top 50 sites are Google Analytics (analytic tracker); Google Adsense (advertising tracker); DoubleClick (advertising tracker); NewRelic (analytic tracker); ScoreCard Research Beacon (beacon); and various social media widgets (Facebook, Twitter, Google).

This kind of commercial collection and use of young people's information isn't restricted to the most obviously commercial sites on the top 50 list. For example, the privacy policy for the educational gaming site cool-mathgames.com (no. 29) states:

> We and our business partners, such as advertisers, may use various technologies to collect information from your computer and about your activities on the Site. For example, we and our business partners may collect and store non-personally identifying information through technologies such as cookies, log files, clear gifs (also known as web beacons), and other technologies to help determine user viewing preferences for advertising and other purposes.[17]

One of the most remarkable findings in Phase III data is the shift in students' attitudes towards this kind of commercialization. When we first held focus groups in 2000, the students we talked to overwhelmingly felt that recognizable online brands were trustworthy friends. In our 2004 survey, three quarters of students reported that product-centred games — such as the Lego Star Wars Microfighters game on Addicting Games — were not "mainly advertisements" but "just games"[18]

But the students we talked to in 2011 used very different language when it came to advertising. Although they congregated on commercial sites, they were either ambivalent or distrustful towards the advertising they found there. Many felt that companies were trying to "fool" or "trick" them into releasing information and that the constant surveillance was "creepy." Even when they tried to read the "fine-print", they felt that companies were purposely trying to hide what they

---

[16] Trackers were identified by using Ghostery.
[17] http://cdn.cdndn.net/t/ds_legal.html
[18] Nairn, A. and Hang, H. (2012), *Advergames: It's not child's play. A review of research.* London: Family and Parenting Institute. (Although this question was not included in the 2013 survey, research done elsewhere has confirmed this, with one study even finding that children as old as 15 often did not recognize advergames as ads.)

were doing and a number were uncomfortable with the possibility that companies might "twist their words" or coopt their photos for marketing purposes. This suggests that we may need to revisit the privacy policy framework, to ensure that commercial practices more effectively meet young people's expectations and needs in the future.

Understanding Online Conflict

As mentioned earlier, the encouraging news about online harassment is that the percentage of students who report that it is frequently a serious problem for them is relatively low. However, those students who do have frequent problems are also less likely to report that school policies intended to help them cope with online harassment are helpful. This is consistent with our focus group findings where students as a whole were highly dissatisfied with zero tolerance policies that held them to account for their online interactions especially because, from the students' perspective, school authorities tended to misconstrue their communications and "over-react".

This dissatisfaction is important to address because it appears to create barriers between students who need help and the teachers who are often in the best position to help them. Focus group participants indicated that it was difficult for them to go to a teacher they trusted; and principals are often bound by zero-tolerance policies that may force them to take actions that are out of proportion to the severity of the incident. This reluctance is reflected in our survey findings: teachers and police are among the last people students reach out to when they experience online harassment.

> "There are fewer people who'll say 'I'm being bullied' because there's like, the police are going to come and they'll take over"
>
> 13-14 year old in Ottawa
>
> *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online*

School culture also definitely plays a role: students who are experiencing problems are less likely to feel respected and valued as members of their school community. Accordingly, more targeted school responses that respect students' need for confidentiality, input and/or control are needed to help young people develop healthy relationships and conflict resolution skills.

Our data also indicate that online conflict is highly gendered. For example, boys are more likely to report that they have been mean or cruel to someone online and girls are more likely to report that someone has been mean or cruel to them. Additionally, when both experience online meanness, girls are more likely than boys to report that it is a problem for them. Their motivations for online cruelty also tend to differ. Whereas boys are more likely to say something hurtful as a joke or because they are bored or because their friends are doing it, girls are more likely to say something cruel because someone has said something mean about them first, they don't like the person, the person said something about a friend or they are angry. Interestingly, contrary to the "mean girl" stereotype, boys and girls are equally likely to spread rumours online. However, boys are far more likely to be "trash-talked" or otherwise harassed in online games.

Interventions to help all children learn how to interact in respectful and civil ways must be cognizant of these differences. In particular, it is important to focus on underlying social causes

— such as racism and homophobia — that may put some students at higher risk of bullying than others, especially because there are indications that students may not fully appreciate the consequences of some types of communications. For example, boys in particular are more likely to report that racist comments are harmless fun and are less likely to intervene if someone is being mean to someone else online. This suggests that interventions to promote more respectful dialogue will have to pay attention to broader issues around racism, misogyny and homophobia and underline the importance of civility.

Moving Forward

There are a number of lessons learned from Phase III that can inform the development of digital literacy and privacy education resources and programs, as well as public policy recommendations related to the Internet.

▸ Questioning Constant Connectivity

Especially now that young people are connected throughout the day by a variety of portable devices, it is important to critically assess the effects of this constant connectivity. It is particularly troubling that 20 percent of Grade 4 students and over half of Grade 11 students sleep with their phones in case they get a message in the night. And 35 percent of students worry that they spend too much time online. This suggests that our definition of digital literacy must be expanded to include attention to physical and mental health: as with other forms of screen time, one of the traits of a digitally literate person is knowing when to turn their networked devices *off*.

▸ A Reality Check about Sexting

Based on our findings and other research, it is possible to make several recommendations on how governments, schools and society in general should address sexting:

- *Publicize the fact that sexting – and forwarding sexts – are not normative activities.* While rates are certainly higher than some might desire, we found that both forwarding and sending sexts was less common than many – and, in particular, young people themselves – might believe. Those who seek to decrease sexting should note that when young people believe sexting to be more common than it actually is, this may influence them deciding to engage in it.[19]

- *Develop more targeted approaches for those who are at higher risk of sexting.* Since the number of students who report getting a sext directly from the sender is larger than the number of students who have sent sexts, it may be that those students who do send sexts have done so on more than one occasion and have sent a sext to more than one recipient. Other research suggests that there is a correlation between sexting and

---

[19] Rice et al 2012.

other sexual activity, particularly risky sexual activity.[20] This suggests that sexting, particularly when images are distributed broadly outside the confines of a healthy relationship, may be a marker for other risky behaviours. Effective interventions will keep the nuances in mind, and help youth and adults separate healthy sexual behaviours from risky practices that open up young people to shaming or ridicule.

- ***Teach youth how to recognize and engage in healthy relationships and underline that putting pressure on a partner to send sexts is not acceptable.*** There is evidence that sexting is most likely to cause harm in cases where the sender is coerced: according to one study, just eight percent of students who sent sexts willingly reported that it had caused problems for them, compared to 32 percent of those who had been pressured into sending sexts.[21] We should be helping students to recognize unhealthy relationships and to resist the pressure to send sexts.

- ***Address gender norms.*** It's clear that much of the harm that comes from sexting is related to gender-related double standards that portray girls both as innocent guardians of their sexual innocence and, if they should stray from that role, as being responsible for any consequences they might suffer as a result of their actions. Research has found that these stereotypes are found even in educational anti-sexting campaigns, another way in which poorly considered interventions may cause more harm than good.[22] Because these gender norms are often communicated and reinforced by mass media, media literacy must be a part of any program that aims to mitigate the possible risks of sexting.

⌁ Taking Gender into Account

Digital literacy initiatives must also be responsive to the different ways that girls and boys learn about digital issues. Whereas girls are more likely to learn about finding and authenticating online information from teachers, boys are more likely to turn to online resources. The same pattern holds for learning about how to deal with racist or sexist content.[23]

Girls' propensity to tweet or post content on their own social media site also means that they are more likely to be profiled by corporations who collect the information they post for marketing purposes.[24] This suggests that girls in particular need to know how the commercial collection of

---

[20] Rice, Eric, Rhoades, H., Winetrobe, H., Sanchez, M., Montoya, J., Plant A. and Kordic, T. *Sexually Explicit Cell Phone Messaging Associated With Sexual Risk Among Adolescents*. Pediatrics; originally published online September 17, 2012

[21] Englander, Elizabeth. *Low Risk Associated With Most Teenage Sexting: A Study of 617 18-Year-Olds*. Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, 2012.

[22] Ringrose 2013.

[23] However both boys and girls turn to parents and friends for this information in greater numbers.

[24] Interestingly, girls are more likely than boys to object to marketers using the information they post to advertise to them.

information works, especially because they are also less likely than boys to report they have learned about this. However, the fact that the majority of both boys and girls continue to mistakenly believe that the presence of a privacy policy means the owner of the website will not share their information with others indicates that we still have a long way to go to help both boys and girls understand the networked environment.

▸ Taking Privacy Seriously Online and in the Classroom

The current model behind almost all of the networked spaces young people inhabit is based on the collection and commodification of the information they disclose there. However, this is out of keeping with the nuanced ways in which young people seek both privacy and publicity online, and ignores the social norms they have developed to negotiate a comfortable level of both.

To compensate for this, we should create anonymous, non-commercial online spaces where young people can interact without being constantly monitored and reconsider the pros and cons of policies that rely on surveillance to protect children from online risks. This is especially important in schools as privacy is an essential element of a healthy learning environment where children can express themselves and not be afraid to make mistakes. Taking privacy seriously in the wired classroom would also facilitate more teachable moments where teachers can help students contextualize and deconstruct offensive or misleading content and develop digital citizenship skills.

▸ Replacing Surveillance and Zero Tolerance Policies with Empathy and Responsibility

School policies that rely on surveillance and punishment have been ineffective in helping young people learn how to deal with online conflict. School boards should reconsider zero tolerance cyberbullying policies and instead focus on curriculum that teaches students how to develop healthy relationships and act with respect and empathy for others.

Both students and teachers also noted that school content filters were a frequent source of frustration as they often prevented access to legitimate sources of information or valuable educational tools. (As well, a significant number of students said they felt confident that they could bypass the filters if they needed to, suggesting their effectiveness in blocking objectionable content is limited.) Research elsewhere has shown that students acquire stronger digital literacy skills when Internet content is "managed" rather than "locked down" by schools.[25]

---

[25] Ofsted, *The Safe Use of New Technologies* (Ofsted, 2010), http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/t/The%20safe%20use%20of%20new%20technologies.pdf (accessed November 11, 2014).

⟩ Mainstreaming Digital Literacy Instruction

Overall, the trends in digital literacy instruction are encouraging: well over half of students have learned about the five topics we asked about (searching for information online, authenticating online information, using privacy settings, understanding how companies collect and use personal information online and knowing what is legal and illegal online) from at least one source. However, we also found that students had a poor understanding of some of these topics and were only likely to apply these skills in the contexts in which they had learned them (such as school).

While parents and teachers were the top sources of digital literacy education for both boys and girls, girls were significantly more likely than boys to have learned about most issues from teachers and boys were more likely than girls to have learned from online sources. Since boys and girls should, theoretically, be receiving the same classroom instruction, this suggests that a significant amount of the digital literacy instruction students are receiving is not part of the standard class content but is provided only to students who actively seek it out from their teachers.

Several of the teachers we interviewed also commented on students' need for improved digital literacy instruction: as one secondary school teacher put it, "I don't think students are all that Internet-savvy. I think they limit themselves to very few tools on the Internet and they don't think it's as expansive as it could be. They're locked into using it in particular ways and don't think outside the box." Teachers also spoke of the need for digital citizenship instruction, saying "the biggest skill they need is a moral compass."

These findings demonstrate a need for digital literacy instruction to be made an explicit part of the core curricula of all provinces and territories, not confined to Technology or Computer Science classes but integrated across the curriculum. Additionally, such instruction should address dealing with the ethical and emotional aspects of digital literacy as well as the essential habits of skepticism and security.

Teachers also need to be provided with materials, training and mentorship opportunities to enable them both to address these key issues and to take full advantage of the many positive uses of digital technology in the classroom.

Appendix 1 — List of Recommendations from Phase III Reports

Life Online

- Continued government support for community access points may be an important way to ensure that all Canadian youth have access to online resources.
- Because the majority of the top 10 sites are places where students can create and share information and content, digital literacy education should teach young people critical thinking skills regarding online sharing, digital permanence and the protection of personal privacy.
- Since young people are now connected 24/7, it is important to provide parents as well as teachers with resources and tools to address various online issues.

Online Privacy, Online Publicity

- Household rules against posting personal information online may be a protective factor decreasing the likelihood young people will do so.
- Although anonymity may shield harassment and other anti-social behaviour, children may also benefit from anonymous access to the online public sphere (e.g. the Internet is an important source of information for young people on matters related to their physical and mental health, sexuality and relationships). We should re-think the use of online tracking or other methods of identification because they may interfere with this access by removing the perceived veil that allows young people to seek out information privately.
- Regulators should consider limiting the groups that can collect personal information from children as a large majority of young people do not think that their social media sites should be available to institutional actors including government, police, the company that owns the social networking site, teachers/principals or marketing companies that want to advertise to them.
- At the very least, young people need to be better educated about the corporate uses of their personal information.
- Parents should reconsider the use of online surveillance as a form of parenting, as it may erode the trust that enables children to come to them with problems when they occur.
- Educators need to maintain a firm line between their communications with students and their students' communications with their friends. Effective use of social media for learning may be predicated on respect for students' need for – and expectation of – privacy from educators.

▸ Cyberbullying

- Online conflict demands more nuanced, contextualized and evidence-based responses.
- Interventions must take into account the differences in how boys and girls experience and partake in mean, cruel and threatening behaviours online.
- Many students see meanness as a common form of interaction with little perceived harm, highlighting the need for intervention to help young people develop empathy for others.
- It is crucial to help young people develop healthier relationships with each other and more productive responses to anger and inter-personal conflict. Effective intervention will also target those young people who are most at risk of harm from online conflict.
- In addition to general initiatives designed to increase empathy and promote healthy relationships among students as a whole, we need targeted responses to protect the most vulnerable students from harm. To do this, we need a much deeper understanding of the risk factors, such as gender, disability, race and sexual orientation that may make some children more vulnerable than others. Interventions also need to be broadened to reflect the different forms that online conflict takes, such as harassment, reciprocal conflict, online incivility and relationship abuse.
- Further research into identifying and addressing the risk factors for both sending and forwarding sexts may be more effective than viewing sexting primarily in terms of bullying and relying on criminalization or other punitive methods.
- Parents are important when it comes to helping young people navigate online issues. Older students' willingness to ask parents for help may be affected by the level of trust they have in their parents to help in a way that respects their need for independence.
- Education is needed to give young people the skills they need to navigate conflict in a pro-social and respectful way. In particular, students who witness online conflict need more nuanced advice than just to stand up and defend the person being attacked: instead, they need to be given a range of possible strategies to intervene without risking further harm.
- Zero tolerance policies that require teachers to report all cyberbullying to the school administration and/or police should be re-thought as they take the resolution of the problem out of the student's hands and make it more difficult for students to go to teachers for help.
- School rules need to be re-thought because they have very little impact on student behaviour. Those who need help with conflict may be confused by interventions that are directed towards behaviour that is perceived to be harmless.

▸ Racist and Sexist Content

- We need educational interventions to help students respond productively to offensive comments, especially for older students who are less inclined to speak out.
- Successful educational interventions will have to take gender differences into account.
- The presence of a household rule about which sites not to visit may also be a protective factor.

⊳ Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in a Digital Age

- We need to re-think the value of anonymity to young people who use the Internet as a resource for exploring and learning about sexuality and relationships.
- House rules about sites they are not supposed to visit are more likely to say that they have never looked for pornography online. However, having a household rule about treating people online with respect does not correlate with a lower likelihood of forwarding sexts.

⊳ Experts or Amateurs

- We need to address issues around access, especially for students who come from lower income families.
- We need to teach kids the importance of authenticating online information even when there is no likelihood of immediate consequences – when they will be graded, for example, or when friends or family members are relying on them.
- Teachers should (continue to) take an active role in recommending or confirming reliable sites.
- Digital literacy education should provide students with a better understanding of the commercial uses of the content they post online and the limitations of privacy policies.
- Digital literacy should address ethical issues around the use of cell phones to cheat on tests or disrupt class.
- We need to engage young people on a debate about the ethics around ownership of digital content that takes young people's norms around open access and/or sharing into account.
- Skills in finding online information should be part of standard classroom curriculum.
- Privacy education must be given a place in the curriculum supporting the digital literacy framework.
- Household rules and parental attitudes about downloading music, videos, TV shows, movies or software decrease the likelihood and frequency of students doing so illegally.
- Teachers should explore ways to use the portable digital devices that are ubiquitous in students' lives, such as smartphones and MP3 players, for collaborative work and communication with others in the community.
- School boards should revisit their policies around content filters which pose an obstacle to learning.

Appendix 2 — List of Top 50 Websites

▶ Top 50 Websites (by popularity)

1. www.youtube.com
2. www.facebook.com
3. www.google.com
4. www.twitter.com
5. www.tumblr.com
6. www.instagram.com
7. www.minecraft.net
8. www.miniclip.com
9. www.hotmail.com
10. www.wikipedia.com
11. www.y8.com
12. www.google.ca
13. www.netflix.com
14. www.gmail.com
15. www.pinterest.com
16. www.friv.com
17. www.webkinz.com
18. www.addictinggames.com
19. www.clubpenguin.com
20. www.pubtropica.com
21. www.moshimonsters.com
22. www.reddit.com
23. www.andkon.com
24. www.roblox.com
25. www.yahoo.com
26. www.skype.com
27. www.family.ca
28. www.nhl.com
29. www.coolmath-games.com
30. www.kizi.com
31. www.pornhub.com
32. www.girlsgogames.com
33. www.ebay.com
34. www.animaljam.com
35. www.bitstrips.com
36. www.coolmath4kids.com
37. www.kijiji.ca
38. www.fantage.com
39. www.nba.com
40. www.ytv.com
41. www.agame.com
42. www.sumdog.com
43. www.tsn.com
44. www.ask.fm
45. www.armorgames.com
46. www.wattpad.com
47. www.9gag.com
48. www.itunes.com
49. www.weheartit.com
50. www.moviestarplanet.com

⯈ Top 50 Websites (by category)

Gaming Sites
7. www.minecraft.net
8. www.miniclip.com
11. www.y8.com
16. www.friv.com
17. www.webkinz.com
18. www.addictinggames.com
19. www.clubpenguin.com
20. www.pubtropica.com
21. www.moshimonsters.com
23. www.andkon.com
24. www.roblox.com
29. www.coolmath-games.com
30. www.kizi.com
32. www.girlsgogames.com
34. www.animaljam.com
36. www.coolmath4kids.com
38. www.fantage.com
41. www.agame.com
42. www.sumdog.com
45. www.armorgames.com
50. www.moviestarplanet.com

Social Networking
2. www.facebook.com
4. www.twitter.com
*6. www.instagram.com
*15. www.pinterest.com
26. www.skype.com
44. www.ask.fm

Microblogging
5. www.tumblr.com
22. www.reddit.com
46. www.wattpad.com
47. www.9gag.com
*49. www.weheartit.com

Media (Video or Photo) Sharing
1. www.youtube.com
*6. www.instagram.com
*15. www.pinterest.com
35. www.bitstrips.com
*49. www.weheartit.com

Media Streaming/Television
13. www.netflix.com
27. www.family.ca
31. www.pornhub.com
40. www.ytv.com
*43. www.tsn.com

Search Engine
3. www.google.com
12. www.google.ca
25. www.yahoo.com

Sports
28. www.nhl.com
39. www.nba.com
*43. www.tsn.com

Email
9. www.hotmail.com
14. www.gmail.com

Online Stores
33. www.ebay.com (auction)
37. www.kijiji.ca (classifieds)
48. www.itunes.com (music/video/app downloading)

Other
10. www.wikipedia.com

* Included in two categories

Appendix 3 — Student Profiles by Grade

▸ Profile of Kids in Grades 4 and 5

Going Online

In grades 4 to 5, kids are mainly going online through shared family computers. A minority, however, owns their own cell phone or smartphone (24%), while a third (31%) has regular access to someone else's phone. For these younger students, cell phones are primarily a way to communicate with family, although friends are a close second.

Even at this young age, a third of kids worry that they might be spending too much time online, with one in five reporting they sleep with their cell phones so that they won't miss any messages. On the plus side, most say they voluntarily go offline to spend more time with friends or family or to go outside to play.

Favourite Activities

The Internet is mainly a source of fun and entertainment for this age group, with YouTube as the top website for both boys and girls.

The most popular online activities are:
- playing games;
- downloading/streaming music, TV shows or movies; and
- socializing in virtual worlds (Club Penguin, Webkinz and MoshiMonsters are the most popular online communities).

Privacy Attitudes

Like their older peers, kids in grades 4 and 5 use the Internet to connect with others: just under one third of Grade 5 students have a Facebook account (even though you have to be 13 to legally join). A majority (61% and 74%) are comfortable with friends being able to read their social networking posts, while most (80% and 84%) agree that their parents should be able to see their posts.

These younger students are very comfortable having their parents involved in many other aspects of their online lives:
- 63 percent of kids in Grade 4 and 66 percent of kids in Grade 5 are willing to share passwords with their parents.
- The majority believe that parents can be trusted to help solve online problems.
- Most (79% and 63%) think that parents should keep track of their kids online all the time. (This is interesting given that an overwhelming majority of this age group (93% and 95%) also believe that their parents trust them to do the right thing online.)

Even at this age, kids are quite proactive when it comes to protecting their privacy:
- Most would turn to their parents if an unwanted photo of them is posted online or would ask the poster to remove it.
- Half have assumed other identities online to protect their privacy.

However, there is still much for them to learn about how companies collect and use personal information: three quarters mistakenly believe that if a website has a privacy policy it will not share their personal information with others. This could be because half of these students have never had an online privacy policy or terms of use explained to them or have learned about how companies collect and use personal information online.

Online Meanness

Perhaps because they are still quite young, kids in grades 4 and 5 are the least likely of students who were surveyed to report being mean or cruel to someone online, being recipients of online meanness or cruelty or being threatened online. They also are the least likely to report helping someone who is being picked on online.

For those students who have faced online harassment, most say it wasn't a problem for them – although 17 percent of kids in Grade 4 said it was a serious problem.

For those who report being mean or cruel to someone else online, half say it generally involved name-calling. For one quarter of these students, the incident took place in an online game.

Once again, parents are a primary source of support with over two thirds of these children asking their parents for help if they encounter mean, cruel or threatening behaviour. Younger students are also the most likely group to ask teachers for help with cyberbullying (28%).

Learning Skills for the Internet

While students in grades 4 and 5 understand that not everything online is true, whether or not they take steps to check the information depends on what they need it for. For example, a majority will try to make sure online information is correct if it's for homework, but the numbers are much lower if it's for friends or family or to post on social media.

When trying to decide if online information is correct, two thirds of Grade 4 students will ask their teacher. By Grade 5 students are just as likely to try to see if other sources say the same thing as they are to turn to a teacher for help.

When looking at what they are learning – and from whom – parents emerge as the most significant source for most Internet issues. This is especially true when it comes to being safe online with three quarters of students learning this at home and under half learning about this at school.

Interestingly, although three quarters of students in these grades believe that they could be hurt if they talk to someone they don't know online, most (77% and 88%) are confident that they know how to protect themselves.

When asked what Internet issues they want to learn more about in school, students say, in this order:
- how to tell if online information is true;
- how to be safe online; and
- cyberbullying.

All statistics are from MediaSmarts' 2014 study *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, Phase III: www.mediasmarts.ca\ycww

▸ Profile of Kids in Grades 6 and 7

Going Online

Students in grades 6 and 7 are most likely to go online at home through a portable laptop or shared desktop computer, however, just over half are starting to connect to the Internet through their MP3 players. Over half have access to cell phones or smartphones, with the percentage of kids who own their own phones rising from 38 percent in Grade 6 to 52 percent in Grade 7.

Dovetailing with increased phone ownership, more students in these grades report sleeping with their cell phones than in younger grades (26% in Grade 6 and 37% in Grade 7). A third worry they may be spending too much time online, although a significant number report going offline voluntarily to do things like spend more time with friends or family (81%) or go outside to play a game or sport (78% and 76%).

Favourite Activities

The favourite activities for these ages are:

- playing online games;
- downloading and streaming music, TV shows or movies for students in Grade 6; and
- reading or posting on other people's social networking sites for students in Grade 7.

Virtual worlds are still popular, but use of social networking platforms is growing:

- One third of Grade 6 students participate in virtual worlds like Club Penguin.
- 67 percent of Grade 7 students have a Facebook account compared to 45 percent in Grade 6.
- One third of students in Grade 7 have accounts on Twitter and four out of ten have Instagram accounts.

Privacy Attitudes

Kids in grades 6 and 7 are just starting to learn skills for protecting their privacy online:

- Half have used privacy tools to block strangers from seeing their posts;
- Half pretend to be someone else online to protect their privacy (although they also admit to doing this to access sites they shouldn't, with half pretending to be older than they are on age-restricted websites).

Students in grades 6 and 7 are also starting to consider privacy as it relates to data collection: three quarters would like more control over what companies do with the information they post online.

Kids in this age group are still very open to sharing their online life with their parents:

- Parents are the number one accepted group when it comes to sharing passwords and being able to track your location.
- Three quarters of kids think their parents should be able to read their social networking posts (a larger percentage, however, would rather share their posts with friends).
- 85 percent of Grade 6 students and 77 percent of Grade 7 students trust their parent(s) to help them solve online problems.

Online Meanness

There is a sharp jump between students in Grade 6 and students in Grade 7 who say that they have been mean or cruel to someone online: from 11 percent to 19 percent. Interestingly, the difference is smaller for being on the receiving end of online cruelty: 31 percent versus 36 percent. Most of this online meanness is in the form of name calling.

Kids in this age group have several techniques for dealing with mean and cruel online behaviour:
- Parents are the first people kids turn to for help, followed by friends, another trusted adult, and finally teachers.
- Over 40 percent ignore the problem.
- A third of kids talk face-to-face with the person who is being mean.

Encouragingly, a majority of these kids will intervene when someone is being picked on online – seven out of ten say they have stepped in to do this.

Students who have been mean to others online report a variety of motivations:
- The most common reason is "just joking around" (this is echoed in the high number of kids in these grades –three quarters – who agree that parents or teachers "sometimes call just kidding around bullying").
- The second most common reason is because someone said something mean about them first.

Learning Skills for the Internet

Around half of students in grades 6 and 7 actively go online to find information on sports, entertainment, news and current events. Kids in this age group use different methods for finding information online. The most popular are: searching inside trusted sites; using more than one search engine; and asking a teacher.

To find out if the information they find is correct, students in grades 6 and 7 use the following strategies:
- Check with other websites to see if they say the same thing (69% and 72%);
- Ensure that the facts are from topic experts (60% and 59%); and
- Confirm with a teacher (58% and 55%).

Almost all kids in this age group take steps to authenticate information if it's for school (93% and 92%). However, significantly fewer do this for other situations: for example: 65 percent and 70 percent confirm information they find online for friends and family and 49 percent and 60 percent do this for things they post on social media.

When asked where they are learning about the Internet, kids in this age group report that their parents are more likely to be teaching them about privacy settings; general safety; what's legal and illegal; and how companies collect personal information. The only topic they are more likely to learn about from teachers is cyberbullying.

When asked what they would like to learn about the Internet in school, these students' top choices are:
- how to tell if information is true;
- what is and isn't legal to do online (despite one third agreeing with the statement that illegal downloading is 'not a big deal'); and
- how to be safe online.

Although half of kids in this age group believe the Internet is not a safe place for them – nine out of ten are extremely confident that they know how to protect themselves online. Additionally, an overwhelming majority (95%) say that their parents trust them to do the right thing online.

All statistics are from MediaSmarts' 2014 study *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, Phase III: www.mediasmarts.ca\ycww

⯈ Profile of Kids in Grades 8 and 9

Going Online

Students in grades 8 and 9 are most likely to connect to the Internet through laptops and cell phones or smartphones. We see the impact mobile devices like these are having on parents' ability to supervise their children's Internet use with half of these kids reporting going online without an adult around.

The majority of these young teens have access to a cell phone or smartphone and there is a significant leap in phone ownership from Grade 8 to Grade 9 (from 68% to 83%). Most are using their phones to stay in touch with friends and family and close to half admit to sleeping with their phone at night.

Favourite Activities

Social networking continues to grow with Facebook accounts jumping from 78 percent in Grade 8 to 87 percent in Grade 9. Twitter and Instagram are also gaining popularity: approximately half of Grade 9 students have accounts on these sites (53% and 47% respectively).

The top activities for this age group are:
- reading or posting comments and pictures on friends' social networking pages;
- playing online games;
- reading or posting comments and pictures on their own social networking pages; and
- downloading/streaming music, TV shows or movies.

Looking for news and current events starts to overtake searching for entertainment and sports online. Some Grade 9 students are also starting to use the Internet to get information on more sensitive topics, such as sexuality (10%) and issues relating to physical health (27%) and mental health (18%).

Privacy Attitudes

Many students in grades 8 and 9 pretend to be someone else online for a variety of reasons, including:
- to be older to register on age-restricted websites (51% and 57%);
- to protect their privacy (43% and 48%); and
- to play jokes on friends (39% and 47%).

They also actively manage their online privacy, with just over half of Grade 8 students and three quarters of Grade 9 students having deleted content to prevent someone else from seeing it.

There is a strong desire for general privacy in these grades, with asking for someone to take something down so 'no one' can see it as the most likely reason given for removing content (compared to keeping it from specific groups like parents, friends or teachers).

The likelihood of students talking to their parents about unwanted photos posted online drops significantly in these grades (from 26% to 12%).

Teens in this age group are moving away from parents and towards peers when it comes to sharing aspects of their online lives. For example, the majority say that their friends should be able to read their social networking posts (93% and 94%), distantly followed by their parents (67% and 59%). As well, they want any sharing with parents to be consensual: most feel that parents should not listen in on their kids' online conversations, read their kids' texts or force their kids to friend them on social networking sites.

The good news, however, is that an overwhelming majority believe that their parents trust them to do the right thing online, although there is a comparatively lower level of trust that parents can help them to solve online problems.

Online Meanness

Online conflict rises as kids hit the teen years and the use of social networks increases:

- A third of students in grades 8 and 9 have been mean or cruel to someone online, with name calling the most frequent type of bullying.
- Grade 9 is the peak period across all grades for making threats online and harassing someone in an online game.
- Four out of ten of these students have been recipients of mean or cruel behaviour: but most – three quarters – say this was rarely or never a problem for them.

The most common responses to being bullied online for Grade 8 students is ignoring it, asking friends for help, asking parents for help and talking face-to-face with the person. By Grade 9, fewer kids are turning to their parents for help, continuing the trend of teens seeking more autonomy in dealing with online issues.

While Grade 9 is the peak period for kids helping peers who are being bullied online (71%), it is also the grade where students are *least* likely to agree that it's important to speak out about racism and sexism online and most likely to say that "it's not my place to say anything." This may reflect a move into more adult-oriented online spaces where they feel less confident speaking out and trying to influence the values of the community.

Sexting Activity

Among students who own a cell phone, four percent in Grade 8 have sent a sext of themselves to someone. That number doubles to eight percent by Grade 9. Higher percentages – 17 percent for Grade 8 and 26 percent for Grade 9 say they have received a sext directly from its creator – suggesting that those kids who send sexts of themselves do so to multiple recipients.

The more troubling activity of forwarding sexts is quite low for this age group: in fact these students are actually less likely than those in Grade 7 to forward sexts on to others.

Learning Skills for the Internet

The most popular strategies for finding information online for students in grades 8 and 9 are searching inside reliable sites and using multiple search engines. If it's for school work, three quarters will compare their findings to other sources to double check what they've found.

Kids in this age group are least likely to have learned about the following topics:

- how companies collect and use personal information online (6 out of 10 mistakenly think that if a website has a privacy policy it won't share personal information with others);
- how to deal with racist and sexist content online (although three quarters say it's important to speak out so people know racist and sexist talk is wrong, half also say it's not their place to say something); and
- what's legal and illegal to do online (nearly half of Grade 8 students and 6 out of 10 Grade 9 students believe that illegally downloading is not a big deal).

Almost all of these students say that they've learned about online safety. Like younger students, they are also overwhelmingly confident that they know how to protect themselves online.

All statistics are from MediaSmarts' 2014 study *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, Phase III: www.mediasmarts.ca\ycww

▸ Profile of Kids in Grades 10 and 11

Going Online

Cell phone and smartphone ownership peaks in grades 10 and 11 (87% and 85% respectively) with students primarily going online through their phones or portable computers. These grades are also the peak years for students reporting they sleep with their cell phones and using them in class to chat with friends without their teacher knowing.

Given these are older teens, it's not surprising that over half say there is no supervision of their Internet use at home. Household rules have also declined, with 26 percent of Grade 10 students and 37 percent of Grade 11 students saying there are no Internet rules in their homes. Although kids in these grades are the least likely to turn to their parents if they have a problem online, it's important to note that over half (57% and 55%) still say they trust their parents to help them.

Favourite Activities

Students in grades 10 and 11 are fully immersed in social media, with nearly all (94% and 95%) having Facebook accounts. Online gaming has declined while downloading and streaming music, TV shows or movies is up. (Although students were not asked if they had illegally downloaded content, the majority say that illegal downloading is not a big deal.)

Interestingly, students in Grade 11 spend more time looking up online news and current affairs (65%) than sports (41%) and celebrities (56%). This age group is also more likely to look online for sensitive topics such as sexuality with the number doing this doubling from Grade 8 (10%) to Grade 11 (20%). Looking for pornography also peaks with these older students, with more than a third (33% and 35%) admitting to doing this.

Privacy Attitudes

More than half of these teens pretend to be older to register on age-restricted websites. Many also assume other identities to protect their privacy (45% and 50%) and to play jokes on friends (46% and 50%).

Given the popularity of social networking, it is not surprising that these students are active – and proactive – in managing their social lives online:

- Three quarters have deleted things they've posted online to prevent someone else (most often parents and family members) from seeing it.
- Two thirds have asked someone who had posted something about them to remove it to prevent someone else (most often friends, parents and family members) from seeing it.
- If an unwanted image is posted, most will ask the poster directly to take it down (85% and 79%) or will untag the photo themselves (71% or 72%).
- Six out of ten have used privacy tools to block strangers from seeing their social networking posts.

Kids this age are much less willing to share their online lives with the adults in their lives:

- 95 percent say their friends should be able to read their social networking posts, compared to half who would share them with parents and only 9 percent who would share them with teachers.
- By Grade 11, 33 percent would share their password with their best friend compared to 14 percent who would share it with parents (over half say they wouldn't share their passwords with anyone).
- Three quarters say kids should not be forced to friend their parent(s) on social networking sites.

Online Meanness

Students in Grade 10 are more likely than students in other grades to say they have been the recipients of mean or cruel online behaviour (47%). At the same time, 57 percent say it was rarely a serious problem for

them. This could be explained by the fact that the main way this age group engages in mean online behaviour is through name calling (82%).

These older teens have a number of strategies for dealing with cyberbullying, with their top choices:
- ignoring it;
- talking to the person face-to-face; and
- asking friends for help.

Turning to adults is a less popular option. By Grade 11 only 19 percent would ask parents for help and that drops to 4 percent who would ask a teacher and 5 percent who would contact the police.

These students are most likely to have encountered sexist or racist content online: a third say this happens at least once a week. While most believe this sexism and racism is wrong and it's important to speak out, almost seven out of ten say they don't do so because most of the time people are just "joking around". They also have similar attitudes towards cyberbullying, with most saying that sometimes parents/teachers call it bullying when kids are really just joking.

Sexting Activity

Students in grades 10 and 11 with cell phones are more likely than younger students to have sent a sext of themselves to someone, although these numbers are still relatively small (11% in Grade 10 and 14% in Grade 11). One quarter of students in Grade 10 who have sent a sext of themselves say it was forwarded by the recipient; a number that declines to 17 percent in Grade 11. Students in this age group are also more likely than students in grades 7 to 9 to report having received a sext directly from someone.

Learning Skills for the Internet

Although most students in grades 10 and 11 try to make sure online information is correct when doing schoolwork (89% and 87%), they're less likely to do so than their younger peers. However, they still turn to teachers when they need help in similar numbers, with half of them doing this.

While many of these teens are still learning about Internet topics from their teachers and parents, they are more likely than their younger peers to be learning about these topics independently – either by reading about them online or from their friends.

Students in grades 10 and 11 have learned about the following topics:
- searching for information online: from teachers (48% and 52%); from parents (38% and 31%), from the Internet (27% and 32%) and from a friend (38% and 38%);
- authenticating online information: from teachers (47% and 51%); from parents (26% and 25%), from the Internet (23% and 30%) and from a friend (19% and 19%); and
- how to use privacy settings: from teachers (15% and 11%); from parents (30% and 21%), from the Internet (38% and 52%) and from a friend (38% and 34%).

There are still gaps in these students' education: a majority – the highest of all the grades – have never had someone explain online privacy policies or terms of use to them (77% and 80%), and a third have never learned how companies collect and use personal information online.

All statistics are from MediaSmarts' 2014 study *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, Phase III: www.mediasmarts.ca\ycww.