Young Canadians in a Wired World

Phase III

Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online

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Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III

Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online
Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings of an exploratory qualitative research study that examined the attitudes and experiences of children, youth and parents relating to networked communications technologies. Using a semi-structured interview guide, we conducted a total of 12 qualitative group sessions in Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa, with young people ages 11-17 and with parents of children and youth ages 11-17. A total of 66 young people and 21 parents participated in this research.

▸ Parenting in a Networked World

The parents we spoke with were beleaguered by fear of danger and exhausted from the burden of constant vigilance. Although the exact nature of that danger is poorly defined, many parents told us that surveillance is now equated with good parenting, and that the days of trusting their children and providing them with space to explore the world and make mistakes are long gone.

Many talked about spying on their children, both directly and through surveillance intermediaries. There were a handful of parents, however, who trusted their children and felt that this kind of invasive parenting was harmful. Even the parents who advocated spying on their kids were ambivalent about it and worried about the effect it would have on their relationships with their children. But in spite of their discomfort, they argued that they had no choice, especially because they could not rely on the school system or online corporations to help protect their children.

From our participants' perspective, schools were particularly problematic. They felt that schools were often requiring their children to use the Internet for assignments and homework, but were not necessarily doing enough to prepare them to deal with the pitfalls. The corporations that own the sites

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their children visit were also seen as untrustworthy because they were encouraging kids to disclose "everything" in order to make a profit.

▸ Life in the Fish Bowl – the Children's View

The young people we spoke with told us that, from their perspective, the Internet is now a fully monitored space where parents, teachers and corporations keep them under constant surveillance.

Monitoring at Home

Many of our participants told us that parental monitoring is the price of admission; unless they give their parents their online passwords and "friend" them on Facebook, they are not allowed to use networked devices.

Our 11-12-year-old participants accepted this kind of monitoring as a necessary precaution. From their perspective, the Internet is a very dangerous place. They told us that sharing any information put them at risk of being kidnapped, assaulted by a stranger, and stalked. The 11-12-year-olds also appreciated parental rules because they did not want to come across offensive content. They demonstrated strong resilience when it came to dealing with both offensive content and unwanted conversations with strangers. They clicked out of offensive sites, knew not to talk to strangers, used moderating tools, and were very careful about divulging any personal information. However, they had also learned that these precautions were necessary because people were not trustworthy.

The teens we talked to also demonstrated strong resilience about dealing with "creeps", and almost universally limited their online interactions to people to whom they were connected in the real world. From their perspective, constant parental monitoring was accordingly unnecessary and rooted in paranoia. Monitoring was particularly annoying when younger relatives "snitched" on them and most used privacy settings and other methods to block nosy family members from their online lives. However, their privacy was particularly difficult to maintain because many of their parents felt that they had the right to snoop through their Facebook accounts or read their text messages.

The teenagers who did share the details of their lives with their parents were the ones who were not routinely monitored. Trust in this case was mutual; the parents trusted their children to behave appropriately and the children responded by providing them with access to their Facebook page. This suggests that there may be an inverse relationship between surveillance and trust, and that monitoring alone may work against open family dialogue.

However, in spite of their frustration with parental monitoring, almost all our participants felt their parents were acting out of good intentions. And, even though parents were perceived to be annoying, distrustful and naïve, our participants all agreed that if they did run into trouble online, their parents were the ones who would help them navigate the pitfalls. Typically, they tried to handle problems on

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their own first, but they knew that their parents had their backs, and were available on call to come in and set limits when they were needed.

Monitoring at School

For our participants, monitoring at school was a given; they all told us that everything they did online was tracked. However, school monitoring was so extensive that it frequently blocked them from accessing educational materials.

But the real problem with monitoring, from our participants' point of view, was the school's desire to police their interactions with their peers in order to ensure that they did not "swear" or write something "inappropriate". Rather than giving them the opportunity to communicate and then correcting them when they went off course, schools created an environment where any communication between them was perceived as risky. This kind of micromanagement frustrated our participants, particularly in the context of anti-bullying programs.

From their perspective, cyberbullying was easier to deal with than offline meanness, because online communications leave a digital trail. The visibility of online dialogue also let them challenge bullies publicly and hold them to account. They also demonstrated a strong resiliency when it came to cyberbullying. They had very clear strategies: first, ignore it and de-friend or block the person (typically a very successful strategy); if it continues then confront the bully face-to-face because it is easier to call someone to account in person; and if that does not work or you are not comfortable talking to the person directly, call in your parents and they will help you resolve the conflict.

However, almost all of our participants were disdainful of school anti-bullying programs; they felt that, in general, teachers and principals did not understand the kinds of problems they might face and only made things worse when they intervened. Anti-bullying programs also pathologized a great deal of their everyday behaviour, and that many of their day-to-day communications were redefined as bullying by school authorities.

Monitoring in the Marketplace

Although our participants still tended to congregate on corporate sites like Facebook and YouTube, they did not see online corporations as friendly or trustworthy. Instead, they told us online companies were trying to "fool" them and "trick" them into releasing information. Their attitudes towards online advertising ranged from ambivalent to distrustful. A number of them expressed discomfort with companies that might "twist their words" or co-opt their pictures for marketing purposes, and the older teens expressed their annoyance with spam. Some tried to read privacy policies and terms of use agreements but they generally agreed that this did not help because corporations purposely hid what they were doing with their information.

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▶ What Young People Get Out of Networked Technologies

The pervasive monitoring that our participants experienced online was problematic for them, because many of them use online technologies to explore the world, learn new things, try on new identities and connect with friends. Surveillance shut down online spaces for these uses, especially identity play and connecting with friends, because the lack of privacy made it more difficult to achieve anonymity or intimacy.

Tweens

Our 11-12-year-old participants used networked devices to meet their developmental needs to explore their own interests and to learn more about the adult world and the types of social roles available to them. The Internet was particularly useful when they wanted to learn more about things they would encounter in the future, like places they were going to visit on family vacations, high school and jobs that interested them. This kind of exploration provided them with a safe way to "rehearse" things and become more comfortable with teenage and adult roles.

The Internet also made it easier for them to learn about current events that first came to their attention offline and to follow celebrities. They demonstrated a strong critical understanding of many of the popular culture images they encountered and often made decisions about the kinds of content they did not want to see because it made them uncomfortable.

Monitoring was also less problematic because they tended to have less interest in online communication. Although they did use networked technologies to keep in touch with family and find out what friends were doing and saying, social networking sites tended to bore them and were relegated to places older teens go.

This age group particularly enjoyed "pranks" or "trolls", where someone would fool you and misdirect you to the wrong site on purpose or make a silly phone call. Pranks were also useful, because they helped them learn how not to be fooled.

Early Teens

Our 13-14-year-old participants also enjoyed online humour, and sites that allowed them to post anecdotes and read silly things that other people had done. They enjoyed laughing at and laughing with others who did things that were foolish or silly, and found comfort in the fact they were not the only ones who were likely to do something "stupid". They also liked to connect with others through humour and some published stories and drawings on literature and artwork sites as a form of self-expression.

The early teens expressed annoyance with pranks, although they also laughed about them and some admitted they continue to "troll" friends for fun. Accordingly, pranking continued to be one of the ways

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they played with each other, but it also allowed them to demonstrate their superior knowledge of the way things work online.

Some of our 13-14-year-old participants signed online petitions, most of which were focused on animal cruelty, but the main uses of networked technologies were for connecting with friends and self-expression.

Not many of our participants talked about identity play. Some talked about pretending to be someone else on a chat site, but few wanted to do this because chat rooms were universally seen as dangerous. Those that did participate in identity play told us that the sense of danger was part of the appeal. Like pranking, it provided them with an opportunity to explore the adult world and poke fun at it in a relatively safe way. However, even those participants who did go on chat sites were reluctant to talk to strangers because they were worried that they themselves would be identified and disciplined for it.

Online technologies were also a way to express oneself, especially for shy teens. The participants told us that social networking and texting were important ways to communicate their feelings, so they could better understand themselves and their social interactions. However, this was problematized by the fact that they knew adults were monitoring them. Accordingly, the lack of online privacy made it difficult for them to express themselves for fear of reprisal.

Older Teens

Our 15-17-year-old participants relied on online technologies to talk to friends, organize events and gatherings, follow celebrity gossip, and access YouTube videos to learn how to do things like dance. They were no longer interested in online pranks and universally identified "trolling" as the worst thing about being online. Like the younger teens, this group used the Net to learn more about current events that interested them. Some also used newspaper sites as a way of connecting with home when they were out of town.

Some participants also expressed concerns that this easy access to the outside world was making them lazy.

Older teens still relied on social networking to keep in touch with their peers, but the background monitoring to which they were subjected constrained their communications with each other and discouraged them from posting certain kinds of content. Instead, many turned to anonymous blogging where they were freer to express their feelings. Anonymous online self-expression therefore played an important role in helping older teens make sense of the social world and their place in it.

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▶ The Rules of Online Friendships

Since online self-presentation was so important to all our participants, they had a clearly defined set of rules about what friends post – and do not post – about friends. Personal attacks were generally forbidden and a sign that a friendship was at an end. However, personal attacks were also an opportunity for your friends to stand up for you.

Pictures were highly regulated by all of our participants. Some of them routinely untagged every picture of them posted on Facebook, so they could keep control of their images. Others monitored their friends' pages to make sure they were being represented fairly.

It was generally agreed that friends never post embarrassing pictures of friends. If someone in their circle of friends posted a picture they did not like, they would contact them and ask them to take it down. If the picture was not removed, they would try to access the source (i.e. the friend's cell phone, camera or Facebook page) through whatever means and remove it themselves.

Friends could be trusted not to expose each other to ridicule. Friends therefore kept silly and embarrassing pictures of each other on their phones because phones were considered to be private; or they deleted them after the joke was over.

There were also specific rules about exposure that determined how close friends were. For example, an unrealistic number of online "friends" was seen as inauthentic and a sign of desperation. Similarly, "spam statuses" were an indicator that someone was seeking an inappropriate amount of attention and was therefore not a desirable friend.

Girls who exposed themselves by posting sexualized pictures on Facebook or sexting were the subject of special derision. Girls of all ages accordingly exercised extra caution to avoid being labelled a "slut".

Relationship status also regulated the degree of attention someone was entitled to pay to an online persona. Checking out new people online was a form of stalking that was generally socially acceptable so long as the person did not make any direct contact. Creeping, or paying more attention, was acceptable for "best friends" because they were supposed to know your intimate secrets, but others, like parents, were expected to keep their distance. The fact that information was posted on Facebook did not determine who should or should not look at it; instead, the level of attention was closely regulated by the people's respective positions in a complex web of real world social relationships.

Our participants also told us that online communication made it easier to deal with unwanted attention from people outside their circle of friends. Unwanted contact could be ignored. By not responding,

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participants were able to create and maintain personal and social boundaries without face-to-face embarrassment.

▸ Ethical Use of Online Content and Digital Literacy

All our participants used online technologies to express themselves in some way, and put a great deal of thought into crafting their online personas. As part of that process, they would often co-opt copyrighted material and repurpose it for their own self-presentation. Our participants also routinely reproduced online content, especially images, in their school assignments. Virtually all the young people we talked to were familiar with the issues around plagiarism, and told us that their teachers had strict rules that required them to cite the source and provide clear credit to the creator of the content. These rules structured their views on ethical use of online content both in and out of school.

The younger participants who incorporated music and images into their personal profiles or videos did not see this as a use of someone else's property, and typically did not worry about issues of ownership. When we asked about copyright concerns, they reasoned that the rules were the same as they were for plagiarism in school: it was fine to use the material so long as you cited where you got it. From their perspective, they were complimenting the artist who produced the material.

Our teenaged participants also told us that it was permissible to use song lyrics, videos and stills so long as they cited the source, or the songs were well known enough that people would know where they came from. They were particularly frustrated by the copyright hoops they were required to jump through on YouTube, and felt that they were not doing anything unethical so long as they were not earning any profits from the use.

Downloading music without paying for it was a widespread practice according to all our participants.

Perhaps because of the high level of monitoring networked technologies in general, our participants did not use networked devices to enhance their learning in innovative ways. The school environment was considered to be hostile to iPods and cell phones, and the students' ability to use any networked device (including computers) was highly dependent upon the particular teacher. Some teachers allowed them to use the calculators and agendas on their phones and iPods to help them keep track of assignments; others took advantage of school websites where they could post homework or class notes and remind students of upcoming tests. But, for the most part, our participants primarily used online technologies to access Google and do research.

Some teachers would let them use their phones or iPods or go on Facebook as a reward for completing their work in a timely way. They generally worried that greater access to these devices would be counter-productive because they would be easily distracted by incoming texts and messages from

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friends. At the same time, they continued to text friends under their desk when their teachers were not looking.

On the other hand, students who had trouble concentrating found that listening to music or using the Internet actually helped them concentrate, because it helped them to shut out the distractions in the classroom.

There was little evidence that our participants were using networked devices to collaborate on school assignments. Interestingly, they universally told us their teachers told them not to use Wikipedia because "Anyone can put anything on there."

▶ Unplugging

Although a few of our participants told us that losing access to the online world, even for a week, would be catastrophic, many of them talked about the need to retreat in order to re-establish a sense of privacy. Some told us that losing access to online technologies would not be "a big deal", while others felt that devices were becoming so fully monitored, that they had little choice but to unplug.

▶ Moving Ahead

Combined with our qualitative research from teachers,[1] the insight collected through this qualitative research has raised a number of themes relating to the digital lives of children and youth, and the ways that adults can encourage the greater critical engagement that is at the heart of fostering digitally savvy young Canadians.

Our findings indicate that there is already a solid basis upon which to build. In spite of widespread concerns on the part of adults, the young people we spoke with were aware of online risks, largely self-regulated their own behaviours to avoid and manage those risks, and consistently demonstrated resiliency and competence in their responses to those risks. They actively sought out parental guidance when needed, and indicated a desire to work *with* adults when online conflicts or concerns arose.

We look forward to exploring how best to do that in our national school survey in 2013.

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[1]See *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III -- Teachers' Perspectives* at http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy

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▸ Introduction

Young Canadians in a Wired World began in 2000. The project, the first of its kind in the world and still one of the largest, was created to gather qualitative and quantitative data regarding young people's experiences with networked technologies. Over the past decade, it has explored the kinds of technologies children and teens are using, and the effect these technologies are having on their daily lives. The longevity of the project has also created unique opportunities to identify and explore changing patterns over time.

The first phase of data collection took place in 2000-2001, and we returned to the field in 2004-2005.[2] The current phase of the project was initiated in 2011, with funding from The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.[3]

As part of Phase III, we conducted a series of qualitative focus group discussions with parents and young people between the ages of 11 and 17, to explore the following questions:

- What are young people's and parents' attitudes towards and experiences of:
    o the role of networked communications technologies in the learning process, both in and out of school;
    o copyright and fair use provisions regarding online content;
    o online privacy; and
    o online harassment?

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[2] See http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy for reports on Phase I and Phase II. [French URL: http://habilomedias.ca/recherche-et-politique]
[3] We also conducted qualitative interviews with key informant teachers in February and March of 2011. See *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III -- Teachers' Perspectives* http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy for a detailed report of our findings.

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- What social codes, if any, have children developed with regard to their online communications?
- What innovative uses of networked communications technologies, if any, do children report?

▶ Method

To help explore these questions, we conducted a total of 12 qualitative group sessions in September and October, 2011. A semi-structured interview guide was created, and ethics approval was obtained from the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity.

Four focus groups were held in each of three Canadian cities, Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa. In each city, the respective groups consisted of: children ages 11-12; children ages 13-14; young people ages 15-17; and parents of children between the ages of 11 and 17. The number of people participating in each session ranged from six to 11, with an average of seven participants per group.

A total of 66 young people and 21 parents participated in this research, as follows:
- 20 young people and seven parents participated in Calgary
- 21 young people and seven parents in Toronto
- 25 young people and seven parents in Ottawa

We recruited our research participants by advertising in various Boys and Girls Clubs and public libraries located in each city. Participants were selected on a first come, first served basis. Parental consent was obtained for all participants under the age of 18.

Participants came from a diverse set of cultural backgrounds, and reflected the ethnic diversity of their respective communities. Participants also reflected a wide range of socio-economic positions, from working class participants to participants from wealthy families with professional parents. The groups in Calgary and Toronto were conducted in English, and the groups in Ottawa were conducted in French.

Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. The facilitator used a semi-structured interview approach, to allow new questions to arise from the participants' responses.

With participant permission, the focus group discussions were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and participants are identified only by city, age group and pseudonym.

The following report summarizes our findings.

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▸ Parenting in a Networked World

The project has gathered data from parents over the past decade, to provide a fuller understanding of the effect of networked technologies on the daily lives of children and their families. Interestingly, our data from 2011 indicates that there has been a significant shift in the way that parents talk about and experience these technologies.

When we first collected data in 2000, the parents we talked to were enthusiastic about the opportunities that the Internet would bring their children. They were confident that online access would provide their children with unique and important educational opportunities, and help prepare them to succeed in the information economy of the future. They trusted the schools to teach their children how to use the Internet well. They also trusted their kids to make good choices and to ask for help when they needed it. Almost all agreed that monitoring their children's Internet activity would be a breach of that trust and an invasion of their children's privacy.

By 2004, the parents we talked to had a very different perspective. The Internet was no longer a benefit; it was a source of conflict in their families. They were frustrated that their kids were "wasting their time" instant messaging and playing games when they should be using the Internet for school work, and they spent a lot of their parental time limiting, managing and arguing over their children's use of the family computer.

After talking to parents in 2011, it is quite clear that the days of keeping an eye on how long children spend on the home computer in the family room are long gone. Our research participants told us that their kids go online through laptops, school computer labs, public library networks, iPods, smart phones, ipads, gaming consoles, at school, on the bus, in the car, in their rooms, and at the dinner table. These multiple points of entry have made it increasingly difficult to supervise their children's online activities, partly because there is no longer one single access point that can be easily monitored. However, the main difficulty is the perception that the number of risks attached to online communication has grown exponentially. With only a few exceptions, the parents we talked to felt that the Internet is no longer a benefit or an irritant – it is a source of insecurity and fear.

Parents spoke of a pervasive sense that their children faced dangers from unknown and unknowable assailants. In the words of an Ottawa parent, once your child is online, "...everyone will know. If someone who you don't want to have, knows what you're doing and reads it, they'll know. Stalkers – all that stuff... I'm really afraid of that." A Toronto parent agreed that this fear changes the parenting terrain: "… we have to stay on top of it, because if we don't, the moment we don't we'll lose them, and they'll have gone too far and then we can't get them back."

Given the seemingly unlimited potential for harm, many of our participants told us that good parents can no longer exercise benign neglect and trust their kids to do the right thing. Instead, they need to

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constantly monitor everything their children do online in order to keep them safe. In other words, invading children's privacy is now an imperative of good parenting.

Many talked about spying on their children, both directly and through surveillance intermediaries. The Toronto group was typical: "Who was it that said you had spies out there? I have nieces, [who] … will write to her, or even call me to say 'uh, tell her to change ... her wall, her status, or whatever,' so that's good." Others spoke of reviewing every text, every wall post and every email, to make sure their children were not in a position to take a risk or make a mistake in judgment. One mother in Ottawa monitored her daughter both on Facebook and in-person simultaneously:

> I monitor everything, down to her cell phone, down to everything (Calgary parent).

> I caught my daughter one evening. She was doing her homework and she told me, "Mom I'm not on Facebook! Don't worry I'm doing my work!" But I was on Facebook … I was sitting next to her and I said, "You're not on Facebook?" "No." "OK. Well, you just tagged your sister in a photo six minutes ago … So I have to monitor.

There was one parent in each of the three cities who still trusted his or her child and felt that this kind of invasive parenting was harmful. Even the parents who advocated spying on their kids were ambivalent about it and worried about the effect it would have on their relationships with their children. But in spite of their discomfort, they argued that they had no choice – they had to spy – especially because they could not rely on teachers or online corporations to help protect their children.

> That's a problem related to schools that send youth off to do research online without explaining how to authenticate what they find (Ottawa parent).

From our participants' perspective, schools were particularly problematic. They felt that schools were often requiring their children to use the Internet for assignments and homework, but were not necessarily doing enough to prepare them to deal with the pitfalls. Again, this conversation was typical:

> Parent 1: I don't think [teachers] really accept that there's really that many perverts out there. I think they need to be proactive with the students. Don't teach them how to access this and get to there and do that, that's all wonderful, they'll figure that out or talk to friends. They need to talk more about the dark side ….

> Parent 2: Well, I think if educators insist on making kids use the Internet, they should take some responsibility for making them aware for problems that can come up in the course of doing that (Calgary).

The corporations that own the sites their children visit were also seen as untrustworthy because they were encouraging kids to disclose "everything" in order to make a profit:

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What stood out to me is … your information is … their [corporate] property for like, 30 years. I was like, 'wow.' Yeah, that's made me a lot more cautious … because I didn't want, you know, people … putting information that's confidential. Facilitator: Do you think your kids know those kinds of things? That Facebook owns all that? [Chorus of 'no's] (Toronto parents).

Parent 1: That's what I'm saying, that Facebook, they don't even let you [consent to release your child's image].
Parent 2: They don't even ask. But I still think my child's image is mine.
Parent 1: And if it gets used anywhere, I will be very upset (Calgary parents).

Their frustration was not limited to websites. Although many of them gave their children smart phones in order to "keep them safe," they worried that their kids were now addicted to them, and that unknown others were able to use GPS to track their children's physical location. In the words of one Ottawa parent, "It seems there's a type of software or something that's available… or a chip, I don't know. But someone elsewhere can get access to a phone even if it's off… That was frightening." And, to a certain extent, our participants blamed the phone companies. This Toronto parent's comment resonated with much of the discussion: "I really resent the fear that all these phone companies have instilled in people." This resentment and lack of trust is a significant shift from 2000, when high tech companies were seen to be building a future in which children would be empowered through technology.

In summary, the parents of 2011 are beleaguered by danger and exhausted from the burden of constant vigilance. Although the exact nature of that danger is poorly defined, many of the parents we spoke to told us that surveillance is now equated with good parenting, and that the days of trusting children and providing them with space to explore the world and make mistakes are long gone.

▶ Life in the Fish Bowl for Children and Youth

Interestingly, there has also been a significant shift over the past decade in the way children and young people view the Internet. When we first talked to young people in 2000, they described the Internet as a completely private space that adults could not enter or control. In fact, it was one of the few places where they could break free of the bubble wrap that surrounded them in the real world and explore the adult world beyond the reach of parental eyes. They were confident that their online interactions were fully anonymous and consequence-free. When they were making decisions about where to go online, most of them looked for brands they knew because the corporations that owned those branded sites were perceived as friends that could be trusted.

By 2004, the kids we talked to had fully integrated online technologies into their social lives, and they used them to try on different identities, deepen their connections to their real world friends and follow their own interests. They sometimes did this anonymously, and they sometimes identified themselves;

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indeed, identification was becoming increasingly important because they could only find their real world friends online if they each revealed their identities.

Even though our research participants in 2004 knew they could be watched, online privacy was still very important to them, especially privacy from their parents and teachers. They responded to keystroke monitoring and other invasive tactics by devising a number of privacy-protective strategies of their own, from using IM language that was incomprehensible to adults to purging their browsing histories at home and at school. Corporate surveillance was still mostly under the radar, although our follow-up quantitative survey in 2005 indicated that about one-quarter of them were beginning to notice the advertising that was built into online games.

In 2011, that private space for play had mostly disappeared. Our participants told us that the Internet is now a fully monitored space where parents, teachers and corporations keep them under constant surveillance.

Monitoring at Home

Online surveillance often starts with parents. Many of our participants told us that parental monitoring is the price of admission; unless they give their parents their online passwords and "friend" them on Facebook, they are not allowed to use networked devices. A 13-14-year-old in Ottawa explained, "Yes, 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."

> She's very been open with me with everything because I told her the minute it's not open, or she lies, or I find out through any of my [spies] anything, it's all gone (Calgary parent).

Our 11-12-year-old participants accepted this kind of monitoring as a necessary precaution. From their perspective, the Internet is a very dangerous place. They told us that sharing any information put them at risk of being kidnapped, assaulted by a stranger, and stalked. Because of that, in the words of one boy in Toronto, they "can't go on anything that involves talking."   This was easy to do, because most of them found online dialogue boring. For example, a girl in Ottawa once chatted with a boy she knew for a few minutes, but she did not see the point of it: "He said, 'are you alive? Like are you alive? Are you alive?' After that I was just like 'eww'". There was a general consensus that online communication was something that older kids do. Another Ottawa girl summarized: "Well normally, us, at our age, we don't really need to [use Facebook] … there are high school girls who need to but me, I admit, I have like five friends."

The 11-12-year-olds also appreciated parental rules because they did not want to come across offensive content. Our Calgary group put it this way:

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Facilitator: Do you think the rules make sense? [Chorus of 'yes's]

Taylor: Yeah, I'm actually happy that they're there … Because, like, for example, if there's sexual content, I don't really want to see that, so, I'm actually happy it's there.

Ryan: It makes me feel ... disgusted.

Hannah: Yeah.

Emma: Yeah, like 'oh my god!'

Ryan: It makes me feel like ...

Taylor: It makes me feel paranoid like [anxious sound].

Our youngest participants demonstrated strong resilience when it came to dealing with both offensive content and unwanted conversations with strangers. They clicked out of offensive sites, knew not to talk to strangers, used moderating tools, and were very careful about divulging any personal information. However, they had also learned that these precautions were necessary because people were not trustworthy.   As an 11-12-year-old girl in Calgary put it, "Everyone lies".

 [On] the OhMyDollz site … there are people who have nothing to do. They say 'ah I'm going to create a new character and I'm going to start insulting people.' … Once there was one who was doing all kinds of stuff like that to me and then I was like … 'what's she talking about?' So what you do is you signal the person who moderates the site to receive the message. And then if she sees that she's mean, she kicks her off (11-year-old in Ottawa).

The teens we talked to also demonstrated strong resilience about dealing with "creeps", and almost universally limited their online interactions to people to whom they were connected in the real world.   In the words of a 13-14-year-old in Ottawa, "you don't want weird people to look at your page". From their perspective, constant parental monitoring was accordingly unnecessary and rooted in paranoia.

Facilitator: What makes a creeper?

Alicia: When it's like a 30-year-old man from the other side of the world that's adding you. [Chorus of yes's.] They start having a conversation, it's like 'no thanks' (15-17-year-olds in Calgary).

This also opened them up to nagging. As a 15-17-year-old boy in Toronto put it, "My mom actually is against me having pictures on my Facebook in general, so like, anytime I have, like, a new picture up or something, I'll get lectured." They typically respond by using privacy settings to limit what their parents can see: "My mom keeps on telling me, 'You're on Facebook! Get off! Do your homework!' And I'm like ... de-friend" (15-17-year-olds in Calgary).

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> [Parents have] good intentions, but they annoy us (15-17-year-old in Calgary).

Monitoring was particularly annoying when younger relatives "snitched" on them. The following conversation between some 13-14-year-old girls in Toronto is illustrative:

Allie: [My mom] deleted [her Facebook account] 'cause she's like, 'oh, I get too addicted to it', 'oh I should start seeing the beautiful nature,' whatever, whatever. So I'm just like, ok, but then she has back-up ... I have ... my cousins and some of my aunts on Facebook. So ... she would just like come on up to me 'oh your aunt told me blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah'.

Lya: Oh my goodness, that happens to me a lot.

Allie: You too?

Lya: ... [My cousins snitch on me] ...I don't even have them on Facebook, I don't even talk to them or look at them, like at their log. And [my mom] will just come up to me and say 'Oh, they saw that picture, um, with you and that girl at the mall, I'm like, um, OK ...

Jen: Then you delete them.

Lya: ... The same night I go and delete them ... then [my mom] gets mad, she's like 'don't delete your family members'. I'm like, well, tell them to stop stalking me.

Equating this kind of surveillance to stalking was commonplace among our teenaged participants, and most of them used privacy settings and other methods to block nosy family members from their online lives.

> I blocked my brother, he's like a little spy for my mother (15-17-year-old in Calgary).

They also found the suspicion levelled at their online actions disturbing. They lost trust in extended family members who reported them to their parents, and struggled to explain that they needed privacy with respect to their peer relationships. That privacy was particularly difficult to maintain because many parents felt that they had the right to snoop through their Facebook accounts or read their text messages. But, as one 13-14-year-old in Toronto explained, "There should be a point where parents will just like, leave you alone and not have to know every single thing about you. Like I get, the protection side, but they don't need to know every single thing about you."

> [E]very time I go downstairs ... my mom will just like, pick up my phone and will start looking through my phone" (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

Part of the problem reflected their concerns that their parents did not understand the subtleties that define their relationships. Many complained that if their parents saw them in a picture with someone of the opposite sex, they assumed they were in a relationship. Again, the 13-14-year-old girls in Toronto explain:

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Jen: … sometimes you trust your younger sides of the family but they, they end up snitching on you …

Lya: Oh yeah, yeah, I have a perfect example … you … take a photo with a guy, right? Automatically … [a relative] on BBM thinks that you're dating that person, so my mom came like 'oh, oh, someone told me all' and I'm, like, what are you talking about? She says 'oh, BBM, BBM'. I'm like, 'he's my friend' and she's like 'are you sure about that?' I'm like why? Why are you even … making assumptions like this if you don't know who he is? …

Jen: You're like, 'oh, you guys are just friends' and you understood, and … now [her mom] is bringing it up saying that, and I try talking and then she gets all mad at me, I'm like 'kay, 'kay, that's why I don't have you on Facebook.

Moreover, that relationship was somehow perceived to be more dangerous because it was online.   One girl summarized the feeling of the group: "My mom trusts me enough to, like, actually bring a guy home, like one of my guy-friends home? But she doesn't trust me enough to like, have him up on Facebook, which kind of makes me depressed" (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

Interestingly, the teenagers who did share the details of their lives with their parents were the ones who were not routinely monitored. Trust in this case was mutual; the parents trusted their children to behave appropriately and the children responded by providing them with access to their Facebook page. Two girls in the 15-17-year-old group in Calgary put it this way:

Alicia: I figure if I wouldn't want my parents to see it, I won't post it. Like, I'm not going to post a bunch of, a very vulgar status, with lots of swears in it. My parents are on my Facebook, and I don't block them from anything, so I'm not going to …

Maddy: My mom pretty much said to me, 'if you wouldn't post it in a newspaper, don't post it on Facebook'. So, I totally agree with that rule.

Another 13-14-year-old in Ottawa felt similarly:

It's like, my parents are trusting and if they ask to see my Facebook I'd be like 'ok, go ahead'…There's nothing troublesome I've displayed when I go on the Internet".

This suggests that there may be an inverse relationship between surveillance and trust, and that monitoring alone may work against open family dialogue.

However, in spite of their frustration with parental monitoring, almost all our participants felt their parents were acting out of good intentions. As a young teen in Ottawa said, "My mom, she worries a lot that I'll, like, meet up with a stranger, like, and he'll be, like, bad. My mom, she worries about those kinds of things, about my safety."

They also worried about their parents. It was generally understood that swearing and sexually explicit material upset parents, so many of our participants tried to shield their parents from online content.

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They reasoned that, since parents were not used to such things, it was important to protect them and not expose them to too much: "My mom is really, really, really polite and well-mannered, like if I even say like, 'Jesus' she'll be like 'don't say that, we're in public!' (11-12-year-old in Toronto).

But, even though parents were perceived to be annoying, distrustful and naïve, our participants all agreed that if they did run into trouble online, their parents were the ones who would help them navigate the pitfalls. Typically, they tried to handle problems on their own first, but they knew that their parents had their backs, and were available on call to come in and set limits when they were needed. An 11-year-old in Ottawa recounted how her parents helped her cope with a Google search gone awry:

> Willhelmina: I was doing a search on butterflies... I wrote the butterfly "Ulysse"... Then, there was a naked woman with like, a butterfly covering her body. And I was like, I don't want to see that and once my parents came in and they thought I went to see that.
> Facilitator: What did they do?
> Willhelmina: Well I explained to them and they blocked it. I don't know how but... They blocked it all the same.

As these 15-17-year-old girls in Calgary put it:

> Maddy: I think the thing too is that, with my parents, if anything happened to me, they're going to stand behind me and they're going to make sure this person that's bullying me stops.
> Bridget: Unless you started it.
> Facilitator: What do you think they'll do if it's you that started it?
> Maddy: Oh, I will never see the computer ever again.

The experience of a 13-14-year-old boy in Calgary demonstrates the value of parental assistance. This boy was being "stalked" on Facebook by a 13-year-old girl who liked him. When she posted a comment on his wall saying that she wanted to be his girlfriend and that, "btw, I'm not a virgin," both he and she were the brunt of some fairly cruel comments from his friends. He knew he was out of his depth, and immediately went to his mother. After discussing it, they agreed that he should delete the string and tell his friends to drop it, and the matter was quickly resolved.

What worked for this boy, and for all our participants, was not parental surveillance – what worked was knowing that their parents were in the background, maybe not paying attention or knowing everything, but ready on call to come in and help, and impose boundaries when they were needed.

Monitoring at School

For our participants, monitoring at school was a given; they all told us that everything they did online was tracked, although they also happily shared the latest way to circumvent school filters to log in to Facebook or YouTube. They understood that there were limits; as an 11-12-year-old in Calgary put it, "I

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understand, like, why we can't do Facebook, like if we're trying to like, search up stuff for like homework, they don't really want us talking to our friends in India, that would be distracting." However, school monitoring was so extensive that it frequently blocked them from accessing educational materials.

For example, a number of participants from different cities complained that their school filter blocked YouTube even when their teachers sent them to the site as part of a school assignment. Other sites were often blocked for spurious reasons. One 15-17-year-old recounted a time when her school filter blocked the site edukids because the key words included "education slash learning." School filters similarly denied access to sites that included the word "stupid". One school district even allegedly blocked its own educational portal site because students were handing in assignments for other students and posting pictures that were not related to school. All of these examples were offered as proof that school filters were "dumb" and "useless".

But the real problem with monitoring, from our participants' point of view, was the school's desire to police their interactions with their peers in order to ensure that they did not "swear" or write something "inappropriate". Rather than giving them the opportunity to communicate and then correcting them when they went off course, schools created an environment where any communication between them was perceived as risky. In order to manage the risk, everything students did and said had to be captured so it could be controlled.

This kind of micromanagement frustrated our participants, particularly in the context of anti-bullying programs. They had a very good understanding of the ways in which online communication could get out of hand, and also how to cope. As one 15-17-year-old boy in Calgary explained, "it goes back to hiding behind the screen. They say a lot of things and just because they can post it … because they're not face-to-face, they kind of like, feel a little bit more protected, so they say a lot more, like, things, and be a lot more offensive." An Ottawa 13-year-old used this same dynamic to cut online bullies down to size by moving the confrontation offline: "the majority of people who harass others on the Internet, it's people who aren't really tough and online they think they're very tough and all that and you talk to them the next day and they're like 'oh sorry, sorry, sorry.'"

But, interestingly, our participants told us that this kind of meanness was easier to deal with online than offline, because online communications leave a digital trail: "in real life … you don't have any record of it, but when it's, you know, online, you can go back and see it ... you can use it as proof, you can

Ashley: But then again, we're supposed to write every day everywhere else, except for school. What's the big deal if we do exactly what we do at home, at school? … Teachers should be allowed to read what we write, and if it's inappropriate, they can make us take it down, but they shouldn't just block us out from it, that is our own right.
Shane: I agree with that, right there (13-14-year-olds in Calgary).

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be like 'I have the messages right here, this is what they said, this is what I said'" (15-17-year-old in Calgary).

The visibility of online dialogue also let them challenge bullies publicly and hold them to account. One of the 15-17-year-old boys in Calgary told us how he intentionally challenged people who posted racist comments online, precisely so other people would see his comments. From his perspective, the seeing of the interaction was what mobilized social shaming and took power away from the bully.

Once again, our participants demonstrated a strong resiliency when it came to cyberbullying. They had very clear strategies: first, ignore it and de-friend or block the person (typically a very successful strategy); if it continues then confront the bully face-to-face because it is easier to call someone to account in person; and if that does not work or you are not comfortable talking to the person directly, call in your parents and they will help you resolve the conflict.

However, almost all of our participants were disdainful of school anti-bullying programs; they felt that, in general, teachers and principals did not understand the kinds of problems they might face and only made things worse when they intervened. The following conversations were typical, and are worth quoting at length because they demonstrate the depth of their frustration.

> Emma: All the time, every year they have this big meeting.
> Taylor: Yeah, big presentation.
> Emma: They're like 'You don't know what this means! You could make people commit suicide!' And they have these people like 'I used to be cyberbullied, it was so sad' [heavily sarcastic tone], and it's like 'oh my god, just kill me now' [desperate tone]. Every year it's like the same presentation. Every year, like the exact same lines, it's just annoying ... (11-12-year-olds in Toronto).

> I think, um, it isn't really needed to like, make that presentation over and over again. I think that they should actually, like, if they recognize a problem in it, then they should do it ... (11-12-year-old in Calgary).

> At our elementary school last year we had like 50,000 workshops on that … they talked to us about it so much we were like 'it's nothing' (11-12-year-olds in Ottawa).

> [Do you ever talk about, like, cyberbullying?] Katie: Yeah? Oh my god!
> Shauna: Actually it's boring …
> Katie: Sometimes when someone takes …
> Maya: Yeah, it takes so long …
> Jen: It takes so long, you just sit there … and it's, like, boring, it's annoying …
> Maya: Like, we all heard it before … Every single Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, to, all the way to Grade 12 [heavy sarcasm] …

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Katie: I'm like NOBODY CARES – WE KNOW THIS! (13-14-year-olds in Toronto)

Rebecca: Don't bring a teacher into this.
Katie: Noooooo … Number one, teachers exaggerate (13-14-year-olds in Toronto).

Our participants did not just find anti-bullying programs annoying or boring. They had real problems with the school's approach to the problem, and felt quite strongly that the kinds of interventions available in the schools tended to escalate conflict. From their point of view, students expressed reluctance at times to confide in their teachers because, even when they would tell students they could trust them with a problem, they still went to the principal. Telling a teacher therefore made a conflict "way bigger than it is and it's just going to make it worse," because "they'll bring more people into it, and more people and more people. And then everyone's going to know about it … And then there's a beefcake … like a fight, like a dust-up" (13-14-year-olds in Toronto). The situation was complicated by the fact that anyone who told was labelled a "snitch". Once that happened, other students "won't trust you, [they'll] talk to you less and cut you off" (15-17-year-old in Toronto).

[I]f you go to the teacher, and you tell on this person they're going to call you a snitch and then your life is just going to be worse than it was when it started (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

Ironically, intervention was perceived to be the most dangerous when they were facing a physical threat from a bully. One 15-17-year-old boy in Toronto had experienced conflict with a local gang and he said, quite seriously, that if he had done what the school suggested, he would be dead. Another 15-17-year-old boy in Calgary reiterated this:

I still wouldn't go to the teacher, regardless, if it was somebody telling me they're going to kill me or something like that, I'll still handle it myself, or I just, I won't even pay no attention to it, cause if you go to a teacher, they'll make an even bigger deal, like, gonna get cops involved … When you say something about getting killed or something, that's way bigger, that's you getting arrested, you going to court, and all that kind of stuff, and you're making it way bigger than, than what you really want it to be. You could get yourself in trouble; you could even get killed from that, from just telling the teacher …

So our participants had very little faith in their school's approach to resolving conflict. But their main concern was that anti-bullying programs pathologized a great deal of their everyday behaviour, and that many of their day-to-day communications were redefined as bullying by school authorities. Participants in multi-cultural areas like Toronto talked about getting suspensions or detentions for comparing tans after a holiday south, because a teacher took offence when one girl told another girl she was darker than her. Similar problems arose when a teacher overheard friends talking about the differences in their skin colour (one was black and the other was Asian).

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Our participants also felt that adults in general tended to overreact to the way young people expressed themselves. One 15-17-year-old girl in Calgary explained, "Well, with us it's, our inside jokes, we like post to Facebook pictures, friend goes in comments like 'aw, you ugly girl.'" Even though no insult was intended and no insult was taken, teachers could easily mistakenly categorise the comment as bullying. A 13-14-year-old in Toronto agreed: "older people could take it in a way, like, different way and think it's way ruder than you actually meant it." The problem was particularly acute with regard to swearing:

> Rebecca: If my friend or I say the b-word on Facebook? Like, me and my friends … we all say – but, like as a joke – everyone, like everyone, I'm guessing like everyone in our generation kinda knows that it's a joke. No, I don't really know if anyone really takes it personally, but if my mom sees it … She gets all mad and she gives me a big lecture about how, like, it's not an appropriate word to use because, like, it's...
> Lya: Something you can, like, get offended by it,
> Rebecca: Yeah, it's like, some people get offended. And I understand where she's coming from but, like, my friends, none of my friends, like, I personally don't take it personally. It's just … we just say it absentmindedly (13-14-year-olds in Toronto).

Our participants also worried that reporting behaviour to the school would result in a loss of control over the problem. As a 13-14-year-old in Ottawa put it, "You're like, 'bah, I'm just having mean things said to me [online]'…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 it over.

In summary, our participants reported that monitoring at school made it more difficult for them to access online educational materials, and subjected their daily interactions to unproductive scrutiny. Opportunities for them to learn proper behaviour or ways of interacting from their teachers were clearly eclipsed by the school's reliance on surveillance and punishment.

Monitoring in the Marketplace

Our participants also told us that corporations monitored them online. However, unlike the young people we talked to in 2000 and 2004, they no longer saw these corporations as "friends"; instead, they told us online companies were trying to "fool" them and "trick" them into releasing information. Their attitudes towards online advertising ranged from ambivalent to distrustful. A number of them expressed discomfort with companies that might "twist their words" or co-opt their pictures for marketing purposes, and the older teens expressed their annoyance with spam.

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Some, like Maddy, used the language of creeping: "Sally: I sort of trust [the website company], I trust it I think ... Maddy: Well, now I'm wondering about the creepy people in the corporation" (15-17-year-olds in Toronto). Expressions like "creeping," being "creepy," being a "creep" were used by our participants to describe situations in which someone overstepped the norms associated with exposure and looked at them too intensely. The worst kind of creep was the dirty old man – but, again, they showed resilience and reported a high level of success with ignoring, blocking or de-friending anyone who communicated with them in a "creepy" manner. The problem with "creepy" corporations was that they could not block or de-friend them.

"I know Facebook saves everything…everything that happens on Facebook, Facebook will save it even if you erase it". (15-17-year-old in Ottawa).

Some tried, in the words of a 13-14-year-old girl in Toronto, to "… read the fine print cuz they might trick you," but they generally agreed that reading privacy policies and terms of use agreements would not help because corporations purposely hid what they were doing with their information.

Although our participants still tended to congregate on corporate sites like Facebook and YouTube, they did not see online corporations as friendly or trustworthy.

▶ What Young People Get Out of Networked Technologies

The pervasive monitoring that our participants experienced online was problematic, because many of them use online technologies to explore the world, learn new things, try on new identities and connect with friends. Surveillance shut down online spaces for these uses, especially identity play and connecting with friends, because the lack of privacy made it more difficult to achieve anonymity or intimacy.

Tweens

Our 11-12-year-old participants used networked devices to meet their developmental needs to explore their own interests and to learn more about the adult world and the types of social roles that were available to them.

I like looking at puppies (11-12-year-old in Toronto).

The Internet was particularly useful when they wanted to learn more about things they would encounter in the future, like places they were going to visit on family vacations, high school and jobs that interested them. This kind of exploration provided them with a safe way to "rehearse" things and become more comfortable with teenage and adult roles.

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The Internet also made it easier for them to learn about current events that first came to their attention because family members or teachers talked about them. For example, our participants turned to online news sources to follow events like Hurricane Katrina, the Japanese tsunami, the Haiti earthquake, and the deposal of Muammar Gaddafi. They would also google a variety of charities, such as Free the Children, especially after learning about a natural disaster in other parts of the world.

Online information was also useful when it came to following their favourite celebrities and to "[s]ee what's hot and see what's not" (11-12-year-old in Toronto). As such, the Internet provided them with easy access to popular cultural artefacts that could be adopted or rejected, depending on their judgment of them.

Interestingly, they demonstrated a strong critical understanding of many of the popular culture images they encountered. The following conversation is a good illustration of this:

> Hannah: I used to watch Hannah Montana ... But now I can't watch Miley Cyrus because...
> Taylor: She has changed!
> Emma: Yeah, she's like pole-dancing and like, dancing with girls, like, and ...
> Facilitator: So, you don't 'like that stuff, you don't want to watch that? ... Or is it that your parents don't like it?
> Hannah: I don't like it, but my parents like, think she's okay still ...
> Emma: I was watching like, a Kid's Choice Awards thing and Miley Cyrus was performing and she was doing 'Party in the USA,' and there was like ... this little ice-cream truck going and there was like a pole and she was like, standing at it and we were like 'don't touch the pole, don't touch the pole!' and then she starts pole dancing. We're like ... 'oh my god.'

The fact these children were making these kinds of judgments without parental involvement was also typical. In fact, they told us that watching offensive movies with their parents exacerbated their discomfort, so they would turn to the Internet to find out what movies to avoid. They would also use the Internet to scope out movies their friends recommended to avoid "uncomfortable" content. They were frustrated when movie trailers were not forthcoming. The movie *Bad Teacher* was a case in point: "Yeah, but they don't always say what the, what the movies

> Ryan: [W]hen I watch like, movies and there's like those ... parts. It just makes me feel, like, I'm like, telling myself 'this isn't ... good.' 'Skip.' I just skip it ... Hannah: It's more awkward with your parents. [Yeahs and giggling] Taylor: And you're kind of like 'uhh...' Hannah: 'Um, change it! Change it!' (11-12-year-olds in Calgary).

about. Like for the movie *Bad Teacher*, they didn't really explain that the whole point of the movie was her trying to get, like, the boobs ... Yeah, I saw it with my friend and we were like, 'I had no idea that was what it was going to be about'" (11-12-year-old in Calgary).

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For our younger participants, parental monitoring was not a real problem because they appreciated the help and were more interested in lurking than trying on new identities. Identity play was identified as something older teens do. The site IMVU was a case in point:

> Wilhelmina: Her cousin is her on that site. And that site isn't good because it's … maybe 15 years and older. Because there you can kiss people like not really kiss them but like a person and the other person they kiss they can caress each other… and other things.
> Geraldine: Online?
> Wilhelmina: Yes online. Like not really in real life, it's just their characters. And the girls dress like. Not really well, there.
> Nancy: Don't like that because … it's disgusting for girls. And they don't put on clothing that covers their bodies …. It's like they are saying that girls should like dress like that and *inaudible* stuff like that (11-12-year-olds in Ottawa).

Monitoring was also less problematic because they tended to have less interest in online communication. Although they did use networked technologies to keep in touch with family and find out what friends were doing and saying, social networking sites tended to bore them and were relegated to places older teens go. One 11-12-year-old in Toronto put it this way: "I barely go on my Facebook account, I'm like, never on my friends' [Facebook pages] … 'cause I have better stuff to do." Other sites like Twitter were identified as "lame" because people say "random stuff that you don't really get sometimes … Like, 'taking a shower,' okay. I care why?"

> It's really nasty, I didn't watch it, but all my friends are like, 'never trust that girl, if she ever wants you to watch a video, don't do it!' (11-12-year-old in Calgary).

This age group particularly enjoyed "pranks" or "trolls", where someone would fool you and misdirect you to the wrong site on purpose or make a silly phone call, like trying to place an order for 100 pizzas from the school playground. Pranks were also useful, because they helped them learn how not to be fooled. For example, one of the boys in Calgary laughingly told us how he was caught by the prank telling him to do a Google search for "That's not sexy" and then click on "I'm Feeling Lucky." When he was asked what he learned from the incident, he replied, "I won't be tricked again." However, when another child directed them to a prank that was disgusting or offensive, they readily warned their friends not to go there or to trust that person again.

Early Teens

Our 13-14-year-old participants also enjoyed online humour, especially sites like Failblog, Gives Me Hope and Six Billion Secrets. These sites allowed them to post anecdotes and read silly things that other people had done. They enjoyed laughing at and laughing with others who did things that were foolish or

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silly, and found comfort in the fact they were not the only ones who were likely to do something "stupid". They also liked to connect with others through humour. As one 13-14-year-old in Calgary put it, she liked to tweet "Funny stuff that happens to me". This kind of communication was not directed at their friends; part of the pleasure was interacting with an unknown audience, "anyone that reads it" (13-14-year-old in Calgary). One girl in Toronto similarly wrote fan fiction for a general audience, and another in Calgary published her stories, poetry, and drawings on literature and artwork sites as a form of self-expression.

The early teens expressed annoyance with pranks, although they also laughed about them and some admitted they continue to "troll" friends for fun. For example, our Calgary group had this discussion, after telling us that trolling was one of the worst things on the Internet:

> Shane: I do it. [Laughter]
> Peter: But you hate trolls!
> Facilitator: Why do you do it?
> Shane: Just for fun.
> Megan: Hypocrite! [Laughter]
> Facilitator: So what's the fun part of it, just tricking somebody? [Nods from all] … Are you trying to trick a friend or are you just getting it out there to trick strangers?
> Shane: Friends.

Accordingly, pranking continued to be one of the ways they played with each other, but it also allowed them to demonstrate their superior knowledge of the way things work online.

Some of our 13-14-year-old participants signed online petitions, most of which were focused on animal cruelty, but the main uses of networked technologies were for identity play and self-expression.

Identity play was difficult because it was easiest to pretend to be someone else on a chat site, and chat sites were universally seen as dangerous. But for those youth who did participate in this, part of the fun was the danger:

> Megan: Yeah, cause like, I used to go on chat with video, but … if it was like a paedophile, and he could like, if he wanted to know who you were, he could like, find out somehow …
> Facilitator: So you're worried about kind of being identified when you're on those sites?
> Megan: Yeah.
> Facilitator: Okay. What's fun about going on them?
> Megan: You get to talk to strangers.
> Facilitator: So the unsafe part is that you get to talk to strangers, and the fun part is that you get to talk to strangers.
> Megan: Yeah, and like, you get, you can like be whoever you want to be, you could like pretend to be, like a guy …

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Shane: My friend pretended to be a little kid, they grabbed a teddy bear and just sat there (13-14-year-olds in Calgary).

However, the perceived presence of police seeking to identify people on chat sites deterred some participants from chatting because they themselves did not want to be identified.

> Whenever I talk through the phone or something, I'm not embarrassed to say stuff? But then, when it's face to face, I get so shy (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

Online technologies were also a way to express oneself, especially for shy teens. But all our participants told us that social networking and texting were important ways to communicate their feelings, so they could better understand themselves and their social interactions. However, this was problematic by the fact that they knew adults were monitoring them. This conversation in Toronto is illustrative:

Aisha: For me yeah, 'cause I kind of actually want to post something that I feel … But I feel like I don't wanna tell my mom that? Because she might spaz out, or like get worried? [Yeah's] Then I just, I'm just like, 'I can't post that'.
Jen: At times I want to swear so bad … sometimes I have problems, sometimes I want to swear but then I think about my family and stuff and it scares me so much 'cause they're gonna go tell my mom and then that's it.

Accordingly, the lack of online privacy made it difficult for them to express themselves for fear of reprisal.

In addition, the ease of online communication was also identified as a potential problem for some: "The thing about, like, texting and Facebook and Twitter … it gets to a point where, like I, I know some people who kind of hide behind them? Like, they don't really talk to people in person? … It's kinda bad because then you get, you kinda block yourself out from what's actually happening" (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

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Older Teens

Our 15-17-year-old participants relied on online technologies to talk to friends, organize events and gatherings, follow celebrity gossip, and access YouTube videos to learn how to do things like dance. They were no longer interested in online pranks and universally identified "trolling" as the worst thing about being online. Being Rickrolled (misdirected to a video of Rick Astley singing the 1987 song, *Never Gonna Give You Up*) was particularly annoying, especially because they often had to restart their computers or cope with a stream of related messages and notifications on their phones. A 15-17-year-old in Ottawa noted the effect of maturation: "At first it was just, like entertainment, and then, when you get older, you realize your needs for other things and not just wasting time, for school, things like that, I think that comes with age."

> [Being trolled] it's noisy and, it's like you can't touch your phone until they're done having their fun (15-17-year-old in Calgary).

Like the younger teens, this group used the Net to learn more about current events that interested them. Some also used newspaper sites as a way of connecting with home when they were out of town: "When I'm away from Toronto, I'll go on, like, the *Toronto Star* site, if I'm away for a long time and just be like 'what's up in Toronto?' (15-17-year-old boy in Toronto).

But some participants also expressed concerns that this easy access to the outside world was making them lazy:

> Diana: … I'm not a lazy person, but I am like, lazier than before, like, instead of getting up and going to my phone … or going to the house phone to go and … call for, like, pizza or something, I'll go on the Internet and just...
> Leah: Well, I don't know, um, well I guess sometimes it can … make you lazy, like he said, like you can look something up opposed to going to the library, so you can just stay home all day and do that.
> Mitchell: Because I have a laptop, I just got a laptop … I don't really have to go anywhere. If I'm not going outside I'll stay on my laptop the whole day, cause everything's just right in front of me. I can listen to my music, I can talk to my friends, I have my house phone upstairs, I have my cell phone right there, so you could basically say it makes you more lazier, be less social (15-17-year-olds in Toronto).

As a whole, they were also very careful about what they posted online. They knew adults were watching and often chose not to post things to avoid any misunderstandings. A boy in Toronto told us, "I tend to not really have pictures of myself on Facebook … I'm sort of paranoid, I guess, when it comes to that. Uh, I sort of just make sure that there's not really anything people can use to find me ... I try not to do anything that I would regret." Teens in Calgary agreed:

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Well, I don't really do much stuff that would actually get me into serious trouble, like, I would never post something that could possibly get me arrested or anything … I know people who go on their Facebook and like, take pictures of the weed that they're smoking right now, and I'm like, 'no, don't do that,' and then they're like 'why not?' and then I just ignore them for a while after that.

At the same time, our participants continued to maintain a presence on social networking sites and would visit them to see what others were doing. One teen in Calgary put it this way: "You kind of hope that something amazing's going to happen, that someone's going to post something that's going to, like, blow my mind. [Does it happen?] Sometimes, yeah."

Accordingly, older teens still relied on social networking to keep in touch with their peers, but the background monitoring to which they were subjected constrained their communications with each other and discouraged them from posting certain kinds of content. Instead, many turned to anonymous blogging where they were freer to explore "anything that came up" like "relationship kind of thingies," and "express all my anger". Although this kind of online expression was difficult to keep up because it required a high level of commitment, the teens that blogged used it to help them work through feelings and conflicts with peers. For example, one girl in Toronto told us:

… say if I saw like, or heard, that … a girl did something or whatever, then like, I'd kind of like, put my opinion towards it. Without names … I'd be like 'this happened and I feel this way about it … she shouldn't have did this, or maybe she should have did that.' … I just wanted to say what I thought. No one ever had, like... my blogging … website, or URL, so, … no one knew about it, it was just me blogging, and just putting it out there and if you just came across it and you read it and like 'this is kind of interesting,' then you'd follow, right?

Anonymous online self-expression therefore played an important role in helping older teens make sense of the social world and their place in it.

▸ The Rules of Online Friendship

Since online self-presentation was so important to all our participants, they had a clearly defined set of rules about what friends post – and do not post – about friends. Personal attacks were generally forbidden and a sign that a friendship was at an end. For example, a 15-17-year-old girl in Calgary recounted a story about her ex-best friend posting "Best friends since kindergarten? I don't think so, I'm done with your [expletive]" on Facebook. The incident was the last of a series of fights that demonstrated that her friend was untrustworthy.

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However, personal attacks were also an opportunity for your friends to stand up for you. Emma, an 11-12-year-old in Calgary, told us that an acquaintance posted a bad picture of her on the acquaintance's Facebook page and people were posting cruel comments about the way she looked. So she contacted her friends, who immediately posted, "'no, Emma looks cool, she's awesome, she's so brave' and stuff, and [Emma] was like 'I love you guys'."

In fact, pictures were highly regulated by all of our participants. A 13-14-year-old in Ottawa explained the core rule governing posting a photo of someone else on Facebook: "if it's your friend, well that's fine but if it's someone you don't know… You shouldn't do it." Some of them routinely untagged every picture of them posted on Facebook, so they could keep control of their own images. Others monitored their friends' pages to make sure they were being represented fairly.

> I don't want … myself to be in someone else's phone or computer … Or like, other people showing other people, being like, 'look at this!' (15-17-year-old in Toronto).

It was generally agreed that friends never post embarrassing pictures of friends. If someone in their circle of friends posted a picture they did not like, they would contact them and ask them to take it down. If the picture was not removed, they would go to the source and remove it themselves. For example, one of the 11-12-year-old girls in Calgary had had a sleepover at a girl's house and during the sleepover the girl had posted pictures of them all acting silly. When the girl refused to take the picture down, our participant went into her friend's Facebook page (she had not logged off her account) and deleted it herself. Even though this caused conflict, she felt strongly that she had a right to control her own image and that it was inappropriate for the girl not to delete the picture when asked.

Others talked about deleting pictures from other people's cameras and phones to avoid having an embarrassing or unflattering picture making it onto Facebook. They explained that these kind of pre-emptive actions were necessary because:

> Emma: Cause … if there's a picture of my goofing off, like making a funny face, you don't want everyone to see that, it's between you and your friends.
> Taylor: Yeah, other people, other people probably all make fun of you, and then that'll stay around for a while because that's happened before.
> Emma: Yeah, only your friends understand why you're doing it …
> Taylor: Yeah, and then everyone else, like, sees it and then they're kind of like 'oh, why are you doing this?' (11-12-year-olds in Calgary).

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> Diana: I just don't take stupid pictures that I know could ruin my reputation or something. Leah: I don't think any of my friends would. Diana: Exactly. And if I take stupid pictures on a camera, then I delete it, right? (15-17-year-olds in Toronto).

Friends, on the other hand, could be trusted not to expose each other to ridicule. Friends therefore kept silly and embarrassing pictures of each other on their phones because phones were private, or deleted them after the joke was over. For example, during our discussion with the 15-17-year-olds in Calgary, Bridget pulled up an embarrassing picture of Maddy that she had on her phone and started teasing Maddy about it:

> Bridget: [Giggling] Look at the picture that I have of you. [Laughter from everyone even though Bridget only showed it to Maddy]
> Alicia: But it's not like something I wouldn't send to somebody, I wouldn't post pictures that I have of people...
> Maddy: Oh, it's nothing dirty. [Laughter] It's just a lot of makeup with ... facial hair...
> Bridget: I wouldn't post it on Facebook, I'm not like that.
> Facilitator: By keeping it on your phone you've got it, but it's not as public as Facebook?
> Maddy: Yeah.

There were also specific rules about exposure that determined how close friends were. For example, it was universally agreed that someone with too many friends on Facebook was a "loser" and a "stalker" who did not have any "real friends". As one participant put it, "That's not proper to add people without knowing them. [And the person who did add them] may say 'who are you, why are you stalking me?' I'm blocking you if I don't know you. Just 'cause I have mutual friends – I don't know you" (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

An unrealistic number of online "friends" was seen as inauthentic and a sign of desperation. Similarly, "spam statuses" were an indicator that someone was seeking an inappropriate amount of attention and was therefore not a desirable friend:

> Bridget: It's like using people's statuses as diary, like, they post such, sometimes it's such in detail things, it's like 'I did not need to know that' …
> Sally: And then you get spam statuses, they're like 'I'm going to the washroom now, bye' a new status, you're like ...   Yeah, like that. And you have message, and you're like 'come back, I'm back.' Nobody cares! (15-17-year-olds in Calgary).

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Girls who exposed themselves by posting sexualized pictures on Facebook or sexting were the subject of special derision. Girls of all ages accordingly exercised extra caution to avoid being labelled a "slut". They also did not necessarily sympathize with those girls who had posted sexualized shots, and tended to blame them for their indiscretion. Boys, on the other hand, were free to post sexualized pictures of themselves and no one would harass them. However, if a girl lost control of such a picture, her reputation was ruined and she would have to live with being known as "the 'naked picture girl' … it's in your name forever. I guess until you graduate" (15-17-year-old from Toronto).

> Just be careful what you post. Don't like, put yourself in a bikini as a profile. 'Oh, here's me.' That makes me crazy when people do that ... it's gross ... Nobody wants to see you in that ... you don't need to expose your 15-year-old body on Facebook, it's not necessary (13-14-year-old in Toronto).

Relationship status also regulated the degree of attention someone was entitled to pay to an online persona. Checking out new people online was a form of stalking that was generally socially acceptable so long as the person did not make any direct contact. Creeping, or paying more attention, was acceptable for "best friends" because they were supposed to know your intimate secrets, but others, like parents, were expected to keep their distance. The fact that information was posted on Facebook did not determine who should or should not look at it; instead, the level of attention was closely regulated by the people's respective positions in a complex web of real world social relationships.

Our participants also told us that online communication made it easier to deal with unwanted attention from people outside their circle of friends. Unwanted contact could be ignored: "If someone's calling me I hit 'ignore' if I don't want to talk to them. If they text me I pretend like I never saw the text. If they BBM me, I don't read it ... Facebook, if they're annoying me I just block them, so they can't see my account altogether" (15-17-year-old in Toronto). Strangers who attempted to insinuate themselves into these 'friends-only' spaces were suspect and unwelcome. An Ottawa 13-14-year old girl explained:

> Charlene: for me, it's people I don't know, like I never met and who… add me and… that bothers me because it's like I've never seen you in my life… I find that stupid.
> Facilitator: Do you respond to them?
> Charlene: Na I ignore them because I don't know what they want to do.

By not responding, participants were able to create and maintain personal and social boundaries without face-to-face embarrassment.

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▶ Ethical Use of Online Content and Digital Literacy

All our participants used online technologies to express themselves in some way, and put a great deal of thought into crafting their online personas. As part of that process, they would often co-opt copyrighted material and repurpose it for their own self-presentation. For example, some of the tweens used pictures of celebrities for their social networking profile pictures, and created YouTube videos featuring themselves dancing to popular music. The teens incorporated song lyrics and music videos on their social networking sites as a way of expressing themselves. The practice was so widespread, that youth universally agreed that "Everyone does it". A smaller number also used copyrighted music and pictures in videos they created to post on YouTube.

> Leah: [I]t's all pictures, and art, and lyrics and stuff ... some of them get to your head, or mean something to you ... It's also a way of telling people how you feel ... Mitchell: Yeah, it's like a subliminal message, you can't really see it (15-17-year-olds in Toronto).

Our participants also routinely reproduced online content, especially images, in their school assignments. Virtually all the young people we talked to were familiar with the issues around plagiarism, and told us that their teachers had strict rules that required them to cite the source and provide clear credit to the creator of the content. These rules structured their views on ethical use of online content both in and out of school.

For example, at first blush, younger participants who incorporated music and images into their personal profiles or videos did not see this as a "use" of someone else's property, and typically did not worry about issues of ownership. When we asked about copyright concerns, they reasoned that the rules were the same as they were for plagiarism in school: it was fine to use the material so long as you cited where you got it. But at the same time, some of them had to navigate copyright restrictions on YouTube because their material had been taken down for copyright violations in the past. They felt that this was a silly concern, because "we were just dancing to it, it's like, we didn't say in the video that we made it up." Especially given the popularity of the music they chose, everyone was aware of the identity of the original artist and, from their perspective, they were complimenting the artist by reproducing it. They also referred to Maria Aragon, the Canadian girl who became famous after she posted a cover version of Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* on YouTube, as proof that the practice was ethical.

Our teenaged participants also told us that it was permissible to use song lyrics, videos and stills so long as they cited the source, or the songs were well known enough that people would know where they came from. They were particularly frustrated by the copyright hoops they were required to jump through on YouTube, and felt that they were not doing anything unethical so long as they were not

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earning any profits from the use.   One 15-17-year-old girl in Calgary told us that she was particularly annoyed when she purchased songs from iTunes but was unable to use them in a YouTube video because the digital rights management attached to iTunes songs made them incompatible with her video maker software. She felt she was justified in downloading the music from a free site to work around the restriction because she had already purchased the song from iTunes.

Downloading music without paying for it was a widespread practice according to all our participants, in spite of the fact that teachers were "always kind of, tirade-ing" about it "cause it's not like the police are going to hunt you down and arrest you" (11-12-year-old in Calgary). Music was a central part of their lives and access to music was taken as a given, even if they had to stretch the rules of ethical use. However, like monitoring, copyright issues tended to interfere with their online lives in an annoying way, and were out of step with their own understanding of ethical use.

Perhaps because of the high level of monitoring networked technologies in general, our participants did not use networked devices to enhance their learning in innovative ways. The school environment was considered to be hostile to iPods and cell phones, and the students' ability to use any networked device (including computers) was highly dependent upon the particular teacher. Some teachers allowed them to use the calculators and agendas on their phones and iPods to help them keep track of assignments; others took advantage of school websites where they could post homework or class notes and remind students of upcoming tests.

But, for the most part, our participants' use of online technologies for school work was restricted to using Google to do research. Some schools provided them with links to educational sites but even then they tended to default to a simple Google search. After a search was completed, most of them used "whatever pops up." The majority liked Google because they could find information quickly and independently, without having to "read up on everything."

> Christian: Neither [personal blogs or Wikipedia] are allowed [for school work]. Charlene: Yeah. George: Probably if it's like someone's opinion but not the right … answer… (13-14-olds in Ottawa).

A minority preferred books, precisely because books gave them an opportunity to read in more depth and put the information they found into context, "opposed to like, looking on Google and then getting this whole load of … crap" (15-17-year-old in Toronto).

> But when I'm on the Internet doing things, it's just easier for me because I'm paying attention to the computer, but like not all the loudness and people doing things (11-12-year-old in Toronto).

Some teachers would let them use their phones or iPods or go on Facebook as a reward for completing their work in a timely way. They generally worried that greater access to these devices would be counter-productive because they would be easily distracted by incoming texts and messages from friends. At the same time,

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they continued to text friends under their desk when their teachers were not looking.

On the other hand, students who had trouble concentrating found that listening to music or using the Internet actually helped them concentrate, because it helped them to shut out the distractions in the classroom.

There was little evidence that our participants were using networked devices to collaborate on school assignments. Interestingly, they universally told us their teachers told them not to use Wikipedia or "anything that starts with wiki" (15-17-year-old in Ottawa) because "Anyone can put anything on there" (15-17-year-old in Calgary).

▶ Unplugging

The young people we spoke to were confident in their ability to navigate the dangers they faced online, and demonstrated a real resiliency with respect to coping with offensive content and unwanted online attention. However, the degree of monitoring made the online world a much less friendly one than it was in 2000. From our youth participants' perspective, parental surveillance eroded private spaces for reflection and social interaction with peers; school surveillance pathologized many of their daily interactions and made it more difficult to use new technologies to learn; corporate surveillance made them uncomfortable because they had no control over how their interactions would be used by marketers.

Although a few of our participants told us that losing access to the online world, even for a week, would be catastrophic, many of them talked about the need to retreat in order to re-establish a sense of privacy. Others told us that losing access to online technologies would not be "a big deal". A 13-14-year-old in Calgary told us, "I'd survive. I don't need technology. I have books." Some 15-17-year-olds in Toronto told us "It would kind of suck" and be "slightly annoying" but "it wouldn't bother you that much." Two 13-14-year-old boys in Ottawa boasted:

> Andre: I already did it for a month.
> Facilitator: yeah?
> George: Me, I did it for 2 months this summer.

Others felt that devices were becoming so fully monitored, that they had little choice but to unplug. Jen, a 13-14-year-old in Toronto, lamented:

> "[M]y mom said the only way I can have, um, my phone, is if I add her on BBM … So I, I don't even want to have a phone anymore ... I don't want to do on Facebook, 'cause I wouldn't add my cousins on my phone. So, it's like a place away from the computer, so I would write it on my phone. But then that's another block: like I can't have it on my phone or the computer. Yeah, so there's nowhere else to do it besides in person."

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▸ Moving Ahead

Certainly, the challenge for parents and teachers is to help young people learn the digital literacy skills they need to successfully navigate the online world. Our qualitative research with teachers[4] identified a number of best practices that demonstrate the powerful contribution networked devices can make to learning in today's schools. Leading educators are doing excellent work in this regard across the country. The next step is to learn from their experiences and develop professional development programs and in-class support to help all teachers feel confident and knowledgeable enough to create classroom climates that foster digital literacy skills development.

We also need to think more carefully about the kinds of skills that young people need to fully maximize their online experiences. The teachers we talked to in 2011 asserted that digital literacy is about critical thinking and citizenship. Many of the young people we spoke to accepted at face value the mainstream images and ideas that permeate their online environment. We may need to encourage a greater critical engagement with these images and ideas if we truly want to foster innovation, collaboration and communication. Moreover, we may need to rethink the role of monitoring, since the kinds of surveillance that are instituted at school and at home to protect young people work against the communication and trust that is at the heart of fostering digitally savvy youth.

Our findings indicate that there is already a solid basis upon which to build. In spite of widespread concerns on the part of adults, the young people we spoke with were aware of online risks, largely self-regulated their own behaviours to avoid and manage those risks, and consistently demonstrated resiliency and competence in their responses to those risks. They actively sought out parental guidance when needed, and indicated a desire to work *with* adults when online conflicts or concerns arose.

We look forward to exploring how best to do that in our national school survey in 2013.

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[4]See *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III -- Teachers' Perspectives* at http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy.

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