Enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety

A research report on an intergenerational ‘Living Lab’ experiment

Dr Amanda Third
Dr Damien Spry
Kathryn Locke

June 2013

Young and Well CRC
Unit 17, 71 Victoria Crescent
Abbotsford VIC 3067 Australia
youngandwellcrc.org.au
Enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety

A research report on an intergenerational ‘Living Lab’ experiment

Dr Amanda Third
University of Western Sydney

Dr Damien Spry
University of Western Sydney

Kathryn Locke
University of Western Sydney

ISBN: 978 0 9871179 3 9

Suggested citation: Third, A, Spry, D & Locke, K 2013, Enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety: A research report on an intergenerational ‘Living Lab’ experiment, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.

Copies of this guide can be downloaded from the Young and Well CRC website youngandwellcrc.org.au

© Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre 2013

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Unit 17, 71 Victoria Crescent, Abbotsford VIC 3067, Australia.
Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge support from the team at the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, as well as Ishtar Vij and Matt Dawes at Google Australia.

The authors would also like to acknowledge Associate Professor Ingrid Richardson from Murdoch University and Jess Strider, formerly of the University of Western Sydney for their contribution to an earlier report based on work undertaken in the United Kingdom.


This report is published on the Young and Well CRC website.

A special thank you goes to the seven parents and three young people who participated in this study for sharing their time and their insights.

---

**Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre**

The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre is an Australian-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policymakers from over 70 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people’s lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government’s Cooperative Research Centres Program.

[youngandwellcrc.org.au](http://youngandwellcrc.org.au)

---

**University of Western Sydney**

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) is a modern research-led metropolitan university that was established in the late 1980s. UWS nurtures a distinctive, high-impact research culture, committed to enhancing our region’s cultural, economic, environmental and educational development, and is responsive to contemporary challenges in Greater Western Sydney and beyond.

[uws.edu.au](http://uws.edu.au)
Table of contents

Main messages ........................................................................................................................................ v
Executive summary ........................................................................................................................... vii
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
Aims ..................................................................................................................................................... 2
Methodology ........................................................................................................................................ 3
The experiment at a glance .................................................................................................................. 9
A snapshot of ‘Living Lab’ teaching-learning ..................................................................................... 10
Workshops: Key findings .................................................................................................................... 11
Comparing the scenarios: Control group and Living Lab .................................................................... 20
Comparative analysis: London vs. Sydney ............................................................................................ 24
Conclusions ......................................................................................................................................... 25
Author biographies ............................................................................................................................... 26
References .......................................................................................................................................... 27
Further reading .................................................................................................................................... 28
Main messages

Technology use potentially offers young people a suite of important benefits.1 These include building a young person’s media literacy; supporting their formal and informal education; encouraging them to explore their creativity and their identity; sharing their creative outputs; strengthening their interpersonal relationships; and fostering their sense of belonging and connection to their communities. However to maximise this positive potential, it is important young people are supported to minimise the risks of online engagement.

This research shows that young people today generally understand the range of risks they might face online, and they take active steps to protect themselves. Their online safety strategies draw upon school-based cybersafety education, as well as the information and skills they gain through peer networks, sibling relationships, and conversations with the adults in their lives.

Young people do not distinguish between the online and the offline in the ways that adults do, and this has consequences for the ways young people practice online safety. Rather than sliding into a moral vacuum when they go online, young people draw upon the same moral framework that shapes their offline engagements.2 This underlines the importance of parents continuing to have open and ongoing conversations with young people about their online activities that reiterate their family’s values. These conversations are one backdrop against which young people make decisions online.

However, managing children’s online engagements and supporting their online safety can be challenging at times. The strategies parents currently use centre primarily on overt or covert monitoring of their children’s engagements with technology, and in particular their social networking activities. Parents also think it is important to have ongoing conversations with their children, and to know how to use online security tools and software.

However, many parents report that they have a limited understanding of the reasons why young people engage with technology, and that their own digital literacy is insufficiently developed. Further, some parents lack either the skills or confidence to use the internet to inform themselves about online safety, and many feel unsure about where to turn for reliable online safety information. The result is that many parents feel under-equipped to address the numerous and often complex safety issues their children might face online.

Having tech-savvy adults around them supports young people to engage online in safe, smart, respectful and responsible ways. As such, a key challenge for promoting young people’s online safety lies in building adults’ familiarity with the platforms young people use, along with their technical skills and understanding of the attractions of using technology. This will enable them to take advantage of the full suite of tools that are available to them to support their children’s online safety.

To build parents’ digital literacy further, it is important to foster intergenerational conversations about technology use. Many young people have skills and expertise in the use of technology, and this is potentially a significant resource for parents when enhancing their own digital literacy. Sitting down with a young person in front of a computer, or with a tablet or a mobile phone, and talking to them about how they use technology can greatly assist adults to gain the skills and the confidence to have open and ongoing conversations with their children about their technology use, as well as practical strategies to support their children’s online safety. These conversations also provide opportunities for parents to reinforce the family values that shape their children’s technology use.

Finally, whilst the rapid development of new technologies and digital practices poses a consistent challenge, it is critical that cybersafety policy and programs are informed by the best possible evidence. Further, it is crucial that mainstream research, parent education and policy responses to the challenge of online safety place the insights and experiences of young people themselves at the centre. This ensures that the strategies that are developed are germane to young people and therefore more likely to have strong uptake. This in turn best positions young

---

1 See Collin et al, 2011, The benefits of social networking services, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.
2 Third et al, 2011, Intergenerational attitudes towards social networking and cybersafety: A Living Lab, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.
people, along with those who care for them, to take full advantage of the opportunities that online engagements can offer.
Executive summary

Many parents report they would like to further develop their technology skills and expertise so they can better guide their children’s engagement with technology (Third et al. 2011). Whilst both informal and formal cybersafety education are having a positive impact on young people’s capacity to identify online risks and take steps to ensure their wellbeing, there is scope to improve parent education in ways that empower parents to support their children’s safe engagement with technology.

To identify the key areas that cybersafety education for parents should target, this study set out to better understand how parents think about online safety and to document the strategies they currently deploy to support their children to use technology safely. This study was interested in understanding more about the full range of online safety practices parents use, including parents’ familiarity with and proficiency in the use of technical cybersafety measures such as online security controls and privacy settings. Anecdotal and scholarly evidence suggest that, whilst many technology providers make high-quality online safety tools freely available to the public, parents have yet to embrace these fully (see for example Mitchell et al. 2005). As such, this study sought to assess to what extent parents have the necessary digital literacy skills and access to the right kinds of technical tools to support their children to be safe, smart, responsible and respectful online.

Furthermore, this study explored the impact that training by young people can have upon parents’ capacities to support their children’s online safety. Building on the insights of a previous Young and Well CRC pilot study (Third et al. 2011), this project hypothesised that an intergenerational education model might assist parents to further develop their digital literacy and enable them to better support their children’s safe online engagement. The previous study, entitled Intergenerational attitudes to social networking and cybersafety, used a ‘Living Lab’ methodology to investigate the intergenerational dynamics shaping attitudes towards and usage of social networking services (SNS) and cybersafety. It sought to create a non-hierarchical teaching and learning environment in which young people sat with an adult in front of a computer screen in order to work through a series of hypothetical scenarios developed by young people and relating to parents’ concerns about young people’s social networking practices. Researchers observed the Living Lab in process, documenting and analysing the intergenerational conversations and skills exchange that took place. This study used the same methodology but, this time, focused the learning scenarios on key online safety issues and the strategies parents and young people use to address them. This enabled the research team to identify strategies for enhancing parents’ digital literacy to support young people’s online safety.

Upon completion of the Living Lab workshop, both parents and young people emphasised the benefits of fostering intergenerational conversation about issues of young people’s technology use and online safety. They noted that intergenerational dialogue enabled the building of trust and a sense of shared responsibility regarding the use of technology. Interacting with young people around their technology use can increase a parent’s digital literacy – including their knowledge and technical skill in using online safety controls – and can provide a context for increasing understanding about the benefits of being active and social online. This study indicates that, given the chance, parents will find ways to discuss with their children their mutual obligations and responsibilities for others, as well as discuss appropriate online behaviour and how to seek advice or help.

KEY FINDINGS

1 PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE APPROACH THE ISSUE OF ONLINE SAFETY DIFFERENTLY

Consistent with recent research findings (Livingstone 2008, 2009; Livingstone & Das 2010; Yardi & Bruckman 2011), this study generated evidence to suggest that a generation gap shapes the safety management strategies parents and young people deploy to address online safety concerns. This gap is the result of a combination of factors including:

- differences in the purposes for which parents and young people use technologies in their everyday lives
- broadly generalisable variations in the levels of technical and online literacies demonstrated by young people as opposed to parents
- divergent perceptions of the impact that online and networked media experiences—and in particular, social networking—have on a young person’s identity formation.
Among the parents there was generally a high level of concern regarding the capacity of online interactions—such as social networking—to have negative impacts on their children, but a more limited knowledge of either the technical skills or the social norms that can be employed to manage online communication. Their concerns notwithstanding, the majority of parents in this study believe that “using technology, including social networking sites, is generally good for young people.”

To manage concerns about their children’s online safety, parents rely primarily on either overt or covert monitoring of their children’s engagement with technology, and in particular their social networking activities. Parents tend to distinguish between ‘the online’ and ‘the offline’, configuring them as distinct realms of both children’s activity and parental influence. Parents feel they have much more control over and/or input into their children’s offline engagement than their online activities. This was distinct from the way that young people spoke about technology as providing just another setting for interaction in their everyday lives—and one that they use often in conjunction with or simultaneous to what adults would describe as ‘offline’ interaction.

Whilst social networking unnerved their adult counterparts, our young participants singled it out as a form of online participation with far-reaching positive impact for young people. When confronted by some of the adults’ hostile attitudes to social networking, young people strongly advocated the benefits of engaging in social interactions online. One claimed for example that, “I wouldn’t have experienced other cultures without social networking.”

Young people generally expressed a high level of awareness of the risks of online interaction. Whilst young people understand that communicating in an online environment can be problematic, they also feel reasonably confident that there are ways to manage potential problems, either through controlling what they post online, or by taking an approach that interprets online communication contextually. They believe that they have become better at managing risks over time. This study confirmed an important finding of a previous Young and Well CRC study (Third et al. 2011); namely, that rather than sliding into a moral vacuum when engaging online, young people in fact apply the same established moral framework to both their online and their offline engagements.

Both parents and young people reported that, within their families, older siblings share the skills and norms they have acquired with younger siblings, and that it is important for them to do so. Young participants take the responsibilities associated with mentoring siblings seriously. They believe that they are sometimes better positioned than parents to guide younger siblings because they have intimate understanding of the issues young people face online, and have accrued significant experience and technical skill in addressing them. Under the right circumstances, older siblings can be an important informal resource for supporting the safe online engagement of younger users.

2   YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERTISE IS A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS WHO WANT TO ENHANCE THEIR DIGITAL LITERACY TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

Parents emphasised the crucial role that education plays in teaching children about the risks associated with online activity. Young participants identified formal online safety education, along with other forms of education, as having a strong influence upon their capacity to identify and respond to risks appropriately. However, when they reflected on their own experiences of learning to use technology, parents reported that—in contrast to their children—they had minimal opportunities to learn about technology and that, when the chance to learn more presented, it was often taught in an abstract rather than a hands-on, experiential way.

These generational differences in opportunities to learn about technology are reflected in different levels of digital literacy between parents and young people. For example, parents’ baseline knowledge and understanding of online safety controls is limited. When young people and parents discussed how to manage online safety in the workshops, some of the parents raised the possibility of ‘using software to set parameters’ as something they thought should be done—not realising that this possibility already existed. Further, questionnaires, workshop discussions and technical activities conducted in this study indicated that parents’ technical skills in using online safety controls ranged from novice to average.

In contrast to parents, when it came to technical skills pertaining to online security and privacy settings, young people ranged from average to expert. Young people were much more likely either to already know how to adjust privacy and security settings on a variety of online platforms, or to be able to search and experiment with online functions in order to learn ‘by discovery’ about settings.
There is thus scope for innovative education models to play a key role in enhancing parents’ understanding and uptake of online safety controls, and young people’s expertise is potentially a significant resource for parents who are looking to enhance their own digital literacy to support their children’s online safety. Intergenerational experiential learning models such as the one trialled in this study can thus facilitate young people to share their technology expertise with adults.

3 PARENTING STYLES SHAPE PARENTS’ STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

This study highlighted a diverse range of strategies used by parents to regulate their children’s technology use and ensure online safety. These divergences in parents’ approaches to online safety correlate with differences in their general approach to parenting. For example, where open and frank discussion characterised the parent-child relationship, those same principles were at the heart of the strategies the parent deployed to ensure their child’s online safety. Parents with a more autocratic parenting style were more likely to set rules and expectations regarding online engagement autonomously and implement them by imposing strict consequences (such as turning off the household’s wi-fi). Strategies for promoting the uptake of online privacy and security settings by parents must be able to accommodate a diversity of parenting styles if they are to have traction with parents and prove effective.

4 PARENTS RELY PRIMARILY ON ‘OFFLINE’ STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

Parents were unanimous in their desire to exercise some influence over their children’s online activities. Acknowledging their limited familiarity with online methods of safety and profile management, parents reported that they generally rely primarily on offline methods of monitoring and regulating their children’s online engagement. They identified a range of key strategies for managing their children’s online activities, including: surveillance and control at home; formal guidelines and disciplinary procedures mobilised through the school environment; and both informal education (largely comprising conversations between family members and/or friends) and formal school-based cybersafety and digital literacy education. Aside from a couple of exceptions, parents generally did not recognise the potential for the use of online security and privacy settings to help their children to manage their online interactions. There is thus scope for education to improve parents’ awareness and uptake of online security controls.

Parents were overwhelmingly in support of the kind of formal cybersafety education that is conducted in schools. They highlighted the role played by schools in addressing areas of concern—especially relating to cyberbullying and the posting of personal and/or explicit content online—and were generally of the view that schools are managing incidents of (online) bullying quite well. However, parents also recognise that the responsibility for ensuring their children’s safety online cannot rest solely with institutions. As such, parents seek to complement the work that schools are undertaking using strategies implemented in the family home, which reiterate their family values.

5 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS THAT PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION CAN HELP PARENTS TO GUIDE THEIR CHILDREN TO ENGAGE ONLINE IN SMART, SAFE, RESPONSIBLE AND RESPECTFUL WAYS

This study shows that promoting intergenerational conversation between adults and young people who are not directly related greatly enhances adults’ understanding of the role of online interactions in young people’s lives and encourages them to experiment with the technology and become more familiar with it. These conversations also increase young people’s understandings of adults’ concerns. Given that one of the consistent hurdles to parental uptake of online privacy and security settings lies in parents’ generally more limited technical literacy, intergenerational conversations of the kind facilitated in this Living Lab experiment can help to foster parents’ use of online security settings, and thus promote parents’ capacity to guide their children to engage online in a smart, safe, responsible and respectful manner.

Our young participants were enthusiastic about the opportunity to better understand the factors shaping adults’ approaches to managing their children’s online engagement. One young person described the Living Lab as “an enlightening experience” that had highlighted intergenerational differences and enabled her to better understand
what drives parents’ concerns about their children using technology. Young people were also very excited by the fact that they had been able to assist a parent to learn more about why young people use technology, as well as to guide them to increase their technical skills.

The parents involved in the Living Labs noted how reassuring it was to work with and hear from young people. They reported that they increased their understanding of the types of online safety management tools available, as well as how to use them. They saw this as a uniformly positive experience. Having gained a certain level of technical familiarity with the use of online safety controls, the parent participants claimed they left having the confidence to apply and build upon the set of new skills they had begun to acquire in the Living Lab. But the most important take-away for the parents on the technical front was that working with the young person gave them a safe space to experiment with the technology and learn by discovery.

This interest in and support for the role young people can play in increasing parents’ levels of literacy and confidence suggests the approach is well-founded and would be well-received. By working intergenerationally, parents and young people can enhance their digital literacy and close the generational gap in attitudes and approaches to online safety.

The following report explains in further detail the findings of the pilot study that was conducted in Sydney, Australia in early 2012.
Introduction

Recent research demonstrates that a generation gap shapes the safety management strategies parents and young people deploy to address online safety concerns (Third et al. 2011; Livingstone 2008, 2009; Livingstone & Das 2010; Yardi & Bruckman 2011). Although many online safety options—including privacy settings and security controls—are now available to parents (Mitchell et al. 2005), their uptake remains limited. This is not to suggest that parents are indifferent to the online safety issues their children potentially face. Rather, parents report that they have a limited understanding of the reasons why young people engage with technology, and that their own technical skills and broader digital literacy are not sufficiently developed to enable them to guide their children’s technological engagement (see for example, Third et al, 2011). Further, some parents lack either the skills or confidence to use the internet to inform themselves about online safety. The result is that many parents feel under-equipped to address the numerous and often complex safety issues their children might face online.

Young people are also concerned about their online safety. Confirming previous reports, this study revealed that young people take informed steps to minimise online risks (Hinjuda & Patchin 2008; Hitchcock 2008; Kaufman 2011; Lenhart & Madden 2007). However, young people and parents have divergent understandings of how to implement the range of available online safety tools and software, and parents frequently have limited understanding of the steps their children are taking to keep themselves safe online.

Previous Young and Well CRC research suggests that experiential modes of learning can enhance parents’ understanding of the world of online and networked media with which their children engage (Third et al. 2011). Building on the insights of this previous research on intergenerational attitudes to cybersafety and social networking, this project further investigated the capacity for training led by young people to impact upon parent’s capacities to support their children’s online safety, this time with a particular focus on parents’ use of security controls and privacy settings.

This project trialled an innovative experiential learning model that enables productive conversations and skills transfer between young people and adults about the benefits and risks of being online, and strategies for ensuring online safety. The project deliberately positioned young people as experts or educators, a role reversal that enabled us to develop, explore and evaluate the interactional learning model for enhancing parents’ own digital literacy, as well as their understanding of their children’s online activities. In particular, the project investigated the intergenerational dynamics shaping understandings of online safety to determine what both parents and young people can do to collaboratively establish and maintain safer online practices.

The study was conducted in two locations—London, UK and Sydney, Australia—between September 2011 and March 2012, in order to enable reflection upon the similarities and differences between the two different national contexts. This report focuses primarily on the findings from the Australian-based study.3

3 A brief summary of the comparative findings can be found near the end of this report. The findings of the UK study can be found in Strider, J et al, 2012, Intergenerational approaches towards enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.
Aims

The overarching aim of this study was to find ways to support the further development of parents’ digital literacy so that they are better equipped to guide their children’s online safety practices. More precisely, this project investigated how an experiential learning model premised on intergenerational exchange can enhance parents’ broad digital literacy, as well as promote their understanding and uptake of privacy and security controls. To achieve this, the project aimed to:

- Identify how parents and young people understand and approach the issue of cybersafety.
- Map the similarities and differences in the ways young people and parents practice cybersafety.
- Examine how increased digital literacy can enhance parents’ technical skill set (e.g. their capacity to use technical controls), help them better understand the integral role of online and networked media in young people’s lives, and increase their confidence and their capacity to effectively promote their children’s ability to engage online in smart, safe and responsible ways.
- Investigate whether innovative experiential learning models that promote intergenerational dialogue can assist parents and their children to better navigate some of the risks associated with online engagement, as well as maximise the positive potential of young people’s online and networked media use.

Young people drew upon their insights, experiences and expertise to design the workshop for adults.
Methodology

Whilst the rapid development of new technologies and digital practices poses a consistent challenge, it is critical that cybersafety policy and program design is informed by the best possible evidence. Further, it is crucial that mainstream research and policy responses to the challenge of online safety are founded in a rigorous evidence base informed by youth-centred methodologies. This ensures that the strategies that are developed are germane to young people and therefore more likely to have better uptake. This in turn means that young people, along with those who care for them, are best positioned to take full advantage of the opportunities that online engagement can offer.

This project brings together two innovative qualitative methodologies that enable young people’s insights and experiences to shape the research process: Living Lab (Levén & Holmström 2008) and Interrupted Spaces (Bolzan & Gale 2011). These two methodologies and the methods used to generate data are briefly described below.

LIVING LABS AND INTERRUPTED SPACES

A ‘Living Lab’ is “a user-centric research methodology for sensing, prototyping, validating and refining complex solutions in multiple and evolving real life contexts” (Eriksson et al. 2005, p. 4). The Living Lab method does not simply observe subjects in the mode of more conventional participant observation methods but actively engages participants in creating or modelling a ‘real life’ activity. It then draws upon participant expertise and practice to devise change-oriented interventions that are observed, documented and analysed. In this way, the Living Lab methodology integrates research goals with participant experience. The strength of this approach lies in its simulation and contemporaneous analysis of ‘authentic’ social interaction. In this project, the Living Lab approach was used in two phases: (a) an initial workshop for young people, in which the research team prompted them to design the structure and content of a workshop young people would lead with parent participants; and (b) a workshop in which young people worked through ‘real life’ scenarios with parent participants, in front of a laptop, as a basis for intergenerational experiential learning about cybersafety.

‘Interrupted spaces’ (Bolzan & Gale 2011) is a methodology based upon an interruption in the usual life worlds (habitus) of our research participants that provokes both participants and researchers to critically reflect on common practices and the assumptions underpinning them. In this project, interruption was enacted by inverting the usual power relationships that structure cybersafety education. That is, whereas cybersafety education conventionally positions adults as experts and young people as the subjects, this project sought to cast young people as experts of online interaction and effective cybersafety strategies, and position the adults as the ‘students’.

The above methodologies are designed to produce an in-depth or granular understanding of the ways both young people and adults engage with technology in an everyday way. As such, it is standard practice to use smaller sample sizes (e.g. 5–15 participants) when deploying these methodologies.
METHODS

Drawing upon the ‘Living Lab’ and ‘interrupted spaces’ methodologies this project worked with young people to design and deliver a workshop, based on experiential learning principles, to skill parent participants in cybersafety strategies. To achieve this, the project undertook three phases of activity in Sydney in March 2012. The research team captured this series of different exchanges and analysed them.

PHASE 1: WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

In Phase One, the research team conducted a workshop with three young people to identify the ways they practice online safety and to develop cybersafety education resources for parents. This included designing an intergenerational experiential learning exercise to be implemented with a group of parents in the final Living Lab workshop.

Before commencing the workshop with young people, the research team developed a set of eight scenarios based upon the findings of a literature review (Strider et al. 2012) and a previous related study and report (Third et al. 2011). These scenarios covered specific concerns relating to particular popular web-based services (e.g. Skype and Facebook), as well as broader online safety concerns (e.g. talking to strangers online, revealing personal information online, online bullying). Several others explored parents’ and young people’s behaviour (e.g. monitoring browser histories and encouraging older siblings to act as ‘gatekeepers’ for younger children in the family).

In the workshop, young people firstly discussed their own experiences of cybersafety. Drawing upon this discussion, they went on to identify what they think parents need to know about their children’s online safety. These discussions used mind mapping to capture the discussions. Lastly, the young people workedshopped the series of scenarios presented by the research team and together selected and edited what they thought were the three most relevant scenarios to take to the workshops with adults. The scenarios young people selected related to ‘online bullying’; ‘age-specific issues & sibling relationships’; and ‘popularity vs. security’ (see ‘Online Safety Scenarios’ box).
Online safety scenarios

The following three scenarios were presented to parents participating in both the control group workshop and the Living Lab workshop. In both instances, the scenario discussion followed a broader conversation in which the parents were able to raise questions and concerns without specific prompting from the researchers. In the Living Lab, parents were asked to direct these questions and concerns to the three young people.

1 ONLINE BULLYING

Over the last couple of months, your teenager seems to be very unhappy. They have stopped seeing their friends and have expressed reluctance to go to school or to participate in their usual social activities. At the same time, you have noticed that they are checking their mobile phone and Facebook page very regularly and with nervousness. You suspect they may be being bullied online but they have not talked to you about it.

• What steps could you take to address this?
• How would you go about talking to your teenager about how they express themselves online?
• What do you think can help prevent and remedy online bullying?

2 AGE-SPECIFIC ISSUES & SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

You have two children—one in their early teens and another in their late teens. You feel confident that your older child has a good understanding of online safety and can navigate social media sites and other online activities effectively. You are, however, concerned that your younger child does not have the same level of knowledge when it comes to online safety and believe that they may be more susceptible to being contacted by strangers, revealing personal information, and stumbling across inappropriate material.

• How do you feel about your younger child using social media sites and other online services/activities?
• What kinds of things can you think of to encourage your older child to act as a role model for your younger child?

3 CONNECTIONS ONLINE: POPULARITY VS. SECURITY

You are growing more and more concerned about who your teenager is connecting, talking and sharing content with online. They have over 500 Facebook friends, which, you think, is significantly more connections than they have offline. You are concerned they are exposing themselves, including personal details and photos, to strangers online. In particular, you are concerned that you have overheard them talking with a close friend about being in touch with someone they met online. You know you would be very concerned if your child was to connect with an older person who they had never met in ‘real life’.

• What could you do to find out who your child is connecting with?
• Can you think of any strategies that can be used to explain “online” safety values to your child?
PHASE 2: CONTROL GROUP WORKSHOP WITH PARENTS

In this workshop, researchers worked with a group of four adults to identify and discuss their concerns about their children’s online safety and to conduct a digital literacy exercise in which parents were asked to search online for information and assistance in implementing privacy and security controls and other cybersafety strategies. At the conclusion of the discussion, the research team talked through the list, developed by young people, of the top ten things adults should know about their child’s online safety (see ‘Top ten things parents should know about supporting their child’s online safety’ box).

This workshop was used as the control group for the intervention carried out with a different group of parents in the final workshop.

10 things parents should know about supporting their child’s online safety

A LIST CREATED BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PARENTS

1. What is ‘said’ online is permanent.
2. Children will be able to find their way around most security measures if they want to:
   
   “This generation has more literacy than the previous one... It’s very difficult for parents to be able to compete.”

3. Educate yourself about the sites that your children use.
4. Learn how to report something you think is inappropriate or dangerous on the sites your children use.
5. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are not ‘the problem’. Rather it’s the way they are used that can be an issue:

   “Emotions aren’t a part of the hypertext.”

6. Be aware of how advertisers use sites like Facebook.
7. Understand that most online relationships start offline — if your child is being bullied online, it is probably happening offline too.
8. Know what to look for in your child’s online relationships, and what makes a positive or negative relationship... but also trust your intuition.
9. Get your own Facebook account and become ‘friends’ with your child.
10. Overall, trusting your child is the best prevention for children doing the wrong thing!

PHASE 3: LIVING LAB WORKSHOP WITH PARENTS

In the final phase of data collection, our young participants conducted a ‘Living Lab’ workshop with a second group of three parents. After an initial discussion led by the young people about parents’ concerns about their children’s online safety, each young person sat in front of a computer with an adult to work through a series of ‘real-life’ scenarios relating to young people’s use of the internet and social networking. The young person walked the adult through how they use the technology to keep themselves safe in order to teach adults about young people’s technology use via an experiential learning exercise. Importantly, this exercise was directed by the individual parent’s concerns and curiosities. Positioned as experts, each young person’s role was to listen to the
parents and respond to their questions by drawing on their own expertise and demonstrating in real time how they dealt with particular online safety issues in their everyday lives.

**RECRUITMENT**

This small-scale pilot study was designed to gain a ‘deep’ ethnographic understanding of the complexities shaping parental approaches to promoting their children’s cybersafety that can be used to delineate future research directions. As such, our study focused on a small sample of parents and young people.

Young people were recruited locally via the University of Western Sydney’s careers network. Three young people, aged 18 to 20 (two males and one female)—all university students—were selected for the project via a competitive application process.

Adult participants were recruited using the services of a social research recruitment company, Qualitative Recruitment Australia. Seven parents with children aging from 8 to 17 participated in the project (four in the control group and three in the Living Lab). The parents’ ages ranged from 44 to 55. Over half of the participants had a combined household income of over $100,000. Parent participants came from a range of Sydney suburbs. Four parents participated in the control group workshop and three participated in the Living Lab workshop.

**DATA GATHERING**

Informed by youth participation and user-centred design principles, this pilot study generated qualitative data via the three workshops (a workshop with young people; a control group workshop with parents; and a Living Lab workshop with both young people and adults). Data was gathered using a range of qualitative methods, including:

- questionnaires for adults
- notes taken by researchers during the workshop discussions
- mind mapping exercises
- audio-recorded ‘vox-pop’ interviews with all participants directly following the workshops
- email interviews with adult participants three weeks after the workshops.

Further, each participant had a laptop for the duration of the workshops, and all workshops were recorded using Silverback usability testing software. Silverback generates three files on each laptop: a video recording of participants’ faces and interaction with other participants, an audio recording of participants’ comments and conversation, and screen capture which tracks all screen activity on the participant’s laptop. Each file was then analysed by the researchers to detect similarities and differences between the control group (parents working without young people’s input) and the Living Lab (parents working in collaboration with young people).

**USE AND LITERACY**

There were clear distinctions between young people and parents in terms of their use of online and networked media. Young people were more likely to use online and networked media and, in particular, to spend more time online using social networking services (SNS). However, even among the small sample of young people (n=3) there were differences in reported levels of use. Two of the young people identified as expert users, with one reporting that it was important for him to be constantly connected. The other young person in our sample was less technically proficient but was nonetheless a regular user.

---

4 www.qualitativerecruitment.com.au
Parents’ internet use varied to a greater degree. Most, but not all, went online with some frequency. All participating parents rated their skill level at using computers as ‘good’ to ‘excellent’, citing a broad use of software programs. On average, they reported spending over four hours per day on the computer, and two or more of these hours online. This reporting highlighted that, for the parent participants, working on the computer was not necessarily associated with ‘being online’. All but two parents stated that they used at least one SNS platform, citing Facebook and LinkedIn as those with which they were most familiar and likely to use. Some reported being friends with their children or their children’s friends. Contrary to self-evaluations, there was extensive variation in the confidence and technical skill of the parents when asked to navigate both familiar and unfamiliar websites, and most found the tasks that required them to check and adopt technical security and privacy controls very challenging. These difficulties related to adults’ general levels of digital literacy as opposed to the complexity of the tools with which they were asked to experiment.

The variations in online use were mirrored by variations in digital literacy. As we discuss further below, within both cohorts there were different capacities to access relevant sites, perform required functions and generally to understand what was possible when it came to managing online identity and security. Nonetheless, young people were fairly certain they were more literate than their parents, saying “this generation has more literacy than the previous one” and “it’s very difficult for parents to be able to compete.” Adults generally echoed this view. Over half the parents surveyed believed that their children knew much more about technology than they did.

One of the parents had a very low level of online literacy to the extent that she was unable to open an internet browser without assistance. However, the levels of general digital literacy among the parents could be characterised as average. In this sense, young people’s assumptions about the ‘older generation’s’ relatively poor literacy levels were not supported. However, the ‘generational literacy gap’ varied from person to person.

5 UK researcher into children and the media David Buckingham (2009) cites the widely adopted Ofcom (UK Office of Communications) definition of media literacy as “the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts” (p. 3). From this, we employ the term ‘online literacy’ as a shorthand for the ability to access, use, and manage online communications, specifically SNS’s, in a way that meets the needs and desires of young people and/or parents.
# The experiment at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase one</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Phase three</th>
<th>Phase four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE</strong></td>
<td><strong>CONTROL GROUP WORKSHOP WITH PARENTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>LIVING LAB WORKSHOP WITH PARENTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>DATA ANALYSIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hours; 3 young people</td>
<td>3 hours; 4 parents; led by the research team</td>
<td>3 hours; 3 parents; led by 3 young people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## AIMS

**Phase one**
- Identify how young people think about and practice cybersafety
- Ask young people to identify what parents need to know about how young people keep themselves safe online
- Design the Phase 3 Living Lab workshop to skill parents in digital literacy and the use of technical controls to support their children’s online safety
- Develop a series of experience-based scenarios through which to educate adults about online safety
- Skill young facilitators to communicate effectively with parent participants in the Living Lab context

**Phase two**
- Generate baseline data including:
  - demographics of our sample
  - parents’ knowledge of, and concerns about, young people’s online practices and their capacity to manage risks
  - parents’ existing strategies for monitoring their children’s technology use
  - participants' levels of media literacy.
- Assess to what extent parents are able to obtain useful information about and assistance with supporting their children’s online safety

**Phase three**
- Generate baseline data as per the Phase 2 workshop
- Assess to what extent parents are able to obtain useful information about, and assistance with, supporting their children's online safety
- Observe the nature, content and dynamic of a computer-aided dialogue between young people and adults in which young people are positioned as 'expert', and scenarios are used to prompt questioning and problem-solving
- Assess whether intergenerational experiential learning strategies can enhance parents’ digital literacy and skill them to use technical controls to support their children’s online safety

**Phase four**
- Generate baseline data as per the Phase 2 workshop
- Assess to what extent parents are able to obtain useful information about, and assistance with, supporting their children’s online safety
- Observe the nature, content and dynamic of a computer-aided dialogue between young people and adults in which young people are positioned as 'expert', and scenarios are used to prompt questioning and problem-solving
- Assess whether intergenerational experiential learning strategies can enhance parents’ digital literacy and skill them to use technical controls to support their children’s online safety

## ACTIVITIES

**Phase one**
- Mind mapping
- Focus group discussion and brainstorming
- Group scripting of workshop structure and learning scenarios
- Collaborative generation of a list of ‘Top ten things adults should know’

**Phase two**
- Paper questionnaire for parents
- Group discussion about strategies for managing cybersafety, drawing on the three scenarios devised by young people in Phase 1
- Computer exercise in which parents were asked to firstly search for information on the internet about how to utilise privacy tools and controls, and then install them on the laptop they were working on (recorded using Silverback software)
- Talk through a list of ‘Top ten things adults should know’ (generated by young people in Phase 1)
- Vox-pop style debrief drawing on ‘most-significant change’ methodology

**Phase three**
- Paper questionnaire for parents
- Group discussion about strategies for managing cybersafety led by young people and drawing on the three scenarios they devised in Phase 1
- One-on-one computer exercise in which parent participants were given access to Google’s Family Safety Centre, and assisted by a young person to work their way through the available cybersafety tools and controls and install them on a computer (recorded using Silverback software)
- Talk through a list of ‘Top ten things adults should know’ (generated by young people in Phase 1)
- Vox-pop style debrief with parents and young participants drawing on ‘most-significant change’ methodology

**Phase four**
- Process reflection
- Discourse analysis
- User interaction analysis

NB: Parents participating in the Phase 3 workshop did not participate in the Phase 2 control group workshop. Young people and parent participants were not related.
A snapshot of ‘Living Lab’ teaching-learning

During the Living Lab, the young people were each paired with a parent and asked to help them complete a set of tasks using a laptop computer. These tasks were designed by the research team to assess the parents’ digital literacy but also to inspire conversations between the young people and the parents. Tasks included searching for information about online safety, navigating the security and privacy settings on Gmail and Facebook accounts (accounts with pseudonyms were used for this purpose), choosing an appropriate safety filter, and locking the filter setting using the tools available via the Google Family Safety Centre website. Here is an example of what took place:

SNAPSHOT: JANE AND ABRAHAM

Jane: 19 years old, female, student
Abraham: 55 years old, male, vocational trainer, father of two boys (16 and 22 years old)

Abraham was initially uncomfortable and unsure about how to approach the set tasks. He immediately sought assistance from Jane, deferring to her opinion about what search terms to use to locate information about cybersafety even though this task required no technical skills. In fact, despite Jane’s tacit direction and hands-off approach, Abraham appeared from the outset more comfortable seeking Jane’s advice and direction than trying things out for himself.

In a revealing exchange early in the workshop, Jane, after waiting some time to see if Abraham might be able to discover for himself, stepped in to show him where to find the options function for online management of the Gmail account settings. Abraham promptly asked Jane if she had done it before and Jane replied that she had simply guessed. Soon after, and perhaps encouraged by Jane’s admission that she was experimenting rather than relying upon prior knowledge, Abraham became more active in trying to find things without direction from Jane. Jane then congratulated Abraham for being able to find things by himself.

This interaction shows the potential for young people to educate parents in important ways: firstly, by passing on information about where online tools are and how they work and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, by modelling and encouraging approaches to self-directed and experimental approaches to online learning.

As the session progressed, Jane worked with Abraham as he encountered Facebook for the first time. Abraham had previously expressed hostile attitudes towards Facebook that (as was revealed in later interviews with young people) had surprised young people. When confronted with the task of finding the account management settings, Jane was able to suggest to Abraham that he take a similar approach to the one taken earlier when attempting to undertake the task related to Gmail settings. This again demonstrates that the value of the intergenerational approach goes beyond the transfer of knowledge to include attitudinal changes to online literacy: specifically, Jane here encouraged Abraham to take an experimental, even ‘playful’, approach.

Abraham then proceeded to explore the site with his cursor, scrolling over different possibilities before quickly finding and clicking through to the settings function. Jane and Abraham’s subsequent discussion about privacy settings, including how ‘tags’ work to determine online visibility and how to ‘block’ people, led to direct discussion about how these might help issues like cyberbullying. Abraham clearly was learning about online tools and thinking about how this may apply to his real life concerns. This continued as Abraham learned about the Google search settings, and he seemed quite likely to apply this knowledge after the workshop. He remained unconvinced, however, as to the virtues of Facebook even as Jane attempted to convince him that he and his family might find it valuable.

In the post-task interview, Jane noted with some surprise that Abraham, despite having quite strong views on the subject, knew relatively little about the potential for online settings to be used to manage online safety: “The parent I was working with was shocked that privacy settings actually existed, and that you had a choice about what you made available to the ‘outside world’.” Jane here notes the gap between what Abraham thought he knew and what he actually knew—a finding that was consistent throughout the workshops.
Workshops: Key findings

Findings from the control group and Living Lab demonstrated that a workshop developed and led by young people provided a productive space in which to explore and document parents’ perspectives and their main concerns regarding their children’s online activities. In addition, researchers discovered that the non-hierarchical ‘Living Lab’ workshop format constitutes a productive way for adults to learn more about how to address the concerns they have regarding online safety. In doing so, the researchers identified five key research findings:

1  PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE APPROACH ONLINE SAFETY DIFFERENTLY

The workshops identified key differences in the ways parents and young people understood the place and value of online and networked media in everyday life; the ways they used them; and their levels of literacy. These variations produced divergent perceptions of the risks associated with online engagement, which in turn translated into different practices pertaining to online safety. As such, in keeping with the most recent research findings (Livingstone 2008, 2009; Livingstone & Das 2010; Yardi & Bruckman 2011), this study generated evidence to suggest that a generation gap shapes the safety management strategies parents and young people deploy to address online safety concerns.

ADULTS’ ATTITUDES AND APPROACHES

Among the parents there was generally a high level of concern regarding the capacity of online communication to have negative impacts on their children, but a more limited knowledge of either the technical skills or the social norms that might be employed to manage online communication. Their concerns notwithstanding, the majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that “using technology, including social networking sites, is generally good for young people.” Further, most parents in this study expressed a strong desire to maximise the benefits of their children’s online and networked media practices by finding mechanisms to enable their children to participate online in a safe, supported and responsible manner.

In conversation, parent participants frequently distinguished between ‘the online’ and ‘the offline’, configuring them as discrete realms of both children’s activity and parental influence. This was distinct from the way that young people spoke about technology as providing just another setting for interaction in their everyday lives — and one that they used often in conjunction with or simultaneous to what adults would describe as ‘offline’ interaction. When it combines with lower levels of familiarity and comfort with technology, this enduring adult perception of ‘the online’ as a space that is separated from ‘the offline’ appears to heighten parent participants’ concerns about their children’s online and networked media activities. That is, for our parent participants, conceiving a distinction between ‘the online’ and ‘the offline’ appears to fuel the idea that young people’s online engagement takes place outside the sphere of adult control. It was clear in conversation that parents felt they had much more control over and/or input into their children’s offline engagement than their online activities.

Previous Young and Well CRC research (Third et al. 2011) has shown that questioning this distinction between the online and the offline for parents is key to helping them understand how young people use online and
networked media in practice, and thus enables parents to better guide their children to participate safely online. In particular, the previous study showed that, rather than slide into a moral vacuum when engaging online, young people in fact apply the same established moral framework to both their online and their offline engagement. This study suggested that promoting a more youth-centred understanding of online and networked media—that is, one that understands technology as providing a setting for interaction that is integrated with young people's other everyday activities and shaped by their broader social and moral values—will potentially assist parents to better assess the risks their children face and respond to them effectively.

Confirming the results of the previous Young and Well CRC study (Third et al. 2011), a generation gap appears to shape attitudes towards social networking in particular. A number of parents expressed a sense of bewilderment as to the attractions of social networking services. Commenting on Facebook, parents stated: “I don’t get it”, and “I think it’s a teenage thing.” In this sense, parental attitudes contrasted sharply with young people’s attitudes in that the desire to connect online was generally less appreciated and the risks were more acutely felt.

All parents either agreed or strongly agreed that “young people were at risk of many things online.” Questionnaires identified online bullying, predators and the sharing of private information as their main concerns. In conversation with parents, their concerns focused primarily on bullying, an issue raised in relation to mobile phone use (especially texting), as well as online spaces more generally. Bullying was seen by the parents as a serious problem related to young people's online and mobile use. Whilst parents conceived bullying as both an ‘offline’ and ‘online’ problem, they were strongly of the view that bullying had become much more insidious since the widespread uptake of online and networked media, and was therefore an issue that schools in particular were compelled to address. As we discuss below, parents spoke in very positive terms about the ways schools had responded to the challenge of the online dimensions of bullying. A second key area of concern that emerged from discussion centred on the types of relationships, and attitudes towards sexual relationships, that might be formed online. Participants also mentioned stalking, computer viruses, scams, pornography and peer pressure as prominent cybersafety concerns.

Discussions with parents revealed that, to manage their concerns, their cybersafety strategies centred on either overt or covert monitoring of their children’s engagement with online and networked media, and in particular their social networking activities, so as to ensure that their children were being protected from inappropriate content and unwanted contact. Interestingly, those parents who relied on covert monitoring of their children’s online and networked media engagement expressed some reservations about doing so. They claimed that they felt guilty about “snooping” on their children but felt that they did not have other effective strategies available to them for ensuring their children were engaging safely.6

Parents’ faith in young people’s abilities to engage safely with online and networked media was low. When asked whether they thought “young people know how to manage risk and stay safe online”, all but one parent disagreed. It is noteworthy that only one of the parents talked about the use of privacy and security settings as a prominent feature of the strategies they implemented to ensure their children’s safety online. Whilst parents encouraged their children to adjust their own privacy settings when using platforms such as Facebook, they did not use software that blocks particular forms of content. However—and importantly for the purposes of this study—all of the parents expressed an interest in learning more about how to address the risks their children face online by implementing cybersafety controls, alongside a range of other online safety strategies.

6 In making this statement, it is important to note that it was very difficult to determine whether those parents who monitored their children’s online activities covertly were interested primarily in ensuring that their online engagement were “safe” or whether they were concerned about the nature of children’s social relationships and interactions more broadly.
Young people generally demonstrated a high level of awareness of the implications of posting content (text, images and video) online. For example, they discussed the need to be mindful of how language can be misinterpreted by the receiver of the message because emotional cues (body language and the like) that would be present in an offline discussion are largely absent from an exchange on a screen. As one young person said, “emotions aren’t part of the hypertext.” Young people generally understood that communicating in an online environment could be problematic but they also tended to feel confident that there were ways to manage potential problems, either through controlling what they posted online, or by taking an approach that interpreted online communication contextually. For example, one mentioned ‘trolling’—the deliberate use of provocative language online that aims to upset readers—and suggested that “people need to understand that it is not always serious.” In this sense, it appeared young people used shared sets of social norms to interpret and engage in online communication. Young people felt these practices worked to minimise any negative consequences of being exposed to this kind of communication. The young participants also used strategies such as blocking to regulate the potential for contact with these kinds of users.

Whilst social networking unnerved their adult counterparts, our young participants singled it out as a form of online participation with far-reaching positive impact for the social identity of young people. For these young people, online social networking is a given of social life today; not having a presence on social networking sites is more or less unthinkable. These observations reflect research by new media scholars in the UK (Livingstone 2008) and the USA (Boyd 2007) that describe the profound value placed on online social networks by young people. Importantly, when confronted by the negative or hostile attitudes towards social networking services of some of the adults, young people openly advocated the benefits of engaging in social interactions online. In the post-workshop debrief with young people, the young participants were incredulous in the face of claims made by one of the parents that using Facebook was akin to being unthinking or immoral. In response, and echoing the findings of previous Young and Well CRC research (Collin et al. 2011), our sample underlined a range of positive impacts social networking has had on their development including the facilitation of important social relationships; the establishment and maintenance of support networks; and fostering a sense of community and belonging. Further, one participant claimed that “I wouldn’t have experienced other cultures without social networking”, thereby couching a defence of social networking in cross-cultural appreciation and understanding.

Despite their convictions about the positives of online social networking, young participants exhibited a strong awareness of the range of potential risks associated with online social networking. These perspectives were informed by a range of sources including formal school-based education, and informal information sharing and values testing via peer networks. Young people also reported having their own concerns about the use of social networking sites by peers and particularly by younger users, including younger siblings. In doing so, they expressed a strong ethics of care that, for them, reflected the strength and importance of friend and family relationships, and their broader social values. Their concerns included the evident need to compete online for the number of Facebook friends. The drive to accumulate Facebook friends was associated with issues of status anxiety as well as concerns about the trade off between, on the one hand, the need for numbers and, on the other, the risks to security (e.g. identity theft) and safety (e.g. bullying) associated with being friends with people that are not ‘really friends’. This was seen as a risk one learned to manage with experience, and a lesson that they—as young people—might be best placed to assist younger siblings to learn.

In the context of the Living Lab conversations, the point about the positive role older siblings can play in guiding younger children’s online interactions emerged as an important one. Young participants reported that they informally shared these skills and social norms with younger siblings, and that it was important for them to do so. Parent participants corroborated these observations, detailing the ways their older children provided a reference point for younger children within their own families. Young participants reflected on their roles and responsibilities...
in relation to younger siblings in a manner that acknowledged they potentially played an influential mentoring role and indicated they took the associated responsibilities seriously. They believed that, under certain circumstances, they might be better positioned than their parents to guide younger siblings because they were not in a direct position of authority in relation to their siblings; they often had a more intimate and direct understanding of the issues young people face online; and had accrued significant experience and technical skill in using online and networked media technologies. As one participant expressed it:

“I get through to my young brother and sister a lot better ... especially given that I’m still experiencing it.”

Clearly, the capacity for older siblings to play a mentoring role for younger siblings is dependent upon digital literacy and specific intra-family dynamics. However, the findings of this study suggest that, under the right circumstances, older siblings can be an important—albeit informal—resource for supporting the safe online engagement of younger users. This would constitute a worthy avenue for further research.

2 YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERTISE IS A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS WHO WANT TO ENHANCE THEIR OWN DIGITAL LITERACY TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

Parent participants’ knowledge of and technical familiarity with online privacy settings and security controls contrasted sharply with that of young people.

Compared to the young participants, parents reported a limited baseline awareness of the tools that were available for managing safety and security. For example, when young people and the parents discussed how to manage online safety, some of the parents raised the possibility of ‘using software to set parameters’ as something they thought should be done—not realising that this possibility already existed. Some parents reported that they had not thought to use the internet as a resource for information on managing accounts and settings or how to use privacy and security controls. One parent, for example, admitted, “I’ve never looked for security and privacy settings before.” Another parent noted that they felt ill-equipped to assess the veracity of the kind of information that is available on the internet. Two had enjoyed marginal success with commercial filtering software but parents generally favoured offline methods for monitoring, regulating and disciplining their children’s online behaviour.

Parents were less likely to experiment with the technology in an intuitive fashion. This distinguished them from our young participants, who were much more at ease with tasks that required them to navigate sites using a process of trial and error. When it came to using online security settings, in contrast to the adult participants, young people were much more likely either to already know how to adjust privacy and security settings on a variety of online platforms, or to be able to search and experiment with online functions in order to learn ‘by discovery’ about settings. In particular, young people were more knowledgeable about the capacity for managing accounts and settings on social networking sites than were the parents. Indeed, whilst in some cases parents’ generic digital literacy might have approximated that of the young participants, the generation gap was more significant when it came to the specific issues of online safety and social networking account management.

As noted above, parent participants’ confidence and technical skills varied. However, regardless of their digital expertise, most found the workshop tasks that required them to check and adopt technical security and privacy controls very challenging. Parent participants demonstrated little knowledge of or technical proficiency in using the options for managing the settings associated with social networking sites, email and search engines. They attributed this to their level of

Most parents found the tasks that required them to check and adopt technical security and privacy controls very challenging.
digital literacy rather than the complexity of the tools that were trialled. As we discuss below, adults who participated in the Living Lab workshop reported that sitting with a young person in front of a computer screen enhanced their understanding of online security settings and their confidence and skill in using them.

Whilst the above observations about the relative levels of digital literacy of parents and young people held true, it must be acknowledged that, within both cohorts, there was some variation in the capacity to access relevant sites, perform required functions and generally to understand what was possible when it came to managing online identity and security. However, on the whole, when it came to technical skills pertaining to online security and privacy settings, young people ranged from average to expert and the parents from novice to average. As such, this study found that young people are potentially a significant resource for parents who are seeking to enhance their digital literacy, including learning how to better implement privacy and security settings to keep their families safe online.

3 PARENTING STYLES SHAPE PARENTS’ STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

Interviews with the parents exposed a diverse range of attitudes and strategies for addressing the challenge of online safety. Some parents had spent a considerable amount of time thinking about and developing strategies for ensuring their children’s online engagement could be safe. Other parents—particularly those who felt less skilled in their use of technology or who had a limited understanding of the role of technology in their children’s lives—were less deliberate in their attempts to develop tailored strategies and relied, instead, on their established parenting framework—on their ‘gut’, as one participant described it—to guide their approach to online safety.

Divergences in approach to online safety then, perhaps not surprisingly, correlated with differences in the adult participants’ general approach to parenting. As a young participant noted:

“We got to hear from three different parenting types, even though they had similar aged children, they were very different types of parents.”

Where open and frank discussion characterised the parent-child relationship, those same principles were at the heart of the strategies the parent deployed to ensure their child’s online safety. Parents with a more autocratic parenting style were more likely to set rules and expectations regarding online engagement autonomously (as opposed to negotiating them with their children) and implement them by imposing strict consequences (such as turning off the household’s wi-fi) for breaking established rules. These parents were more likely to see their child as innocent and/or vulnerable and therefore requiring protection. More liberal parents favoured ‘hands-off’ approaches. Whilst they acknowledged that this approach could not ensure their child’s safety 100 percent of the time, they believed there were valuable lessons to be learned from making mistakes and that, as long as they maintained an open relationship with their child, they would be positioned to guide them through any difficult circumstances. These parents were more likely to view their children as semi-autonomous individuals who, with their parents’ and peers’ proper support and guidance, would grow by being exposed to a range of different experiences.

Despite the diversity of approaches to handling online safety, the majority of parents reported that their sense of how to respond to the challenge of cybersafety tended to oscillate between two polarised positions, namely: on the one hand feeling like they wanted to throw their hands up in defeat; and on the other hand feeling like they wanted to assert total control over their children’s online engagement. Two ‘outlier’ participants provided insight into opposite ends of this spectrum of parental response:

- A single mother caring for two challenging children said that she found it very difficult to monitor online behaviour, acknowledging that “I don’t really know what my daughter does on Facebook.” The same interviewee had some exposure to social networking sites in the context of her own life but felt like she did not understand technology well enough to be able to effectively guide her children. This limited understanding of technology, combined with the time pressures associated with caring for two children as a single parent, meant that she did not intervene in her children's online activities. In her own words, she had ‘given up’. 

A father of older children (late teens and early twenties) expressed an unequivocal rejection of online social activities and gaming, saying “I am personally against social networking.” He cited disruptions in face-to-face communication with family who had come to visit from abroad as his rationale:

“These things really depressed face-to-face communication... My niece came from Lebanon and she never talks to us, she is always on Facebook... it’s incredibly terrible.”

This parent claimed that his children did not use Facebook; that his family had had a conversation about it and his children knew that it was not appropriate to use such sites. He stated that the choice not to engage had been made by his children. He also stated that he agreed with this decision and monitored his children’s internet use to ensure they were not using social networking services. For this parent, the idea that his children did not use Facebook was an indicator of the strength of his family’s values:

“My own children decided not to go on Facebook... I monitor that and we don’t have a problem... The students who are on Facebook can’t think. My children are not like that.”

The experiences of these outlier participants remind us of the diversity of family circumstances and the variety of parenting styles. They underscore the important point that different families will manage online behaviour in diverse ways, and raise questions about the ways parenting styles impact young people’s approaches to online safety. Strategies for promoting the uptake of online privacy and security settings by parents must be able to accommodate this diversity of parenting styles to be effective.

4 PARENTS RELY PRIMARILY ON OFFLINE STRATEGIES TO ENSURE THEIR CHILDREN’S ONLINE SAFETY

Parents were unanimous in their desire to exercise some influence over their children’s online activities. As one parent said, “you’d want to have some control... you don’t know who’s out there... or what happens when they post a picture or whatever.” In keeping with their limited pre-existing familiarity with online methods of safety and profile management, parents reported that they generally preferred offline methods of monitoring, regulating and disciplining their children’s online behaviour. They identified a range of strategies as crucial to helping manage their children’s online activities, including: surveillance and control at home; formal guidelines and disciplinary procedures mobilised through the school environment; and both informal education (largely comprising conversations between family members and/or friends) and formal school-based cybersafety and digital literacy education.

Parents emphasised the crucial role that education played in teaching children about the risks associated with online activity. This point was also supported by the young participants who, at multiple points in the Living Lab conversation, identified formal online safety education, among other forms of education, as having had a strong influence upon their capacity to identify and respond to risks appropriately. Parents too were unanimous in their support for the kind of formal cybersafety education that is conducted in schools about the legal and other consequences of online activity. A number of parents highlighted the role played by schools in addressing areas of concern, especially relating to cyberbullying and the posting of personal and/or explicit content online. There was generally a view that schools, when they became involved, were managing incidents of (online) bullying quite well. Parents described counselling and disciplinary approaches as both thoughtful and necessary. As one parent said, in relation to a cyberbullying incident that was dealt with at his child’s school, “my kid’s eyes opened up and they saw what could happen.” However, importantly, parents also recognised that the responsibility for ensuring their
children’s safety online could not rest solely with institutions. As such, parents sought to complement the work that schools were undertaking using strategies implemented in the family home, which reiterated their family values.

Those parents who opted for surveillance strategies as a way of regulating their children’s online engagement tended to undertake real-time monitoring of online activities by ensuring the computer was used in a central, visible space within the family home. One parent noted that “we have the laptops in the dining room,” while another noted that “[the son’s] door is always open.” Parents also checked up on—albeit with varying degrees of regularity—the kinds of activity that had occurred. Strategies they deployed included viewing search histories; requesting that their children add them as a friend on Facebook; or having access to their children’s account names and passwords so that they could log in and observe their activity. Parents reported that, where they were open with their children about the fact that they were watching their activities in these ways, the fact that their children knew their parents had the potential to check up on them was enough to moderate their children’s behaviour, meaning that parents did not necessarily feel the need to check their children’s accounts regularly.

Parents also identified a number of other constraints they placed upon their children’s technology use that they felt assisted them in ensuring their children’s online activities remained safe and supportive of their wellbeing. Parents noted the importance of regulating online activity through the establishment of rules and expectations about appropriate online behaviour, including rules about responding to the online activities of others. In general, these limits were negotiated with their children. A number of parents reported limiting the time children spent online in order to dedicate time to other activities such as participating in sport, completing homework and so on. A couple of parents stated that, when they had concerns that their children were spending too much time online, they sometimes resorted to shutting off the household’s wi-fi access.

Interestingly, despite their conviction that parents shared responsibility for young people’s online safety, it was not until they were prompted by the research team that parents identified open conversation as an important mode of influencing their children’s online engagement. However, the majority of parents believed that it was important to have ongoing conversations as a way of ensuring that their children could identify potential risks early and consult their parents about how to handle them. Parents highlighted that such communications needed to balance parents’ desires for disclosure with their children’s need to retain a degree of independence from their parents. Whilst one parent suggested that her close relationship with their children would enable their children to disclose the nature and content of their online activities without fear of being judged or embarrassed, another parent called attention to his children’s need for autonomy and privacy, especially as they matured: “Once they start getting older... they are curious... they don’t necessarily want you looking over their shoulder.” As mentioned above, two ‘outlier’ adult participants had very different attitudes to their children’s online activities, one having little awareness and the other claiming that his children were not using social networking services at all. Both of these parents were less forthcoming about the types of conversations they had with their children about their online activities.

5 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS THAT PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION CAN HELP PARENTS GUIDE THEIR CHILDREN TO ENGAGE ONLINE IN SMART, SAFE, RESPONSIBLE AND RESPECTFUL WAYS

Both young people and the parents expressed strong appreciation of the role that intergenerational communication plays in managing online safety and privacy and welcomed the opportunity to be able to sit down in front of a computer screen with one another in the Living Lab setting.

Young people were enthusiastic about the opportunity to better understand the factors shaping adults’ approaches to managing their children’s online engagement. One young person described the Living Lab as “an enlightening experience” that had highlighted
Intergenerational differences and enabled her to better understand what drives parents’ concerns about their children using online and networked media:

“I think they were more cautious because of the different life experiences that they have had. Whereas we grew up with technology, it is part of our lives.”

Young people were also very excited by the fact that they had been able to assist a parent to learn more about why young people use online and networked media, as well as to guide them to increase their technical skills. For them, intergenerational conversation presented a way that parents could learn about online activity, develop levels of trust around online behaviour, and address the limits of their online literacy. Young people said:

“Trusting your child is the best prevention to children doing the wrong thing.”

“Communication will make the difference.”

“You want your children to be able to talk to you.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by the parents who said, following the workshop, that:

“If there’s a problem, you’d talk to them.”

“It comes down to communicating with the child and developing ‘mutual respect’.”

The parents involved in the Living Lab noted how reassuring it was to work with and hear from young people. One of the parents summed up what she had learnt from the other participants, and especially young people, in the following:

“I learnt] how different parents are dealing with social networking and bullying and better educating our children on all those aspects. But most importantly, hearing it from the younger participants ... was for me adding a whole new sphere to it ... So for me, sharing and interacting with their experiences and hearing what three highly educated [meaning, tech-savvy] young adults think about their experiences and how they feel about Facebook and how they feel about security settings and privacy, it’s really pertinent to me as a parent because [laughs] those three have restored my faith somewhat in Facebook.”

In the post-exercise interviews, during which they were asked what they learnt, parents reported that they increased their understanding of the types of online safety management tools available, as well as how to use them. They saw this as a uniformly positive experience:

“I learnt about the settings on Facebook ... the privacy settings, which I haven’t touched. I’ve set up a Facebook account and haven’t touched any of it, so I’m going to be doing that when I get back home. And just the ease that you can do it, especially with the Google Family Centre [how] you can set up the block, the security settings”

Parents were enthusiastic about better understanding parents’ approaches to online safety, assisting them to understand why and how young people use technology, and helping to improve parents’ technical skills.

Parents reported that it was very reassuring to work with and hear from young people, and that this strategy improved their technical skills.

Parents increased their understanding of online safety management tools, as well as their capacity to apply them in practice.
“I didn’t actually realise, I mean I went into my own Facebook profile after we had done the exercise and I didn’t realise that everything was just open to everyone ... and I didn’t even know that in Google you can actually have a safe mode ... so that was very important for me.”

“When I learned how to use some settings I was pleased to see the security settings there and [how you] do really have to make your profile public, you can secure it if you want to.”

Having gained a certain level of technical familiarity with the use of online safety settings, the parent participants claimed they left having the confidence to apply and build upon the set of new skills they had begun to acquire in the Living Lab. But the most important take-away for the parents on the technical front was that working with the young person encouraged gave them a safe space to experiment with the technology. Working alongside a young person in front of the computer screen—particularly if the young person was not an expert user and needed to experiment with the parent present in order to find the answer to the parent’s technical questions—gave parents an up-close view of the ways that many young people approach online and networked media; namely, with a willingness to ‘play’ and experiment until they find what they need. Our findings suggest that encouraging parents to engage with technology in this kind of ‘intuitive’ and ‘playful’ way will greatly enhance the likelihood that they utilise online security settings to better manage their children’s online engagement.

Additionally, some parents noted that the process of engaging with a young adult in front of a computer screen had alerted them to the fact that older siblings might offer their younger children an important avenue of knowledge and advice. Some adults even suggested that their older children might be a better source of information and guidance than the parents are, citing the fact that, not only is their technical skill better, but their younger child might be more comfortable approaching them about sensitive topics. The parents in the group emphasised that they approved of this strategy because they had strong levels of trust in their older children.

Finally, adult participants noted that intergenerational conversations in the Living Lab context opened up opportunities for parents and young people to work together to find safety practices that work best with their levels and patterns of technology use, their family values and parenting styles.

This interest in and support for the role young people can play in increasing parents’ levels of literacy and confidence suggests the approach is well-founded and would be well-received. It suggests that, despite initial pre-conceptions of a generational divide that leads to young people and parents having differing uses and levels of online literacy, as well as differing attitudes and approaches to online safety, there is much to be gained by all parties from working intergenerationally.
Comparing the Control group and Living Lab: Differences in working through the scenarios

In both the control group and the Living Lab, the diversity of parenting styles and a low average age of the children of the participants had a significant impact of the discussion of the scenarios. In the control group, one parent had a very ‘hands-off’ approach to her children’s online experiences and was not that concerned about the issue of online safety. In contrast, a parent in the Living Lab stated that he was ‘against’ social networking sites and did not believe his children should be (or were) socially active online. Researchers found that the presence of an ‘outlier’ parent moderated the other participating parents’ responses. The two group discussions focused primarily on the role of education in and monitoring of their children’s online experiences.

In the control group the parents’ responses to the scenarios were either based on hypothetical discussions (see above), or emphasised offline strategies such as physical, real-time monitoring. The parents in the Living Lab, prompted by questions and ‘devil’s advocate’ suggestions by young people, were more expressive about the role of online strategies in addressing their children’s safety. However, though these online strategies were raised, parents prioritised offline strategies of physical, real-time monitoring and education via open communication.

The ‘scenario’ boxes on the following pages outline the key differences and similarities between the control group and the Living Lab discussions of each scenario.

---

The scenarios used in this experiment were first developed by the team involved in the UK study (see Strider et al, 2012), in conjunction with the young research participants in London. These scenarios were further developed and refined by the research team that authored the current report, in conjunction with the Sydney-based young people who participated in the Australian study.
Scenario one
ONLINE BULLYING

Over the last couple of months, your teenager seems to be very unhappy. They have stopped seeing their friends and have expressed reluctance to go to school or to participate in their usual social activities. At the same time, you have noticed that they are checking their mobile phone and Facebook page very regularly and with nervousness. You suspect they may be being bullied online but they have not talked to you about it.

- What steps could you take to address this?
- How would you go about talking to your teenager about how they express themselves online?
- What do you think can help prevent and remedy online bullying?

Control group

The responses to this scenario oscillated between a more general discussion of ‘the issue’ (with some expressing that it was not an issue for them due to the age or personality of their child), and a discussion of strategies for managing bullying (both if the child was the perpetrator or the victim). Strategies discussed included: taking away the computer: informing the school; involving other parents; and encouraging face-to-face communication/resolutions. The parents expressed the importance of communicating the public and permanent nature of online bullying. Notably, the means for addressing bullying were thought to lie in ‘offline’ strategies.

Living Lab

All parents in the Living Lab agreed that a strong connection and communication with your child was the key to both the prevention and management of online bullying. Young people reiterated this. Both online and offline ways of facilitating this open communication were discussed. Parenting networks, rule setting, mutual trust, monitoring, being active in their life and school involvement were all articulated as important. One parent emphasised that proactive (as opposed to reactive) school intervention was useful, such as having a specific school counsellor to deal with cyberbullying. Parents also discussed the benefits of monitoring their children online by being their ‘friend’ on Facebook. Young people queried whether this was always welcome. Young people also highlighted the ‘pros’ of social networking services (e.g. positive exposure to other cultures and contexts, security can be controlled by individuals and monitored by the site itself) when some parents began discussing the negative aspects (online communication is more permanent, therefore cyberbullying is ‘worse’, there is a danger of over-exposure and predation, can diminish communication skills).
Scenario two

AGE-SPECIFIC CONCERNS & SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

You have two children—one in their early teens and another in their late teens. You feel confident that your older child has a good understanding of online safety and can navigate social media sites and other online activities effectively. You are, however, concerned that your younger child does not have the same level of knowledge when it comes to online safety and believe he/she may be more susceptible to being contacted by strangers, revealing personal information, and stumbling across inappropriate material.

• How do you feel about your younger child using social media sites and other online services/activities?
• What kinds of things can you think of to encourage your older son/daughter to act as a role model for your younger daughter/son?

Control group

Most of the discussion for this scenario prioritised the role of the younger child—how the older sibling might affect their online experiences, and what strategies should be used to ensure their online safety. Parents agreed more monitoring (e.g. checking history) was needed for younger children, though their level of digital literacy may thwart this. Again, communication ‘offline’ was emphasised. There was not an agreed upon perspective about the role of the elder sibling. Some parents believed that less influence from an older sibling would maintain the younger child’s innocence, while others believed that siblings could ‘look after’ each other. Gender of the children and friendships outside of the family were cited as effects on this sibling relationship.

Living Lab

The parents in the Living Lab repeated many of the concerns and perspectives of the control group, however the influence of young people in the group allowed for an alternative viewpoint (the older sibling perspective) to be shared. Again the parents stressed the importance of monitoring younger children and using technical blocks or protective software and, in recognising their digital literacy, the value of educating them on the dangers online (e.g. via examples in the media). Young people emphasised the flaws in the blocking/protective software method (e.g. that they are location-based), and yet also the naivety of young children in what they access/download. They also reiterated that younger siblings may not be receptive to older siblings’ advice/involvement.
Scenario three

CONNECTIONS ONLINE: POPULARITY VS. SECURITY

You are growing more and more concerned about who your teenager is connecting, talking and sharing content with online. They have over 500 Facebook friends, which, you think, is significantly more connections that your son/daughter has offline. You are concerned they are exposing themselves, including personal details and photos, to strangers online. In particular, you are concerned that you have overheard them talking with a close friend about being in touch with someone they met online. You know you would be very concerned if your child was to connect with an older person who they had never met in ‘real life’.

- What could you do to find out who your child is connecting with?
- Can you think of any strategies that can be used to explain ‘online’ safety values to your child?

Control group

The beginning of this scenario discussion was about whether their child’s online safety was a major concern for these parents. Some parents stated that it was not, and that they were more concerned about time wasting online, or that their lack of digital literacy meant they were not involved in their children’s online experiences. Those that were concerned about security emphasised education as the key preventative measure. For example, using the media to explain what could happen, and talking to them about ‘issues’ such as the internet being public and ‘faceless’. Creating parameters and monitoring online were seen as the responsibility of the parent (e.g. friends of Facebook) and the websites/SNS. They believed that less privacy should be given in exchange for better security.

Living Lab

In this group they discussed the conflict between children wanting ‘popularity’ (e.g. multiple friends on Facebook) and the importance of security. Young people expressed both the benefits of social networking services and gaming (e.g. gaining good friends), as well as the downsides (e.g. can be ‘status-driven’). Similar to the views that were expressed in the control group workshop, it was stated that rules and limits were important, along with both physical, real-time monitoring and online monitoring. The parents also articulated that the approach to online security would be dependent on the personality type, gender and age of the child.
Comparative analysis: London vs. Sydney

The Sydney-based study described in this report replicated an experiment that was conducted by a Young and Well CRC research team in London (United Kingdom) in October 2011. This comparative element enabled the research team to begin to explore the similarities and differences between the ways online safety is being conceptualised and practiced by young people and parents in the two different national contexts. The original research brief proposed that any differences detected by the study might be taken up as opportunities for experiences and lessons learned to be shared across national borders. However, rather than stark differences, the comparison revealed a high degree of similarity between the ways online safety is thought about and practiced in the two national contexts. The similarities suggest that some of the key challenges associated with ensuring young people’s online safety are not confined to a specific national context but may be common across advanced capitalist, English-speaking cultures (i.e. the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States). However, to verify this claim, further comparative research would need to be conducted.

The following similarities emerged from the comparison of the findings of the two studies:

1. There is a strong overlap between the experiences of the Australian and the United Kingdom cohorts of parents vis-à-vis the challenges of parenting to support their children’s safe, smart, responsible and respectful online engagement. Whilst many parents could see the value in their children’s technology use, they did not feel especially well-equipped to respond to the rapidly changing and diversifying technology environment.

2. Both cohorts of parents exhibited similar levels of digital literacy and technical skill, suggesting that the generation gap between parents’ and young people’s understanding and use of technology is a significant issue in English-speaking countries. In particular, both cohorts noted that opportunities to learn more about technology were either limited or were taught in a way that did not necessarily build their confidence in and familiarity with using technology in their everyday lives.

3. Parents in both the UK and Australian cohorts rely primarily on offline strategies for promoting the safe online engagement of their children. Whilst it is clear that further fostering young people’s capacity to engage safely online is dependent on such strategies, there is scope for global technology leaders and alliances to play a significant role in a coordinated approach to raising awareness and promoting increased uptake of online security controls and privacy settings through targeted strategies.

4. Both studies suggest that differences in parenting styles shape the ways parents work to guide and support their children’s online safety. Strategies that are developed to enhance parent’s understanding and uptake of online security settings must be able to accommodate and work with a wide range of parenting styles.

5. Young people in both locations demonstrated they had important technology expertise to share with their adult counterparts. Further, young people in both countries were enthusiastic about better understanding parents’ approaches to and concerns about online safety; sharing their knowledge with parents; and enhancing parents’ technical skills. This suggests that young people, mobilised effectively, constitute a significant resource for improving parents’ digital literacy and achieving more widespread uptake of online security settings.

---

8 The findings of the UK study can be found in Strider, J et al, 2012, Intergenerational approaches towards enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne. Two of the authors of this report were members of the team that conducted the UK study.
Conclusions

The differences between the generations are apparent in terms of literacy and attitude. Young people appeared to be relatively more adept with navigating social networking services and managing profiles than parents, and they were generally more comfortable experimenting and ‘playing’ with online functions and settings. Young people also see online social networking and peer-to-peer communication as an aspect of their social lives that is both inevitable and generally positive.

The variations between the generations, however, are not uniform. Moreover, they cannot be explained simply by virtue of the differences in ages or by noting that the roles and duties of parents result in a particular, shared set of attitudes regarding their responsibilities towards children. Instead, there are significant variations within generations, based upon differences in skills and experiences with online media, different attitudes towards parenting and childhood, and different approaches to parenting in a digital world.

Notwithstanding the variations in literacy and attitude among the parents, the workshops demonstrated that there was scope for enhancing parental knowledge of control settings in the three sites tested (Facebook, Gmail, and Google). However, the benefits of increased knowledge about online control settings, and particularly instruction in their use, were noted and very well-received.

From the workshops and the discussions, it is apparent that parents, despite the considerable variation in parenting styles, usually approach digital safety issues—including, for example cyberbullying or inappropriate content—in a way that prioritises offline strategies, either within the family or with the involvement of schools. Increased digital literacy and changed attitudes towards the social uses of online media may affect this.

This study found that intergenerational exchanges of information, skills and attitudes positively impact both parents’ and young people’s understanding of what is at stake in online safety, and how young people can be supported to act in smart, safe, responsible and respectful ways online. Both parents and young people emphasised the benefits of building trust and a sense of shared responsibility regarding online media use that occurs in a context that fosters intergenerational conversation. Both young people and parents saw the benefits of exchange as a way of developing digital literacy. This study indicates that, given the chance, parents will find ways to discuss with their children their mutual obligations and responsibilities for others, as well as discuss appropriate online behaviour and how to seek advice or help. Interacting with young people around their technology use can increase a parent’s technical skills and knowledge about online safety control methods and tools, and can provide a context for increasing understanding about the benefits of being active and social online.
Author biographies

**Kathryn Locke** is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Curtin University (Western Australia) and a freelance researcher and writer. She also teaches externally for Murdoch University in Perth. With a background in cultural studies and psychology, Locke is currently completing a PhD with Murdoch University entitled, *Locating the Creative City: Tracking theories, language and practice of a new discourse*. Prior to entering academia, Locke worked as a project manager at FORM, a not-for-profit cultural organisation. Her publications include: *Urban conversations: Making Perth a creative and lively city*, co-edited with J. Jones, UWA Press, Perth, in press; ‘Access denied: Reading, writing and thinking about techno-literacy’ in *The revolution will not be downloaded: Dissent in the digital age*, (Eds) M Kent & T Brabazon, Chandos, London, 2008; and ‘After dark: Perth’s night-time economy’, in *Liverpool of the South Seas*, (Ed) T Brabazon, UWA Press, Perth, 2004.

**Dr Damien Spry** teaches in media and communications programmes at the University of Sydney and the University of Technology, Sydney, and is a researcher on media and social marketing projects at the University of Western Sydney. Dr Spry’s research includes the online and mobile worlds of children and young people, with a particular interest in the policy implications of emerging uses of new media. His doctoral research, into mobile media use in Australia and Japan was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Project grant and conducted in conjunction with the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People. He has presented and published his research by invitation in the United States, Germany, Japan and South Korea and is co-editor of *Youth, Society and Mobile Media in Asia* (Routledge, 2010). He is an editor-at-large for *Communication Theory*.

**Dr Amanda Third** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, and a member of the Institute for Culture and Society, at the University of Western Sydney. Dr Third has a research interest in young people’s everyday use of online and networked technologies and the potential for new technologies to support young people’s wellbeing. She has conducted several large externally-funded projects with organisations using technology to support young people. She leads the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre’s Research Program 2: Connected and Creative, and is the Chief Investigator on an Australian Research Council Industry Linkage project entitled ‘Young People, Technology and Wellbeing Research Facility’. She has been a member of the Technology and Wellbeing Roundtable since 2008. In 2009 Dr Third was awarded the Murdoch University Medal for Early Career Research Achievement.
References


Collin, P, Rahilly, K, Richardson, I & Third, A 2011, The benefits of social networking services, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (formerly Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing), Melbourne.

Eriksson, M, Niitamo, V & Kulki S 2005, State-of-the-art in utilizing Living Labs approach to user-centric ICT innovation: A European approach, Centre for Distance-Spanning Technology at Luleå University of Technology.


Hitchcock, JM 2008, Public or private? A social cognitive exploratory study of privacy on social networking sites, (Thesis), California State University, Fullerton.


Strider, J, Third, A, Locke, K, & Richardson, I 2012, Parental approaches to enhancing young people’s online safety: A literature review, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.

Strider, J, Locke, K, Richardson, I, Third, A 2012, Intergenerational approaches towards enhancing parents’ knowledge and practice of online safety, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.

Third, A, Richardson, I, Collin, P, Rahilly, K & Bolzan, N 2011, Intergenerational attitudes towards social networking and cybersafety: A Living Lab, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.

Further reading


Rushkoff, D 2011, ‘We interrupt this program: Media theorist Douglas Rushkoff has second thoughts about our digital practices’, School Library Journal, viewed 27 March 2012 at http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/printissuecurrentissue/888611-427/we_interrupt_this_program_media.html.csp