

“You can see anything on the Internet, you can do anything on the Internet!”: Young Canadians Talk about the Internet

Leslie Regan Shade
Nikki Porter
Wendy Sanchez
Concordia University

Abstract: This paper presents emerging findings based on 35 semi-structured interviews conducted with children and youth from the research project Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home. The objective of this research is to examine young people's use of the Internet by focusing on the overall media environment at home. Our study indicates that while children and young people are active and intrepid Internet surfers, they use the Internet to extend their local and school-based social ties, and that they have very little concern for offensive or illegal content issues. We argue that these experiences of children and young people need to be considered an intrinsic facet of Canadian Internet policy development treating children and young people as valid and active citizens.

Résumé : Cet article présente de nouvelles données basées sur trente-cinq entrevues semi-structurées menées auprès d'enfants et de jeunes dans le cadre du projet de recherche « Les enfants, les jeunes, et les nouveaux médias au foyer ». L'objectif de cette recherche consiste à examiner l'utilisation d'Internet par les jeunes en tenant compte de leur milieu médiatique au foyer. Notre étude indique que les enfants et les jeunes, bien qu'ils soient des cybersurfeurs actifs et intrépides, utilisent principalement Internet pour développer leurs réseaux locaux et scolaires, et qu'ils ne se préoccupent guère de questions de contenu offensif ou illégal. Nous soutenons qu'il faut tenir compte des expériences de ces enfants et jeunes dans l'élaboration d'une politique canadienne pour Internet qui traite ceux-ci comme des citoyens actifs à part entière.

Keywords: Internet use—children and youth; Internet policy

In Canada, children and young people are accessing and using the Internet at an increasing rate. For many Canadian families the Internet has quickly become a

Leslie Regan Shade is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke St., Montreal, QC H4B 1R6. E-mail: lshade@alcor.concordia.ca. Nikki Porter is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University. E-mail: nikkiporter@sympatico.ca. Wendy Sanchez is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University. E-mail: pozolito@hotmail.com.

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domestic utility, used alongside—and sometimes more than—television, radio, and newspapers (Dryburgh, 2001). Government surveys demonstrate a steady growth in domestic computer ownership and Internet access. The Statistics Canada Household Internet Use Survey of 2003 revealed that the majority of Canadian households were already connected to the Internet, with 6.7 million households having at least one member who regularly used the Internet from home—an increase of 7% from 2002. The early adopter households included those with higher incomes and educational levels, members active in the labour force, and those with children still living at home. Domestic broadband access rose to 56% from 2002, with approximately 4.4 million (65%) accessing high-speed, through either a cable or telephone connection (Statistics Canada, 2004). An earlier Statistics Canada study, *Cycle 14 of the General Social Survey* (2001), also indicated that youth are the fastest growing group of Internet users, with nine out of every 10 teenagers aged 15 to 19 reporting having used the Internet at some time in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Although policy questions often drive research on children and the Internet, there is too often an emphasis on economic imperatives: youth as a future labour force and the impact of early Internet adoption and use; or moral panics—content issues focused on harm and mitigating risk, such as pornography, or safety issues related to online predation and cyber-stalking. Media coverage of Internet issues related to families and children tend to concentrate on problem areas, particularly child pornography, pornographic content in general, and criminal content. What is left out of the public discussions and policy literature is a detailed consideration of how children are using these technologies in the shifting landscape of their home environments.

It was within these seemingly contradictory yet powerful assumptions about the role of the Internet for Canadian children and youth that the research project *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home* was designed. In her literature review on empirical Internet research of children and young people, Sonia Livingstone (2003) called on academics to adopt a critical stance in relation to the speculative hype surrounding children and the Internet, and, given the prevalence of the Internet in young people's lives, for public policy to consider the missing link of children as integral to questions surrounding access and privacy. To date most Canadian studies on children and the Internet have focused on the educational context, rather than the home. Studies of household media use and consumption tend to adopt an adult-centred focus, despite the fact that children and young people in the household are oftentimes the earliest users of media. Shifting the focus from this adult-centred perspective to one that looks at children and young people as active users and participants was felt to be particularly timely, given the widespread uncertainty about the significance of contemporary changes in both childhood and the media landscape.

As Daniel Miller and Don Slater argue, “We need to treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces” (2000, p.5). The objective of *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home* is to examine young

people's use of the Internet within the domestic realm. This research project looks at how the Internet is inserted into the daily social practices of children and young people to interrogate and understand their everyday uses. The project consists of three streams: semi-structured interviews with children and youth in their home about their Internet use; policy analysis of issues related to children and new media, such as access, privacy, and intellectual property; research on the commercial aspects of new-media products for children and youth, and whether and how the Internet is being used by youth for civic engagement.¹

This paper, based on 35 semi-structured interviews with young people ages 7-17, presents our initial findings from within the context of this larger project. In the first part of the paper we present a brief contextualization of research trends in the social sciences about children and the Internet. The second part focuses on the interview findings and offers a brief analysis of the meaning and implications of the statements offered by our participants. Topics explored include time spent online, uses of the Internet (leisure and school work), perceptions about privacy, and attitudes toward online advertising, music downloading practices, and identity play. Our study indicates that while children and young people are active and intrepid Internet surfers, they use the Internet to extend their local and school-based social ties, and that they have very little concern for offensive or illegal content issues. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the findings and implications of this research for both the literature on children's everyday uses of the Internet and Canadian policy.

Although there is concern amongst parents and policymakers about violence and pornography, our research indicates other more insidious potential areas of concern. These areas are less spectacular, but do raise important ethical and political considerations: a lack of awareness of privacy information and a proliferation of data mining targeting youth; a lack of discussion of questions surrounding copyright, downloading, and online plagiarism; and finally, a tendency of policymakers to address children as consumers of entertainment rather than as potential citizens or active media producers.

Contextualizing research on children and the Internet

The widespread deployment of the Internet in the 1990s ushered forth seemingly paradoxical discourses and claims from government and the mass media about the role of the Internet in the lives of children and young people. As Henry Jenkins argues, the past decade has been dominated by two prevalent myths about youth and digital technologies—the “Myth of the Columbine Generation” and the “Myth of the Digital Generation” (Jenkins, 2004). One myth operates under fear and sensationalism, the other from a perspective of optimism and exaggeration.

In Canada, policy and program initiatives, such as the federal government's SchoolNet, established in 1994, were created in order to extend Internet connectivity to all K-12 schools across the country in the belief that such connectivity would enrich educational pedagogy and create future employment opportunities for students, despite scant empirical evidence (Shade & Dechief, 2004).² The initial hype about the Internet from policymakers, educators, and pundits in the

Canadian context focused on its use as a valuable educational tool for young people in the “knowledge-based economy.” Schools eagerly jumped on the Internet bandwagon, and in Canada government programs such as SchoolNet and Computers for Schools actively promoted the adoption of the Internet for educational betterment. Children were seen as innate computer users and natural adapters in digital multi-tasking. Exemplary of this rhetoric was Don Tapscott’s (1999) *Growing Up Digital*, where he celebrated the rise of what he dubbed the “net generation”—the children of the baby boomers who are “taking control of critical elements of a communications revolution” (page 26). But as Ellen Rose (2003) has cautioned, and as our findings indicate, we need to question these rhetorical strategies that celebrate uncritically children’s facility and adaptability to computer mediated communication. Similarly, Neil Selwyn (2003), in his discussion of the discourse surrounding children and computers in the U.K., urges scholars to engage in a more nuanced political economic analysis on how the notion of the child as computer user has been naturalized and propagated in order to promote a technology agenda beneficial to corporations and governments. For instance, Canada’s SchoolNet was widely promoted and funded by the federal government as emblematic of Canada’s excursion into the information economy—and was publicized via celebrity and political branding inside and outside of the country (Shade & Dechief, 2004).

Conversely, a detailed analysis of Canadian news coverage of the Columbine and Taber, Alberta, shootings revealed that the negative influence of the mass media received the most attention. When two male high-school students went on a killing rampage at Columbine, many believed their actions were strongly influenced by an increasingly violent media culture. Reports that the two young perpetrators had posted a hate website, which targeted some of their classmates, triggered the debate. When the public learned that information about explosives had also been posted online, the debate intensified. A content analysis of 1999 Canadian newspaper coverage of the effects of the Internet on children and families presented the Internet as a place where more problems (almost 60%) than benefits (almost 40%) exist. The majority of articles focused on problems such as child pornography (31%), online crime (13%), and pornography in general (13%) (Shade, 2002). Although it is important to note that this media coverage must be contextualized within panics generated by the 1999 Columbine incident, which produced many newspaper articles and much commentary calling for more vigilant oversight on media and Internet content,³ it is also necessary to bear in mind that only 6% of the articles questioned the value of the Internet or its use by children in schools. Only 5% of the articles looked critically at Internet use and participation by children and young people in relation to digital divide issues (Shade, 2002).

To date, several research projects in Canada have concentrated on children, young people, and new media. The Gentech Project aimed to counter gender stereotypes of computer use and young girls’ lack of knowledge and hands-on experience with computers.⁴ André Caron’s Groupe de recherche sur les jeunes et les médias at the Université de Montréal examined domestic use of the computer

(Caron, 1999). Stephen Kline's media analysis work (2001) surveyed teenagers in BC to examine their overall media use, revealing that teens overwhelmingly use the Internet for entertainment, rather than educational purposes. As well, he discovered a gender divide in use of media, as more boys than girls engaged in interactive video games. *Girls, Digital Technology and Popular Culture: From Play to Policy* is examining how preadolescent and young adolescent girls in Britain and Canada are interacting with technologies.⁵ As well, the Internet within educational contexts, from the influence of technology in the commercialization of public education (Moll, 1997; Robertson, 1998), and socioeconomic factors in the digital divide in schools (Looker and Thiessen, 2003), have been a rich locus of research. *Children, Young People and New Media in the Home* supplements the findings of these other projects but differs in that it is not explicitly focusing on gender differences in use and its avowed research site is the home.

The U.K. project, UK Children Go Online (see www.children-go-online.net), is exemplary of a broad-based initiative with support amongst partners in diverse sectors—academia, industry, government, and civil society—for exploring the nature and meanings of children's Internet use. The closest parallel to this research in Canada is the Young Canadians in a Wired World (2001-05) project, conducted by the Media Awareness Network (MNet). The first phase of this project examined, through surveys and focus groups, students' perceptions and self-reported behaviours on the Internet. Results indicated that Canadian youth are "highly engaged participants in an online world." Young people view socializing and communicating (36%) as the Internet's biggest asset, followed by access to information, entertainment and fun (31%), and educational benefits (24%). Accordingly, this project found that young people's online activities are dominated by playing and downloading music (57%), sending and reading e-mail (56%), surfing websites for fun (50%), playing and downloading games (48%), instant messaging (48%), socializing in chatrooms (39%), and doing homework (38%).⁶ Even with a much smaller sample size, our findings are similar to MNet's. Where we differ is that MNet did not do in-home interviews and instead relied on surveys and focus groups.

Research methods to study children's interactive media experiences are in a nascent phase. In his overview of research on children and ICTs, Leslie Haddon (2004) highlights how domestication research has influenced the study of parent-child relationship to ICTs, stressing as well the importance of peer orientation in patterns of usage. Wartella, Lee, and Caplovitz (2002) recommend employing multiple research methods (quantitative and qualitative), with research efforts targeting children of varying socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. Although many studies on children and media utilize interviews as a research tool, Vicki Mayer cautions that "interviews must be placed in the context of who is sampled and who chooses not to participate" (2001, p. 310). The risk then—if interviews are not contextualized is that "the method becomes strikingly similar to interviewing practices in journalism and marketing that use only certain youth voices taken out of their contexts" (p. 310).

Research methods and findings

For the initial phase of the project *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home*, the primary research methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews with children and young people in their homes. Thirty-five children and young people were interviewed in Montréal, Windsor, Toronto, and Ottawa from 2003 to 2004. Informants were recruited from personal contacts, churches, and schools. The ages of recruits ranged from 7 to 17, and a spectrum of family socioeconomic backgrounds and gender was sought. However, the majority of those interviewed were preteens and teens, aged 12-16 years of age, with a fair split in gender. Most of the children and young people were from middle-class backgrounds. Audio interviews and observation (approximately 1 hour in length) focused on a range of questions, including perceptions of the Internet and its societal importance, learning to use the Internet, its role for school work, entertainment, and leisure, privacy perceptions, downloading habits, and attitudes towards advertising. A contextual interview guide was prepared, with questions designed to be predominantly open-ended. This allowed for an approach used by Ellen Seiter in her description of television audience studies, wherein she relied upon the extensive quotations from her informants. Seiter points to the necessity to establish “rapport between the researcher and the subject. This may range from conducting interviews in a friendly, open manner to establishing personal friendships with informants” (1999, p. 13).

Conducting research with children and young people presents several logistical dilemmas. Securing university ethics research clearances, with parental assent and children’s consent forms aligned to the specific age group of the children and youth to be interviewed, took longer than initially anticipated to be approved.⁷ Locating the children and young people posed a problem. Notices about the research project and personal contacts in community centres did not yield any families or young people interested in participating. Solicitation through local schools was complicated by a need to get approval from school principals and school boards. Instead, neighbourhood contacts from the research supervisor and personal contacts from the student interviewers yielded the most beneficial results. Securing trust with the parents of the children was important to achieve before interviews could be scheduled. Quickly establishing a rapport with the children and youth before and during the interview was necessary. Before the interviews started, children and their parents were required to sign the assent and consent forms, and children were made verbally aware of their interview rights.

The analysis that follows does not quantify the interview findings, but summarizes what the children and young people told us during their interviews, relying on their actual responses to give a more nuanced account of their experiences. Pseudonyms for the children and young people are used throughout the article.

What does the Internet mean to you?

Children and young people were asked to define the Internet and describe its impact on their lives. Most of the younger children did not understand this ques-

tion, and the teenagers also struggled with a response, often equating the Internet with the computer itself or computer software. The majority of responses focused on the Internet as a vast library, and on its social aspects—a fun tool to play games, or a more convenient communication technology than the telephone. The immediacy and convenience of the Internet was also noted:

Maya (10): “. . . is a big thing that you type in some words and it gives you a whole bunch of sites and if you click on one you get your information like snap-snap-snap-snap.”

Carrie (12): “I think it’s somewhere where you could look up things for projects and it’ll come faster. And you don’t have to wait as long. Like if you go to the library, you have to wait if somebody has the books. And on the Internet you can just go on and you can get it right away.”

Emily (16): “I just, I find it makes things a lot easier to make plans on the weekend when I want to go out . . . to do study and research or projects and also to get things typed up. It just it seems to make things a lot more convenient.”

Mark (16): “I find like it can expand your knowledge. I find that without the computer I would be that much less intelligent than I am now because I read a lot, new books, you know, yeah.”

Most of these children and young people were introduced to computers in their schools and homes during the late 1990s and the first few years of the new century. For many of them, the Internet was synonymous with computers, as software packages and Internet connectivity were bundled into all computer applications and thus made relatively indistinct. As their responses indicate, the Internet is yet another communication tool for extending sociality and, as some claim, gaining knowledge for school work.

Learning to use the Internet

Asked when they first learned to use the Internet, all of the children and young people stated that they started using the Internet two to three years ago. Many were introduced to the Internet at school either through formal classes or from teachers who suggested websites for school work. Most gained experience via surfing and exploration. The influence of peers and friends was a strong motivator for many to get online:

Sara (14): “A lot of my friends had MSN Messenger so I started using that so I could talk to friends through the computer.”

Tessa (16): “Everyone at school was chatting so I was like, *okay*.”

While some were introduced to the Internet by their parents, others commented on their expertise over their parents:

Tessa (16): [referring to her mother] “I have to really write it down for her, I show her, and then I have to write it, at least about five times so she can get it.”

Maya (10): “Dad taught me, my mom is not that good at the computer [*smiles*] so, and my dad and I are the ones that go mostly on the computer, yes, and my brother is like, ‘Why is Maya always on the computer?’”

When asked why her mother didn't use the Internet, Maya responded:

"I don't know, because I think my dad uses it more for his school, and my mom just sits at home, she doesn't work, so she doesn't need it, but now she has learned how to use the e-mail, and now she has her own e-mail address for her sister . . . it's so simple."

Peer influence and connecting to Internet content that relates to their social interests is a prime motivator for children and young people to go online. Achieving a degree of computer and Internet expertise over their parents—particularly their mothers—was an obvious source of pride for many young people. Other studies, such as Livingstone and Bober's (2005) *UK Children Go Online*, have also pointed out that within the family, many children are indeed the Internet experts. Further research could examine whether socioeconomic and immigrant status influences the dynamics of familial expertise.

Placement of computer in the home, family rules, and time spent online

The digital entertainment bedroom culture was the exception, rather than the norm, with most sharing computers with other members of the family. Typically, computers were located in a central part of the house accessible to other family members. These included dedicated computer rooms, a corner of television play-rooms, hallways and alcoves, and basements. Connor (15) mentioned that the computer is installed in an open area of the house "just so my parents can make sure we're not doing anything bad."

Rules on computer and Internet use varied, with the most frequent rule seeking permission from parents to go online. Few mentioned time limits. Other commonly mentioned rules included "non-written" and "common sense" rules about not accessing pornographic content or shopping online:

Luc and Philip (9, 12): "Can't look at 'disgusting' things."

Sara (12): "I'm not supposed to like um give out any personal information or anything. I know I'm not supposed to like buy anything."

Sandra (12): "I'm not allowed to go on for too long and I'm not allowed to swear or anything . . ."

Brendan (13): "Just don't go on bad things and don't go on chatlines."

Joey (16): "Well, I guess there's some expectations that I won't go to hate sites. But then again who wants their kid going to blackpanthers.ca or something."

When the children were asked how many times a week they went online, the replies varied. While the younger children went online a few times per week, the older teenagers were more likely to go online on a daily basis.

Connor (15): "Like on an average night if I have nothing to do I'll probably spend three or four hours on the computer. But it's like multi-tasking: I'll do my homework, I'm watching TV so I'll just have MSN on."

Tessa (16): "I do it constantly, in the morning, at night, on the evening . . ."

Diana (17): "I use the Internet in the morning, at night, everyday. I use the Internet all the time. *There is no day I don't use the Internet.*"

Mark (16) mentioned that he's trying to cut down on his Internet use because it distracts him from doing his homework:

"Like I'm going to do my homework, whatever, I'll be here for a few minutes and then 10 minutes becomes like an hour, and an hour becomes three hours, and then next thing you know it's 9 o'clock and you are getting ready to pack up and go to your room and do whatever and by that time you are not done and you are like, 'Oh, I forgot to do my homework for Mr. Watts, or James,' you know."

Mark admitted that he found the Internet addictive. He referred to it as "a drug almost . . . you know, it really is, it's like a guy who does heroin, you know, you get up in the morning and you get into the computer even before your eyes get adjusted . . . you have a big problem."

The placement of the computer within domestic configurations and rules surrounding time spent online were areas where parents could exercise a modicum of control over their children's Internet usage. Negotiations over hours of use, time spent online, and use of the Internet in public spaces of the house point to variations in the age of the children and degrees of trust between parents and children.

IM rules!

None of the younger children (9-11) had an e-mail account. Teens (12-17) had free Hotmail accounts (required to sign up for MSN Instant Messenger), but only a few of them used e-mail on a regular basis; occasional e-mails to distant relatives and friends comprised the extent of their use.

However, rather than use e-mail to communicate with their friends, the communication tool of choice for the young adolescents and older teens was instant messaging (IM), often surpassing use of the telephone. Typically communication was between school friends, and their buddy lists, albeit routinely quite large, were comprised of friends from their school, local community, or extended communities of interest, such as sports communities. The size of the buddy lists ran the gamut from a low of 17 to an average of 50 and a high of 100. But, as Jason (16) noted, "I know them all but a lot of them, a lot of people you find that they've added you or you've added them and you don't even really know them so you don't talk to them. They're just kinda there."

When asked if they could trust who they were talking with on MSN, most conceded to talking to friends or acquaintances of friends. Tristan (14) said that there were ways to gauge the veracity of what someone typed online: "I've met people who've you know lied about their age and they're like 12 but they said they were 19. That's kinda more obvious cause there's stuff . . . like you can tell if they misspelled words that are pretty easy to spell and it wasn't just because they couldn't type."

Joey (16) will only talk to people on MSN who he knows, but because he is on many buddy lists, he occasionally gets contacted: "A lot of people that have me and they talk to me, then they tried stalking me so I blocked them and delete them because those people are freaks." Asked to talk more about this "stalking" he replied, "Well, they'll keep, they harass me, like I have this girl from Oshawa she's

like trying, she'll ask me 'Will you go out with me?' I'm like 'I don't know you and you live in Oshawa.'" (Joey lives in Windsor, about a five-hour drive from Oshawa.)

For many, talking online increased their self-confidence. For Kirsten (16), communicating with new friends online is "less scary"—but most of the new people she meets are through friends and therefore not complete strangers. Rebekah (14) commented that "I guess I may be more open, 'cause, you know, you're not talking to someone face to face and it's not, there's no awkward silence or anything. You can just type anything."

Others mentioned that talking online is more expedient:

Connor (15): "It's a lot easier to make plans with people on MSN. 'Cause you're just like 'Hey, do you want to do something?' And it's a lot less awkward than calling people."

Joey (16): "It's just mostly a social thing. So it's MSN talking to friends 'cause instead of using the phone and talking to one person I can talk to seven people at once. So hey, why not?"

Annie (16) was the only one to express negative feelings about MSN: "'Cause MSN if anything has made it worse in terms of exercise and stuff like that."

Closely related to the use of IM was identity play. We were interested to know whether children and youth adapted different personas when they were online. Did they find that online communication encourages openness in discussing issues amongst peers? Many reiterated that communicating via MSN allowed them to feel more confident. Connor (15) "swears online . . . but like when I'm with my friends I don't think I'd say anything on the Internet that I wouldn't." Mark (16) finds the Internet facilitates uncensored emotions: "If you say them on real life you get punched in the face, you know, it's so much easier to argue with somebody over the Internet rather than saying 'Hey buddy, fuck you,' you know."

Several pretended to be someone else on the Internet, via MSN or ICQ, but this was not typical. Tristan (14) once was "kidding around with this guy and said I was in the mafia. He believed me too . . . I said I closed down this guy's store. I don't know if he believed us or not, but he seemed to get mad when he found out I wasn't in the mafia and that I was 14 going on 15."

Impersonating a friend, or having one's identity impersonated by a friend, was more common. A friend of Emily (16) messaged her to ask her what was wrong with her earlier in the day on MSN. According to her friend, "I was talking to you but you didn't really seem like yourself." Emily realized someone was impersonating her, and then she had to change all her passwords, but never found out who was impersonating her. Tessa (16) once used her friend's password (which she had been told) in order to log in as her, but this was just a one-time occurrence not meant to hurt her friend. Tessa also admitted to using her ex-boyfriend's password to log into his e-mail "about every week" and reading his messages. She thought this was "funny" and wasn't concerned that he would find out because "there is a thing you can click and it will say that it is unread again." Mark (16) admitted to using fake identities as a prank "all the time . . . like 'Hello, this is the Department

of Investigations of the Prevention Offices and we have found pedophile images in your computer.' You expect to see how people react and then I say, 'I'm joking,' you know."

The prevalent use of IM to communicate with known friends or to meet new friends within wider friendship circles has been noted by other researchers. Shayla Marie Thiel, in her examination of the use of IM by adolescent girls, notes how it has been used constructively for the negotiation and articulation of their identities, particularly with respect to gender. While some of the young women she studied used IM to reinforce media-induced and stereotyped discourses surrounding sex and body image, others were eager to present an online identity as strong, intelligent, and self-aware. Thiel argues that although IM is "an opportunity for a girl to better understand who she is and *play* with who she wants to be in the future" (2005, p. 197), she is not optimistic that use of IM will radically shift gender identities in more equitable or progressive ways: "It is more likely that, because we will all still be functioning within the confines of culture and prevalent discourses, things will remain very much the same" (2005, p. 198).

School work

The Internet was used by all the young people for school work—to research specific school projects, as an aid in homework, and often to look up websites their teachers recommended. Few of them used the public library.

Mark (16): "No, the library hardly exists now, mostly old people go to the library now, maybe to take out a fiction book . . . Ever since the Internet became big, the library just booted out the planet. There are still some people . . . but old people are not comfortable with computers, they are almost afraid of computers."

Asked how they could verify the truthfulness of online material, a typical response came from Kirsten (16). She does most of her research online and goes to the library once a year. Her biology teacher warned her class that not everything online is legitimate, and although this is in the back of her mind when she does her research, she admitted that she didn't do anything to check the sources or information. Another common response was from Jason (16), who said, "I always look up a few different sites and then, just say I'm writing a paper or whatever, I use the information that's consistent throughout all the sites." This was echoed by Emily (16): "I normally check out more than one website and if I find conflicting information I won't use it . . . 'cause my American History teacher, he showed us a picture and it was a band playing. And he showed us the real picture and it was like someone being arrested. And it was just like how things get changed around on the Internet."

Credible sources the young people identified included universities, professors, organizations, and news media sites:

Sara (12): "I go to sources that are like an organization or something and then I know that's true."

Tristan (14): "For the most part I find stuff that is truthful . . . Once I got into crimelibrary.com, which is all about crime and how crime is investigated and

famous criminals. It's a site created by Court TV so I don't think they'd lie. 'Cause like you know they have lawyers writing for them. Famous lawyers that are documented on their site. So something like that, I don't think that's a lie."

Tessa (16): "I will browse through but I will look for something that has a professor's name, a doctor's name."

What is interesting about what these young people told us is that they depend upon the Internet as a quick and "easy" information source that is readily available in their home. Assessing the veracity of the information they used appeared to be a matter of evaluating the credibility of a site via its "branded" and perhaps entertainment- or news-related credentials. Perhaps, as well, the public library has decreased in significance for these young people, reflecting the evisceration of this institution through decreased public funding leading to branch closures and the curtailing of open hours of many public libraries across Canada.

Music downloading

Most of the young people aged 12-16 downloaded music, using software programs such as WinMX or KaZaA. Some were not regular users, and two of them commented that downloading the software "screwed up my computer" (Brendan, 13; Nick, 14). Only one young child, Amanda (7), said she tried to use file-sharing software but she found it "boring" because "I thought I could download books or something. And I was trying to do that but instead I got something else which is a movie that never turns on." Although most were aware of the debates surrounding the ethics of downloading music and the politics of file-sharing software, many were unable to explain the copyright intricacies. Joey (16) was the most astute:

Joey (16): "I don't think it's illegal in Canada because some of our taxes that we pay for buying blank CDs, that is given to copyright laws and whatnot. So I believe that it is not illegal here in Canada but it is in the United States. But the thing they might catch Canadians for is using American programs like KaZaA . . . on which they download from But I just think it's, um, like the '70s or '80s when they tried to scramble the cassette things so people just record it but it's pretty much just like that. I don't think it's going to be any major thing. They'll sue like three people, try to scare the general public but . . ."

Even though most knew that downloading music was "illegal" and "stealing," all admitted to occasional downloading. Sara (12) said, "It's kind of illegal to [do] that, plagiarism . . . but I still downloaded a lot of music . . ." Chad (17) doesn't download music but commented that even though "it's wrong to do it . . . it's so easy so you might as well do it, know what I mean? . . . And now they've got songs that come out and they stop halfway and start making weird music so that like annoys the kid to stop doing it . . . which is smart but kinda sucks."

Most rationalized the downloading of one or a few songs as acceptable:

Brendan (13): "Um I think it's alright 'cause people still, like, buy CDs and everything. So I think it's alright to just download a couple songs and listen to them once in a while."

Rebekah (14): “I think it kinda depends ’cause some people, they download thousands of songs and they’ll make CDs. But normally if there’s just a song I like and I wouldn’t be planning on buying the CD anyways ’cause I only like one song, I might go to it. Or if I’m interested in buying a CD I’ll go on it. But I don’t make CDs and I don’t download full CDs ’cause I think it’s kind of unfair.”

Jason (16): “Like I don’t have a problem paying, I’d go out and buy an album, but I’m not gonna go and buy one album for one song.”

Many also blamed the high cost of CDs as prohibitive, thus further rationalizing their downloading:

Connor (15): “I know it’s copyrighted and stuff like that but they charge so much money for CDs. MusicWorld’s really good—they have \$14.99 but . . . other places like HMV, it’s 20 bucks for a CD and basically you’re buying the CD because you heard one song on it that you like. So you’re just buying the CD for one song and even singles are like eight bucks. So I’d rather—I don’t care, I’m just going to download the music rather than pay 20 bucks.”

Jeremy (16) admitted that downloading is “like stealing, like the artist has to make money . . . but like I’m not loaded so I don’t wanna go and have to buy every single CD for like one song off the CD, you know . . . meanwhile it’s like kind of illegal but like you know who’s gonna know?”

Some also expressed the opinion that because musicians and the music industry were financially comfortable, downloading didn’t cut into any profit margin. For Emily (16), “Artists sell their albums for so much money . . . I don’t really personally think it’s that big a deal. They have enough money . . .” Tristan (14) said, “Music’s an industry that you can get rich off of, but I don’t think that should be the reason you go into that business. I don’t know why so many artists are like ‘No, you can’t download our songs, you have buy them.’” And, according to Kirsten (16), reggae artist Shaggy “was discovered on like KaZaA . . . so he can’t complain . . . but they’re already millionaires anyways . . . I’m not going to be 20 bucks short at their expense, eh? If their CDs weren’t so expensive, I would buy them.”

Various statistics and studies reinforce our findings. Without a doubt, young people are the dominant user group that is engaged in peer-to-peer downloading.⁸ The music industry has been particularly vocal about the dangers of peer-to-peer file sharing and has initiated various campaigns targeting youth. In late September 2005 the Canadian Recording Industry Association (CRIA) launched a national campaign to protect and promote “products of the mind” in advance of public hearings in the fall on Bill C-60, the new federal copyright legislation. In support of their campaign, new national polls by POLLARA Inc. and Environics Research Group were released, which detailed that “the vast majority of this file-swapping activity is concentrated in Canada’s younger generation, contrary to the view of some observers that the phenomenon is widespread. Comprising just 21 percent of the population, Canadians between 12 and 24 years old are responsible for 78 percent of illegal music downloading” (CRIA, 2005).

Online game play

For all the children and young people, entertainment uses of the Internet were a huge attraction, with game playing the most prevalent. Games included those designed for the Web (often extensions of toy products, such as Mattel's Barbie), games adapted for the Web (such as card games), and online video games, running the gamut from NeoPets to CounterStrike. The choice of which games to play revealed gendered patterns; Cody (7) liked to play commercial toy product games like Slimeballs and Lego's Bionicles. FoxKids' website ("they have farting games") and cartoons at Cartoon Network were also favourites. He expressed distaste for games about "babies" or "girl games": "Girl games are like doing like Barbie stuff." On the other hand, the favourite activity of Amanda (7) is Barbie's "Make a Mystery," "Design Your Mystery," or the "Magic Train" on the Barbie site. Said Amanda, "You get to dress them in the coolest outfit." Here she describes a movie on Diva Starz called *Fashion Emergency*: "And you click here to enter. [reading the text] 'Last Day of Summer.' She calls up her friends—this is what happens—like all the friends at the same time. This girl says 'My tan line,' this girl says 'First I thought I shrunk my clothes in the wash. Next thing I knew it was my whole closet!' 'Cause none of their clothes fit and then so they go shopping and they went like this, they were saying 'We grew' so now they're going . . . they're planning on going to the mall."

Many of the younger adolescents and teens mentioned a favourite site, addictinggames.com, where a variety of action, puzzle, arcade, sports, card, and multi-player games are archived. For Sara (12), "They're fun. They're really like challenging and stuff . . . And a lot of my friends do them so like it's like who can get to the highest level and stuff." Tessa (16) mentioned a site, freearchive.com, where you can find "card games, any kind of games, really word games, animation games." She plays "when I can't sleep, so I played yesterday about an hour at three o'clock in the morning." Aaron (17) played games on Candystand.com, a site sponsored, owned, and operated by Kraft Foods. A variety of games—card, sports, puzzles, arcades, and multi-player—are available. Some feature branded games, such as the Life Savers Mini-Putt game. "It's pretty funny," Aaron said. "Sometimes there's a soccer game in these little drink packages. I can't remember the name. Uh, Capri Sun, that's it." Asked what he thought about the branding, he responded, "I don't mind it too much, but there is that, you know, it's kinda corny that these little, yeah, things are in a game."

Joey (16) played an online game called Counter Strike, "that's just a counter-terrorist terrorist game. How appropriate for this day and age. With the, uh, axis of evil. And George Bush the retard." Asked about whether his gaming was solitary, he said, "It's morally a social thing, too. Everything pretty much has a social connection . . ." Mark (16) was an Ultima (an RPG—role playing game) fan, but for him "it was kind of a bad habit because I became kind of addicted, I was spending like 15 hours a day on the computer and I still sometimes I spent too long, whenever I get into Ultima . . . I had dreams about playing games, oh yeah, for sure, it corrupted my mind."

Game playing online is a popular activity for many young people, and many of these games are steeped in commercial content and branded play. This has been an increasing trend in the commercialization of children's online content as media conglomerates, toy manufacturers, and food companies rush to stake out an online presence and cash in on this lucrative demographic. Market researchers estimate the value of the children's market at around \$1.8 billion for the Canadian "tween" market alone, including both the money children spend themselves and the influence they exert over family purchases (Sutherland and Thompson, 2001). However, the lack of a critical sensibility surrounding this commercial presence is unnerving—at least from our adult perspective.

Attitudes toward advertising and perceptions on privacy

Given the pervasiveness of commercial websites targeting children and young people, a series of questions was asked about their attitudes toward advertising and perceptions on privacy. We hoped to find out if young people were aware that their Web surfing could be monitored for commercial advantage and whether they knew that cookies were an invisible component of their use of many websites.

Cody (7) will click on advertising banners if he finds them interesting. Usually these are ads or links on the commercial sites he visits, for instance on Cartoon Network. As he was being interviewed, he spotted an ad for Hot Wheels and was immediately distracted: "Oooh nice. Oh, that looks good. I sort of want to look at that Hot Wheels." During our interview with Brendan (13), a Planter's Peanut ad was visible on the computer screen. Asked what he thought about advertising on the websites he commented, "Uh, seems pretty cool. Like you have different people trying to advertise different things when it's on the Internet when you're trying to play games. It's very interesting."

Philip (9) and Luc (12) were not that concerned or aware of advertising, although they did mention that a Nike pop-up was "Dumb. It keeps on popping in my screen." Pop-up ads were seen by many as annoying yet of interest:

Lucia (13): "Sometimes I read them because I am curious. The ones I don't like are the ones that say you are chosen and you are going to win that, they say, you are chosen to win a prize and it says write your e-mail here and you don't know anything."

Connor (15): "I hate pop-ups so much. They slow down my computer so badly. And I close them before I even open them so there is no point in making them, really."

The children and young people were asked if they knew about cookies, privacy statements, or if they were concerned about divulging personal information during their online surfing. The youngest children did not understand questions about privacy. Maya (10) was unusual because she researched cookies for a school project:

"They are when, like, when you go on the Internet, the cookies are little things that go from the Internet site that they send to the user and it tells them what they are doing on the site. Let's say they are doing it for a shoe company, if they

click on leather shoes, and most people click on leather shoes, they know that most people look more under leather shoes than fabric shoes . . .”

Asked how she felt that sites could track her personal information, she commented, “I think it’s just fair, they want to know what you are doing, they have the right because it’s their website, and if you don’t want people doing that, then you don’t go in the Internet.”

John (11) did not know much about cookies, although his father has explained them to him. When asked if he ever thought about giving out personal information, he said, “Well, yes. Lots of reasons, like giving your real name and information, and you should not give personal information.”

Sandra (12) did not know what cookies were. Asked about her opinions about websites collecting personal information, her response was: “Well I don’t mind, ’cause I don’t go on anything that would be like bad.” Asked if she would ever give out personal information, she replied, “Only when I’m signing up on stuff that I know is not bad . . . I’d give my name and phone number and, uh, sometimes if I have to, I give my address.” She mentioned that she would not give out credit card information or personal information about her parents—for instance, how much money they earn.

Lucia (13) also did not know about cookies, but remarked that the concept “is funny because computer parts have name like chips and cookies.” Tristan (14), although “not really worried” about websites tracking his personal information, was aware that sites regularly engage in this practice: “That’s why I delete my cookies.” Brendan (13), on the other hand, does not read privacy statements and is not concerned about websites tracking personal information because “I don’t think that happens.”

When asked to fill out online forms asking for personal information, Rebekah (14) said she didn’t always use her real name, or will change “a bit” of her personal information. She won’t give out her address because “I don’t want them to know stuff about me.”

Emily (16) had over 100,000 cookies on her computer and said that she has “heard of them and I think we deleted some from our computer once but . . .” When asked if she would give out personal information, she replied, “Um, not often. I’ll put my name in. I usually don’t put Emily . . . I don’t really put in my address. I don’t really think there’s a need for it.” She did, however, have some concerns about privacy because of news reports on downloading: “We used to share all our files and we don’t share our files anymore.” But she does not read privacy notices.

Tessa (16) also makes up fake names and other identifying information when websites, such as the dating service Match.com, ask for personal information. When asked about privacy statements she said, “I look briefly and then I look how long it is and then I just click on ‘I do.’ ”

Mark (16) doesn’t worry about his personal information online. He said: “I don’t think anybody is interested in this 16-year-old kid on the Internet, right now, I guess; I don’t have any secret IRS files.” When asked if he reads privacy state-

ments, he conceded that “I really should but I don’t because we don’t like to take the time to read a letter that is the size of this table, is really exhausting.”

Diana (17) was one of the few older teens that read a privacy statement: “The first time I used an account for Hotmail I read everything, word by word, but the second time I just read the main ideas and the final parts.”

Privacy matters in the online world. Knowing how to control one’s own online privacy assures the maintenance of personal dignity and autonomy. Increasingly, online marketers employ stealth methods in order to reach children and young people. Data mining raises important ethical issues in terms of children’s rights to privacy and freedom of expression (Grimes and Shade, 2005). While most of the literature on children’s privacy issues has focused on the protection of personally identifiable information (such as name, home address, and so on), not enough attention has been paid to information collected and stored in aggregate form (Danna and Gandy, Jr., 2002). But it is also interesting to note how many of our respondents displayed not only a lack of concern for their own privacy, but also for the privacy of others; for instance, Tessa (16) hacked into other people’s IM and e-mail, using their own passwords.

Porn is easily and accidentally accessed

Asked if they had ever accidentally run across offensive content, such as pornographic images and sites or violent content, most of the adolescents and older teens said that they had strayed across porn, either through a search engine or pop-up. The mother of Ignacio (12) related a story wherein Ignacio attempted to find Barbie materials for their neighbour’s daughter and instead retrieved a porn site: “He called me and said, ‘Mom, I don’t know what is that?’ He also gets a lot of junk e-mail and there is a lot of porn going on. So I have to be with him all the time when he uses the Internet. He is very innocent, he closed the porn site, but still, is not safe for him to use the Internet alone.”

During casual surfing, porn was often located and “hidden” in non-porn sites, particularly commercial, entertainment-oriented sites. Sandra (12) related how she went to a site to find somebody’s music, “I think it was celebrities.com,” and instead found “a nude site.” Tristan (14) said he found a lot of porn on Google: “For some of the stuff you type in, you’d be surprised what they can bring up.” Joey (16) said, “I’m not supposed to see it. My virgin eyes,” but that he found it “all the time. Like you’ll be going somewhere and you’ll get like Blackjack or Derry Does Dallas.” Jeremy (16) was the only one who admitted to even glancing at porn sites. At his house, they get a lot of porn pop-ups, and Jeremy thinks this is because his brother looks at online porn. Sometimes he also ends up on porn sites when he is searching for something else and the description on the search engine is unclear. Depending on whether or not his mom is around, he either closes the sites immediately or “glances at them” and then closes the windows.

Unstated but implied house rules included not searching for pornography, but when young people unintentionally accessed porn, their parents were often notified. The mother of Brendan (13) found porn in the browser history, but he explained “it just popped up that one day so it went on the history.” Tessa (16)

related clicking on a site for an actress “and it was totally not that, it was free sex . . . and then about a hundred pop-ups, so I said, ‘OK, now I’m going to turn off my computer . . .’ I couldn’t close them fast enough, so I had to turn off the entire computer . . . I feel like *oh, my God!* . . . I think I told my parents because I was laughing so hard.”

The popular media has paid inordinate attention to children’s access to pornographic content, and in the United States one could presume this is because of the increasing influence of Christian fundamentalist ideology in politics and the education sector. Although we are not trying to minimize the prevalence of pornographic content online, our findings do suggest that young people are not as concerned about this content area as are adults and policymakers. As Jenkins (2004) reminds us, “Childhood may be an age of innocence but adolescence is a time of transitions and sexual discoveries.” Each generation experiences their own form of exposure to sexual content; for the baby boomers, it could have been *Playboy* magazine, and as Jenkins continues, “In that context, it’s hardly surprising that most teens today encounter porn on the Internet. The challenge is how to protect children from premature exposure to pornography and how to help youth think through their initial encounters, wanted or unwanted, with sexually explicit material.”

Discussion and policy implications

Our findings indicate that for those children and young people who have ready access to the Internet from their homes, the Internet is integrated into their everyday lives. For many, it has become a rather commonplace communication tool, one that coexists alongside other communication devices in their homes, such as the television and the telephone. In some instances, the Internet or various applications (such as IM for the teenagers) has surpassed use of the telephone as a facilitator for organizing social events, echoing other studies, such as the Pew Internet & American Life’s 2001 survey of teenagers (Lenhart, Rainie, and Lewis, 2001).

Many of the children and young people we interviewed were introduced to the Internet in their school and were encouraged to use the Internet to further their school work. But the attraction of commercialized online content that provides an extension of popular television and film culture is for many young people seductive and time-consuming. As our study shows, children and young people are adept at multi-tasking while on the computer, windowing through MSN, multiple Web browsers, and word-processing software. Yet their responses to our questions revealed only a simplistic understanding of the technical and social nature of the Internet. Many young people easily trust the information they find online, while others find it difficult to verify the accuracy of their online information. Frequently, many confused or equated the “Internet” with computer hardware and word-processing software. Not surprisingly, entertainment over educational uses was the preferred mode. When asked what their favourite websites were, or in looking at their browser history files, a marked preference for commercial content was revealed, whether in the form of gaming sites (newgrounds.com, addicting-

games.com, shockwave.com), music sites (lyrics.com or sites of specific bands), toy sites (Barbie.com, Sponge Bob Squarepants), entertainment sites for teens (Alloy.com), clothing sites (American Eagle, Gap), or search engines (Google and Yahoo! being the most popular).

Indeed, when it comes to website content for children and young people, commercial content abounds, particularly with the cross-media convergence of music, television, and film products. How critical are children and young people of commercial content? Many of the young people weren't perturbed at all by the immersion of brand names into games and stories, with many even finding it natural; and if they found overt advertising annoying or gratuitous, most admitted to ignoring the branding in favour of playing the games. There were also indications of gendered preferences in terms of content and play, particularly with the younger children choosing to engage in websites of television and toy products catering to boys or girls. Considering the gendered segmentation of popular film, television, and toys, and the reproduction and extension of this content to websites, this is not remarkable.

Given their uncritical attitude toward advertising and commercial content, it is not startling that, for most of the young people interviewed, their cognizance of online privacy was weak. Reading the privacy statements on websites and services such as Hotmail and MSN was ignored by most. For some, there was no fear of giving out personal information online, although their responses did reveal caution as to how much personal information they would divulge about themselves and their family. We should ask whether adults are more privacy-aware than younger people. We should also think about how privacy awareness and education can become an integral component of Web literacy courses and whether media literacy programs in school integrate these specific aspects of digital literacy.

For these children and young people, the culture of downloading rather than uploading was the norm. Most of those aged 12-17 regularly downloaded music (and some games), and most were aware of, although not too clear on, the legal intricacies surrounding recent file-swapping debates. All shared an "open source" sensibility which decreed that downloading music (particularly a song or two) wouldn't financially deprive artists or the music industry. In fact, many rationalized their decision to download because they felt CDs were too expensive; as many argued, the music industry is so profitable that they perceived no tangible harm in them "stealing" a song or two. With respect to using the Internet to upload personal content, only a very few of the young people had their own website. These were hosted on free Web-hosting sites or as part of a game forum, with the content devoted to their hobbies or interests. No one maintained his or her own blog or online diary.

Children and young people's attitudes toward and perceptions of privacy and copyright, their often-uncritical stance toward commercial content, and their interpretation and assessment of the veracity of online content are of special interest in terms of government policy. Canadian Internet policy has tended to ignore how children and young people have become a viable and integral online

target market, which is a disquieting omission when considering the overall political economic framework of the Internet and the profitable demographic that marketers are seeking to attract. One exception is PIPEDA—the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (see www.privcom.gc.ca/legislation/02_06_01_e.asp). This legislation, designed to support and promote electronic commerce by protecting personal information collected, used, or disclosed in certain circumstances, recognizes minors as a vulnerable category for purposes of consent. Unlike the United States, Canada does not have an equivalent to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which requires website operators that target children or that knowingly collect information from children who are 13 years of age or under to post a privacy policy (see www.ftc.gov/privacy/privacyinitiatives/childrens.html).

However, industry is worried about youth attitudes toward music downloading, and one concerted effort is through the Canadian Recording Industry Association’s (CRIA) campaign to encourage youth not to download music. The Canadian Value of Music Coalition is targeting youth aged 9-17 via public-service announcements on radio and television, online games classroom modules, and a telephone hotline on the value of supporting the purchase of Canadian music (see <http://keepmusiccoming.com>). The latest CRIA campaign, intended to influence debates over federal copyright legislation, Bill C-60, is titled “Products of the Mind” and reinforced by several new polls that indicate young Canadians between the age of 12 and 24 are the dominant illegal downloaders. This tactic has been criticized by CIPPIC, the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic. Staff Counsel David Frewer argued: “We should be talking about ways to make this technology work to the advantage of both Canadian artists and music fans. Instead we see a continuation of the major labels’ strategy of vilifying young people and suing customers” (CIPPIC, 2005).

We agree that continued vilification will not work when trying to solve this complex social and policy issue. But neither will a rhetoric that either inflates the promises or the dangers of Internet usage by children and young people. This will only misguide future policy and, as we suggested earlier, may bypass more subtle areas of potential concern. Policymakers need to think critically about developing digital literacy skills that consider children and young people as valid and active citizens. Digital literacy, as Ellen Seiter (2005) argues, is multi-faceted and includes teaching children about Internet economics, genres of online writing, sourcing of Web information, and the intricacies of search engines. Developing these critical skills through provincial educational curricula or the incorporation of digital literacy into mandatory classes at different grade levels should be encouraged. As our research indicates, policymakers may want to shift their focus to the proactive development of digital literacy skills, particularly those concerning the authenticity and prevalence of commercial content, raising awareness of privacy rights, and intellectual property/copyright education.

This study does not purport to offer generalizable declarations but rather a modest account from the experiences of the children and young people them-

selves. Future research that looks at the experiences of children and youth of different class, race, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as their location in rural, remote, and northern regions, would be of value. Yet many of our findings are reinforced by other recent studies on youth usage of the Internet, such as those conducted by the Media Awareness Network in Canada (2001, 2005), the *UK Children Go Online* study (Livingstone & Bober, 2005), and many papers presented at the international conference *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media*.⁹ These studies indicate that for those children and young people whose families have the socioeconomic means to provide domestic access to the Internet, it has quickly become an indispensable yet often mundane social technology for many of them.

Echoing many of the findings from this small project, the Media Awareness Network's *Young Canadians in a Wired World—Phase II* study reported that “for those young people who have been using computers from the time they were three or four, computers, the Internet, and the Web are not new or different, they are part of their life's landscape” (Media Awareness Network, February 2004, p. 8). But we must ask: with respect to the Internet, how do children and young people see themselves? Do they see themselves as citizens or do they see themselves as mere consumers, with their ability to interact with friends and access an array of content?

Given the domestic prevalence of the Internet in children and young people's lives, more detailed studies that shed light on their perceptions of the ethics of Internet privacy, online commercialization, and file sharing would be timely. And, given that children and young people are active users and potential shapers of future digital content, developing a critical and creative education and awareness campaign that involves their input into its design and outreach is vital.

Notes

1. Guiding questions about the impact of the Internet on children and young people that frame this research project include the following:

Access: How is Internet access shaped by socioeconomic factors?

Lifestyle: How do children and young people relate to the variety of new media available to them? How is the Internet situated in their everyday lives—socially and educationally? How do their experiences with the Internet relate to the views of their parents and teachers?

Uses: Are children and young people forming new communities based on using the Internet? How does the Internet influence their social lives and relationships with their peers and family? Do boys and girls differ in Internet usage?

Social Change: Is the Internet transforming the way children and young people socialize, learn, and participate in society? Will these benefits translate into future economic betterment?

Content: What new-media forms are being created and marketed to children and young people for educational and leisure/entertainment purposes? What social factors influence the content of new media for children and youth?

Commercialization: What do children and youth think about the pervasiveness of commercial content on the Internet? Do they uncritically accept it? Are they aware of strategies by commercial interests to target youth? What do they know about privacy issues?

For further information on the project, see <http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/comm/shade/>. Thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for their support of this project through an Initiative on the New Economy Standard Grant.

2. Despite millions of federal dollars invested in SchoolNet, little to no evaluation of the program or its creation of Web-based resources has ever been conducted. The 2004 federal budget downsized SchoolNet substantially, and it is doubtful that the program will continue past 2006.
3. When these issues are brought to public attention in the media, children, and society, are portrayed as naïvely impressionable and at risk from the nefarious influences of these technologies. (See Gibbs (1999) and Greenberg & Wilson (2005).)
4. See GenTech website at www.educ.ubc.ca/faculty/bryson/gentech.
5. For a full description of the project, see the Digital Girls site at www.digitalgirls.org.
6. Because multiple categories were allowed, the total percentage exceeds 100%.
7. Samples of the assent and consent forms can be found at URL: <http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/comm/shade/participants2.html>. See also Matthews, Limb, and Taylor (1998) for a discussion of ethical considerations in conducting research with children. Although written for the field of geography, the examples of good methodological practice are valid and pertinent for scholars and students in communication and media studies.
8. The Media Awareness Network's 2001 survey, *Young Canadians in a Wired World: The Students' View*, revealed that file sharing is a popular activity for teens and tweens; 57% of kids said that downloading and playing music is what they like to do most on the Internet, while only 6% of parents are aware that their kids download music. The 2001 Pew Internet & American Life survey (Lenhard, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001) estimated that 37 million American adults and youths have retrieved music files on the Internet. Livingstone & Bober's final report, *UK Children Go Online* (2005), on kids and youth 9-19 years of age, indicated that 46% of kids surveyed in the U.K. download music (11% every day, 16% every week, 8% once a month, and 11% less often).
9. *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media* was an international conference sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, the Institute of Education, University of London, July 26-29, 2004.

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