Chapter 5
Cyberbullying, Sexting, and Online Sharing:
A Comparison of Parent and School Faculty Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Schools are pushing to implement more technology use to promote student learning. Yet, adults may not be completely aware of the non-academic online activities students engage in, like cyberbullying, sexting, and online sharing. In this study, parents (N = 663) and educators (N = 548) from four US states were surveyed on their understanding and awareness of their children's/students' online activities. Adult awareness levels and perspectives were compared. Parents and educators were found to be similarly supportive of computer use adding value to student education, but significantly differed in their trust levels of students' computer usage, preparedness to talk to students about Internet safety issues, and comfort regarding students using online social media. Additionally, parents and educators differed significantly in their understanding of how sharing of explicit material occurs online.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is potentially limitless in its capacity to retain and disseminate data. Whether fact or fiction, biased or objective, and accurate or not, access to information is continuously at our fingertips. Communication has also become more convenient with the advent of the smart phone and other handheld devices, making it simpler and quicker for people to connect to others on a global scale. Children of the 21st century have become known as *digital natives*: "those born after 1980…when social digital technologies came online" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008); they explore the Internet for their own personal

interests, and often seek out others with similar interests (Nguyen, 2010). Older individuals, born before 1980 are characterized as *digital immigrants*, and may or may not have learned to adapt to the growing trends of technology (Ribble & Bailey, 2007). While a majority of digital immigrants may be proficient in using technology, Ribble and Bailey (2007) stated that members of this older generation are not as technologically intuitive as their younger, more tech-savvy counterparts.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

A digital divide grows wider between digital natives and immigrants as technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Bolt and Crawford (2000) described the digital divide as a disparity between those who have access to the Internet and technology education, and those who do not. However, the digital divide mentioned here, derives in part from the intergenerational differences stemming from real-life experiences (Oblinger & Oblinger 2005; Pieri & Diamantini, 2010). Before the existence of laptops, cell phones, and other handheld digital devices, adults may not have experienced situations related to what youth are faced with online today. The unfamiliarity with how situations play out in an online world and the inability to draw from their own childhoods often leave adults feeling unequipped to provide relevant advice or solutions to current-day cyber issues (Nguyen, 2011). Most parents and educators fall into the category of digital immigrant, and if they have minimal experiences and knowledge in the area of cyber safety, as well as general tech savvy, how prepared are adults to effectively assist in problem solving and discussing these issues with their children or students?

Another difficulty adding to the problem is the difference between school and home cultures regarding the issues of cyber safety education. Often the priorities of educators do not coincide with those of parents and guardians at home (Feller, 2006). Many academic and social gaps exist between these two cultures, and it is no different when dealing with cyber safety. Nguyen (2010) stated that teens and adolescents are not often provided the opportunities to discuss cyber ethics, safety, and responsibility with adults at home or at school. Similar to sex education or drug prevention, it is important for adults to have "the talk" with children to avoid unwanted consequences from online misadventures (Donlin, 2012; Ohler, 2011). However, for cyber safety education, since many adults lack relevant prior experiences and are not well-versed on how to deal with cyber issues (Nguyen, 2010; 2011), it is a greater challenge for adults to figure out the proper things to talk about during a cyber safety discussion.

In addition, an educator's responsibility over a group of technology users is large compared to that of a parent. For instance, an educator may hear about or must deal with multiple cyber misconducts on a daily basis, while a parent may only be informed of a cyber issue if his or her child happens to be involved in it. The exposure to cyber issues varies between parents and educators, which is why it is important to understand the perceptions of parents and school faculty when it comes to cyber awareness and cyber ethics.

The following describes a subset of data from the Multimedia Juvenile Victimization (MJV): Insights into Youth Behavior to Help Law Enforcement project. The MJV project was a two-year study whose goal and purpose was to contribute to the understanding of Internet and technology-facilitated crimes against juveniles and assist law enforcement in their efforts. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the Internet safety awareness levels and perceptions of parents and school faculty in the states of Hawaii, Virginia, Wyoming, and California. We undertook this study to compare the perspectives of parents and faculty in their understanding and awareness of important Internet safety issues.

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