IDENTITY AND BELONGING

GROWING UP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

WOOLF COLLEGE

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University of Kent

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

INTRODUCTION

A report by the Children's Commissioner (2017) suggests young people are increasingly engaging in digital services: those under the age of 18 represent a third of all internet users. While there are multiple benefits that can stem from young people's use of social media (including enhancing learning, friendships, support and accessing health advice), specific online risks have been identified including poor mental health, cyberbullying, sexting and sexual harassment, online pornography, sexual solicitation and radicalisation. The heaviest users of social media are also those most vulnerable to low wellbeing, symptoms of anxiety and depression and reduced empathy.

The purpose of the third conference in our Identity and Belonging series was to bring the latest academic research to those who have regular contact with young people. We were joined by a number of delegates from a variety of backgrounds, including education providers, psychologists (educational and forensic), support workers, social workers and HMPPS. A variety of topics were discussed, such as the positive and negative effects of social media on health and wellbeing, cyber-bullying, developing critical thinking, 'phubbing' and use of a digital life story for looked-after young people. A series of workshops on building digital resilience and well-being, adolescent brain development in the digital age and online grooming and radicalisation simulations enabled delegates to engage and learn from the experiences of each other. Overall, this conference enhanced delegates awareness of the benefits and risks of young people engaging in online services, and methods to support young people in a rapidly increasing digital world.

DUNCAN STEPHENSON

Royal Society for Public Health

As Director of External Affairs & Marketing for the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), Duncan has responsibility for developing the organisation's voice on public health issues. He has been behind many of the organisation's new campaigns and awareness raising activities including: #Status of Mind and Scroll Free September, which focus on the impact of social media on mental health and wellbeing.

#StatusOfMind

The #StatusOfMind report highlights the growing use of social media in young people. These 'digital natives' have not experienced a world without online access or social media and it has effected how they interact and communicate with one another.

Social media allows easy access to health advice, self-expression, and development of emotional and social support. However, usage is linked to increased anxiety and depression symptomology, poor sleep hygiene and body image, and a 'Fear of Missing Out'.

RSPH recommendations include:

- Pop-up messages for heavy usage

- Platforms to highlight digitally altered images

- Safe social media use taught in schools

- Intelligent analysis to identify those at risk of poor mental health

- Digital media awareness training for professionals
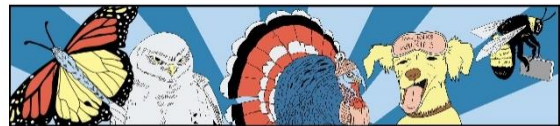
RSPH is calling for social media users to take a break from their accounts throughout for #ScrollFreeSeptember. Five options are available:

1. *Cold Turkey*: Give up all accounts for 30 days

2. *Social Butterfly*: Take a break at social events

3. *Night Owl*: Give up social media after 6pm

4. *Busy Bee*: Give up personal accounts at work or school

5. *Sleeping Dog*: Give up social media in the bedroom

RSPH
ROYAL SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH
VISION, VOICE AND PRACTICE

SALLY WILLIAMSON & DR LINDSEY CAMERON

Salus Group & University of Kent

Sally Williamson is a founding member and Director of Salus. Sally is passionate about securing services that make a difference to young people, their families, school and communities.

Dr Lindsey Cameron is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Kent. Lindsey research focuses on the development of school-based interventions.

12,000 children and young people, from over 100 Kent primary and secondary schools, completed surveys assessing their online behaviour. Across the two cohorts (2014-15 and 2018-19), large increases in social media use and gaming were seen. For instance, Facebook use increased from 5% to 11% and Minecraft from 25% to 75%. PokemonGo was used by 98% of respondents in the 2918-19 cohort (which didn't even exist in 2014-15!).

Associated with increased use of digital media is a growth in experiencing unwanted, nasty, or negative comments (12 vs. 39%) and photos/videos online (3 vs. 13%), or finding a fake profile (3 vs. 13%); with these higher in the secondary than primary schools.

At primary school, boys are slightly more likely to experience online harassment than girls, but there is no difference in gender at secondary school. Primary school pupils are more likely to tell someone about online harassment than secondary school pupils.

Key messages:

1. Digital media usage is rapidly growing.

2. Cyber bullying and online harassment are important issues young people face.

3. Evidence-based programs are needed to support young people in building digital resilience.

SALUS
IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

University of Kent

PROFESSOR JANE REEVES

University of Kent

Jane Reeves is a Professor of Child Protection and Simulation Development at the University of Kent. Jane has co-written immersive simulations which tackle complex child protection issues. Jane is currently working with the Home Office on a second radicalisation simulation called 'Behind Closed Doors'. The simulations are widely used across the UK and internationally by professionals and young people.

Social Media Simulations

Simulations provide a safe environment for exploring child protection scenarios. Both professionals and young people can reflect, evaluate, practice and learn from immersing themselves in the simulations.

"A vision for professionals and children to learn in a modern way how to protect themselves on and offline"

Virtual environments are engaging, immersive and interactive. They allow individuals to take risks safely, are learner-centred, and stimulate discussion. Through experiential learning, which many people thrive on, problem solving skills can be developed.

The Centre for Child Protection currently has a number of simulations available targeting a variety of child protection issues:

1. 'Rosie 1': Child sexual abuse

2. 'Rosie 2': Child neglect

3. 'myCourtroom': Family courts

4. 'Zak': Radicalisation

5. 'Looking out for Lottie': Child Sexual Exploitation

6. 'Visiting Elliot': Managing sex offenders in the community

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PROFESSOR KAREN DOUGLAS

University of Kent

Karen Douglas is a Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Kent. She studies the psychology of human communication, including the antecedents and consequences of belief in conspiracy theories, and how communication technology influences social interaction.

'Phubbing'

Phubbing is the act of snubbing someone in a social setting by paying attention to a phone rather than engaging with them directly. Phubbing behaviour is becoming more common in social interactions with the growth of smartphone use.

An individual's level of internet addiction, 'Fear of Missing Out' and self-control predicts smartphone addiction. In turn, those with high levels of smartphone addiction are more likely to phub others.

Phubbing is associated with negative perceptions of communication quality and poor relationship satisfaction. In addition, phubbing was associated with lower self-esteem, perception of meaningful existence, need for control and sense of belonging.

A number of campaigns are now targeting phubbing, with recommendations including:

1. Making meals a phone-free zone to allow meaningful discussion
2. Phone stack at social events, with the first person reaching for the phone paying the bill!
3. No-tech hour at home to encourage development of social and communication skills without reliance on a smartphone

University of Kent

DR AFRODITI PINA

University of Kent

Dr Afroditi Pina is a Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at the University of Kent. She conducts research in forensic and social psychology within the areas of sexual violence, gender equality and victimisation. She is interested in examining the psychological explanations for people's attitudes and behaviours that pertain to online and offline sexual harassment, revenge porn, and sexual-objectification.

#NoToRevengePorn

Image-based sexual abuse, more commonly known as 'Revenge Porn', involves sharing intimate, sexually graphic images and/or videos of an individual on public online platforms without their consent.

Revenge porn can have a wide range of negative effects on victims, including physical threats, offline harassment, breakdown of personal relationships and loss of employment. Emotional distress is reported in 93% of victims, with experiences including anxiety, guilt, paranoia, PTSD and loss of self-esteem.

Personality traits have been identified which are related to likelihood to engage in revenge porn (e.g., narcissism, psychopathy and moral disengagement). This differed dependent on gender, with high levels of sadism in men and Machiavellianism in women, contributing to engagement in perpetrating revenge porn. However, both men and women are equally likely to engage in revenge porn.

Preventative strategies for revenge porn include:

1. *Education*: school campaigns on consent and respect
2. *Awareness*: emphasizing impact on victims
3. *Legislation*: increase knowledge of new laws surrounding revenge porn
4. *Regulation*: specific regulations on social media providers to prevent uploading/sharing of revenge porn

University of Kent

DR SIMON HAMMOND

University of East Anglia

Dr Simon Hammond is a Lecturer in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia. His research transcends health, social care and higher education sectors and he co-produces best-practice guidance in the area of digital literacies and resilience. He is interested in how digital technologies continue to reshape everyday social possibilities for action across the life course.

Digital Life Story Work

Particularly for looked after children and young people, disruption in early life means it is difficult for them to create a coherent life story (who they are, where they were born and grew up, who their family are, etc.). Life Story Work supports children and young people to develop a coherent sense of self-knowledge.

As young people place a high value on technology, digital tools can motivate engagement in Life Story Work (LSW). Such digital tools allow young people to continually update, edit and reflect upon their emotions, thoughts and feelings.

A four-year longitudinal study of 10 looked after young people (aged 14-18) and their carers. Young people self-reported positive change as a result of the Digital Life Story Work (DLSW) and gain a sense of ownership of their history. Young people uploading content demonstrated increased ability to reflect on recent events. Practitioners viewed DLSW as a positive addition for engaging looked after young people.

Key messages:
1. Visit digitallifestorywork.co.uk
2. Try reflective work with young people (i.e., vlogs and podwalking)
3. Using familiar technology can increase young people's engagement
4. Use of earlier, low intensity interventions (including DLSW) can improve long-term outcomes
5. Need for increased evidence-base on DLSW

SALLY WILLIAMSON & JILL ALLEN

Salus Group

Working in the Salus Group, both Sally Williamson and Jill Allen deliver innovative services to children, young people, families and schools. They aim to improve the social skills, emotional and mental well-being, and educational attainment of children and young people. Through a Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Kent Universities, the Salus Group ensure all services have a robust evidence-base.

Workshop 1: Make it Happy

In their workshop, Sally and Jill focused on evidence-based ideas and strategies that can help practitioners to build digital resilience and well-being in children and families. Strategies include ongoing conversations with young people, modelling behaviour, setting of boundaries, repetition, consistency and the need for compassion. As Sally and Jill suggest, technology is neither good or bad, it is how we use it.

Sally and Jill also discussed the necessity of protecting your own digital reputation. Strategies include ensuring your profile is private, checking company regulations on personal social media use, and using the blocking/reporting methods on social media.

In the group activity attendees were asked to select an emoji which corresponded to how they would feel if, as a teacher, *'a parent contacting them on facebook to tell them they looked nice following a parents evening'*. A variety of perspectives were raised, including:

😲 Feeling surprised/embarrassed as this is unexpected

😡 Feeling angry at the invasion of privacy

SALLY GREEN

University of Kent

Sally Green is a Training Officer at the Centre for Child Protection at the University of Kent, where she has co-developed simulations to highlight the dangers of grooming and radicalisation. Previously a Police Officer for 22 years, a large portion of her career was as a Youth Engagement and Safer Schools Officer. Sally has worked directly with young people on many issues including, Child Sexual Exploitation, Gangs, Grooming and Radicalisation.

Workshop 2: Young Zak

Radicalism, also described as 'brain washing' refers to the process by which a persons vulnerabilities is exploited towards crime or terrorism, by a third party who have their own agenda.

Sally discussed the pressures faced by the education sector on reducing radicalism. As young people spend more and more time online, they are at greater risk of being exposed to radicalisation. Specific 'psychological hooks' include:

- Need for identity, meaning and belonging
- Desire for status, excitement and adventure
- Being at a transitional time of life
- Being influenced by a group
- Feelings of grievance and injustice

Young Zak offers the opportunity to engage in direct work with children/young people at risk of radicalisation. Using a safe virtual environment, by sharing personal information Young Zak compromises his safety on a social media platform.

In a series of Vlogs, Young Zak starts to be groomed for radicalisation. This simulation allows individuals to engage with the story and identify where grooming is occurring and how to put in place measures to prevent it. This tool helps to develop critical thinking in young people.

NIKKI CARPENTER & EMMA HARRISON

Kent Educational Psychology Service & St Nicholas School

Both Nikki Carpenter and Emma Harrison are trainers in the Solihull approach, aiming to support the emotional health and well-being of children and young people. Nikki has worked as an Educational Psychologist with Kent County Council since 2003. Emma is a Specialist Teacher for Social, Emotional and Mental Health, providing outreach to Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools.

Workshop 3: Adolescent Brain Development in the Digital Age

Nikki and Emma discussed how teenage brains are under reconstruction and are greatly influenced by the environment (termed neuroplasticity). Digital media can be viewed as an environment, impacting on the development of adolescent's brains.

The impact of the digital environment on the brain is complex. For instance, online digital network size has been found to relate to the density of grey matter in the amygdala (an area of the brain associated with emotions).

In addition, gaming has been associated with the same areas of the brain associated with behavioural addictions. Conversely, engagement in digital media has been found to enhance cognitive ability to multitask, improves visual attention, and reduces cognitive decline of memory.

With these complex and mixed messages, parents often report feeling poorly equipped, fearful and helpless around the management of their child's use of digital media. Strategies that can be useful include:

- Help build digital resilience
- Establish a space separate from technology
- Be a present, consistent role model

DELEGATE FEEDBACK

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Relevant Research

Hammond, S. P., & Cooper, N. J. (2016) Podwalking: A framework for assimilating mobile methods into action research. *Qualitative Psychology, 3*(2), 126-144. Retrieved from https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/59970/1/QUA_2013_1027.pdf

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Pina, A., Holland, J., & James, M. (2017). The malevolent side of revenge porn proclivity: Dark personality traits and sexist ideology. *International Journal of Technoethics, 8*(1), 30-43. doi:10.4018/IJT.2017010103

Reeves, J. and Sheriyar, A. (2015). *Radicalisation and child protection: Thinking it through.* Retrieved from https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/prevent-and-social-work-policy-procedures-and-resources/

Royal Society for Public Health. (2017). *#StatusOfMind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing.* Retrieved from https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/status-of-mind.html

External Links

Digital Life Story Work

Royal Society for Public Health

Salus Group

The Centre for Child Protection

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

University of Kent Organisers:

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All speakers, workshop leaders and student helpers.

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