

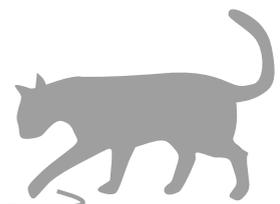
Olga Kolpakova
(Ed)



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European Commission

Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse

Focus groups' findings



RISKTAKING ONLINE BEHAVIOUR
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH
RESEARCH AND TRAINING

ROBERT

Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse

Focus groups' findings

2012

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Introduction

Olga Kolpakova

Over the last two decades more than 200 studies have been made that focus on various aspects of child online sexual violence. The majority of the surveys highlighted the way children use Internet. According to one of the largest surveys – EU Kids Online survey – produced in 2010, 60% of European children aged 9 to 16 years use the Internet on a daily basis, spending on average 88 minutes online. They do their homework, play games alone or against the computer, watch video clips online, use Internet interactively for communication (social networking, instant messaging etc.) and read/watch the news, play with others online, download films and music, share content peer-to-peer (eg, via webcam or message boards), visit chat rooms, share files, blog and spend time in a virtual world (Livingstone et al 2011). Internet accessibility, frequency and duration of use, and types of children’s online activities have been the focus of studies in a number of other national surveys (Leicht & Sorensen 2011, Children... 2006, Medienpädagogischer... 2010a,b, Mainardi and Zraggen 2010, Soldatova et al 2010, Levina et al 2011, Medierådet 2005, 2008, 2010).

The more active our children are online, the greater the risks associated with Internet use. According to a number of studies, a significant number of children and young people practice behaviour which could potentially lead to negative repercussions, such as seeking new friends online (Levina et al 2011), having contact online with someone they have never met face to face (Livingstone et al 2011), having people on

“buddy lists” known only online (Ybarra et al 2007, Levina et al 2011), sending personal information to people they have never met face to face (Livingstone et al 2011, Levina et al 2011), posting personal information (Ybarra et al 2007) and sexualized images (Svedin & Priebe 2009, Daneback & Månsson 2009), posing nude (De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006) or masturbating in front of a web cam (Svedin & Priebe 2009), sending personal information (Ybarra et al 2007, Levina et al 2011), sending or receiving sexual images (Lenhart 2009), accessing pornography (Svedin et al 2011, Wolak et al 2007, Sørensen & Kjørholt 2007, Sabina et al 2008), talking about sex online (Medieradet... 2010, Livingstone et al 2011, Ybarra et al 2007) and meeting people face to face offline who they initially made contact with on the Internet (ACPI/PROTEGELES 2002, Helweg-Larsen et al 2009, Livingstone et al 2011, Mainardi & Zraggen 2010, Monteiro & Gomes 2009, Wojtasik 2004).

In some cases such behaviour could be regarded as a form of adolescent age-appropriate social and sexual expression and curiosity, and may not always lead to negative consequences. In other cases, however, children and adolescents have narrowly avoided danger in potentially threatening situations. Therefore, not all those interacting online with unknown people, sometimes discussing sex, have been exposed to unwanted sexual solicitations or other negative repercussions (Wolak et al 2008). Of those who reported having seen pornography online accidentally or purposefully, two out of three were unaffected by the experience (Livingstone et al 2011).

However, some children and young people do experience negative consequences from such behaviour. Children may feel cheated, disgusted or uncomfortable by what they have seen on pornographic websites (Livingstone et al 2011), young people may be highly distressed after incidents of solicitation (Mitchell et al 2001), in some cases children and

adolescents could be pressured or threatened into having sex during offline meetings with their online acquaintances (Suseg et al 2008, Helweg-Larsen et al 2009, Levina et al 2011). Studies have shown that the Internet (Levina et al 2010), and in particular chat rooms (Briggs et al 2010, Wagner 2008) and social networking sites (Wise et al 2010), could be used by offenders who are interested either in engaging in cybersex without any direct wish to meet in real life or in meeting offline for sex.

In a number of studies individual risk factors that led to sexual abuse, were identified. Studies show that girls (Baumgartner et al 2010a, Ellonen et al 2008, Mainardi and Zraggen 2010, Mitchell et al 2007a, Wolak et al 2008), adolescents (Baumgartner et al 2010a, Ellonen et al 2008, Livingstone et al 2011, Wolak et al 2004), youngsters with lower education (De Graaf and Vanwesenbeeck 2006), teenagers who identify themselves as homosexual or those with unclear sexual orientation (Wolak et al 2004) are at a higher risk of experiencing Internet-related sexual abuse. Personal behavioural factors such as frequent Internet use (De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006, Mitchell et al 2001, Stahl and Fritz 2002, Wolak et al 2008, Ybarra et al 2004), online risk-taking behaviour (ACPI/PROTEGELES 2002, Mitchell et al 2001, Mitchell et al 2008, Stahl and Fritz 2002), and substance use (Ybarra et al 2004) may also increase the chance of a young person becoming a victim of Internet-related sexual abuse. Another group of individual risk factors is related to personal traumatic experiences and emotional situations. According to the research data, youth (especially girls) with a history of offline sexual or physical abuse (De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006, Mitchell et al 2007b, Wolak et al 2008) and youth suffering from depression (such as sadness, emptiness or concentration problems) (Ybarra et al 2004) are at greater risk of online sexual solicitation. Even though a number of researches (Kvam 2001, Sullivan & Knutson 2000, SISO & SUS 2007) have shown that children with disabilities are more often exposed to sexual

abuse, it is still not clear if these children are at greater risk of online sexual violence. A group of environmental risk factors includes: single-parents or reconstituted families (e.g. Gallagher 2007), homelessness or runaways (e.g. Regional... 2008), higher household socio-economic status (Livingstone et al 2011, Mitchell et al 2003), the lack of close parental relationships (ICAA 2004, Sørensen 2007), as well as lower levels of parental control (De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006, Mitchell et al 2003).

In a few studies, resilience in relation to young people's online behaviour was specifically focused upon. It was found that young people could use a number of strategies to reduce the risks of negative repercussions when meeting online friends in real life. These included informing their parents (e.g. Livingstone et al 2011) or friends (Bauermeister et al 2010) about the meeting, arranging meetings in public places and trying to get to know an online friend better before meeting them offline (Bauermeister et al 2010). When negatively affected by online contact (sexual messages, bullying, sexual images), children could use the following strategies: hope that the problem would go away by itself, report the problem, change their filter/contact settings, delete any messages from the person or block the person, try to fix the problem, talk to someone about the problem or stop using the Internet temporarily (Livingstone et al 2011).

In addition to the growing impact the role of the Internet is having on children's lives, researchers are specifically discussing the problem of merged online/offline environments (e.g. Lansdown 2011, Levina et al 2011). The online environment provides young people with more opportunities for accessing information, self-expression, self-promotion, social role experimentation and communication. It has become an integral part of their life where the boundary between online and offline experiences is vanishing. At the same time, offline safety rules and behav-

our patterns are not always applicable to the online environment, and children's online activities are to a lesser extent controlled by parents. It may seem obvious that there is a need for online behaviour education; we have to teach our children safe and correct use of information and communication technologies and improve parents' ability to effectively control the online activities of their children¹.

However, there are still some aspects of child online sexual violence that have not been studied sufficiently. In particular, we do not clearly understand the child's role in establishing and developing online relations with people who may potentially harm them in the future. Do children take the initiative themselves? Do they actively seek new friends and contacts online? What is their response to unwanted approaches? How do young people identify individuals that pose a risk of online sexual violence? Do they think that they are at risk themselves? Which strategies do young people usually use to stay safe online? Do young people perceive their world as undivided or do borders between the online and offline world still exist? Are there any groups of young people who are at greater risk of online sexual violence than others (such as LGBT, young people with disabilities, young people in residential care etc.)? And if so are there any differences between these groups in how they establish agency in a virtual world, negotiate online relationships, identify risks, stay safe online and distinguish between the online and physical world?

The project ROBERT, Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training, is one attempt to answer some of the above questions. This project intends to make online interaction safe

¹ More detailed overview of research data on child online sexual violence is presented in Ainsaar, M., Lööf, L. (2011) (Eds) Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse: Literature report. Council of the Baltic Sea States, Stockholm. Also available at http://www.childcentre.info/robert/public/Online_behaviour_related_to_sexual_abuse.pdf

for children and young people and is implemented from June 2010 to September 2012, funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Programme as a Knowledge Enhancement Project. It is managed and coordinated by the CBSS Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at risk, EGCC, in partnership with the University of Tartu (Estonia), Linköping University (Sweden), University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom), Save the Children Denmark, Save the Children Italia, Innocence in Danger (Germany), Stellit International (the Netherlands and Russia) and Kingston University (UK).

As part of the project, focus groups with young people, some of whom may be considered to be more at risk of online abuse (young people in residential care, young people that are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and young people with some form of disability), as well as with young people from the general population were interviewed in 2011–2012 in Denmark, United Kingdom, Sweden, Estonia, Italy, Germany and Russia. The aim of the focus group interviews was to obtain qualitative information about adolescent's online behaviour, their need to socialize, communicate and discover themselves and the world and particularly those behaviours that lead to risk-taking and their possible links with sexual victimization, while examining the strategies they use to avoid victimization itself. The issues that were discussed with children and explored with focus groups could be summarized in three main thematic areas: 1) characteristics of Internet use; 2) characteristics of online communication and its impact on the life of young people; 3) staying safe online.

The results obtained from the focus groups are presented in this report. The chapter "Methodological issues" includes a glossary and a brief overview of focus groups and framework analysis. Particular attention is paid to the issue of ensuring quality in qualitative research. Issues such

as sampling, procedures and data analysis are described. In the chapter "Research results across different groups of young people" five main themes which were identified across the focus groups are examined: Establishing agency in a virtual world; Negotiating online relationships; Distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups; Safety online; Delineating between merged realities. Chapter 3 provides deeper analysis of different groups of young people who took part in the study: young people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, young people with a learning disability and/ or needs for additional support, young people in residential care as well as males and females from different groups. This chapter provides an opportunity to discuss in more detail online behaviours specific for each group of young people and to see if there are any groups of young people who are at greater risk of being victimized online than others. In the Conclusion the main research results are summarized and the answers to the main research questions are provided. In the final part of the report recommendation on the prevention programmes development and implementation are presented.

The report is available also on the Child Center webpage:
www.childcentre.info/ROBERT

1. Methodological issues

1.1. Glossary

Ethel Quayle, Lars Lööf, Kadri Soo, Mare Ainsaar

The EU Safer Internet Project ROBERT has developed a common set of definitions and terminologies relevant to this study and other current pieces of work. In doing so it has drawn on existing research and policy writing in this area.

Age of consent is the age at which the child is considered old enough to make an informed decision to consent to sexual contacts. All countries have defined an age at which children are considered mature enough to consent to sexual contact. For some countries in the world same sex relationships have a different age of consent than do sex between a boy and a girl. Up to this age, most European countries' legislation offer specific protection meaning that any sexual contact with a child below the age of sexual consent is legally seen as abusive or as being an act of rape even if the child claims s/he consented to the act. This is often termed statutory rape. If a child below the age of sexual consent has consensual sex with someone of similar age, many countries have provisions in place handling such acts outside of the legal systems. Some European countries also have different age of consent for sexual contacts with a person significantly older or between persons more or less of the same age.

Child abuse defined by WHO “constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.” (Report... 1999).

Child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a ‘child’ as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. However Gillespie (2010) has argued that such a definition, which uses an arbitrary cut off, is not without difficulties in the context of abusive images and that, “The difficulty of defining “a child” has a direct impact on the ability of the law to create laws relating to child pornography. It is submitted that there are two principal ways of defining a child for the purposes of child pornography: biologically or by age-specification”.

Child sexual abuse includes a spectrum of sexual crimes and offenses in which children up to the age of 17 are victims. (See age of consent). The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007) offers definition for child sexual abuse under Article 18:

- 1) engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities;
- 2) engaging in sexual activities with a child where
 - abuse is made of coercion, force or threats; or
 - abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or
 - abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence (p. 8–9).

Online (cyber) child sexual abuse is the engagement of a child in sexual activities via Internet facilities

- 1) with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities;
- 2) engaging in sexual activities with a child where
 - a. abuse is made of coercion, force or threats; or
 - b. abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or
 - c. abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence.

All of these activities can be differentiated from adolescent sexual behaviours which are developmentally appropriate and which do not imply coercive activity. There are clear overlaps between online child sexual abuse and the commission of contact and other non-contact offences and all are seen as part of a spectrum of sexually violent behaviour towards children and young people.

Online (cyber) child sexual abuse includes the production, distribution, downloading and viewing of child abuse material (both still and video images); the online solicitation of children and young people to produce self-generated child abuse material, to engage them in sexual chat or other online sexual activity, or to arrange an offline meeting for the purposes of sexual activity, also known as grooming or luring; and the facilitation of any of the above.

Contact sexual abuse can be defined as:

a) Penetration

Sexual acts include contact involving penetration, however slight, between the mouth, penis, vulva, or anus of the child and another individual. Sexual acts also include penetration, however slight, of the anal or genital opening by a hand, finger, or other object. Sexual acts can be performed by the perpetrator on the child or by the child on the pe-

trator. A perpetrator can also force or coerce a child to commit a sexual act on another individual (child or adult) (Leeb et al 2008).

b) Non-penetrative touching

This may include intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the following:

- Genitalia (penis or vulva)
- Anus
- Groin
- Breast
- Inner thigh
- Buttocks

Abusive sexual contact can be performed by the perpetrator on the child or by the child on the perpetrator. Abusive sexual contact can also occur between the child and another individual (adult or child) through force or coercion by a perpetrator. Abusive sexual contact does not include touching required for the normal care or attention to the child's daily needs. A perpetrator can also force or coerce a child to commit a sexual act on another individual (child or adult) (Leeb et al 2008).

Non-contact sexual abuse can include the following:

- Intentional exposure of the child to another's genitals or private parts or pornographic material for purposes of sexual arousal or to shock or harass (exhibitionism)
- Photographing or filming of child in a sexual display for purposes of sexual arousal (which may result in the production of child abuse materials). A child below the age of 18 is not seen as being in a position to agree to such acts. In most countries however, such acts committed between young persons of similar age are not seen as abusive.
- Sexual requests or overtures to the child for or other attempts to engage the child in sexual activities that would constitute sexual abuse

were they to be carried out, which may also be described as grooming or solicitation.

- Comments and language of a sexual nature intended to demean, embarrass and/or draw unwanted attention to the child's sexual parts or sexual activity or moral character (whether true or untrue). This should be differentiated from, for example, the teaching of sex education in schools where the content may cause embarrassment but where the focus is not the individual child or young person.
- Persuading, inducing, enticing, encouraging, allowing, or permitting a child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in, prostitution, or sexual trafficking. A child or young person below the age of 18 is not seen as being in a position to give informed consent to such acts and are thus protected also from persuasive, enticing or encouraging behaviours.

(Online) harassment involves threats or other offensive behaviour, sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see (Finkelhor 2000). Online harassment occurs when someone uses the Internet to express aggression towards another person. This can take the form of inflammatory e-mails or instant messages, or damaging pictures or text posted on a profile.

Sexual harassment encompasses a wide variety of behaviours and can range in severity from degrading remarks to unwanted sexual advances and sexual assault (Dill et al 2008). Most expressions of sexual harassment that prevail on the Internet appear in the form of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention (Barak 2005). Gender harassment in cyberspace includes gender-humiliating comments, sexual remarks, dirty jokes, insulting erotic or pornographic picture, and the like. These messages can be targeted directly to a particular person or potential receivers generally. Unwanted sexual attention assumes personal communication between a harasser and victim sending messages that refer to or ask about a victim's intimate subjects (i.e., sex organs, sex life), or invite

to talk about or engage in sex-related activities. In contrast to gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention is specifically intended to solicit a victim to sexual cooperation in virtual or non-virtual environment (Barak 2005). Unwanted sexual attention is a connection point between sexual harassment and sexual solicitation. Obviously, various authors use either sexual harassment or sexual solicitation investigating similar construct.

Sexual solicitations and approaches are requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or give personal sexual information that are unwanted or, whether wanted or not, made by an adult (Finkelhor et al 2000). This definition of solicitations refers therefore to the potential negative consequences to the target person. Unwanted sexual solicitation is the act of encouraging someone to talk about sex, to do something sexual, or to share personal sexual information even when that person does not want to. There are clear overlaps between solicitation and sexual **harassment and bullying**. They all have been linked to psychosocial challenges for youth targeted by them (Ybarra et al 2007). Most of sexual solicitations are limited to online interaction and is relatively mild. Therefore many young people might not find it disturbing. Mitchell et al (2007a) differentiate also between limited sexual solicitation and Finkelhor et al (2000) aggressive sexual solicitations.

Sexual solicitations should be differentiated from counselling, sex education and other communication about sexual issues, when the aim of communication is not to involve person to the sexual activities. It should also be differentiated from chatting about sexual issues, sharing sexual information or even sharing images of sexual content, self produced or other, between consenting peers. These are challenging issues since communicating about sex may occur in online conversations between young people and unknown people, without it in any way violating the child.

Child abuse images has increasingly been used instead of the term child pornography to more adequately reflect the content of what is produced, and to challenge any implicit consensual activity (Taylor & Quayle 2003). The term 'abusive images' is now widely used by those who advocate for children's rights in relation to sexual abuse through photography (Jones & Skogrand 2005), but this change is not straightforward. The term child pornography is consistently used in the majority of laws and policy documents internationally (Akdeniz 2008), and attempts to change terminology are thought by some to be both confusing and to not adequately capture the complex nature of the material (Lanning 2008).

Child pornography has been variously defined in supranational and international policy documents. The European Union's Framework Decision on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography entered into force in 2004 and required member states to take steps to ensure compliance by 20 January 2006. Here child pornography is defined as pornographic material that visually depicts or represents: (i) a real child involved or engaged in sexually explicit conduct, including lascivious exhibition of the genitals or the pubic area of a child; or (ii) a real person appearing to be a child involved or engaged in the conduct mentioned in (i); or (iii) realistic images of a non-existent child involved or engaged in the conduct mentioned in (i).

The definition in the European Union's Framework Decision talks about a 'real' child, 'real' person and 'realistic' images, which may prove unlikely to cover virtual images or cartoons. The Council of Europe's Cybercrime Convention (2001) came into force in July 2004, and Article 9 defines child pornography as pornographic material that visually depicts: a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct; a person appearing to be a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct; or realistic images representing a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct. This relates

to all people under the age of 18, but it is possible for a lower age limit of 16 to be set. The United Nation's Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography came into force in January 2002 and defines child pornography as 'any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes'. In all three a child is defined as someone under the age of 18 years and includes both photographs of actual children as well as representations of children, which would appear to include computer-generated images. However, the issue of age is subject to several reservations and complicated by the age of sexual consent established under national law. Akdeniz (2008) draws our attention to the fact that the UN definition is broad and, as it refers to 'any representation', would also include textual material, cartoons and drawings. The most recent relevant instrument establishing a definition of child pornography is the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. While this definition is restricted to visual materials it does not require that a real child be used in their production (as is the case in the US). However, member states may opt not to criminalise the production and possession of virtual child pornography. Importantly the Convention has chosen not to criminalise the consensual production and possession of materials created by children who have reached the age of sexual consent (Quayle 2009).

Cyberbullying is defined as an individual or a group wilfully using information and communication involving electronic technologies to facilitate deliberate and repeated harassment or threat to another individual or group by sending or posting cruel text and/or graphics using technological means (Mason 2008). Cyberbullying is any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended

to inflict harm or discomfort on others beyond the school grounds and follow targets into their homes (Patchin & Hinduja 2006). In cyberbullying experiences, the identity of the bully may or may not be known. Cyberbullying can occur through electronically-mediated communication at school; however, cyberbullying behaviours commonly occur outside of school as well (Tokunaga 2010).

Internet sex offenders do not have a set of agreed diagnostic criteria outlined by DSM or any other categorical model. Generally Internet sex offenders are considered those whose behaviour can be classified under sexual abuse activities. This includes: downloading illegal images from the Internet (which largely, but not exclusively relate to pornographic pictures of children); trading or exchanging such images with others; producing images through photographing children or modifying existing images and engaging in the solicitation or seduction of children (Quayle 2008). Elliott and Beech (2009) generated a broad typology of Internet offenders comprising four groups: (1) periodically prurient offenders, consisting of those accessing impulsively, or out of a general curiosity, who carry out this behaviour sporadically, potentially as part of a broader interest in pornography (including 'extreme' pornography) that may not be related to a specific sexual interest in children; (2) fantasy-only offenders, consisting of those who access/trade images to fuel a sexual interest in children and who have no known history of contact sexual offending (3) direct victimization offenders, consisting of those who utilize online technologies as part of a larger pattern of contact and non-contact sexual offending, including child pornography and the grooming of children online in order to facilitate the later offline commission of contact sexual offenses and (4) commercial exploitation offenders, consisting of the criminally-minded who produce or trade images to make money.

Online and offline are conventionally seen as relating to computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication. One is seen to occur in the virtual world of cyberspace and the other in the 'real world', although many have seen this distinction as an over simplification (e.g. Slater 2002). For example, Slater (2002) argues that the telephone can be regarded as an online experience in some circumstances, and that the blurring of the distinctions between the uses of various technologies (such as PDA and mobile phone, television and Internet, and telephone and Voice Over Internet Protocol) has made it "impossible to use the term *on-line* meaningfully in the sense that was employed by the first generation of Internet research".

Online sex is when two or more people are stimulating each other sexually by exchanging digital texts, messages pictures or video clips (Döring 2009). The term in itself does not indicate if the contact is voluntary, abusive or the result of unduly pressure or persuasion. Forms of online sex have been known to be used by adults with an interest in engaging a child in sexual exchange, the exchange of texts with a highly sexualised content or exchange of thoughts about sex and sexuality. In these cases the online sex has been an obvious part of the grooming process. (Wagner 2008). Online sex is also by many described as a safe way of exploring your sexuality or a way of having sex with a partner far away geographically. Studies conclude more women than men prefer online sex since they appreciate the opportunity to explore their sexuality in a safe setting.

Paedophilia is defined as a sexual interest in prepubescent children, but also as a diagnosis in medicine. The medically determined paedophilia can have a link with sexual offense against children: Child pornography offenders and sex offenders with child victims are more likely to be paedophiles (Seto 2009). At the same time, some paedophiles have not had

any known sexual contact with children, and perhaps half of sex offenders against children would not meet diagnostic criteria for paedophilia. The American Psychiatric Association Development Group for DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) is 'recommending this disorder be renamed from Pedophilia to Pedohebephilic Disorder'. This would include sexual activity by someone 18 or older with children and adolescents at least 5 years younger (Kramer 2010).

Pornography – see *child abuse images, child pornography*.

Residential care is defined by the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010) as “care provided in any non-family-based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations, and all other short- and long-term residential care facilities, including group homes” (p. 6).

Self-generated content is part of the wider phenomenon of user generated content. User-generated-content (USG) is content created and published by the end-users online and consists of videos, podcasts and posts on discussion groups, blogs, wiki's and social media sites. Self-generated content in the context of abusive experiences mediated by the information and communication technologies mainly refer to images or videos. These are also seen as part of the grooming process where the offender convinces the child to send him images of her/himself naked or in some cases masturbating. The images are often used to persuade the child of the harmlessness of sexual contacts between a child and an adult, lowering the child's inhibition to engage in off-line sex or to be paid by the adult to meet. Wagner (2008) has suggested that the adolescent involved sees him or herself as an accomplice to the abuse after having sent the perpetrator images and after having been paid for sexual services. Self-

generated content is differentiated from casts of different forms, web casts or voice interactions in the way that it is published wilfully by the person that is in the image.

Sexting has been defined as the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images by minor teens (Lenhart 2009). “Sexting” refers to the use of mobile phones with built-in cameras to produce and distribute images of oneself in a sexually provocative or revealing position. Photographs produced by the use of “sexting” can be distributed to unintended third parties, often leading to embarrassment and harassment. Moreover, senders are also in danger of being charged with possession and distribution of child pornography, regardless of the fact that they are minors and the pictures are often of themselves (Zhang 2010). It has been suggested that the problematic nature to this activity depends on its persistence and extent. Isolated incidents are unlikely to be seen as a form of sexual violence but this is different from persistent activity with extensive dissemination of images. Ostrager (2010) has suggested that “The legal system needs to distinguish between sexting as a serious offense posing a danger to others, and when it is simply a romantic entanglement: the act must fit the punishment” (p. 272).

Sexual exploitation is one form of sexual abuse. It is differentiated from sexual abuse by the fact that the act of sexual abuse is somehow unequal and exploitive from the start of communication. For example the child's position as younger and less experienced is exploited for the gain of the offender through the coercion and the persuasion of the child (Quayle et al 2008). Asquith and Turner (2008) suggest that sexual exploitation encompasses various forms of sexual abuse including prostitution, child pornography and child marriage, and is used variously to mean any one or all of these.

Commercial sexual exploitation can be differentiated from other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation on grounds of the motive of profit. Commercial sexual exploitation may drive to the abuse and exploitation of children or may be a consequence of it. It includes the prostitution of children, trafficking for sexual purposes, the production, sale distribution and use of child pornography, and child sex tourism (Kane 2006).

Sexual grooming can be defined as a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of justifying or denying their actions (Craven et al 2007). In the UK the Home Office defines grooming as '*a course of conduct enacted by a suspected paedophile, which would give a reasonable person cause for concern that any meeting with a child arising from the conduct would be for unlawful purposes*'. This definition formed the basis of the grooming clause in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Davidson and Martellozzo 2005). The main difference between sexual grooming and sexual solicitation is that the groomer first attempts to befriend a child and gain his/her confidence and trust before sexually abusive behaviour (Rogers et al 2010). However, the solicitation occurs without any special friendship-forming phase – a child is exposed more quickly to unwanted requests for sexual activity and sexualised talk.

Violence. The definition of violence is that of article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "all forms of physical or mental injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".

Violence against children is an intentional behaviour by people against children that is likely to cause physical or psychological harm including physical and mental abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, societal forms of violence, such as exploitative child labour, and children's involvement in armed conflict (Skinnider). Violence against children is the broader concept than child abuse, especially due to its societal dimension. Many forms of violence that are harmful to children (i.e., involvement in violent conflicts in state) lie outside common definitions of child abuse. Moreover, violence can be seen rather as deliberate exertion of physical force and power (see Krug et al 2002); however, abuse refers to the treatment of somebody in inadvertent or harmful way. Violent toward a child can be acquaintance or strange adult and underage persons.

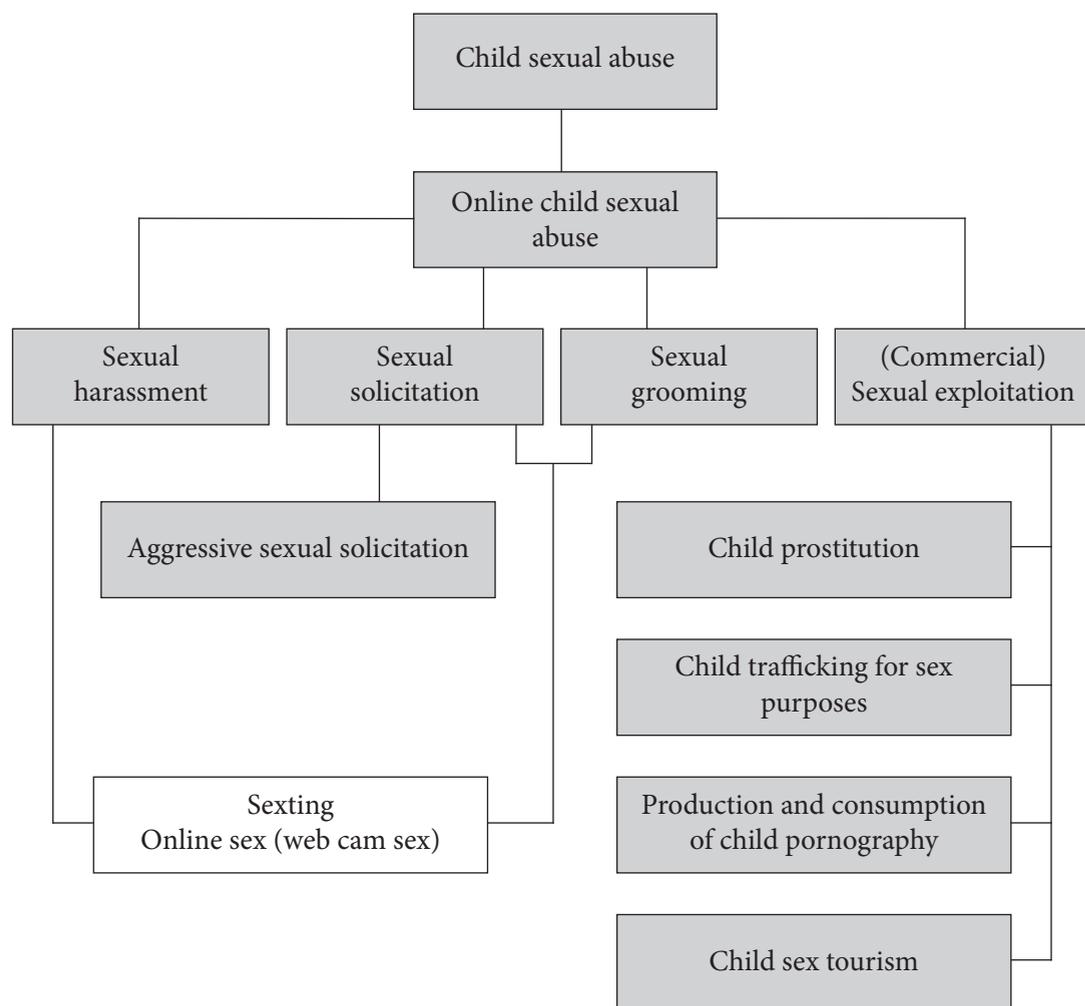
Virtual child pornography includes non-photographic pornographic images of children (NPPIC); that is, fantasy visual representations of child pornography in the form of, for example, computer generated images, cartoons or drawings (Ost 2010).

In the United Kingdom this is a new offence under ss 62-68 of the C & JA. The image must either focus 'solely or principally on a child's genital or anal region', or portray any of the following acts:

- (a) the performance by a person of an act of intercourse or oral sex with or in the presence of a child;
- (b) an act of masturbation by, of, involving or in the presence of a child;
- (c) an act which involves penetration of the vagina or anus of a child with a part of a person's body or with anything else;
- (d) an act of penetration, in the presence of a child, of the vagina or anus of a person with a part of a person's body or with anything else;
- (e) the performance by a child of an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive or imaginary);

(f) the performance by a person of an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive or imaginary) in the presence of a child.

Web cam sex is a form of online sex where the participants engage in sexual behaviour simultaneously in front of a camera connected to the computer. They can see their partner(s) on the screen at the same time as they can show themselves to their partner(s).



1.2. Focus groups

Ethel Quayle

An overview of focus groups. There is now a long history of focus group research which has been seen as “a way of collecting qualitative data, which – essentially – involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson 2004, p. 177). Focus groups can be used to collect data from multiple individuals simultaneously and are often seen as less threatening for many research participants (Barbour 2007). One of the distinct features of focus-group interviews is its group dynamics, which means that the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews (Rabiee 2004). Krueger and Casey (2000) have suggested that this environment is helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions, and thoughts. Focus groups are also an economical, fast, and efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants (Krueger & Casey 2000), thereby potentially increasing the overall number of participants in a given qualitative study. This was an important consideration in the choice of this approach for the project.

While the research question and research design ultimately guide how a focus group is constructed, groups usually last between 1 and 2 hours and consist of between 6 and 12 participants. The rationale for this range of focus group size stems from the goal that focus groups should include enough participants to yield diversity in information provided, yet they should not include too many participants because large groups can create an environment where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences. Krueger (1994)

has endorsed the use of very small focus groups, (mini-focus groups), which include 3 or 4 participants, when participants have specialized knowledge and/or experiences to discuss in the group (Onwuegbuzie & Houston 2009). A focus group is, according to Rabiee (2004) a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being 'focused' on a given topic. Participants in this type of research are, therefore, selected on the criteria that they would have something to say about the topic, are within the age-range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Richardson & Rabiee 2001).

Krueger (1994) suggested that it is ideal for the focus group to have a moderator team. This team typically comprises a moderator and an assistant moderator. The moderator is responsible for facilitating the discussion, prompting members to speak, requesting overly talkative members to let others talk, and encouraging all the members to participate. Usually, the moderator presents the focus group participants with a series of questions. In contrast, the assistant moderator's responsibilities include recording the session (in this instance using a digital recorder) taking notes, creating an environment that facilitates group discussion, such as dealing with latecomers, being sure everyone has a seat and arranging for refreshments (Krueger & Casey 2000).

Focus groups and young people. Research on sensitive topics can benefit from Focus Group environments in which a sense of shared realities, experiences, and support can be promoted through discussion and encouragement from group members as well as facilitators. Lehoux, Poland, and Daudelin (2006) have suggested that Focus Groups are social spaces where individuals' construct their own views by sharing, contesting, and acquiring knowledge (Koro-Ljungberg et al 2010). This

method has been used in research with young people to explore emotional aspects of sexual health (Van Teijlingen et al 2007), experiences of alcohol use (Demant & Jarvinen 2006), sectarianism in Northern Ireland (Leonard 2006), transitions to adulthood and envisaging the future (Brannen & Nilsen 2002), experiences of living in poor urban neighbourhoods (Figueira & McDonough 1998), and the lives of young Muslim men in Scotland (Hopkins 2004). It has been suggested that it is the interaction between participants, rather than between participant and researcher, that generates data, as participants are able to question one another (Kitzinger 1995). The method can also reveal multiple points of view and raise unanticipated issues (Skop 2006).

However, focus groups are not without problems, one of which concerns how and whether participants in a group establish common ground in their discussion, and how individual contributions are added to this. This clearly has implications for the extent to which it is then possible to attribute what is said in the focus group to individual participants, or to whether they are a function of the group's interaction. That is, whether the focus group data can be considered a collection of individual attitudes and opinions, or whether the interaction between participants results in emergent views that are not reducible to any one individual (Hyden & Bulow 2003). As a consequence, it has been argued that the benefit of the focusgroup lies not in the production of individual-level data, but in the production of data through social interaction (Hollander 2004, Kitzinger 1995).

It has also been suggested that focus groups can be empowering and this was of specific interest in relation to the project and its bid to understand the views of young people who might otherwise be seen as potentially marginalised. Overall, it has been argued that the collective experience of focus groups can empower participants to take control of the research process, and discuss issues that are of concern or inter-

est in a language and framework that make sense to them. In doing so, they can also provide the opportunity for participants to contribute to research design and, ultimately, the production of research and data that are more meaningful (Bagnoli & Clarke 2010).

1.3. Framework analysis

Ethel Quayle

An overview of the framework analysis method. The framework method was developed by specialist qualitative researchers working in an independent social research institute in the UK (Ritchie & Spencer 1994). This institute, which is now known as NatCen (www.natcen.ac.uk), has a history of carrying out research using a variety of methods, especially surveys. NatCen's research covers all areas of social policy and is used to understand social behaviour in more detail. The results of the research ultimately contribute towards informing social policy in relation to, for example, health and lifestyle, children, schools and families, political attitudes, crime and justice, and income and welfare (NatCen 2009). This type of research is called 'applied policy research' (Ritchie & Spencer 1994). Over the last 20 years, qualitative researchers working at NatCen have developed the framework process into a robust and comprehensive method that enables the researcher to work systematically through analysis of raw data into concepts that explain, and enhance the understanding, of social behaviour.

The analysis method enables researchers to each take responsibility for different aspects of the analysis process while having the facility to be able to view easily each other's progress for discussion and review. Fur-

thermore, there is an increasing need for transparency in the analysis process so that the reviewers of the research, especially funders, can see how the findings were derived. The framework method has established analytical stages that enable others to review how the final interpretation was developed (Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

An overview of the framework approach. This approach is similar to thematic analysis, and this can be seen particularly in the initial stages when recurring and significant themes are identified. However, analytical frameworks, such as thematic networks and the framework approach, emphasise transparency in data analysis and the links between the stages of the analysis (Braun & Clark 2006, Pope et al 2000, Ritchie & Lewis 2003). At the centre of the analytical process is a series of interconnected stages that enable the researcher to move back and forth across the data until a coherent account emerges (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). This results in the constant refinement of themes that may aid the development of a conceptual framework. Briefly these stages are: data management – becoming familiar with the data (reading and re-reading); identifying initial themes/categories; developing a coding matrix; assigning data to the themes and categories in the coding matrix, and generating descriptive and explanatory accounts (Srivastava & Thomson 2009). These will be further illustrated with respect to our focus group data.

Ensuring quality in qualitative research. Mays and Pope (2000) have argued that Quality in qualitative research can be assessed with the same broad concepts of validity and relevance used for quantitative research, but these need to be operationalised differently to take into account the distinctive goals of qualitative research. Yardley (2000, 2008) has developed criteria to evaluate methodological and analytic rigour in qualitative research which include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance. Within the current study sensitivity to context was achieved by a systematic ap-

praisal of the relevant literature and use of existing interview data from an earlier part of the project which had focused on young peoples' experiences of online exploitation. We were also aware of potential power imbalances within the project and attempted to reduce these by a consultation process with other youth to guide the semi-structured interview. Commitment and rigour was achieved by the use of Framework analysis, which uses a structured and transparent analytical process. We also subjected the thematic framework to independent review from other research teams within the consortium. The research teams involved were all experienced in qualitative research and the multiple perspectives that followed from this was an important part of evaluating the analysis. Coherence and transparency were achieved by constant checking and refinement of the analysis and having the framework tool open to review on a shared, secure platform, accessible to all members of the research team. Impact and importance refers to the contribution of the current research findings to theoretical knowledge and its translation into practice. The focus group analysis is part of a larger research project funded by the EU Safer Internet Programme. It builds on an extensive body of recent research from EU Kids Online and the Online Grooming Project and was initiated because of important gaps within the existing knowledge base relating to problematic experiences of young people in the context of risk taking. The researchers also were mindful of the criteria developed by Chenail (2011) to appraise the quality of qualitative research.

Application of the framework approach. The reasons for using Framework for the analysis was that it is seen as being suitable for analysing cross-sectional descriptive data, therefore enabling different aspects of the phenomena under investigation to be captured (Ritchie & Lewis 2003) in a very transparent way. It is also the case that the stages of the analysis help guide the process from its initial management through to the development of explanatory accounts (Smith & Firth 2011).

1.4. Sample

Ethel Quayle

Twenty-seven focus groups were identified across 7 countries, representing a purposive sample of children coming from groups that have been associated with increased 'vulnerability'. The demographics of the sample can be seen in Table 1 with respect to country, age range, gender, and, where appropriate, known vulnerability. The average number of young people in each group was 7.

Demographic breakdown of Focus Groups

Focus Group	Country	Sex	Age range	Category
1	Denmark	Male and female	15 – 16 yrs	General population
2	Denmark	Male and female	14 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
3	Estonia	Female	14 – 17 yrs	General population
4	Estonia	Male	14 – 16 yrs	General population
5	Estonia	Female	14 yrs	Young people in residential care
6	Estonia	Male	14 – 16 yrs	Young people in residential care
7	Germany	Male and female	17 – 24 yrs	LGBT
8	Germany	Female	16 – 18 yrs	Young people in residential care
9	Germany	Male and female	18 + yrs	Young people with disabilities
10	Italy	Female	14 – 16 yrs	General population
11	Italy	Male	15 – 16 yrs	General population
12	Italy	Female	16 – 19 yrs	LGBT
13	Italy	Male	16 – 19 yrs	LGBT
14	Italy	Female	15 – 16 yrs	Young people in residential care
15	Italy	Male	16 – 18 yrs	Young people in residential care
16	Italy	Female	14 – 16 yrs	Young people with disabilities
17	Italy	Male	15 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
18	Italy	Male	15 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
19	Russia	Female	17 – 20 yrs	LGBT
20	Russia	Female	13 – 17 yrs	Young people in residential care
21	Russia	Male	14 – 18 yrs	Young people in residential care
22	Russia	Female	13 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
23	Russia	Male	14 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
24	Scotland	Male and female	14 – 16 yrs	Young people with disabilities
25	Scotland	Male and female	14 – 18 yrs	Young people with disabilities
26	Scotland	Male and female	14 – 17 yrs	Young people with disabilities
27	Sweden	Male and female	15 – 17 yrs	LGBT

Table 1

Children with the following forms of disabilities took part in focus groups: physical disabilities, global developmental delay, downs syndrome, dyslexia, learning difficulties (dyslexia), ASD, hearing-impairment.

1.5. Procedure

Ethel Quayle

Views about vulnerability in young people were sought from 7 members of the Safer Internet youth panels and these were used, along with the existing literature, to inform the focus group guide. The organisation responsible for this work package (Save the Children, Italy) generated participant information sheets, consent forms and focus group guidelines for facilitators and these were reviewed by the consortium before being submitted for ethical review by Linköping University (Sweden), University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom) and NGO Stellit (Russia). Focus group participants were sought in each country through educational and social networks and modifications were made to the research materials to meet specific needs (for example, simplifying the text to increase accessibility for young people with a developmental disability) and all materials were translated into the first language of each group of young people. The participant sheet included information about the purpose of the study, how the focus groups would be recorded and the data stored, and the rights of the participants, including withdrawal from the study, anonymisation of data, and to whom complaints might be directed.

The focus groups were moderated by at least one person who was familiar to the young people as well as a researcher from each country. Groups took place in contexts frequently used by the young people, such as a separate room in a school, institution or youth facility and effort was made to ensure that the arrangements were comfortable and that refreshments were available. The focus group guide was shown to the young people prior to the actual group and time was given to establish the 'norms' of the group and to make clear that this was not an invitation to make personal disclosures. Young people were also given the names of trusted contact people should the group have triggered any concerns or distress. The focus groups were recorded digitally and on transcription all identifying information was removed. The digital files were erased on translation (into English) and transcription and the files were uploaded onto a secure web-based platform to which only the researchers had access. All shared materials, including the Framework and analysis were also uploaded onto this platform.

1.6. Data analysis

Ethel Quayle

The first stage of data analysis involved the researchers becoming very familiar with the data and developing an overview of the main ideas within the data. This also allowed us to make reference to the aims and objectives of the research and ensure that the data related to these (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). All transcripts were read initially by three people from the University of Edinburgh team, with one researcher (L.H.) taking responsibility for the initial development of a theoretical framework.

Developing a theoretical framework. During the initial stages notes were made by the researchers of the main ideas that occurred within the data and these were collated into themes which could be organised into a conceptual framework. This initial framework was developed with four of the focus groups and then discussed to look at its integrity as well as the theme labels that had been used. These were entered into an excel spread-sheet. The emerging framework was 'quality checked' by being independently rated by two other research teams who were part of the overall research group (Stellit International and Tartu University). The themes and subthemes identified during this and the following stages can be seen in Table 2.

Themes and sub-themes identified across the focus groups

Supra-ordinate theme	Sub-themes
Establishing agency in a virtual world	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The extent to which the Internet is used or available 2. Structured or constructive use of the Internet 3. Reasons for using social networks and chat rooms 4. Selective use of information on the Internet 5. Positive use of webcams
Negotiating online relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Response to unwanted approaches 2. Malicious, exploitative or illegal activity online 3. Offline meetings 4. Sexual exploitation online
Distinguishing between in-group and out-groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying persons of risk 2. Relating risk to the self 3. Differences by sex, age or perceived vulnerability 4. Identity information
Safety online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Instruction and support from others 2. Safety online 3. Responsibility of external parties 4. Location of risk
Delineating between merged realities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peer relationships 2. Online versus the physical world 3. Self-confidence and self-esteem

Table 2

Indexing. In this next stage the theoretical framework was referred back to the transcripts of the focus groups to explore the 'fit'. This involved reading through the data in the transcripts and noting the theme on the draft theoretical framework that this applied to. This was applied to each focus group, using extracts from the data entered into each cell to illustrate the relevance of the theme to the particular group. Some refinements were made to the index to better fit the data and each of these was discussed by the three researchers. During this stage some of the subcategories were moved and others merged. The data were entered into the Excel file so that they could be visualised as a whole. The ability to visualize the data in the charts helped the researchers to understand and interpret the data set as a whole, as data that initially may not have appeared relevant, may subsequently be important (Ritchie & Spencer 2003).

Synthesising the data. The final phase of the framework analysis process involves mapping and interpretation in order to synthesise the data (Ritchie & Spencer 2003). In this phase, the charts were reviewed in order to make sense of the entire data set. This involved checking the summaries on the charts against the original data or comparing the themes and sub-themes with each other. Each of the themes was examined in relation to their constituent sub-themes to help generate explanatory accounts that clarify the data. These were then written up by the researchers for discussion with each other. Following this, the themes were examined in relationship to each other, looking for similarities and differences within them and across the focus groups. This synthesis of the data is described in the following section.

2. Research results across different groups of young people

Ethel Quayle, Linda Hutton, Karen McKenzie

2.1. Establishing agency in the virtual world

Unlike with earlier media, the Internet has brought with it the capacity to shape and create content, and this is of particular relevance to some, but not all, young people. Burwell (2010) has suggested that, “youth culture is becoming synonymous with digital technology and mediated practices like texting, tagging, blogging, social networking, and remixing”. One of the main themes to be identified in the focus groups was ‘Establishing agency in the virtual world’. However, as is seen in this theme, agency not only relates to the ability to create and modify content but also relates to the availability of access, how access is used, the use of particular platforms, such as chat rooms, selective use of information and webcams.

This theme will be explored in relation to five subthemes: Extent to which the Internet is used or available; Structured and/or constructive use of the Internet; Reasons for using social networks and chat sites; Selective use of information on the Internet, and Positive use of webcams. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Subtheme 1: Extent to which the Internet is used or available. The EU Kids Online Report (Livingstone et al 2011) demonstrates that frequent Internet use has become commonplace for many children in Europe, but that for children who still lack access efforts are vital to ensure dig-

ital exclusion does not compound social exclusion. One assumption in our choice of participants for the Focus Groups was that some young people may have different levels of access, in particular those children and young people living in institutions. What became apparent, as with the EU Kids Online data, is that there are differences between countries, as well as between different groups of young people in terms of availability and use of the Internet.

For children living in residential care there was considerable variability in the level of access to the Internet:

“...we don't have Internet here.” (F:RC²)

“If you feel like it you stay on it, otherwise you get off it.” (M:RC)

Variation in access for this group was also seen in terms of before and after moving into residential care:

“When I lived at home, it was at least six hours.” (F:RC)

“When I lived at home I used it 24/7... I was always at my computer.” (F:RC)

However access for some young people in residential care also related to money or actual access to a computer:

“I go to the Internet point.” (M:RC)

“If I have money for this, I can stay online for days.” (M:RC)

² Here and after “F” means female, “M” means male, “AG” means all gender (related to LGBT young people); “LGBT” means focus group with young people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, “DH” means focus group with disabled/ handicapped children, “RC” means focus group with children in residential care, “GP” means focus group with children from general population.

Even within other groups there was variation in levels of Internet use, with some young people describing being online as much as possible, while others clearly setting limits on their use, or had limits set for them:

“Let’s say they allow me to see whatever I like on the Internet, but in any case they’ll never know because I delete everything, and otherwise I use my phone to surf the net... even when I’m at school, I go to the bathroom, go on Wi-Fi and I’ve installed a chat programme on my phone, and I spend the whole day there.” (M:DH)

“...anyway, personally speaking, during classes I always have my mobile in my hand, because when maybe there’s a bit of a gap or free period or maybe someone is being tested orally... after all, I spend 7 hours a day at school, I do need to do something while I’m there.” (F:GP)

“Not for more than 20 minutes or half an hour. I get fed up by then.” (F:RC)

“...if I don’t have anything else planned, an hour or so.” (F:DH)

However, as can be seen by some of the extracts above, it was more usual to spend frequent periods online than not, and that on occasions such access supplanted activities such as school work.

Of interest is that many young people had multiple platforms for accessing the Internet. Livingstone et al. (2011) identified that many of these activities are conducted in “private spaces” and the mobile phone has rapidly moved from a device through which we could make traditional telephone calls to one through which we can communicate through mobile to mobile text messages (SMS) and into a multimodal information and communication technology (ICT) offering users a wide array of

media consumption, production, and publication; information/media delivery; and interpersonal communication options (Lillie, 2011):

“Yes, also at school, because I use the Internet on my mobile phone.” (M:LGBT)

“I’ve had a period of time when I didn’t have a computer – it was broken – so I’ve used iPad and iPhone also.” (F:DH)

Subtheme 2: Structured and/or constructive use of the Internet. Across the groups young people were able to identify different uses of the Internet that allowed them to make possible things that were important to them. This might include sharing of information:

“I also put up the information on this exhibition... we have just exchanged information about where, when and who.” (F:RC)

“By now, everyone is on FB, so groups for each of the classes end up being created. Where you’ll find homework due the next day. Without you needing to call someone...” (F:GP)

“Well, you can exchange information fast, – what do you think and what you want to do and when you are going out for example...” (M:GP)

It can also relate to looking for information that might relate to hobbies and interests or as a way of helping with schoolwork:

“You can ask about anything from a cake recipe to answers you need for your Greek homework.” (M:LGBT)

“Sometimes I do my homework, I mean searches for my homework.” (M:GP)

“Then I go to e-school.” (F:RC)

“No, I don’t use FB that much. I use the Internet for music, and then quite often for my studies. I may not feel like reading a book, so I look for it online and maybe it’s even written a differently there, in a more interesting way, or else maybe just out of my own personal interests.” (M:LGBT)

“I go on ADC Sport Mediaset that has all the international and European sports.” (M:DH)

“I just watch films and things like TV series.” (F:RC)

But one activity frequently referred to was communication with other people:

“...for instance, there’s a friend of mine who had been the last year in America... and once a week we speak.” (M:DH)

“For information search and for communication with other people.” (M:RC)

“To communicate with people, for instance, if they live far away from you.” (F:RC)

“I mean you get in touch with people online and then see if they are the same, you try to get help. You want to see if they are going through the same thing.” (F:LGBT)

It was interesting that across the focus groups it would have been difficult to distinguish differences in how young people used the Internet except for those from LGBT groups.

“GLK is a group created on FB which intends to bring together young

people – gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, all aged under 25. It’s a secret group.” (F:LGBT)

“I don’t know, from time to time you get these questions or there is some kind of call for help on SchülerVZ. I’m on that site and also on StudiVZ. And if I’m in some groups there... I’m actually I several groups there. And if there are any cries for help or things like that, then I usually offer help and provide guidance and information. That’s what I do, for example.” (AG:LGBT)

“To find support, in the sense that you know that you are not alone, there are many of us and if you have any problem, like for instance with your parents, what happened? Also stuff like that. Also then to create – the idea was to create a space with a community feel... I the sense of having a group and identity of our own...” (F:LGBT)

This feeling of the need to both offer and receive support in a safe space can be clearly seen in both sexes. The following extract is from a member of a LGBT who is female, followed by a male from the same group:

“I even got in touch with people outside of S. As in I lived in an area where homosexuality isn’t that normal. Listen, as in you’re looked down upon. And I felt really bad about it like I wanted to kill myself. But then I got in touch with people outside and they hadn’t come out to their parents who were really religious either but to certain friends so you could see a small future in that. As in you saw that it could get better.” (F:LGBT)

“But there was a lot, when I was somewhere around 10-11 when I found out that there was something called homosexual and bisexual. And then I understood that I was myself. And that was generally when these questions materialised. At first I denied it because my mother is very religious so, well I denied it a lot until I couldn’t cope

any longer. I couldn't live a lie. Because everything was a struggle. Felt like shit so then I started admitting to myself and then I started to get in touch online with other people who maybe were in the same position as you and that's when you understood that there were others like me and I'm not alone." (M:LGBT)

Subtheme 3: Reasons for using social networks and chat sites. Livingstone et al. (2011) demonstrated that across Europe 77 per cent of 13-16 year olds have a profile on a social networking site but that while social networking makes it easier to upload content, most children use the Internet for ready-made, mass produced content. Livingstone and Brake (2010) concluded that "Contrary to popular anxieties about isolated loners who stay at home and chat to strangers online, as distinct from the sociable kids with healthy face-to-face social lives, empirical research undermines any sharp line between online and offline, or virtual and face-to-face. Rather, youthful practices are best characterised by the flexible intermixing of multiple forms of communication, with online communication primarily used to sustain local friendships already established offline, rather than to make new contacts with distant strangers... and this applies equally to social networking...". These practices are clearly evidenced across all of the focus groups:

"I, for example, moved to a completely different area, and I was completely alone at my new school, I didn't know anyone. And so, on the weekends I go out with my old friends, but I'm also in contact with them through FB during those few periods of time I can get on it."(F:GP)

"Sometimes, if I don't go to school and see that one of my mates is on FB, I'll ask him for our homework assignment and just ask how the day went." (M:DH)

"For example, instead of wasting money on a call to a friend in H,

you can make a video call and you even get to see each other, no?"
(F:RC)

"...FB is probably the next option I'll use if I don't get an answer on a mobile phone... I'm always checking my mobile; if I'm not getting an answer to my call I go like this and see if the person is on FB."
(M:LGBT)

For some children living away from home this provided access to family or friends with whom contact would not otherwise be made:

"And with my sister because we have been living separately and missing each other: we correspond frequently." (F:DH)

"Yes, I met uncles and relatives who I'd never met in real life and this way I was able to meet them." (F:RC)

"...I have a sister living in Italy... We write to one another on FB, because it's a lot easier. And it's cheaper." (M:GP)

However, social networking did include making contact with people who were not known in the offline world:

"Twitter is a place where you meet a lot of strangers. It's different from FB, where you really just communicate with your friends."
(AG:LGBT)

"For example you can communicate with those people you don't meet face-to-face." (F:RC)

"One reason why Twitter is so appealing is that you can also get to know strangers more personally. You get to know the person at a distance. In other words, at an emotional distance, you get to know the person." (AG:LGBT)

“You can also find new friends from there, not only old ones, but new ones too, for example through FB.” (M:GP)

For some young people social networks provide an important link with people who may be similar to themselves:

“That is, if you aren’t from here, from O, then in a place like my hometown, it was better to be on a social network, for example things like right now, to get to now other gays. There isn’t a youth group there within 100 km. And somehow it was easier over these social networks.” (AG:LGBT)

“And over social networks, you also get to know groups where you can build personal contacts. For example, through Lesarion I learned about a lesbian meetup group before moving here. Because I’m also from a Catholic area. Where it is still really...” (AG:LGBT)

“You feel lonely and you want someone to be with and to have someone to love.” (M:LGBT)

Subtheme 4: Selective use of information on the Internet. Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Ybarra (2010) discuss that, despite admonitions against it, posting of personal information is prevalent amongst young Internet users. Such information may include names, school names, ages, pictures of themselves, or telephone numbers (Wolak et al 2006). Livingstone et al. (2011) suggest that “It seems, in sum, to be a fairly common practice for children to post identifying information of some kind or other on their SNS profile. Some information is routinely asked for by sites (e.g. a clear photo) or a correct age, although not all children provide this. Some is not asked for but is still provided by a minority of children (e.g. phone number)”. As can be seen in the following, the majority of young people in the focus groups demonstrated a high level of awareness about potential problems in making personal information

available:

“I don’t have my phone number on FB, nor email address.”(F:GP)

“...the photo and info page can be seen only by friends with mutual friends and then all the rest can only be seen by friends.” (F:GP)

“...accept only people I know, because I don’t want people I don’t know to be able to look at my page.” (M:DH)

“In my profile I only stated the year of birth and the city I live in.” (F:RC)

However, not all young people felt the same. The next two extracts are from males:

“Everyone can see my profile. I don’t really care.” (F:RC)

“I have most of my personal details there. I don’t much like to put strange stuff or invent stuff.” (M:LGBT)

There was also considerable ambivalence about putting up images, especially ones that might be thought to be sexual:

“At first I wasn’t allowed to put up a photo so there was nothing, but now that I’m 15 it’s been a couple of years that...” (F:GP)

“I have a facial shot and nothing more... but precisely on Cruiser you can have a photo album with a lot of pictures.” (M:LGBT)

“Yes, I would understand in season and time for you to do it like if you’re on the beach but if you’re like sitting in your bedroom wearing nothing but shorts or just your underwear, take a picture and just like pose then it’s just attention, attention, give me attention.” (M:LGBT)

“This exactly attracts these perverts, that someone puts her bosom in the Internet, that from here and there the décolletage is so much visible, and then comes some sort of strange questions.” (F:GP)

“...they were having some fun with it together with some friends. It was in a locker room, and they had taken pictures of them and that kind of thing, where they were naked. And you could see their bare asses. And there was also one where they had their hands over their groin and that sort of thing. That might have been a little over the line. But it was very funny” (M:GP)

This ambivalence was seen in both sexes and there were several discussions of what might happen to both males and females in relation to posting photographs. The following comes from a female participant:

“...there was once a boy who also did send some kind of picture to someone and then the picture was used against him and he started to demand some things and he wasn't able to turn to anyone and then he killed himself.” (F:GP)

Similarly from a male living in a boarding school:

“And the game was about the ones who lost – they were supposed to kiss. But we were sure that we were going to win, so the girls would have to kiss and we really wanted to see that. But then we lost. So we had to kiss. And pictures were taken – and then they were posted on FB. And then the talk started about how we were gay and that sort of thing. And how they had no idea about us. So then we had to explain that we weren't – but they still think that we are.” (M:RC)

However, on some occasions there was more selective exposure of personal information, and this was largely seen in the LGBT groups. The first extract is from a female participant and the second from a male:

“If I was like going to talk about my sexual preferences, as in I'm bisexual, I do that on the chat, because both my sister and my brother have me on FB, and my dad and my stepmum, and not one of them knows about it.” (F:LGBT)

“Before I had my dad and stepmum on FB then and then it felt like I couldn't be who I was like on FB. So I blocked them and since then I have been much more open...” (M:LGBT)

“The point is that before I hadn't given my sexual preference and it was only later that I decided to put it on my page, also for psychological reasons, because I'm not the least bit ashamed of it...” (M:LGBT)

Subtheme 5: Positive use of webcams. For a number of young people web cams were seen to be of benefit, and most often used to communicate with people who were friends or family:

“I have one incorporated in my mobile, and then there's a friend of mine, seeing as we hardly ever get to see each other... and then Skype when my girlfriend was in England.” (M:DH)

“I have friends in Spain and this way we see each other very often.” (F:GP)

“You can get the Skype program and make phone calls.” (F:DH)

For some young people, living away from families and friends, or having specific disabilities made this all the more important:

“I use it for chatting with classmates; many of them are now in hospital to have a medical operation, so we have video talks with them.” (F:DH)

“Skype is also good... the fact that you’ve been here two years but can see your family who is far away.” (M:RC)

“I mostly use it for my family who are not living in D.” (F:DH)

“Yes... especially when deaf – I mean we talk a lot with sign language.” (F:DH)

One additional use was associated with recreational activities:

“At night before starting the CounterStrike game I get into a room specially furnished for this activity: a fridge, a PC desk, a notebook and a very convenient chair. Feet on table, I open the fridge and take from it everything I will need. Then, via Skype with a webcam on, the ten of us friends together discuss the game, its strategy, tactics etc. This is how I use the camera.” (M:RC)

A final use related to issues of safety and the ability to know who it is you are talking to:

“I was on Cruiser and had chatted with a guy like for ages and, yeah, we decided that we should meet but he wanted to see me on the webcam before and I can understand that as like a safety thing.” (M:LGBT)

“I also think it’s simply important because of intonation. There are just a lot of things you could have meant very differently.” (AG: LGBT)

”Yes, but I have seen her when she has put up a web or then I have seen her this way that I know she is the one she claims to be. I know exactly.” (M:GP)

2.2. Negotiating online relationships

A number of aspects of the online world afford opportunities for experimenting with identity that are not as readily available in the physical world, such as anonymity, asynchronicity, and the use of avatars. It is argued that engaging in a virtual environment, where the social cues and personal characteristics of ourselves and others are not immediately apparent, provides opportunities for individuals to experiment with how they present themselves and respond to others (Talamo & Ligorio 2001) i.e. negotiating online relationships. One of the main themes that resonated with the majority of young people was that engaging in online activity required the young person to negotiate a range of online relationships.

This theme manifested in a number of ways, which are represented by the following sub-themes: Response to unwanted approaches (both proactive and passive); Malicious, exploitative or illegal activity online; Approaches made to others; Offline meetings, and Sexual exploration online.

Subtheme 1: Response to unwanted approaches (proactive and passive). Early research suggested that having the opportunity to experiment with identity in an online environment can have both psychological and physical benefits (McKenna & Bargh 1998, Vebrugge 1983). It does, however, require the young person to manage and respond to a range of unwanted approaches. This can range from passive responses such as ignoring the approach to more proactive responses such as the young person taking control of the interaction for his/her own amusement.

For some young people, the approach, while unwelcome, was not perceived as particularly troublesome and the young person would tend to respond passively, by ignoring or not responding to it:

“But I do not pay attention to this.” (M:RC)

“If someone doesn’t know me, then I just delete them or ignore them.” (M:DH)

For many young people, their responses were immediate, reactive and pragmatic and most commonly took the form of ‘blocking’ or deleting the person making the approach or refusing to ‘add’ them in the first place:

“Block him, don’t chat with him anymore, the same could happen also with someone else, delete anyone you don’t know.” (F:RC)

“I usually get a request, sort of, add me to your friends list, please. I mean that someone wants to become my friend. Usually I turn such offers down.” (M:DH)

“Well, if someone you don’t know contacts you, don’t take the candy – it’s the same as in real life.” (M:GP)

A number of young people across the focus groups indicated that they perceived themselves to have an active part in negotiating online relationships and, in some cases, would exert control by doing things for fun or continuing the exchange under their own terms:

“Well, you can... I mean, if they request friendship because they’re thinking, ‘Hey, she’s hot’, or ‘He looks cute’ or that kind of thing. Then it’s like – you can choose for yourself whether or not you’re going to accept. So it’s not as though you’re sitting there, thinking, ‘No, I shouldn’t post that’, or that kind of thing. Because you can choose

for yourself whether or not you want to be friends with them.” (F:GP)

“If strangers talk to me, then I say, ‘I’m not on. Call me later’, or something – something for fun. Then they don’t write to me anymore. With the strangers I don’t know.” (M:DH)

“I have... They first write to me, and if I see that this is a normal person, not some sort of freak, that the communication develops normally, I add him/her. If not – I send him/her to hell.” (M:DH)

While the range of reactions were broadly consistent across all of the focus groups, those young people from the LGBT group expressed responses which indicated more active responses in terms of continuing the interaction.

Here the group member describes the way in which she sustained the interaction by continuing to respond over a period of months:

“What’s weird is like there are always 50-year-old men who like ‘Hi cutie’, like that. ‘Do you want some fun and do something’, then you write ‘Well, no, sorry period’. And then you send and then he writes ‘Where do you live?’ and then obviously you write back like none of your business. And then like a little while goes by a while like a month or so when you don’t hear anything from anybody and then there are like three different messages from the same person and then it ends up with them like stalking you online and asks and then and sends images and that all the time. I had that with a 51-year-old man who stalked me all the time for a week he wrote like 500 messages in total to me.” (F:LGBT)

Similarly another member of this group sustains the interaction and negotiates the conditions under which he will continue to do so:

“And, um, I said to him several times that I wouldn’t meet him and I wouldn’t have sex with him but I can talk but if he sends more of those pictures I will report it and say that it’s...” (M:LGBT)

Here the group member exerted his control over the interaction in order to have fun at the expense of the other individual:

“...then they usually ”depend on what you’re looking for” and then they say what they want then you say that’s what you are and then you can sit and write with them for like ages, I was yanking this guy’s chain for like three hours with A then finally he said, so I sent this picture, I found a picture on Google of two pee-wees and then it says there under “forlorn cam” or something and then I sent those and he thought it was for real and then he wrote: “OK, I’m sitting here at the office wanking over your pictures” and I just like OK, no it’s time to stop so I just said that I’m a 16 year old guy have fun wanking.” (M:LGBT)

This contrasts with the responses of most other group members who indicate that they would terminate contact immediately or shortly after it is initiated:

“That there was this guy who said he had a photographic studio and so he added me on, but when he asked if I was Interested I said no and that was that. I didn’t chat with him anymore and deleted him.” (F:GP)

“...first I’d take him off and then if necessary take myself off.” (M:RC)

“I also see every day, that someone was added again [to her account], but then it is right away Delete, Block. And then I do not pay attention who it is. As soon as there is some strange and English

based account, then I do not accept it. Once I did, but then it was – Hi, babe and ... “ (F:GP)

The young people from the LGBT group also appeared to be more proactive in reporting the individual than many of the other groups.

These group members were clear that they could and should report those making unwanted approaches when their own attempts to resolve the situation, by blocking the person, are unsuccessful:

“He didn’t stop writing, he wrote like another twelve messages and sent like another fourteen pictures and then finally I spoke to one of them on QX you know then they said block him and we will deal with the problem. That’s like how you can resolve it.” (M:LGBT)

“The first thing you tend to do is block the person if you notice that he creates a new account or goes through a friend or something you block the individual or you report it straight away.” (F:LGBT)

“Yes, like, block and report, block and report.” (F:LGBT)

Whereas these group members responded by reporting the unwanted approaches to the police:

“...that’s when I noticed that it was an older man who lay masturbating on his bed. So I removed him from MSN and all and then afterwards I believe I received 18 pictures in total of his genitals, on Cruiser. So I rang the police and reported him and received a good sum for it.” (M:LGBT)

“When I reported this old man then I had, theen, I knew that, because, then I had saved the pictures on my computer so then I could show them to the police, so yes, that can be a good thing.” (M:LGBT)

Reporting to external authorities was much less common amongst the other young people in the other focus groups and was only reported as a strategy by one individual.

Subtheme 2: Approaches made to others. As well as negotiating unwanted relationships a number of the focus group members described the ways in which they took an active role in approaching others. This appeared to range from the young person initiating the approach to others to the more responsive approach of building on previous interactions to suggest a change in the way the interaction progressed.

Here a number of focus group members describe the more active approach:

“I search through my friends’ pages and look for nice girls they have on the friends list, and I offer friendship to them. If she agrees, we start communicating. Sometimes people from other places request friendship, and if I see that the girl is nice then...” (M:RC)

“Well, I mean trying to fix a date with a girl and seeing what will happen.” (M:DH)

Others may respond more cautiously in approaching others, first determining if the other person seems genuine or not:

“At first I say I live here and then if I see that person is not taking the piss... At first I can even go for it and just say normal things. I don’t know, it depends on what kind of person it is...” (M:DH)

“Yes, [when talking with a girl] I don’t become familiar straight away. It’s difficult though.” (M:DH)

“First you talk, I wrote to her and asked ‘should we meet up?’” (M:RC)

In another case, the approach was made in order to make a fool of others:

“I did when I used to go on Messenger a lot! When I was with my friends at the other home we’d first go on Badoo where we had a fake profile with lots of fake photos, we’d start fooling around with the guys and in the end we’d give them Messenger contact details and we’d turn on the web cam. And we’d have a laugh, taking the piss out of them!” (F:RC)

These approaches may also be for the purpose of actively seeking support from others who were thought to be like the young person:

“I mean you get in touch with people online then and see if they are the same, you try to get help you want to see if they are going through the same thing.” (F:LGBT)

There appeared to be differences between the sexes in the ways in which the young people approached others online. The males were more likely to adopt direct approaches than the females and to have the aim of establishing contact with girls. By contrast the girls were overall less likely to report that they initiated approaches to others and, when they did, it appeared to be for either the purposes of gaining support from someone who they considered would be like them or in an insincere way in order to have a laugh at the expense of others.

Subtheme 3: Offline meetings. On some occasions, the online approaches resulted in offline meetings. The results of these offline meetings were mixed. A number of young people described disappointing and negative consequences, including the person not living up to his/her online persona in reality and the young person experiencing aggression.

“Her avatar was really beautiful and she wrote a lot about herself. But when I came to a date with her I found a girl from our class, fat and ugly, 90 kg of weight. I simply passed by without talking to her, I was afraid of her since the 2nd grade.” (M:RC)

“You get what you want and are off... I mean one sexual act, and then everyone goes ones way. I often have my relations with girls in this way. Once a girl froze onto me, and I even got beaten.” (M:RC)

“Yes but they can follow you, they can like follow if you say that you know that I live there, so they can persecute you all the way home and then there things can happen.” (F:LGBT)

For others the outcome of the offline meeting was positive, particularly if time had been spent in getting to know the person online:

“We ask each other: How are you? What do you do? Something interesting? What places do you visit? We tell each other about our hobbies and interests, sometimes we even meet. First we chat online, then go somewhere together, if our interests match: just for a walk or to a music concert.” (F:RC)

“Yes, I can remember one such occasion: I met him online and I was pretty wary about this acquaintance, because I normally have a rather high psychological threshold against strangers. We started from phone conversations, than he, living in another city, came over to S. for some business of his own and we arranged for a meeting, and all went as we had planned.” (F:DH)

“Well, I can’t mark them as negative; perhaps at first I went through some sort of an adaptation period because the person is totally new to you and you have never seen him before; but then, in half an hour

or so, it all becomes clear and smooth, you are sitting and chatting with him quite normally.” (F:DH)

Although taking time to get to know someone online did not guarantee that they would not differ in reality from their online persona:

“It’s happened to me... as in on the Cruiser-site I was supposed to meet someone we had like chatted, maybe we had talked for like three months, and then like, it was like the first person I was supposed to meet via the Internet and I had got the mobile number and we had texted for a really long time and then we were, like, going to meet at this place. But I was so nervous that I went with a friend, and then I just went past to check who they were and only then I noticed that it was an older guy who stood at that place, because he said he stood there now, so I just went past and then I just texted that I can’t and then I just went back home... because I was... as in you get paranoid somehow I don’t know what it was.” (M:LGBT)

Many young people advocated being accompanied by someone else to the first meeting or ensuring the meeting was in a public place, because of safety concerns. This appeared to be equally applicable for both males and females in the focus group:

“Don’t go out with someone who you’re seeing for the first time, but always with a friend.” (DH)

“I just thought about how I have a friend, you know? She found a boyfriend – a Net-boyfriend – but she didn’t go to meet him alone. She also took a girlfriend along in order to be safe.” (F:DH)

“Well, I mean if you know or that it is someone with a fake account as in, when eventually you meet, as in I don’t understand how, as in

are they as in then you can see that he was a fake and you can just leave if you meet in a public place.” (F:LGBT)

“Then you always take a friend with you, when you are going to meet with someone.” (M:GP)

Subtheme 4: Sexual exploration online. A few of the focus groups used the online environment to explore their sexual identity. This could be through discussing sex with peers and, particularly for males, asking questions about sex or by using erotic writing or images.

Here the males use the online environment to both discuss sex with other males and to ask females questions about sex:

“We discuss sex all the time we are chatting. What concerns a girl – of course, you won’t write such things to her in the first session. It must begin with ordinary things, and only later, step by step, you will approach this topic and cautiously find out what you are interested in. If she can see that you are not a sucker, she replies and you can carry on with her. Then, in the course of the conversation you sort of... hop!.. and ask her this question, and she – hop! – answers, and you go on talking. We do not get stuck on this subject. She simply tells this to you, and the conversation continues.” (M:RC)

“Sometimes I do it with my friend: we go online and start putting these questions to the girl together. We try to contact girls we already know for a long time. If you start asking a girl such things right away, this looks sort of shabbily.” (M:RC)

One young male differentiated between the types of discussions he would have about sex with males compared to females:

“I conversely always ask my friends and answer their like questions,

sort of, ‘Did she give you a fuck?’ I also ask girls: ‘Who are you meeting now? Did you give him a fuck?’, etc. But usually such conversations I have with male friends. For instance: ‘Was she acting up?’” (M:RC)

While this young woman from one LGBT focus group used an online forum to gain more information about her sexuality and potential sexual partners:

“I was like 15 years old and I wanted get to know... because I didn’t know yet about ARCI, this place... but I didn’t want to go to bed with a 50-something year old, girls. It was crazy!” (F:LGBT)

For others in the LGBT groups, the focus appeared to be more on using the Internet to establish a relationship:

“As in I am a member of a site called Mylog, a site where you can have online boy and girlfriends if you want to. And I have a lot there.” (F:LGBT)

“You feel lonely and you want someone to be with and to have someone to love.” (M:LGBT)

This was also true for a disabled member of one focus group:

“Sometimes dating services. I’m also on Handicap-Love almost every day.” (M:DH)

The online environment was also used to explore sexuality through erotic writing and images:

“Well, I blog about my short sex stories so to me it’s just wonderful.” (F:LGBT)

“In the sense that I just let myself go, writing whatever came into my head and posted lots of photos, and then I got to know someone through the Internet and we had already exchanged photos and... then, so I ended it and now I just use FB, as a site...” (M:LGBT)

“I could give you an example. I knew this guy. I’d already known him for a long time and then, I’ll put it this way, I watched him over the camera, and we also exchanged messages that were a bit more erotic, for example, sharing our fantasies with each other. I must say it was really hot – to be frank.” (AG:LGBT)

There were also concerns about the dangers of portraying sex online because it communicated a false picture of sex and relationships:

“I guess that it comes from this, that well there is a teenage boy, and of course he also has some sort of sexual needs. When he sees the naked breast of someone, if there is a picture, and I think that with this picture the boy is seduced, he starts to communicate, he communicates, communicates and then... and then there is some sort of hairy man behind it (laughter)... not that I have been in this situation, but I tell you that...” (M:GP)

“This is rather fake and from this you can have a very wrong understanding of the sex and love act.” (M:GP)

“Exactly, this also influences, especially when the children watch it, then he sees that?... afterwards it is hard to convince yourself otherwise.” (M:GP)

The use of the online environment to explore sexuality was primarily restricted to males and members of the LGBT focus groups. Heterosexual females did not report explicitly exploring sexuality online in the same way as either males or females who were lesbian. While the opportunity

to explore sexuality online was generally perceived as positive by those who used the Internet in this way, there was also concern expressed by a group of teenage boys that it could create an impression of sex and relationships that was fake and unrealistic.

Subtheme 5: Malicious, exploitative or illegal activity online. While many focus group members discussed the ways in which they had experienced negative consequences from engaging in an online environment, a few also described their own activities which could be viewed as harmful or exploitative to others or illegal. These ranged from hacking into the accounts of people who were known to them to trying to obtain money from others.

There appeared to be differences in the type of behaviour engaged in according to sex. Females appeared more likely to describe activities which were intended to cause rifts in relationships:

“I have been going to T. Rate.ee account sometimes... Then I wrote others some dirty things and thanks to this T. had a fall out with one girl.” (F:RC)

“Well, it was managed by me and two other friends and we’d take turns having a laugh, we got this girl’s boyfriend involved, because she was cheating on him in every possible way, with photos from a friend of hers and set up this wall and basically it turned out that she was up to some really bad stuff. We had a good laugh.” (F:LGBT)

Or to make fun of others:

“And also, like H, to take the piss. I’d set up profiles on Yahoo or on Messenger as though I were a man, a good-looking guy and I’d add on girls to take the piss out of them. I’d ask them for photos and then when I’d turn on my web cam I’d get my brother, who’s chubby, to get

in front of it!! hehehe People took it badly!” (F:RC)

“Well, I, for example, would make appointments to meet but then I’d never show. Then I’d go back on the Internet and get all angry telling the guy that I had gone and didn’t see him there, while in fact none of it was true! I left, I didn’t see you there!” (F:RC)

“I had one [a fake account] just in order to be able to take the mickey out of a girl. It was actually good fun.” (F:LGBT)

In contrast, the males were more likely to engage in different types of activity. Such as trying to cheat others out of money:

“For instance, you are chatting in ICQ and your balance is minus 4 roubles, while at minus 5 roubles Internet connection is denied, so you knock on a girl and start talking her ears off, sort of, I love you, let us go out together, please put some money on my account. She does and you are safely online again.” (M:RC)

“Well, if I do not like the newcomer I try to cheat him/her and this is it... To mooch money from him/her, to make the person put the money in my mobile account.” (M:RC)

Exploiting women sexually was also mentioned:

“He always met girls online for one-night sex; after that he simply deleted these contacts from the list, while girls would keep writing to him in the sense “What a motherfucker you are!” That is how he did it: he would have sex and then disappear.” (M:RC)

“I try to cheat girls... Well, I mean trying to fix a date with a girl and seeing what will happen.” (M:DH)

In addition, some young people admitted to illegal activities:

“Yes, I see the matches online, or streaming, or illegal CDs.” (M:DH)

“On MSN, FB, everything out there... then I go around and see what there is, I create disasters, its fun.” (M:DH)

2.3. Distinguishing between in-group and out-group

One theme which quickly emerged from the analysis was a form of in-group/out-group differentiation, primarily when considering risk of harm. According to self-categorization theory (Turner et al 1987) a persons’ definition of similarities and differences to others in relation to the self are determined by processes of self-categorisation, either in terms of personal attributes (personal identity) or via one of their group memberships (social identity). Social identity theory states that individuals define themselves in terms of their group memberships and seek to maintain a positive identity through association with positively valued groups and through comparisons with other groups (Tajfel 1982). People are assumed to strive for a positive identity; to the extent that they evaluate themselves in terms of their category memberships, this need is expressed through favourable comparisons of relevant in-groups versus relevant out-groups (Tajfel & Turner 1979).

The young people involved in the focus groups showed some tendency to distance themselves from online risk in the sense that it was outside of

their current circumstances in terms of age; sex; particular vulnerabilities; location; and nationality. Therefore, while the potential for harm to occur in relation to Internet use was acknowledged, this was very much located as being external to the young people; i.e. with the out-group. Online behaviour as a facet of positive identity formation was also evident, thus contributing to the concept of in-group membership. On the whole the young people involved in the focus groups portrayed themselves – and those like them – as ‘normal’ people who use the Internet for constructive purposes, while those alien to them in some way are the ones with malicious intent who may cause harm to others. In terms of risk, this notion of ‘stranger danger’ is one which is reflected in real-world situations where there is a tendency to perceive those unknown to use as being more likely to harm us than friends or family members.

Within this theme, four subthemes were therefore considered: Identifying persons of risk; Relating risk to the self; Differences by sex, age, or perceived vulnerability; and Identity formation.

Subtheme 1: Identifying persons of risk. In considering persons who may be at risk of causing harm, in a little over half of the focus groups the young people involved equated the sense of ‘other’ in this particular context to those who were literally foreign to them, i.e. from different countries or, in one case, a different area of the same city. It is of interest to note that none of the five LGBT groups identified foreign nationals as persons of risk:

“...a would-be Englishman, with an English nickname.” (M:RC)

“I mean Turks and so on, Albanians, Arabs.” (F:RC)

“All sorts of people are on it, all louts asking who knows what... from Ostia and Magliana [neighbourhoods locations in Rome’s most extreme outskirts] those types.” (M:DH)

“And [saying no to friendship requests from] people from Africa and all kinds of other countries].” (F:GP)

“I have also been contacted by a stranger – not here from Denmark but from a different country.” (F:DH)

“I get those Turkish guys who write to me in Arabic!” (F:DH)

However in at least one case a young person recognised that this concept of ‘the other as foreigner’ may simply be a form of negative stereotyping, although this does not detract from the notion of in-group/out-group differentiation:

“I think that it is like this kind of stereotype too, my opinion, that those paedophiles and such are most common in Turkey.” (M:GP)

A number of those involved in the focus groups, primarily females, spoke of a more subliminal approach to identifying those of risk, with this sometimes manifesting as a simple instinct that something was not ‘quite right’:

“There was this guy I’d chatted to... for like two months and we were going to meet... But then I got, like, paranoid and asked a load of things then it turned out that it was a fake account.” (M:LGBT)

In the majority of these cases, however, it was identifying behaviour as beyond the boundaries of what was considered to be normal online etiquette within that individuals’ experience that would alert the young person to potential risk:

“Once I happened to be talking to a girl and she asked me to send her a photo. She said “I want to see what kind of body you have” and I said “but why do you care?!” and then I understood that it was a

guy!” (F:RC)

“You can really tell by the talk, how is he speaking, if he has some sort of strange talk then of course he is not the one you think he is.” (F:GP)

“If a person is not willing to communicate after he’s added me to the list.. I usually filter out such contacts.” (F:RC)

“Because he began to... importune people, he became intrusive.” (F:RC)

“...I had never flirted that much and that quickly and like then it felt like it couldn’t be right what he’s saying.” (M:LGBT)

In relation to the notion of relating odd behaviour to risk, some took this further in the sense that those identified as belonging to that particular out-group were considered as being mentally deficient in some way. Of the four focus groups where this attitude was evident three were conducted in Russia, and the participants of three were resident in some form of institution:

“...this person who is behind the computer should go to the psychologist.” (F:RC)

“He was sort of strange or not very adequate... You ask him a question and he, sort of, doesn’t understand.” (M:DH)

“He suggested a meeting and turned out to be a maniac. While chatting online he will never tell you he is a maniac.” (F:RC)

Although mentioned by two females (one LGBT and the other from a residential care), homosexual males from two of the four LGBT focus

groups cited age difference as a potential factor in identifying persons of risk:

“...this guy who he claimed to be... my age and started... telling things, saying things I know I would never have said.” (M:LGBT)

“Over 40. That means older men who write to young men. Who kid around with you, who ask you if you want to earn some money, if you want to meet up with them.” (AG:LGBT)

The female from the residential care who mentioned age difference appeared to take an interesting approach to risk:

“Men between their 30s and 50s would contact me saying things like: ‘Hi, how are you? You’re beautiful! How old are you? Would you like to meet up?’ I made an appointment with one of them at [the train] station; I had even gotten his number and phoned him from an anonymous number to tell him that I had already left! That guy had really showed up... but he had other intentions.” (F:RC)

In one of the LGBT focus groups, one male and one female each mentioned that they discussed unknown persons with friends to assess their behaviour:

“...the same person is in touch with several friends then we’ll sit and discuss what that person has said or tried to do.” (M:LGBT)

“...then I usually ask [my friends] who that person is or ‘have you been in touch with this person’...” (F:LGBT)

For two of the female focus group participants, one of whom was disabled and the other from the ‘General Population’ group, risk was at least in part related to strangers:

“I try to avoid meeting new people online, unless I know them in real life... because it may be some sort of cheating which is no good at all.” (F:DH)

“...when some unfamiliar person just randomly adds you... then it is already weird, that why he/she should add you just randomly, that then you should use your logical thinking and get it, that on the street you are also not going to go with some unfamiliar person.” (M:GP)

Two different female participants (again, one each from the Disabled and General Population groups), however, felt differently as they stated that not all strangers one met on the Internet were of risk:

“I think this is already pushed up a little too much. When one strange person, well I do not know, starts speaking with me during the period of three years, and this only for the reason of boredom, then well, I do not know. This should not always be the case that, oh, he is now a pervert for sure... all have it the same, that when he is just looking at your pictures, he kind of wants to meet with you, well I do not know, to know about your hobbies and ask about everything else, then you definitely need to think that he is a pervert for sure, that he is not for sure who he is. This is really stupid that the ghost is seen where it isn't.” (F:GP)

“First he made friends with me, and then, one after the other, with my pals. They also chatted with him, and it all went quite nicely because he only wanted to socialize; he wasn't any of those criminals, he was just companionable... Today we have good relations with him.” (F:DH)

Subtheme 2: Relating risk to the self. In almost two-thirds of the focus groups there was at least some tendency to externalise the possibility of harm through Internet use, by assigning probabilities of risk to either an out-group or a ‘different version’ of the self. The most predominant example of this, evident in nine of the sixteen focus groups where this tendency was identified, is where the individual related to either those younger than them or to a younger version of their self. However, these younger selves were generally not so far in the past as, for example, in the first quotation where the ‘earlier’ referred to is one year previously:

“And now, I don't accept anyone I don't know by name. While maybe earlier on I used to.” (F:GP)

“I believe that I am not at risk, because I am already 17... Boys aged 12 or so are at risk.” (M:RC)

“Yes, the problems are greatest for those really young kids like 12-13 year olds.” (F:LGBT)

“Junior children who can bear no responsibility and understand nothing. At the age of up to 13” (F:RC)

“I would try to limit a kid's access to the Internet, this is not wise. I've been online since I was 15 years old and I believe that earlier that age is not recommended.” (F:DH)

“Girls aged between 13 and 16 [are most at risk].” (M:DH)

“We have also gotten older and wiser. And I mean – we know what can happen if you talk together with someone who is 85 who asks if you want to come home with him and have some candy (laughs). Or meet in some back alley or another or that kind of thing. So you know what happens.” (F:LGBT)

“In the past, when I was younger and had more spare time I looked for new contacts and added people to my list, sometimes they were sheer strangers.” (F:LGBT)

Equally predominant, however, with again participants from nine of the sixteen focus groups raising this issue, was a sense of being either mentally stronger or simply more intelligent (or less gullible) than those who were most likely at risk of harm on the Internet:

“You should be very gentle-spirited, when you need the psychologist because of this kind of obscenity. Maybe I’m this kind of tough rock myself, but it doesn’t affect me at all.” (F:RC)

“...I’m smart enough to be able to understand whether it’s really a regular girl or a good for nothing in reality.” (M:DH)

“I met him online and I was pretty wary about this acquaintance, because I normally have a rather high psychological threshold against strangers.” (F:GP)

“If someone is too trustful then he/she is more vulnerable, if he/she is cautious and careful, then his/her chances of being harmed are considerably smaller.” (F:DH)

“...having a weak character is definitely decisive.” (AG:LGBT)

“People with mental health problems [are most at risk].” (F:LGBT)

“Childish, credulous, easily suggestible persons [are most at risk].” (F:LGBT)

It was also evident that some males had a tendency to project risk on to females in the belief that their sex alone put them at a higher risk of harm on the Internet:

“...but a guy also is running less of a risk when he goes out with a girl because – not because a woman doesn’t know how to defend herself, but she’ll find it harder, a bit from a physical point of view as... like, for example, if I have bad intentions and I attack a girl that girl will have more difficulties because I am physically stronger.” (M:DH)

“But when we’re talking about siblings, then I think a little, that... because when you see your sister, for example, my sister just turned 13. Or 14. Yeah, 14, I think. And then you can see yourself. I mean, you can see how that’s the way you were once – when you see their status updates. And how they write a lot and that kind of thing.” (M:GP)

“Because they are always after the girls, it’s rare that they go for boys. I mean I’ve never found a gay who’s out there to try and rape you - it would be a really difficult thing.” (M:GP)

In two cases from the residential care group, one male and one female stated that they felt that young people who lived in different environments to themselves were more at risk; this concept of relating location to risk will be covered in greater depth in considering the section ‘Safety Online’:

“Children from care institutions are more attentive and cautious; they do not like meeting unknown people, cause anything may happen: you can bump into a cop etc., I mean if you are on the run. Children in normal families have nothing to fear, at least they think so, and when some mister calls them “Go with me” they go, that is it.” (M:RC)

“...particularly orphans or those from low-income families [will] expose themselves to all this [risk].” (F:RC)

Subtheme 3: Differences by sex, age, or perceived vulnerability. Along with externalising risk to those of different ages; sexes; etc. many of the young people involved in the focus groups aligned potential for exposure to risk with certain subsections of society more than others. In over half of the focus groups vulnerability to risk was related to the sex of the individual, with the majority of both males and female participants appearing to believe that females were most at risk. The rationale behind this would seem to be that females are perceived as physically and emotionally more vulnerable than males:

“Yes, but a guy also is running less of a risk when he goes out with a girl because – not because a woman doesn’t know how to defend herself, but she’ll find it harder, a bit from a physical point of view as... like, for example, if I have bad intentions and I attack a girl that girl will have more difficulties because I am physically stronger.” (M:DH)

“It seems to me that girls are more vulnerable. Boys are less open to it, but still some danger is there.” (M:RC)

“I believe girls are more vulnerable. At the same time boys, in my view, use some other approach to this problem and are less vulnerable.” (F:DH)

“I think that girls are [most at risk], because they are naturally more naïve and credulous.” (F:DH)

“I also think it is teenage girls in most cases aged 14 to 16, because after 16 years old one’s brains begin to work properly, or maybe a girl has already gained some experience of dealing with other people. Why girls? If we are talking about sexual identity, girls are more trusting and perhaps more dreamy, romantic; for them love is always something linked to beauty and loveliness. On the other hand

boys pay more attention to physical contact. That is why girls are more at risk.” (F:DH)

In some cases, males were also considered to be at less risk than females simply because they were less likely to be targeted by others online, although the LGBT female in the first quotation below felt that sexual orientation may have some influence on this:

“But I don’t think a homosexual lesbian teenager gets as many old men on her or, then, older ladies, but if you’re straight then there are many more teenage girls who get old guys after them.” (F:LGBT)

“...there are many more teenage girls who get old guys after them but I don’t think there are many teenage guys who get older women after them.” (F:LGBT)

“Well it depends on the person, but boy does not attract boy in the Internet so much.” (M:GP)

“Because they are always after the girls, it’s rare that they go for boys. I mean I’ve never found a gay who’s out there to try and rape you - it would be a really difficult thing.” (M:GP)

In addition, it was proposed in two focus groups that males were more likely to play games with the potential to communicate with other contemporaneously; therefore, the scope for non-intimate interactions with strangers via the Internet was much greater than it was for females:

“Sometimes [girls play games], but not this way that you sit there all the time and play.” (F:RC)

“Well, in the games, you always find someone [unfamiliar boys].” (M:RC)

In a little over one-third of the focus groups participants also appeared to believe that both attitudes and behaviour were determined by sex, either in the way individuals acted towards others or in the way one sex treated the other:

“...for example with the girl you talk this way... with boys you talk to one another like [differently].” (M:RC)

“It’s more like something men would do... adding a girl because she’s beautiful and writing to her.” (F:GP)

“With men I’m much more mistrustful than with a girl.” (F:LGBT)

“With girls it is like... more complicated to speak with, it all depends... they have all sorts of moods and other one hundred troubles... but with boys it is kind of easy, there is no ‘around the corner’ talk, there is just that you say that it is it, and that’s it.” (F:GP)

“If it’s a girl, first you check out her looks, and whether you know him or not if it’s a guy.” (M:GP)

In one-quarter of the focus groups differences in perceived vulnerability by age of the individual were noted, with risk appearing to increase as age decreased. However as the first quotation below indicates, not all were of this opinion:

“You may be a child at 30 if you are naïve and believe everything. I would not draw such a clear division... Adults are also at risk, not only children are.” (F:RC)

“Sexual harassment is more for children aged 8 to 13 who live in their families.” (M:RC)

“Children are more at risk because they are more naïve and trusty.” (M:RC)

“Junior children... from 7 to 12 years old, are more at risk, than those older than 13.” (M:RC)

“Let’s say that FB is really the paedophile’s silver platter, because it’s really easy to hook up, it takes a minute, because when they write and see that someone’s listening, because when you’re that young you can be easily manipulated.” (F:LGBT)

The notion of others having some responsibility for the safety of young people online was also raised, though this will be discussed more fully in the section ‘Safety Online’:

“I, first of all, would put in jail those parents who give their 13-year-old daughter a web cam without checking what she’s doing with it because it’s one thing if my mother gives me one as I’m 16 years old and I know what I’m doing and I know the people who see me via a web cam; a little girl does it only because she wants to show off that she has a web cam, maybe even showing herself to people she doesn’t know.” (M:DH)

Subtheme 4: Identity formation. It is perhaps during the teenage and young adulthood years that the striving towards identity formation is most evident, and it would appear this was no less likely the case when considering the Internet. As two female participants mentioned, being part of the virtual world held as much, if not more, importance in terms of establishing ones’ place in the world as their status in the physical world:

“...if you don’t switch on your computer and open your email it’s like you’re on the outside, left out, like you don’t even exist.” (F:DH)

“By now, it’s [the Internet] become like a hobby. If you don’t have it no-one even knows your name.” (F:DH)

The way in which individuals presented themselves online was often related to the profile pictures they had on social networks, with sports activities appearing to be particularly important for males:

"I have a photo... of me shooting a hoop that's really cool." (M:RC)

"[My profile picture is of]... me at the stadium." (M:DH)

"[On my profile I have]... two photos, just of me on the field while I'm playing." (M:RC)

Relationships, both intimate and otherwise, also appeared to be important in the presentation of oneself online:

"I have a photo of me kissing a girl." (M:RC)

"[I have a photo] Of me with a bunch of friends." (F:LGBT)

"[I have a photo of] Me and my girlfriend... We're close, side by side." (F:LGBT)

"[My profile picture] is of me and a girlfriend." (M:DH)

The opinions of others in relation to sexual orientation seemed to be particularly important to males, with some straight males being careful to discourage others from believing they may be homosexual:

"I never make friends with males in the Internet. If I write to some, sort of, hi, let's be friends and meet offline – what other people may think about me? No, I am not a freak. If my dad saw this, he wouldn't understand." (M:RC)

"No, I never make friends with males over the Internet. I meet only friends of my friends, and never with those from the Internet. People would not understand that. Perhaps you can't see why, but for us

this is clear. Guys will think I am a pinky." (M:RC)

It was also clear that some homosexual males took steps to hide their sexual orientation from others:

"Before I had my dad and my stepmum on Facebook then and then it felt like I couldn't be who I was like on Facebook. So I blocked them and since then I have been much more open and written like "I saw a handsome guy in town" and everybody like approves and like comments and that. So you're a lot more open when you don't have your parents online because you can tell that if, if they can see what I write then you can tell that you're not as free as when you know that they can't see." (M:LGBT)

"On the one [FB account] that has more friends, where it is not known that I'm gay, I have my real name, etc., while the other is made up." (M:LGBT)

In the majority of focus groups involving the LGBT community (three from five), it was clear that the Internet had played a considerable role in relation to sexual orientation, with individuals seeking support, information and refuge via the Internet:

"I even got in touch with people outside [my own country]. As in I lived in an area where homosexuality, that isn't normal. Listen, as in, you're looked down upon. And I felt really bad about it I like wanted to kill myself. But then I got in touch with people outside and they hadn't come out to their parents who were really religious either but to certain friends so you could see a small future in that. As in you saw that it can get better." (F:LGBT)

"To find support, in the sense that you know that you're not alone, there are many of us and if you have any problem, like for instance

with your parents – what have you done about your parents, what haven't you done, what have you done with your parents, what happened? Also stuff like that. And then also to create – above all once we created GLK – because at first it was all like an absurd utopia – the idea was to create a space with a community feel...in the sense of having a group and identity of our own.” (F:LGBT)

“For example, I think online games are good because you're completely different. There you have a character and stuff like that and it's not so much about sexuality. Instead, you simply play. And it's completely irrelevant who's homosexual and who isn't. You can get to know people in a totally different way and not always with all these prejudices. At school, for example, when I'm hanging out in the schoolyard, then the others walk past me thinking, he's gay, don't touch. But online in a game, that's all completely different. Because you somehow interact with people in a completely different way.” (AG:LGBT)

2.4. Staying safe online

When an individual actively engages online he/she enters an environment that has its own social structures, rules, practices and norms. As with any social structure, it also has associated risks and dangers and users must learn how to successfully negotiate these. The theme of 'staying safe online' introduces a number of subthemes whereby young people describe the ways in which they recognise, avoid and respond to risk:

Instruction/support from others; Safety online; Responsibility of external parties; and Location of risk.

Subtheme 1: Instruction/support from others. Almost all of the focus groups identified either receiving or giving support or advice in respect of staying safe online. This could take the form of practical help about the more technical aspects of engaging safely online:

“...at first, I had one acquaintance who also made this kind of web-site... and then I made too.” (F:RC)

“Personally, I taught my two younger brothers and a cousin, while I, in turn, was taught by my older brother, who happens to have specialised in IT.” (M:DH)

“There are lots of illegal web-sites. My friends told me once that if you visit a porn web-site you can't get rid of porn ad banners after that because while at the web-site you clicked something carelessly, and these ads pop up all the time, later your Windows OS may die and you will have to install it all anew, and this porn image is a damn tricky thing cause you can't switch it off, it remains full screen, and that is all. Yes, guys told me about it.” (M:RC)

More general advice and support about ways to keep safe was also given:

“Go on it but be careful, don't meet up with people you know only online, or if you need a hand give me a shout.” (M:DH)

“I would never disclose my phone number and address in these profiles. I remember once typing in my house number and street name, but people told me: ‘Have you gone mad? Never do this!’” (F:DH)

“I would try to help at the beginning and if I cannot help, then I would kind of recommend with whom he could speak with. For example even this Internet... this support group or... or then at the school are these social pedagogues or some teacher, even class teacher.” (AG:LGBT)

“She where added by someone who didn’t have any mutual friends and had some English friends, but which I think a fake contact created on purpose, which had the photo of an incredibly good-looking English guy, with an English name, and so she ignored it. At first she was thinking of adding him. But I said to her, R., in your opinion, how do you think this guy found you? Just like that? That he just felt like it when he woke up that morning?” (F:GP)

Subtheme 2: Safety Online. All of the focus groups had specific strategies that they used to minimise the risks they faced online. These included proactive strategies such as avoiding particular sites in the first place and limiting the information that was provided when there to more reactive strategies such as going to others for help.

Many young people advocated avoiding particular sites and had clear ideas about which information it was and was not appropriate to share online:

“But I don’t use it [MSN] any more... because there are a lot more fakes there.” (F:LBGT)

“One should not put up your own personal data and one should keep the passwords in secret.” (M:RC)

“My info page is completely blocked when it comes to outside people... Plus I have certain parts that are completely blocked off and can be entered only with a password.” (M:DH)

“...if you in fact put photos that are provocative, half nude, it’s clear you’re not quite right in the head.” (F:GP)

“No, but I don’t go [to certain sites] out of choice, and then it’s not like they would even find out if I did, it’s not like they’re by my side watching me. But I don’t go because I don’t want to – it’s not the same. It’s a moral thing...” (F:DH)

Others had been forced to respond in more reactive ways when they felt their safety was threatened:

“I sometimes tell if there is someone who’s stalking me or as in we have reported I don’t know how many times to the police who have stalked me. I have switched Facebook accounts several times.” (F:LGBT)

Perceptions of online dangers ranged from those who accepted that while some level of risk was inevitable online, it could generally be avoided to those who perceived the online environment as being associated with significant risks.

These young people appeared to perceive the risks as commonplace and not overly concerning:

“My attitude to this is that everybody sooner or later bumps into indecent content, be that a web-site or a pop-up ad; when you download music etc. they are always appearing. It happens that when you watch a movie online side panes are showing all sorts of content including the one in question, so if anyone claims that he/she has never seen it this will be a lie.” (F:DH)

“Hmmm... Internet dangers? I have never encountered such things during my online communication. If there is something unpleasant,

I simply avoid it. Internet-related harm are various viruses. If they get into your PC they can damage your personal files, family photos and upload all this for public access, even for downloading.” (F:DH)

“Everyone lies about their age on those kinds of websites.” (F:GP)

Other young people perceived that there were significant risks associated with online activities:

“...it may be with regard to all those young guys who have disappeared. Like I live in F, some guys there were on the Internet and then disappeared. You didn’t hear anything about this? They were given appointments in F. ...it was in the papers, it’s not like I’m making this up. Appointments to meet were made with them, they showed up and then they disappeared.” (M:RC)

“No, well, when he/she is already past that point, then... if she/he sends pictures already or? Then, yes, it is pretty bad, – to police, but police also doesn’t help much, because then something is already sent to Internet, then she/he can’t get it back any more. This person can send this forward and like spread.” (M:GP)

“Or you may even be talking to a drug dealer; you never know who you might end up meeting. Perhaps he’s a nice guy or maybe he gives you drugs, takes you home and rapes you... how can you be sure?” (F:RC)

Subtheme 3: Responsibility of external parties. As well as describing their personal responsibility for ensuring safety online, a number of young people also identified external parties who they felt had a role to play in creating a safer online environment. For example, there was a

particular focus on the role of parents and guardians in terms of providing access to computers:

“[There are computers] In every room.” (M:RC)

“From three computers, because I switch from one computer to another as I move from room to room, from my mobile or my Mum’s partner’s mobile, my Ipod.” (M:DH)

Setting external limits to Internet use was also evident:

“...at home there are some pretty strict rules about Internet use, or of anything like that, before having done what’s expected of me at my home.” (M:DH)

“...there’s a limit on how long I can be at the computer, like 2 hours.” (F:GP)

“Mum shuts off the Internet when it’s after half-midnight otherwise I’ll miss the bus the morning after.” (F:LGBT)

Some of the young people mentioned limits being set to the ways in which the Internet was used:

“[My mother tells me not to put up] Photos that play a lot on roles in one’s sexuality.” (F:LGBT)

“Like my mother who spies on my Wall – who’s that who made those comments, what’s that...?” (M:LGBT)

“At home, if your family is a good one, parents will warn you against talking with unknown adult people, against being careless. If, on the

other hand, parents are not aware of or do not care for such dangers, then you can get into trouble, too. In any case everyone must think for oneself and protect oneself.” (F:RC)

“People are different. In our family Internet access was strictly controlled. I could use our PC only for simple PC games, after doing homework and from the age of 15. Today I realize that my parents were right. If they had given me a full swing with PC and Internet, I might have gotten into some nasty situation.” (F:LGBT)

Schools were also identified as having an educational role in terms of online safety:

“Speaking of schools, one could introduce this prevention work at school, that’d be early enough.” (AG:LGBT)

“I think that most important is actually this prevention that kids would be aware of this, that it is taught in school and parents talk about it and...” (M:GP)

“Families and care institutions may be different. If in a boarding school tutors do not care for what children are doing, if the kids are left to themselves, then surely they will suffer. If on the other hand a family is a problem one where kids do what they want, including in the Internet, the result will be the same.” (M:DH)

A few young people also identified other external parties as having a responsibility to promote online safety. This included advertisers who placed content in inappropriate places; website and Internet providers and the police:

“...it is ignorant that this kind of place is being like advertised in these exercise books, in math and in those... it is not especially nice

to advertise those weven more and with the pictures of those people... if they want to create this kind of relationship’s portal, then they should keep these to themselves.” (F:RC)

“By now there are no restrictions in terms of age when you enter sites, there are no more restrictions, passwords or to do with age, or you can easily create a fake account, even on YouTube that used to be the case...but to create a fake FB page all you need now are the bare minimum of computer skills to do whatever you want without any checks. For example, last year we did a project at school and there were certain sites that the school had blocked precisely because kids were going on them to see porn online, so with your ID CARD code, which you could enter, it would unblock these only if you were 18.” (M:LGBT)

“It has been a long time since (unclear) we talked with the policeman... policewoman who came and talked about the things with Facebook and MSN and all of that stuff. I didn’t have any users – so I didn’t think about having any. But we talked about it – and I started to find some users on Facebook and Steam and Youtube. So I’ve thought a lot about if there was anyone who tried to talk to me – someone I don’t know – then I would try to resist or respond or provoke or talk together with my mother. But if they answer something that I can easily make some dumb comments about, then they don’t feel like answering again. Or sometimes I can talk with my mother about it.” (F:HD)

Subtheme 4: location of risk. Certain locations were perceived as exposing the individual to greater online risk than others. These included both geographical location (i.e. urban versus rural) and social location (e.g. the family unit versus institutional living):

“Surely those in normal families [are most at risk], because in a children’s house, I myself grew up there, tutors are very alert and watch for such things, and also computers are fewer.” (M:RC)

“Why is it children from normal families? Because, as A. said, tutors are alert, computers are scarce and control is tight. This is said about cities. I live at a children’s house in the countryside, and there control is looser: we easily go to the village and a whole day is needed before they realize we’ve run away.” (M:RC)

“Those who live at care institutions have only limited access to the Internet, if any. At the same time children living in their families usually have no problems with going online and therefore are more vulnerable. Also the family itself has its role in this. If a kid in a family finds no love and warmth, then he/she looks for it in the Internet however silly this may sound. Kids from care institutions are rather closed up individuals and I even can’t say what sort of communication and socializing these children can have online.” (F:DH)

“Kids in care institutions do not know what normal life is, they spend all their time within the four walls, they get very few presents. You can lure them by something, and they buy into this.” (M:DH)

“The computer was in my room and I’d do as I pleased. It depends on the social worker now.” (F:RC)

The debate as to whether the family unit may present higher risk in terms of Internet danger was only raised by young people who seemed to have had or currently had some experience of institutional life, including people with disabilities, those living in a children’s residential unit and orphaned young people. The issue of where risk was located does not appear to have the same salience for the other focus groups.

2.5. Delineating between merged realities

Given the importance placed upon Internet use and the extent to which it has become enmeshed in the lives of children and young adults, it is understandable that some will view their ‘online lives’ as a reality which rivals that of the physical world. The final theme explored here – that of delineating between merged realities – was identified throughout the focus groups in the way those young people involved made distinctions between their ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ lives. This will be discussed under three subthemes: Peer relationships; Online versus the physical world; and Self-confidence and self-esteem.

Subtheme 1: Peer relationships. Although examples could be drawn from only three of the focus groups, it is felt that the issue of peer relationships remained worth mentioning as it highlights how the influence of peers has extended into the virtual world. For example, in one case it would appear that it is possible for strong friendships to be formed:

“I met my meanwhile best friend over the Internet.” (F:LGBT)

In two cases, the issue of safety is touched upon. In one case, in relation to talking with strangers a young woman felt reassured that it was safe to do this as a classmate had also had contact with him, while in another case online safety is somewhat compromised by a sharing of passwords:

“...my classmate had spoken about him a little... then I finally started to talk to him.” (F:RC)

“Once we made so with T., that we were BEST’s (best friends) and then T. told me her password and I told her mine.” (F:RC)

Finally here, it would also seem that peer pressure to influence behaviour extends to the Internet:

“A type of peer group pressure, that’s what I think. Among those teens, that 13-year-old kid, for example. When they say, he, if I drink up this bottle of vodka, I’m cool. And if I post these pictures anybody can see that. And that’s then as semblance of fame.” (AG:LGBT)

Subtheme 2: Online versus the physical world. In the majority of the focus groups at least some distinction was made between the virtual and physical realms, particularly with regard to both relationships/communication and safety online. With regard to the latter, it was clear that many of the young people felt that the behaviour of others online held no real danger for them:

“I know this person does not threaten me in reality.” (F:RC)

“Dangerous?? It [web cam interaction] is not physical harm, rather moral or virtual... Not physical at all accounts. He can shit you all over verbally, but he can’t hit or kick you. You can respond in kind, too, but it is safe because it brings no bodily harm.” (M:RC)

“You’re safer behind a screen than in reality.” (F:LGBT)

However, at least one focus group participant felt that risks could be equal between the virtual and physical worlds:

“It is the same as when children are approached by bad people in the street with similar offers of candies. And if a kid agrees and goes with the person, God knows what may happen.” (F:RC)

The young people involved in the focus groups also seemed adept at recognising deception online in the sense that they were aware the physi-

cal reality behind an online façade could be very different, and that not everyone online spoke the truth:

“They [photos] can be tuned.” (M:RC)

“After all, I’m smart enough to be able to understand whether it’s a regular girl or a good for nothing in reality... I’ve always managed these things well, but obviously it’s something that people who are less expert in or not in a position to understand what is going on shouldn’t do.” (M:DH)

“Most often people pretend to be what in fact they are not. For instance they try to look more pleasing, to fit in with me, to play up to me. And when you meet them in real life you see that this is a totally different sort of person, and you can’t see whether this is the one you chatted to online, or not.” (M:RC)

“You can never trust someone you know only online.” (F:RC)

Once again, however, it was still recognised that deceptions could be effective no matter where they were perpetrated:

“Well in principle this is so, that who is kind of easily fooled in the real life, then she/he is also in the Internet.” (F:GP)

Discussion was encouraged around the difference between an online relationship and one based in the physical world, and in once case at least the young person was extremely clear on the subject:

“What do you mean by ‘difference’? It is the difference between a real person and a computer.” (M:DH)

In general, however, responses were mixed in this regard, with most feeling that a relationship based solely online was very different from one held in the physical world:

“Those [relationships] made normally are much better. That is, it’s ok to chat online with a guy you already know in person and you have no other way of communicating, that is, if you can’t see each regularly, but those aren’t real friendships. They are very different.” (F:GP)

“I’ve never had online-only friendships. You have to be a tough nut and spend days online to be able to imagine your ‘online friend’ would be sitting next to you and would be talking to you live... I just do not see how could this be possible. I need to see a person, talk to him/her, communicate with him/her for some time, and only after this I may be able to form an idea of what sort of person he/she is.” (M:RC)

“But, before I physically meet (in person) someone I am not able to express myself or form a bond in any way.” (M:LGBT)

“Of course, there is some difference! When you talk with someone face-to-face you can see him/her, look in his/her eyes, make out what he/she thinks. If he doesn’t say anything you need not write, you simply use positive, happy smileys while in fact you may feel really bad. He asks you: how are you? and you replies: it’s OK; but in fact it isn’t. If the communication proceeds in real life whatever you say, sort of, it is OK, he sees that it is not that much actually. I do not know, I believe that friendship is like, sort of... you have to meet. You can first have a contact online, in the Internet, but to really make friends you need to meet the person, go out together, socialize in real life. Because the Internet is more about communication, sort

of, let’s go somewhere tomorrow. If we are talking about socializing, it is always better done in real life.” (F:RC)

Some of the young people also noted that managing relationships could be a much more straightforward process online:

“I also think it’s a lot easier online, because it’s also a lot easier to break things off if it all gets to be too much for you.” (AG:LGBT)

“It happens that you feel more at ease with a stranger because you’ve never seen him/her and, having said something or quarreled with him/her, you can then delete the person from the list. If you have to deal with people you see regularly or live together or attend the same school – you will have to apologize. You don’t need to apologize to unknown people: you delete them and forget them.” (F:RC)

“Yeah, and what I’d also like to add about the whole thing is that on networks like that it’s simply a lot easier to see if the person is really lesbian. Otherwise, she wouldn’t be on the site. I mean if I see a woman on the street, I can’t say, oh maybe she is. Maybe I could, but I can’t simply go up to a stranger and ask the person if they are lesbian. That would be a bit weird.” (F:LGBT)

One focus group participant expressed concern that the increase in development of online relationships may have consequences for the future:

“For me Internet friendship is either the beginning of real-life relations or their maintenance. I do not perceive it as an independent phenomenon. There again, I will miss all these non-verbal things and signs. You are gradually losing the feeling of reality of people, they become virtual correspondents. On the one hand, you can even

remember his/her appearance, even many years afterwards you saw them last time, on the other hand you are forgetting details, and such friendship is becoming unreal.” (F:LGBT)

For some, although purely online relationships were viewed with caution, the use of the Internet to maintain existing friendships was considered useful:

“For me, getting to know a person on the Internet from scratch is pretty difficult and not at all comparable to knowing people in real life. So, if I meet someone on the Internet, it’s not like meeting someone in a bar (café). But, I don’t want to be critical, because I then do think that the Internet helps keep up a friendship which might not be easy to keep up due to distance or other factors, so I don’t want to criticise this means of communication, which in my opinion is phenomenal.” (M:LGBT)

“...an online [relationship] is much more safe and predictable, like you know what to say, while maybe emotions would come in...” (M:GP)

However, as one young person stated, developing relationships in any location could be difficult:

“For me it doesn’t make any difference, whether online or in person, because I’m a very shy person. As you can see I don’t talk much. In fact, everyone tries to help me, even my mother scolds me because for example, aside from neighbours and at school, I don’t have any friends. It’s because I don’t want to have them and so it makes no difference whether it’s online or in real life. It’s always the same.” (F:DH)

With regard to communicating with others online, the issue of trust was raised on a number of occasions with the young people generally feeling that they could only truly share their thoughts with someone they knew well:

“In a chat you also never know if the person is the person you think it is. And even if you write to someone now, where you think, I know the person, and by chance someone else happens to be sitting at their PC or something like that. Then it’s not a good idea to talk about private things and stuff like that, because those are the things you don’t pick up on during a chat. That’s why I think it’s better if the person is sitting across from me.” (AG:LGBT)

“When I know someone well and communicate with him/her, I can speak openly and I understand what he/she wants, knows and how he/she views things. And some other chap, V. from another place, – I can’t converse with him the same way, I’ll cheat him out of his money and that’s all.” (M:RC)

Somewhat allied to this was a notion that one could be more open while communicating online, that – whether good or bad - it was easier to be open with others:

“...in the sense that online you can say or do anything and you know that in any case you’re behind a computer and not in front of a person so you’re not even, in inverted commas, involved emotionally and therefore you don’t have any problems saying what you think, etc., while in real life, relationships are formed that are not at all, in my opinion, even comparable.” (M:LGBT)

“That online you can say a load of crap, but in real life it’s a whole different thing.” (M:DH)

“Like, for instance, if I say to a girl ‘wow, you’re beautiful’, I’d never say it in real life; I’d say I don’t like her. Eheh!” (M:DH)

“It also happens that in correspondence you can tell more than in real life, face to face, some barriers are definitely lifted when online.” (F:DH)

It is understandable therefore, that openness can be taken to negative extremes online:

“By the way, what I think is a bigger problem on the Internet is that bullying is also a lot easier.” (AG:LGBT)

There were many young people who, because of their personality type, felt it was much easier to communicate with others online rather than face-to-face:

“Because to speak...that is, I’m not able to relate in person because of my shyness. If you like the person, on the computer it’s [easier]...” (F:DH)

“Talking about myself, I can say that for me it is easier to be frank and open within this sort of mediated communication, i.e. in the Internet, or using a mobile phone and SMS, because you have time to debate a matter in your mind without any haste, word it in a clear and comprehensible matter, and, moreover, in a more frank and sincere way than in alive communication. But with people whom I know only a little, only online and never in real life, I very rarely discuss personal or intimate matters, because most often they are not close friends, our association is either based on shared interests or business.” (F:LGBT)

For one young woman at least, it would appear that talking with strangers online could sometimes be a productive act:

“I can be rather frank with my close ones. But on the other hand, it is easier to talk heart-to-heart with someone you do not know at all.” (F:RC)

This was not to say that caution should not be exercised, or that online communication did not have consequences in the physical world:

“Well, for example – I once experienced on Facebook – where a status update or a picture or something – where there were some people who went in and commented on it, you know? And then in the end, it all led up to the formation of a little gang fight, you know? The kind that ends up with a kind of big fight, you know? The kind where the opponents are standing around and beat the crap out of each other and that kind of shit, you know?” (M:LGBT)

“So he wrote that I was an idiot and a bum and all kinds of crap. So the next day, when I turned up, he barely dared to look at me. So I walked over to him, and I said, “Why were you like that yesterday?” So – how do you say it – so he tried to run away, and I grabbed hold of him. And then he started to cry, because he thought that I was going to beat him up.” (M:LGBT)

Subtheme 3: Self-confidence and self esteem. In ten of the 25 focus groups it could be seen that issues of self-confidence and self-esteem had an impact on online behaviour. For example, for some their lack of confidence in physical world situations was somewhat lessened in the virtual world:

“You like... don’t dare. When you are face to face... at first you don’t dare to like talk. But through the Internet, then you don’t see her and you think that, whatever you say to her.” (M:RC)

“...in my opinion, through a screen you’re able to say a lot more than you can to someone’s face, even if you are arguing about something, I, personally, find it much easier through the computer, at least for me...” (F:GP)

“You know, I am not a nice talker, I am sort of shy and I am not always ready to ask about other things.” (M:RC)

“She lived in another city and we got along well... in Internet. When we met, then she was not. She dared to talk only in MSN and Rate. In real life like blushed a lot and she didn’t have courage to talk.” (M:RC)

The way in which relationships were conducted online also appeared to be influenced by levels of confidence:

“No, it was like this... um, look he was fairly good-looking... and my self-confidence maybe isn’t that great anyway that he started flirting as in really went for it like really quickly.” (M:LGBT)

“Then you go onto QX and every good-looking person you see you write something kind and like something happy, and then when you get confirmation from the individual you get so very happy.” (M:LGBT)

“Well, if you’re lonely and that kind of thing. And you don’t have so many friends, then you can do it [looking for friends on the Internet]. Then there’s nothing wrong with it. But when you have enough friends and you talk together with them. Then there’s no reason to have it.” (M:GP)

Perhaps of most concern in this context was the apparent impact that self-esteem may have in relation to risk:

“I think many [homosexuals] have had low self-esteem precisely that hbtq has been a very large part of the distress you’ve experienced, I think, during the teenage period. So it like you get even more vulnerable and then I think that you become easily manipulated into, well, for instance, you’re so beautiful. Oh, he likes me. Shall we meet? Sure! You like become naïve...” (M:LGBT)

“A person’s psychological state, moral characteristics. If he is naïve, he will agree to an offer of a new mobile phone; if he is an independent personality he will reply: I do not need it, I will wait till my close ones will give it to me as a birthday present. I’ll find a job and buy it myself. For instance today I have an opportunity of earning money. And if some stranger promises me candies, money or gifts, I’ll tell him go to hell. At any age this depends on the person’s moral, inner virtues. At 13 years old children are already able of understanding that unknown people can do harm.” (F:RC)

“They have strong self-esteem and don’t let people put them down.” (F:RC)

3. Analysis of different groups of young people

3.1. Young people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender

Lars Lööf

Discussing “merged realities”. Reading the transcripts of the focus groups a somewhat different picture than the current safer online discussion would have you believe emerges: there seems to be a clear consensus that online and offline contacts are identified as such. The young people in the LGBT focus groups will all at different times in the interviews describe how they draw clear lines between contacts online and other contacts. In describing how they may meet an online contact offline, or describing how an online contact developed into an offline friend, it is clear that there is a clear distinction. Never would an online contact be considered as valuable as an offline contact and never would they admit to confusing what is being said or done online with what happens in the real world.

Online contacts may however play a very specific and clearly defined role historically in young people’s process of forming an identity and deciding on how to present themselves, possibly even more so for young LGBT people. To play with different ways of identifying yourself or different ways of telling people who you are is something that online contacts and forums allow you to do. The participants in the focus groups give examples of how they have used the online forums or online con-

tacts to take command over self-created situations. This can be seen as a way of establishing true control over a segment of your life – a way to try on what control is really like.

A hierarchy among contacts you have online can be discerned where the level of engagement is the primary identifier. To the young LGBT people commitment and openness are as important in the real world as in the online world. These markers may have a stronger meaning to LGBT people who all share a recent history of feeling marginalised and estranged from peers when deciding on how to come out, whether to come out, and whom to come out to. To speak about online contacts is in no way to exclusively speak about online contacts where the issue of your sexual identity is discussed. In other contexts also, sincerity and whether or not you are being honest are aspects which seem to be particularly valued. The honesty can then be played with, but the fact that you address it means that importance is attached to it. The hierarchy can be seen as below:

- Online contact – someone you chat with more than once
- Online contact – someone you chat with more than once where images are exchanged
- Online contact – someone you chat with more than once where images are exchanged, where there are more than one verification (contact via Facebook and another channel)
- Online contact – someone you chat with more than once where images are exchanged and whose telephone number you have
- Online contact – someone you chat with more than once where images are exchanged and whom you talk to using cam and telephone

Online contacts where there is a common link – a friend who knows the person who can vouch for him/her are also seen as different and more valued.

Clearly young people will be in continuous online contact with offline friends; something which is taken for granted and not discussed very much in the focus groups as having the same quality as those more difficult contacts which are online only. True friendship only exists with people you meet face-to-face.

Online only contacts are seen as beneficial in many ways. You can talk to people online in ways in which you wouldn't talk to people you know. Obviously an observation shared by many young people but again, given young LGBT people's recent experiences of coming out or not, using online contacts and platforms to say things you can't say in real life may be more valued.

From this it would appear that as realities are not truly merged in the sense the term is often interpreted, young LGBT people will clearly exhibit a high awareness of who you really know and how well you know the person. The risk of being exploited or used by someone you are in contact with would then be less if you are well aware of the quality of the contact or of where in your hierarchy the contact falls. Using online contacts for specific online purposes, as is described in the focus groups, will also raise the risk-awareness as the specific use of a contact is tied to where in the hierarchy the contact falls.

Find friends online/find partner online/find sex online. Young LGBT people in the focus groups will quite openly discuss how they use the Internet for making contact with people as possible friends and partners. The hierarchy described above is clearly referred to here, where

real-life contacts are at the top and online contacts where there are only chat contacts and where no images or other means of contact exist are valued the least. Having online contact only is indeed valued as such as reported by some of the young people. It may be valuable to remember that not all online exchanges are intended to develop beyond just that.

In the LGBT focus groups it was frequently discussed if the Internet was a good place to make contact with people as friends or as partners. Gay and Lesbian dating sites were mentioned in these discussions both as platforms where you can meet with other Gay or Lesbian persons and where you are likely to be hit on or where you yourself can go to flirt. The dating sites, however, do not really meet the demands of young LGBT people since these are sites that attract older people and the being young and being on one of those sites will give you what some call "the wrong kind of attention":

Age is an important issue here as young LGBT people seem to want to talk, chat or explore the world with their relatively new "selves". Going to gay or lesbian contact sites is one way of finding out more but some young people will talk about feeling put off as they were met with offers for money in exchange for sex.

Internet is as we know used also for sexual explorations by young people as well as adults and the LGBT group is no exception. The young people in the LGBT focus groups were quite open with their experiences of meeting with people they had first met on the Internet for possible sex offline. As can be seen in the analysis, these accounts are full of details on how things can turn bad or how on occasions these online acquaintances turn out to be absolutely wonderful people offline too. Risks of coming to harm are clearly acknowledged and the focus groups show that the young LGBT people in them have a high awareness of risks involved and that people online may try to persuade or cajole them into

doing things they don't want to. As most of them are quite OK with discussing sexual matters online, they do not shy away from advances including sexual language but at the same time the discussions demonstrate a good eye and ear for situations that include warning signs.

Meetings do not always turn out OK though and these stories of disappointing offline dates that were initiated online also serve as reminders of how things may go wrong.

Age is a hot issue in the focus groups. Young LGBT people will all report how they are being targeted for their age and how they need carefully to assess if the person they are planning on meeting really is the age he or she says. Several reports are of how especially men will turn out much older than their online persona. There is also in one group a brief discussion about younger boys flirting and how to manage this without becoming the bad old guy. For the girls in the groups the age issue was less prevalent even if some groups would talk about older women out there. It seems that age becomes synonymous for trying to be someone you're not. Age may be just one of the issues where you may become disappointed.

Safety procedures. The young LGBT people in the focus groups demonstrate a clear awareness of possible risks online. Advice on how to stay safe is discussed in the groups and many of them share stories of how they were in situations that may have turned into harm had they not been aware and perceptive of some of the signals or warnings. Diverse safety measures are discussed in the focus groups and the fact that the groups openly speak about meeting up with others for possible sex makes the discussions very concrete. One boy describes how he had contact with another guy he intended to meet for a long time and slowly

realised that this person kept giving different answers to similar questions. The advice to put the same question to an online contact a week apart and see if the responses are consistent is a safety procedure backed by experience. Knowing people via different channels; Facebook, Messenger, Skype, other social networks and mobile phone is another advice given. Having the mobile telephone number will always allow you to check the name of the person holding the subscription. Seeing them via cam before meeting is another as is staying in touch for a long time before the first meeting. However, being in touch for a long time is, as one young woman said, no guarantee and this is only to be seen as a protective measure in combination with others. Young LGBT people seem to be well aware of the fact that staying out of harm's way demands a high level of consciousness. Meetings should always be arranged in public places with other people around. If done in this way it isn't necessary to adhere to the old golden rule of bringing a friend. To have friends, parents and teachers to talk to is essential as experiences can then be openly discussed. Telling your friends about bad experiences is a good way to stay safe, both for yourself and for others and in the focus groups such experiences are again shared in order to give others a better understanding.

Coming out online. A specific issue for young LGBT people is the coming out process. Discussions on this in the groups clearly show how this is indeed a process and not an event. Many young people will have come out in one context but not in another. The use of social networks is also influenced by this since some will need to be straight in some social networks where their parents or relatives are. All focus groups share experiences on how they came out and how they used the opportunity Internet offers on this. The possibility to ask for advice and to talk to someone

with experiences and questions similar to your own is described by several as the main benefit of the Internet and why they unanimously so much appreciate being online.

Stories of how other young people have come out as gay to their parents, who were living in areas where they felt they were absolutely the only gay person or living with cultural or religious backgrounds that make the issue of coming out as gay or lesbian seem absolutely impossible are prevalent in the interviews. In these cases, chatting online to other young people facing similar challenges is highly appreciated. If you cannot come out to your parents or others close to you, the online life is supportive of your self-respect.

The coming out process seems on the one hand to create a strong positive link with the Internet for many young LGBT people. The Internet is by some described as having saved their lives. On the other hand, the search for information online and for friends and experiences online may be exploited. However, the focus groups with young LGBT people indicate that being open with your sexual orientation to friends and family is protective and when a young person has not come out to his/her immediate surrounding (like family and friends) having come out online may serve as a first layer of protection. For all young people, having a forum where you can discuss openly your online experiences, even those that may include sexual exploration, must be regarded as protective.

Online exposure – images online. It is interesting to note the high level of awareness and the amount of negotiating that goes into the issue of images online in the LGBT groups. You don't want to post images that can in any way be exploited online by someone else and knowledge that

this happens is shared and expressed in the groups and is used to assist in the negotiation process. Another issue is if the images you post or those others post where you appear, may "out" you to people you have not yet decided to be open with. In the focus groups this doesn't mean nude or semi-nude images but situations where you may be playing with the stereotypes together with friends.

There is a clear distinction as the norm seems to be quite restrictive on showing skin – only desperate people post images of themselves in shorts or in a bikini as was said in one group. The young people experience a high demand for images and cam-contacts and at times this seems to become quite frustrating. On the one hand, using the cam to ensure that you know who it is you are talking to will also give you bad and abusive experiences like when one young boy is asked to turn on his web-cam so that they know what they look like before meeting in person, only to find the person he talks to masturbating.

To be in contact with a person who does not have his or her face on the profile is in itself a warning signal and the young people are well aware of people claiming: "don't have a picture on this computer". Another sign that the person on the other side isn't who s/he says s/he is.

Discussion. This overview of a few issues discussed in the focus groups with young LGBT people is in no way comprehensive. When it comes to safety measures, the young people in the LGBT focus groups impress with a seemingly larger set of tools on how to be sure of who you are communicating with online. The risks associated with meetings offline are identified and measures to stay safe are grounded in own or someone else's experiences. The young people participating cannot be seen as representative as they are all in the process of coming out, even if they

have not all done so in all their social contexts. This is not the case with all young LGBT people. Having come out, and having peers with whom you can discuss online contacts indicate a higher level of awareness and access to more safety measures for these young persons.

As many of the young LGBT people in the focus groups seem to be relatively more at ease with discussing sexual online exploration than other young people, this in itself is likely to be protective: It may be that this allows them to have an easier way of understanding when an online interaction becomes sexual and may, as a consequence, be more able to negotiate whether to continue or discontinue the contact.

The degree of self-confidence is important in this context. As is clearly shown by the analysis of all the focus groups, a low level of self-esteem is likely to increase risk and the likelihood of coming to harm.

3.2. Young people with a learning disability and/or with additional support needs

Stephanie Bannon

A number of issues of particular relevance to the population of young people with a learning disability and/or additional support needs were highlighted within the focus groups included in this study.

Research has indicated that young people with a learning disability may be more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour (Blum et al 2001, McNamara & Willoughby 2010). This research has focused on behaviours

not relating to internet use. However, greater levels of social isolation in this population may cause young people with a learning disability to also engage in more risky behaviours online. This was highlighted by some individuals included in the study who reported accepting friend requests on social networking sites from individuals that they did not know in person. A possible reason for this was identified by a focus group member who commented on the desire of certain young people to have friends, "...a lot of people are like, are wanting to have friends...".

A further issue raised was the view of group members that they would delete any inappropriate material that they received or viewed online as well as deleting evidence of cyber bullying and/or harassment. Deleting such evidence can make it difficult for any measures to be put in place to protect the individual at risk. This issue may reflect a difficulty for young people with a learning disability or additional support needs to keep in mind and compare the possible outcomes of taking various routes of action. Research by Livingston et al (2011) suggested that the younger the individual, the less skilled they were at managing certain risks. It may be that this research suggests that, as individuals with a learning disability are likely to perform at a level lower than what would be expected for a young person of the same age without any a learning disability, they may also have poorer skills relating to risk-management.

The young people within the focus groups included in the current study were able to describe ways of avoiding and managing certain risks when using the Internet, e.g. not giving away personal information to unknown individuals. However, when group members were asked to discuss this in more depth or when this was linked to their actual online behaviour, there were discrepancies between what the group members stated they would do and what they actually did. This may indicate that young people with a learning disability and/or additional support needs

do not fully understand information provided to them with regards Internet safety, or that they may be unable to make use of it in relation to their own online behaviour. These findings add to those reported in a recent publication by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. This research involved a focus group of seven young girls, aged 13-16 years with special educational needs. The findings indicated that the group members had received information regarding Internet safety strategies but illustrated a lack of understanding of these strategies and difficulties implementing them (Del-Manso et al. 2011).

Further to this, a number of very concrete strategies regarding staying safe were provided during the focus groups, including locking doors at home and road safety skills. It may be the case therefore that young people with a learning disability and/or additional support needs have difficulty understanding the abstract behaviour and methods required to stay safe when using the Internet.

3.3. Young people in residential care

Olga Kolpakova

Taking into account the specific lifestyle of young people in residential care it would be reasonable to assume that they should have more limited Internet access comparing to other groups of young people. Focus group results have shown that this is not true. Young people in residential care do have some limitations in Internet access including the following: 1) they often have to use Internet in public places such as

libraries and Internet cafes; 2) they may have no Internet access when they have insufficient money to pay for it; 3) the extent to which Internet is used may vary depending on the season of the year (in winter some of them use it much more often than in summer); 4) the policy of the residential care institution may restrict Internet access (for example; it may not be allowed to use computers after 11 p.m.). However, in some cases they manage to overcome these barriers, for example by means of going online via cell phones. Moreover, according to the focus groups results, young people from a residential care group in most cases use Internet almost to the same extent as young people from other groups, and as well as in the other groups of young people the frequency of Internet use in this group may vary from several hours per week to staying online 24/7 on a cell phone.

The goals of Internet use in the group of young people in residential care again are very similar to those in the other groups of young people. The only difference is that young people in residential care group use Internet more often to stay in touch with their relatives, friends and stakeholders who live in different areas, as well as to receive information about what is going on in their home country or region. One of the significant values of social networks is that it provides an opportunity for them to stay in touch with other people and is a much cheaper means of communication than the telephone.

Similar to other groups, young people in residential care accept online only contacts and online communication with people they met face-to-face before. In the latter case they make no difference between online and offline realities. A person who has been a friend in real life and for some reasons is far away at the moment continues to be a friend online. Besides that online relations in some cases may give a sign of the strength of relationships in the offline world: for example real friends are supposed to share their passwords in a social network with each other.

Online relations could also influence relationships with the same person in the real world: one of the focus groups' participants mentioned a case when he quarreled with a person in real-life situation because of some comments he posted in a social network.

Online-only relations from the point of view of young people in residential care are different from online relations with a person they met face-to-face. For some of them it is easier to be more open with a person they only know online and with whom they never met in real life. It is particularly true about young people with low self-confidence and lack of communication skills. This group of children could potentially be more vulnerable as they tend to share personal information with unknown people. However, in most cases young people in residential care reported that they needed to know a person in real life to be able to develop a close relationships with him/her and they could not become close with a person they only know online.

When forming online self-identity for males in residential care, unlike other groups' representatives, it is important not to make online-friends with males because they could be regarded by others as homosexuals even though they are not.

Young people in residential care often have experience of dropping out from schools for a while and may have no parents or be in lower level of parental control, so it is possible to assume that they would know less about how to stay safe online. However, the focus groups have shown that youth from this group are quite well informed about Internet safety rules. They receive information on safety issues from their friends, more experienced users and foster parents. Among the rules of staying safe online they have mentioned the following: 1) not visiting pornographic sites and other unknown suspicious resources; 2) never reacting to spam messages; 3) communicating only with friends, never answering

messages received from unknown people, particularly adults; 4) never adding unknown people to their contact list or getting more information about an unknown person before adding him/ her to their contact list; 5) never sharing personal information; 6) keeping their password secret; 7) arranging offline meetings with online acquaintances in public places; 8) in case of harassment talking to adults one trust.

What is interesting is that young people in residential care seem to be applying most of these rules in their daily life and sometimes more so than young people from other groups. In particular, they restrict access to their profiles in social networks, have proactive response to unwanted approaches online and in most cases they prefer to either block the unwanted contact or to delete it, or report it to the hotlines. Only two participants in the focus groups said that they would try to get more information about the person before taking a decision to block him/her or to continue communication. Young people from other groups usually try to get additional information about unknown persons and only after that could block/ delete/ report unwanted contacts.

At the same time, only in this group of young people was it regarded as amusing to post online pictures of naked friends or boys kissing each other because they lost a bet. It means that some young people in residential care may not be aware of the negative consequences of posting such pictures and may become vulnerable or put their friends at risk.

Like young people from other groups, youth in residential care have had experiences of being victimized by their own illegal online activities including becoming a victim of online bullying. However, only representatives of this group of young people mentioned that some of their friends were approached online by someone trying to recruit girls into trafficking for sexual purposes. Among young people who stay in residential care there are a lot of those who have experience of being home-

less or have a history of running away from home. These focus groups' data agree with research findings that show that homeless children and children who run away from home are especially vulnerable to Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation (Regional... 2008, Mitchel et al 2010).

All the young people who took part in the focus groups use Internet as a tool for socialization, getting in touch with peers and for sexual exploration. However, whereas the LGBT group or groups of young people with disabilities tend to use Internet not only to find a sexual partner but also to find like-minded people, youth in residential care mostly use Internet to get in touch with a person of the opposite sex. In most cases online approaches are made by boys who are seeking girls for romantic relationships. They get in touch with girls online (including girls they never met before), discuss sex online and sometimes meet offline. When arranging an offline meeting they appear to disregard safety (even in cases where they meet girls they have never met before). The only exception was one focus group female who said that she would never meet an unknown boy in real life, only with someone known to at least one of her female friends. This makes young people from this group potentially more vulnerable than young people from other groups. Nevertheless, unlike young people from the other groups, youth in residential care appear to never having experienced any kind of negative consequences of offline meetings with strangers except boys who meet girls who are not as attractive in real life as she described herself in their online communication.

Like other young people, youth in residential care have experiences of being malicious online: exploitative or illegal, including using Internet to tease their friends, particularly the opposite sex. Boys in residential care may also use instant messengers to get in contact with an unknown girl and convince her to put money in their bank account.

Young people in residential care have rather vague ideas about people posing a risk who could get in touch with them online and potentially harm them either online or in real life. In most cases they describe a person that may pose a risk as an unknown foreigner (mostly Turk), 30-50 years old who is trying to talk about sex, suggesting having sex online or asks you to expose yourself. Young people from other groups provided more detailed descriptions of individuals posing a risk.

Much like representatives of other groups, young people in residential care in most cases do not see themselves as being at risk of victimization. Even though a number of research reports have shown that children who lack close parental relations or are in lower levels of parental control are at greater risk of online sexual solicitation (ICAA 2004, Sorensen 2007, De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006, Mitchell et al 2003), young people in residential care in most cases believe that children who live in families are more at risk because in residential care institutions the use of Internet is under stricter control than in families. Nevertheless, there were several young people who admit that children in residential care are more at risk than other groups of young people including those living in families.

In conclusion, young people in residential care could not be regarded as being at much greater risk of online sexual victimization. Even though they could be approached online by unknown people including those who try to recruit them into sexual exploitation, they are quite well informed about online risks, online safety rules and follow most of them while using Internet. The most vulnerable groups are males who try to get in touch with girls via Internet and plan a meeting with them in real life, and young people who lack self-confidence and communication skills and who have difficulties in developing close relationships with peers in real life.

3.4. Analysis based on gender

Kadri Soo

The results of focus group interviews showed lots of differences between sexes in the use of Internet, experiences of online risks and harm, and the ways of talking in a group process. Both boys and girls showed positive and negative practises of Internet use. Boys were aware that they had initiated conversation online with unknown persons, such as female peers. Some boys avoided making friends with males, but establishing online contact with girls seems to be more acceptable. Boys also admitted having online and offline dates with girls they had never met face-to-face. Female participants, on the other hand, generally did not disclose such experiences. This does not mean that they would not have pursued or had had online relationships. On the basis of traditional female gender roles, girls usually do not take an active part in initiating relationships, and if they have they usually do not talk openly about it in group discussions. According to quantitative surveys, there are similar proportions of boys and girls who have had contact with someone they never met face-to-face before, made friends online, and attended offline meetings with online friends (Livingstone et al 2011, Livingstone & Helsper 2007). At the same time boys were more likely to meet strangers offline than girls. In accordance with an American study (Wolak et al 2002), adolescent girls are somewhat more likely than boys to form close friendships but equally likely to form romantic relationships. Boys reported more preference for cross-gender relationships than girls.

In terms of malicious and illegal Internet use that was discussed in focus groups, some gender variations become evident. The pan-European EU Kids Online survey (Livingstone et al 2011), however, did not show any

differences between boys and girls, females in our interviews described more stories of online bullying and teasing. But boys admitted to committing antisocial activities such as cheating others out of money; listening to music illegally; arranging meetings with girls and having sex with them and then disappearing.

The current study indicated that young people, mainly boys, use the Internet for sexual purposes. Boys spoke more openly in discussions about sex with peers, search for information on sexual behaviour and satisfied their curiosity and sexual needs via the Internet by using erotic literature and images. Girls mostly avoided sexual topics in the interview process, with an exception of young women in LGBT group who spoke about searching for more information about their sexuality and potential sexual partners on the Internet.

Several quantitative studies have also shown that a significant number of young people have experiences of online sexual conversations (see Baumgartner et al 2010a, De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck 2006). The surveys reach different conclusions as to which gender has more experiences of online sexual communication. De Graaf and Vanwesenbeeck (2006) found that adolescent boys more frequently than girls use the Internet to initiate sexual conversation, ask someone to do something sexual in front of webcam, and have cybersex. Baumgartner and her colleagues (2010a) who define similar risky sexual online behaviour found no gender differences, 18% of adolescent boys and 17% of girls reported any one of these types of behaviour. Gender differences revealed the level of exposure to pornographic material in cyberspace. There is a lot of research evidence indicating that boys are more likely than girls to view and intentionally seek sexual images online (Livingstone et al 2011, Svedin 2007, Ybarra & Mitchell 2005).

It appeared from the focus group interviews that boys described online sexual talk with male peers differently to conversations with girls. For instance, boys while chatting with each other ask or brag about their heterosexual activities. But while talking with girls about sexual issues they are less rough and blunt, avoiding obscenities and asking more delicate and implicit questions about their sexual experiences. In addition, boys found that communication via the computer allowed them to discuss intimate topics in a more confident and explicit manner than in face-to-face situations. To summarize, the patterns of talk about online relationships and sexual experiences by sexes in the focus group settings are in line with gender roles practises. For boys it is more important to exhibit their experiences and successes in interaction with opposite sex but avoid close relations with boys, which they view as a sign of homosexuality and unmanliness (Connell 2005, Kaufman 2009). Among friends adolescent boys tend to boast about their sexual experiences talking about sex as competition and objectifying female partners (Harper et al 2004). Such a demonstration of sexual prowess in a peer group is an essential criterion for emphasizing masculinity and increasing social status (Messerschmidt 2000).

Both boys and girls described being exposed to unwanted approaches from strangers through instant messaging or using social networking sites. In general neither the boys nor the girls perceived these approaches as troublesome and dangerous and perceived themselves as outside the areas of online risk and harm. The participants in the focus groups, particularly the boys, perceived the girls as being at risk from harmful online interaction. They explained that girls are more naive, gullible and vulnerable due to their sex. But girls involved in the focus groups considered younger females or girls with different mental and behavioural characteristics as being more at risk. Although the participants associated females more with exploitative experiences, they believed that young

males could be at risk as well. Interviewees regarded sexual exploration and communication with unknown (adult) women who might be factually male predators as risky online behaviour for boys. The current results are quite similar to the findings of other surveys. The quantitative surveys showed that both boys and girls to a similar extent have seen or received sexual messages online (Livingstone et al 2011), however, female adolescents are more likely to be unwillingly sexually solicited than males (Baumgartner et al 2010b, Mitchell et al 2007c).

Conclusion

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On the one hand the focus groups' results confirmed findings of a number of previous researches related to young people's online behaviour and online safety. On the other hand the focus groups allowed us to better understand the characteristics of Internet use by different groups of young people. Below the focus groups' results are summarized and answers to the main research questions are provided.

Are there any differences in terms of availability and use of the Internet between different groups of young people? Not surprisingly, given the inclusion criteria for the focus groups, the use of IT-technology was central for all of the young people in their everyday life. Young people from all the groups use different platforms for Internet access including computers, cell phones, tablets, smart phones, iPads etc. Among all the platforms used by young people to access Internet cell phones seem to be less controlled by parents and stakeholders.

Young people in residential care have a set more limited Internet access than young people from other groups and may have a significant difference in Internet availability before and after moving in to residential care, or depending whether they have money to pay for it. But it does not significantly influence the extent to which they use Internet. In all the groups of young people there are those who try to be online as much as possible as well as young people who set their own limits on their use or have such limits set for them by parents or by stakeholders.

Across the groups, young people use Internet to communicate with other people, to share information, search for information related to their hobbies, interests and to aid them with school work. For young people in residential care as well as for young people with some forms of disabilities the Internet provides an opportunity to stay in touch with their friends and relatives who are far away.

Males and the members of the LGBT group may use Internet for sexual exploration. They openly discuss sexual issues with peers, search for information on sexual issues, use erotic literature and images, and try to establish relationships. An opportunity to explore sexuality online is perceived generally as good; nevertheless some young people think that it may create an impression that sex and relationships are fake and not realistic.

For LGBT young people the Internet might be a safe place to offer and receive support as well as to come out and share their true sexual orientation (in some cases anonymously or to selected people they know in real life). That may be linked to the fact that there is a lack of socially accepted route or space provided for LGBT young people through which information can be gained and views exchanged with others like themselves. In this way, the Internet becomes a space for this group that allows for a necessary and valuable kind of growth.

Webcams are vital means of communication for different groups of young people. Young people away from home use it mainly to communicate with their friends and families, for children with disabilities such as hearing impairments, a webcam provides a way of communicating outside of text, and for the LGBT young people, as well as others, it offers sexual opportunities as well as a way of validating who they are talking to.

Do young people perceive their world as undivided, or do borders between the online and offline world still exist? In most cases young people perceive online and offline worlds as different, particularly with regard to safety and relationships/communication. Some of them believe that the virtual world is less dangerous than the real one, others feel that risks linked to virtual and physical world are equal. For all the groups of young people there is a distinction between online-only contacts and online communication with people they know personally, the latter in general is valued more. In cases of online communication with people known offline, the online reality for young people is mostly an extension of the real world. Friends in real life continue to be friends online; sharing passwords to profiles in social networks could be regarded as a confirmation of a real friendship in an offline world, peer pressure to influence behaviour extends to the Internet, and comments made in social networks could influence the offline relationships.

Young people could have different attitudes towards online-only contacts. For some young people, due to their personal characteristics, such contacts could be very valuable as they may play a very specific role in the process of forming their identity and deciding on how to present themselves (especially for young LGBT people), this may allow them to share personal information more easily, to be more open than in offline communication and to discuss issues they have difficulties with in face-to-face communication. Boys and young LGBT people of both sexes have mentioned that it is easier to discuss sexual issues online than face-to-face.

In some cases, strong friendly and trustful relationships could be formed with online-only contacts. But in most cases young people from different groups admitted that they would never be able to develop close and trustful relationships with people they know only virtually and have never met in person.

Some young people reported that managing relationships in the virtual world could be a much more straightforward process. Young people from different groups have stated that if someone quarrels or breaks up the relationship with another person in the virtual world it has considerably less negative consequences for the young person compared to a similar situation when the young person quarrels or breaks up a relationship in real life.

As online-only contacts play a significant role in the life of young LGBT people, they seem to develop a hierarchy of such contacts. The place of a contact in this hierarchy depends on the extent to which they know him/her, and significantly influences the way they deal with that person.

Do young people take initiative by themselves and do they actively seek new friends and contacts online? And if so do they face any negative consequences? By all the groups of young people online communication is primarily used to sustain friendships already established offline, rather than to make new contacts with people who were not known in the offline world. Nevertheless, for young LGBT people and for young people with some forms of disabilities Internet is also a way to find other young people who are similar to themselves (a friend or a sexual partner). Boys from different groups use Internet to find a sexual partner.

There are gender-specific methods in online approaches made to other people. Boys use more active approaches and tend to initiate online conversations with unknown people, specifically female peers and arrange meetings with them offline. Girls were less likely to report that they initiated approaches to others and, when they did, they were either trying to receive support from someone or to make fun of someone.

In many cases seeking new friends or contacts online results in an offline meeting. Young people from different groups reported both positive and negative consequences of offline meetings. Among the negative consequences the following was mentioned: 1) a person in real life turned out to be different from his/ her online persona (older or not as attractive), 2) an online acquaintance showed aggression towards the young person during the meeting (a boy was beaten by a girl).

Do young people exhibit harmful or exploitative behaviour themselves?

Some young people across all the groups exhibit harmful online behaviour themselves. There are gender related differences in this behaviour. Males most frequently try to cheat others out of money, get in touch with girls to have one-night stands with them and disappear, make dates with girls and do not show up, practice illegal activities including listening to illegal CDs, creating problems in someone else's profile in social networks etc. Girls mostly try to cause rifts in relationships or to make fun of others.

Are young people aware of online risks? The majority of young people seem to be aware of online risks. Perceptions of online dangers ranged from those who accepted that some level of risk was inevitable online but it could generally be avoided, to those who perceived the online environment as being associated with significant risks. Mostly young people are aware that making personal information available and sharing photographs could lead to problems, that physical reality could be very different from what is stated or appears online, and that people online are not always truthful. Some young people in residential care seem to be less aware than other groups of young people of the negative consequences of posting their own pictures or their friend's pictures online, particularly those taken for fun or with a sexual content. Young people with learning disabilities and/or a need for special support do

have difficulties in understanding abstract behaviour including methods of staying safe online.

How do young people identify individuals that pose risk of online sexual violence?

Young people across all focus groups seem to use common sense when identifying potentially dangerous persons. In most cases they see this person as a stranger, a person 30 – 50 years old who practices odd behaviour which is different from a normal etiquette and who raises a feeling that something is not “quite right”. In all the groups, except for young LGBT people, a foreign national was regarded as a potential risk even though one participant mentioned that it could be just a form of negative stereotyping and may not always be true.

Do young people think that they are at risk of being victimized by online sexual violence?

What was evident was a tendency of young people to believe that such risks relate to ‘others’, to people different from themselves, and that their own risk-taking had occurred when they were somewhat younger and more naive than they are now. Risk was also seen to be a gender-related issue, with females being identified as often more vulnerable than males. The fact that the young people attribute risks and vulnerability to outsiders or outside factors may be also linked to difficulties expressing –in front of an open group and an unknown moderator – their own vulnerabilities and weaknesses and may therefore represent, at least in part, a form of defence.

Many young people also acknowledged that some elements of risk relate to levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Young people who have experience of institutional life (young people in residential care and young people with disabilities) perceive that geographical and social location could expose a person to a greater online risk than others. Young people who live in big cities and live with their

family were regarded to be at greater risk of being victimized online than young people who stay in institutions or live in villages.

Which strategies do young people use to stay safe online? All of the focus groups had specific strategies they use to minimize the risks they face online. Almost all of the focus groups gave information which concerned either receiving or giving informal support in respect of staying safe online. Many, but not all, young people restrict the availability of personal information to people they do not know. Other safety measures like avoiding particular sites, avoiding provision of personal information online, identity control, communication blocking, discussing unknown people with friends to assess his/ her behaviour and proactive education were often mentioned in the interviews as well.

However, there was ambivalence about the opportunities that the Internet afforded and their responses to them, particularly unwanted approaches by others to which young people reacted proactively by refusing to add, blocking or deleting the unwanted person. Some of them would continue communicating with an unknown person to get more information about this person or just to make fun of him/ her. The less common proactive response to unwanted approaches mentioned by young people was reporting this unwanted contact to police or other relevant authorities. There was also a group of young people who reacted to an unwanted approach passively by ignoring or not responding to it.

In the case of arranging an offline meeting with online acquaintances many young people (both boys and girls) mentioned being accompanied to the first meeting by someone else or ensuring the meeting was in a public place.

The LGBT group's behaviour when carrying out searches (searching for online contacts, increased reactivity to undesirable contacts, and online

exploration of sexuality) reflects the characteristics of a group which, due to objective difficulties tied to social stigmas, has already, at least in part, gone through a complex process of self-discovery and elaboration of a personal emotional and sexual identity. The resilience that has been built up is therefore also reflected in a greater safety and awareness with which the group seems to be moving around on the Net and facing risks related to it. LGBT young people were more likely to be proactive and assertive in their responses, although this may, in part, have been a function of being somewhat older.

The LGBT group has demonstrated a more selective exposure of their personal information especially about their sexual preference, than in other groups of young people. Besides the strategies mentioned above, young LGBT people use the following: 1) checking age of the person before developing online relations with him/ her; 2) putting the same questions to an online contact a week later in order to check the consistency of his/her responses; 3) checking the consistency of the information an online acquaintance provides via different social networks, messengers and mobile phone; 4) getting a cell phone number from an online acquaintance to check the name of the person holding the subscription; 5) seeing the person via webcam before meeting with him/ her; 6) in case of unwanted approaches, negotiation of the conditions under which it would be possible to continue communication. The LGBT group also appeared to be more proactive than many of the other groups in reporting such individuals to police or other authorities when their own attempts to resolve the situation were unsuccessful.

Young people in residential care seem to know all the main rules on how to stay safe online and implement most of them in daily life. More often than other groups of young people they prefer to block or delete unwanted online contacts without trying to get any additional information about him/ her. At the same time males in residential care tend

not to use any safety strategies when arranging offline meetings with females they first got in touch with online.

Even though young people with a learning disability and/or additional support needs were able to mention the main rules on how to stay safe online including restricting access to their personal information, a deeper discussion on the Internet safety issues has shown that they have difficulties in implementing Internet safety strategies in their daily life, have poorer risk management skills and perform a level lower than other young people at the same age who have no learning disability. In particular, more often than other groups of young people they mentioned adding unknown people to their contact lists in social networks.

What are the responsibilities of external parties to provide Internet safety? There was a particular focus on parents and guardians in providing access to computers and mobile devices. Many young people already have limits set up by parents or guardians regarding the time when they can use Internet and what exactly they are allowed to do online; in most cases young people admit that such limits should exist. All groups of children generally agreed that young people should be prepared for Internet life by teachers or parents. Many adolescents mentioned the need to set age or social skill-based limits for the free use of Internet.

Are there any groups of young people who are at a greater risk of online sexual violence than others? Focus groups have shown that there are more similarities than differences between different groups of young people in the way they use Internet, divide the online and offline worlds, initiate online relations with unknown people by themselves, perceive persons who potentially could cause harm either online or in real life as well as in what they know about Internet safety and what they do to stay safe online.

LGBT young people of both sexes as well as males from other groups seem to use Internet more actively than other groups of young people for sexual exploration and for looking for friends and sexual partners and they tend to more often than other groups of young people arrange offline meetings with people they initially met online. At the same time young LGBT people seem to be most active in implementing diverse strategies and complementing each other's strategies to stay safe on different stages of communication with an unknown person starting from the moment of initial contact and ending with an offline meeting. This does not seem to be relevant to males from other groups who try to find sexual partners via Internet, especially males in residential care who do not tend to take any safety measures when arranging offline meetings with their Internet acquaintances. This makes males from all the groups except LGBT potentially more vulnerable and increases the potential risk for them to become victimized by online sexual perpetrators.

Another group of young people who seem to be more at risk of becoming victims of online violence are young people with a learning disability and/or additional support needs. On the one hand, they need to have friends, and on the other hand they seem to have difficulties in understanding Internet safety rules and implementing them when online.

A group of young people that seems to be more vulnerable than others are adolescents with low self-esteem and lack of communication skills. In most cases they find it easier to develop close relations online than in face-to-face communication and seem to be more open than others in sharing personal information with unknown people.

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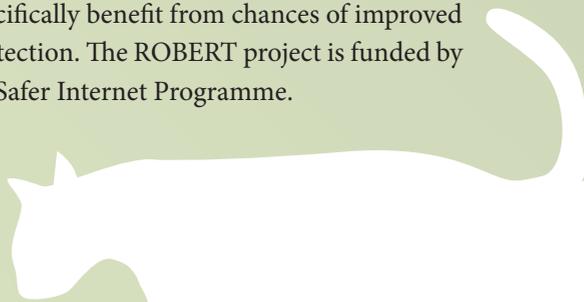
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RISKTAKING ONLINE BEHAVIOUR
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH
RESEARCH AND TRAINING

ROBERT

ROBERT project intends to make online interaction safe for children and young people. This will be achieved through learning from experiences of online abuse processes and factors that make young people vulnerable as well as those that offer protection. Perpetrators' strategies in relation to grooming of children online will also be explored along with developing an understanding of how abuse may develop in the online environment. Children and young people will be empowered in order for them to better protect themselves online. Groups of children perceived to be more at risk will specifically benefit from chances of improved self-protection. The ROBERT project is funded by the EU Safer Internet Programme.



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