RISKY ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Online communities

- Specific online platform(s) through which a group of people interact
- Group-centred (not person-centred)

- Shared norms, values, goals
- Sustained bonds and support
- Sense of (virtual) community
- (At least partly) online interaction

(Blanchard & Markus, 2004; Lee, Vogel & Limayem, 2003; Rheingold, 2008; De Souza & Preece, 2004)
Online communities

- „Virtual“ communities, but real social environment
- Resources (social, information, material)
- Social identity ↔ membership, group perception
- Attitudes and behavior ↔ community norms, values
- Many benefits, but also potential risk
Risky online communities

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- Generated content
  - E.g. hate groups
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- Norms and values
  - E.g. pro-ana communities
Risky online communities
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- Norms and values
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- Abuse of published information
Our project – online risks

- One topic: online communities of Czech adolescents
- June 2012
- Online questionnaire, filled in during classes
- 3,032 respondents aged 10-17 ($M = 14.03$, $SD = 1.90$), 52% girls
Results – online community members

16 % of sample visit **pure** online community (\( n = 493 \))

43 % girls (\( n = 210 \))

56 % boys (\( n = 274 \))

Peak at middle adolescence
Results – online community members

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43 % girls \((n = 210)\)
56 % boys \((n = 274)\)

Peak at middle adolescence
Results – published information

- Name and surname: 73
- E-mail: 66
- Your photograph: 55
- The town where you live: 47
- Full birth date: 46
- Link to SNS: 35
- ICQ, Skype or IM: 26
- Information about your school: 19
- Phone number: 13
- Full address: 6
Results – published information

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Results – published information

Abuse of information published in the group: 6 %

On SNS: 10 %
Results: supported negative topics

- Illegal activities (e.g., thefts, vandalism) - 8
- Instructions on how to become and remain very thin - 8
- Verbal attacks on certain groups or individuals - 8
- Extremist attitudes - 5
- Violent attacks on others - 4
- Using drugs and other addictive substances - 4
- Ways how to physically hurt and harm self - 4
- Ways of committing suicide - 3
Results: perception of online community by social environment

They don’t know I go to the group

- Friends: 13
- Classmates: 27
- Parents: 27

They consider/would consider the group bad

- Friends: 7
- Classmates: 12
- Parents: 21

They think/would think the group is dangerous

- Friends: 7
- Classmates: 7
- Parents: 21

They don’t/wouldn’t agree with what we do in the group

- Friends: 15
- Classmates: 15
- Parents: 24

Friends
Classmates
Parents
Results: perception of online community by social environment

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The perceived community influence on behavioral change

- Scaled from averaged items, alpha = .745

- E.G.:
  - I changed a lot thanks to the group.
  - In everyday life I started behaving differently from before thanks to the group.
Predictors

- Sex, age
- Peer rejection, sensation seeking
- Problem behavior offline, life satisfaction
## The perceived community influence on behavioral change

### 3-step hierarchical regression

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</table>
The perceived community influence on behavioral change

- More perceived by younger children
  - Developmental context
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- By children with problem behavior
  - Possible exacerbation of problematic attitudes?
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- By children seeking sensation
  - Online community as a source of excitement?
Conclusions

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  - Not very frequent abuse of information
  - Low percentage of negative content (3 - 8 %)
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- Most online communities are not evaluated as risky:
  - Not very frequent abuse of information
  - Low percentage of negative content (3 - 8%)

- But despite the marginal occurrence these should not be ignored.
Thank you for your attention.

Contact: hmachack@fss.muni.cz

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Literature

Our project – online risks

On the Internet places there are a lot of places where people of similar interests or opinions meet. Sometimes these people make groups to which their members come back regularly, they often use a nickname, know each other, talk to each other or exchange information or materials. They can meet e.g. on discussion forums, blogs, chats or in games. When you are e.g. on Facebook, you may be a member of such a group, but you may be not.

Those who personally visit such a place or group regularly

Those who indicated predominant online contact