The digital privacy gap:

How adolescents and their parents understand online privacy boundaries

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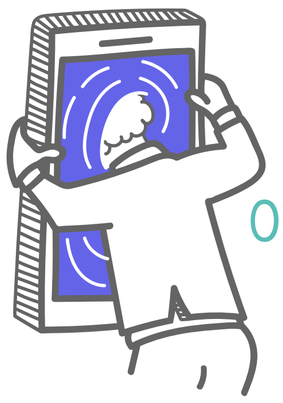
01 Introduction

Online activities are a **routine part of adolescents' autonomous social lives** but also a source of **concern for parents**, raising questions about which experiences adolescents consider **private versus willing to share** with their parents.



Social-cognitive domain theory (Smetana et al., 2009) examined adolescents' **strategies for managing information**; however, recent work argues research should also **distinguish between different online social activities rather than consider online behavior as homogenous** (Van Zalk & Van Zalk, 2020).

02 Objectives

To investigate how early adolescents and their parents **understand the privacy of various online social activities**. To explore the **boundary** between adolescents' right to privacy and parents' right to know. To **enrich the theory** in the **context of digital media**.

03 Methodology

Design: open items as part of cross-sectional survey of **1,562 Czech parent–child dyads** (adolescents aged 11–14, M = 12.51, *SD*= 1.13, 51.4% boys)

Analysis: a qualitative Structured Tabular Thematic Analysis of 5,304 open-ended answers (for this poster 2,000)

04 Results

what is private?

conversations with friends & friends' secrets

crushes, romantic relationships

child's diary, feelings

fun, leisure content & games played with friends

conversations about school

"I should know everything they do online, internet is a scary place."

"Parents don't get why I watch those videos, so they don't need to know it."

what parents should know?

online aggression, insults, threats

sexual solicitations, receiving nudes

strangers

child needs advice

cyberbullying

drugs, alcohol

dangerous challenges

AREAS OF FRICTION

intimacy, watching porn, masturbation

swearing, fights with friends, school troubles

inappropriate, dangerous or prohibited content (porn, violent games, horrors, youtubers)

content created by children

"I trust my child to come to me if anything upsets him."

"My parents should know if something bothers me online."

14:15

05 Conclusions

- The primary friction arises when parents' desire for control overlaps with adolescents' need for privacy surrounding **intimacy, sexuality, concerning behavioral troubles**, even though **both sides agree parents should step in during severe online threats**.
- Children are private about online experiences that are **inappropriate, dangerous or prohibited** according to parents. They are afraid of punishment or judgment because they are doing what their **parents would not approve or understand**.
- Parents want to know if the children experience/watch such content/interactions but **may fail to create an open environment for children to disclose**. However, many parents give their full trust to their children to keep everything private.

MUNI FSS Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society

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