

On the Rapid Rise of Social Networking Sites: New Findings and Policy Implications

Sonia Livingstone* and David R Brake

Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

Social networking sites have been rapidly adopted by children and, especially, teenagers and young people worldwide, enabling new opportunities for the presentation of the self, learning, construction of a wide circle of relationships, and the management of privacy and intimacy. On the other hand, there are also concerns that social networking increases the likelihood of new risks to the self, these centring on loss of privacy, bullying, harmful contacts and more. This article reviews recent findings regarding children and teenagers' social networking practices in order to identify implications for future research and public policy. These focus on the interdependencies between opportunities and risks, the need for digital or media literacy education, the importance of building safety considerations into the design and management of social networking sites, the imperative for greater attention to 'at risk' children in particular, and the importance of a children's rights framework in developing evidence-based policy in this area. © 2009 The Authors. Journal compilation © 2009 National Children's Bureau.

Social networking among UK children and teenagers

Every few years, governments, the public and even technology providers are taken aback by the unexpected take up among young people of yet another innovation – email, chatrooms, texting, instant messaging, blogging and, recently, social networking sites. Public policy aspirations quickly capitalise on these youthful enthusiasms, seeking to revitalise agendas of informal education, health and lifestyle advice, and civic participation. Simultaneously, technological innovations afford the commercial world new possibilities for targeted and embedded marketing, while public policy is also required to address new online risks to children's well-being. This article reviews recent findings regarding children and teenagers' social networking practices in order to identify key recommendations for the future research and public policy.

Most social networking sites are intended for teenagers and adults, though some have no lower age limit and some target younger children. In 2007, 42% of UK 8–17 year olds had a social network profile, including 27% of 8–12 year olds and 55% of 13–17 year olds.¹ Similar figures hold in other countries, and use continues to grow worldwide, though it may have peaked in the USA and UK among young people (comScore, 2008). Ofcom's (2008) survey found that most users visit social networking sites daily or every other day, with parental restrictions on use reported by 62% of middle class users (74% of those under 13), but fewer than half of working class users of any age; further, middle class and younger children are also more likely to have set their profile to 'private' (i.e. accessible only to friends or family)

– 61% of social network users overall have restricted access to their profile in the UK and similar figures apply in the USA.²

Social networking sites, like much else on the Internet, represent a moving target for researchers and policy-makers. Having recently reached the mass market, they continue to evolve as domestic broadband access increases and digital technologies of all kinds, including GPS location tracking on mobile platforms, become more available. Several previously 'closed' social networking sites now allow their users to incorporate features created by third parties and let users log into third party sites using their profile information, potentially undermining corporate responsibility for users' privacy protection.

New opportunities for self-expression, learning, communication and networking?

Because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies [and] within the play of specific modalities of power (Hall, 1996: 4).

Identities are constituted through interaction with others. Increasingly, the sites in which young people perform and experiment with identity include the online domain. As both technology and its uses evolve, this reconfigures the possibilities for social identity construction in ways that are not yet fully understood. But what remains constant, driving online and mobile communication, is young people's strong desire to connect with peers anywhere, anytime – to stay in touch, express themselves and share experiences. 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 (Boneva and others, 2006; Gross, 2004; Mesch and Talmud, 2007), and this applies equally to social networking (Ellison and others, 2007; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007a,b).

At the heart of the explosion in online communication is the desire to construct a valued representation of oneself which affirms and is affirmed by one's peers. Observation of teenagers' social networking practices reveals the pleasure they find creating an online 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1991). A typical teenager's MySpace profile had a big welcome in sparkly pink, with music, photos, a love tester, guestbook and dedication pages, all customised down to the scroll bars and cursor with pink candy stripes, glitter, angels, flowers, butterflies, hearts and more. As she said, 'you can just change it all the time [and so] you can show different sides of yourself' (Danielle, 13, quoted in Livingstone, 2008a). Friends' responses are often strongly affirming, offering mutual recognition in the peer network (Valkenburg and others, 2006).

Teenagers have long decorated their bedroom walls with images expressive of their identity, also keeping a diary or photo album, sending notes and chatting to friends. So does online social networking make a difference? Few claim that social networking has dramatically transformed children and young people's lives, but its specific affordances do appear to facilitate changes in the quantity and, arguably, the quality of communication: these include the ease, speed and convenience of widespread access and distribution of content, connectivity

throughout a near-global network, the persistence and searchability of content over time, the facility to replicate, remix and manipulate content, and settings for managing conditions of privacy, anonymity and exchange (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ito and others, 2008).

One consequence is the wide circles of friends (or 'friends of friends') sustained by social networking teenagers: a survey of US 13–18 year olds found the average number of social networking contacts is 75 (Harris Interactive, 2006). Self-report methods may distort the picture – an analysis of contacts on a random selection of public MySpace profiles for users aged 16+ found the median number to be only 27 (Thelwall, 2008), though contacts numbering in the hundreds are commonplace (Salaway and others, 2008), this enabling bridging social capital – the creation and maintenance of extensive social networks of weak ties (Ellison and others, 2007). A second consequence important to teenagers is that social networking sites enable them to overcome the embarrassments of face-to-face communication, because they afford asynchronous, noncommittal, playful interaction in which the management of 'face' and negotiation of flirting, misinterpretation and innuendo is more controllable (Livingstone, 2008a). Third, social networking disembeds communication from its traditional anchoring in the face-to-face situation of physical co-location where conventions of trust, authenticity and reciprocity are well understood, re-embedding it in more flexible, complex and ambiguous networks in which, it seems, children share advice and support with peers (Heverly, 2008).

Possibly, those who do not engage in social networking miss out on more than just communication. The think tank, Demos, challenges the public sector to keep up with and enable 'the current generation of young people [who] will reinvent the workplace and society' (Green and Hannon, 2007: 62). Educators and advocates of new digital literacies are confident that social networking encourages the development of transferable technical and social skills of value in formal and informal learning (Crook and Harrison, 2008; Ito and others, 2008). Many public sector and non-governmental organisations, from educators to child welfare workers to activist movements hope that through social networking services they can address young people on their own terms, putting the potential of viral marketing to positive use.³ However, whether these wider benefits exist is yet to be established by empirical research.

New risks of privacy invasion, bullying and dangerous contacts?

New opportunities tend to be associated with new risks (Livingstone and Helsper, in press). The UK's Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet (2008) identifies a series of risks to children's safety associated with social networking – bullying, harassment, exposure to harmful content, theft of personal information, sexual grooming, violent behaviour, encouragement to self-harm and racist attacks. Anxious headlines – 'Knife a Pal on Facebook' (Clench, 2008), 'Facebook spells end of lasting friendships, says expert' (Smith, 2008), 'MySpace Invaders: Evil Lurks on Teen Sites' (Webster and Edwards, 2007) – certainly overstate the problem, but there are grounds for genuine concern. Such research findings as exist link social networking with a range of content, contact and conduct risks to children and young people, including some perpetrated by children themselves.

The UK Children Go Online survey of 9–19 year olds found that, among those who used the Internet at least weekly, 57% had seen online pornography, 31% had seen violent and 11% had seen racist content. Further, 31% had received sexual comments online and 28% had been sent unsolicited sexual material. A third had received bullying comments online and

8% had gone to a meeting with someone first met online (Livingstone and Bober, 2005). Two adolescent practices are likely to exacerbate online risk – the disclosure of personal information and the experimental nature of peer communication. Yet it seems teenagers are fairly though not entirely careful when communicating online. A content analysis of a random sample of 2423 public MySpace profiles produced by under 18s found that many provided personal photos (57%), but only a few discussed alcohol consumption (18%), showed images of friends in swimsuit/underwear (16%), provided real names (9%), discussed smoking (8%), showed themselves in swimsuit/underwear (5%) or discussed marijuana use (2%) (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008). A USA survey found that while boys and younger teens are more likely to post false information, older teenagers (especially girls) are more likely to reveal detailed personal information: overall, 49% included their school and 29% their email address (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). An Irish survey of 10–20 year olds found that while 49% gave out their date of birth, only 12% gave their mobile phone number and 8% their home address (Anchor, 2007). Since social networking sites are designed for teenagers to provide at least their name, birth date and photograph, such personal disclosures are unsurprising.

There is growing evidence that personal disclosure facilitates communication risks. While mild peer-to-peer problems may include teenagers teasing each other by posting ‘embarrassing’ pictures, concerns are growing about ‘cyberbullying’ (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006): a 2006 survey found that, although 69% pupils were bullied in past year, only 7% said they had received unpleasant or bullying emails/IM/text messages (Bullying UK, 2006), although another survey found 20% had been cyberbullied (NCH/Tesco, 2006). Higher levels of cyberbullying are reported in the USA: 72% of 12–17 year olds, an online survey found, had been bullied online in the previous year, and 85% had also been bullied in school. Although from a self-selected sample, these figures show how online and offline bullying are linked (Juvonen and Gross, 2008): Hinduja and Patchin (2009) found that 82% of those bullied online knew their perpetrator and 42% who reported being cyberbullied were also bullied at school.

Much research tends not to distinguish modes of communication – email, text, chatroom, instant messaging or social networking. While 33% of 10–15 year olds contacted in the USA reported being harassed online in 2007, they were more likely to be harassed through instant messaging or chatrooms than via social networking sites (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008). Ybarra and others (2007) argue that teenagers who communicate in multiple ways online are most at risk of online victimization, as are those who seek out opportunities to talk about sex with unknown people and who have unknown people in their buddy lists (see also Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2009). Having found that lower self-esteem and well-being is more common among teenagers who particularly seek opportunities to talk to strangers online, Valkenburg and Peter (2007a) argue that chatrooms favour such interaction with strangers more than instant messaging. For social networking, a key factor might be whether a teenager’s profile is set to public or private and whether he or she is careful or casual in accepting unknown contacts as friends. However, research has yet carefully to disentangle the workings of these different factors – forms of online communication, conditions of use, characteristics of the young users, and possible adverse consequences.

Policy implications: balancing opportunities and risks in social networking

Children and youth worldwide have adopted social networking sites enthusiastically, partly because of the erosion of children’s freedoms in the physical world (Gill, 2008). But

children's agency should not be overstated, for their practices are constrained by their degree of digital literacy (which is not as high as popularly assumed; Livingstone, 2008b), and by the technical designs of social networking sites (which impede easy management of settings and transparency regarding the commercial use of personal information). In this section, we identify pressing five issues for researchers and policy makers.

First, opportunities and risks are linked. Teenagers' experience of a range of opportunities is positively correlated with their experiences of online risk, so that the more opportunities they take up, the more risks they encounter, and the more policy attempts to limit risks the more it may also limit opportunities (Livingstone and Helsper, *in press*). Further, the more skilled teenagers are in their use of the Internet, the more they experience both opportunities and risks (and not, as often supposed, the more able they are to avoid risks). The interdependencies between risks and opportunities are partly due to youthful exploration and risk-taking practices – it being part of adolescence to push boundaries and seek out new, even transgressive opportunities (Hope, 2007). It is also a matter of interface design – for example, pornography and sexual advice results from the same online search while filters may block both; similarly, poorly designed privacy controls can be misunderstood by users seeking to share intimate information with friends.

Second, as communicative environments develop, so do the media or digital literacy demands on their users. As long as definitions of media literacy remain contested and schools remain reluctant to incorporate media education into teacher training and classroom curricula, children's knowledge will lag behind the industry's fast-changing practices of embedded marketing, use of personal data, user tracking and so forth, most of which is opaque to young people as they navigate the options before them. Further, limitations on and inequalities in digital literacies mean not all young people benefit from the new opportunities on offer; indeed, providing online resources may exacerbate rather than overcome inequality as opportunities are disproportionately taken up by the already-privileged (Hargittai, 2007).

Third, addressing risk cannot be left solely to parents and children, as neither fully understands how to manage this online nor has sufficient resources to do so. Noting confusion among parents, children and those working in child protection regarding the risks social networking poses to children, the UK's CEOP (2006) calls for 'safety by design' so as to build safety protection into the interface rather than relying on the safety awareness and digital literacy skills of children and parents. In the UK, the Byron (2008) Review led to a new UK Council for Child Internet Safety, established to provide independent and accountable oversight of commercial self-regulatory practices. At a European level, the EC's Safer Internet Programme has supported guidance for pan-European self-regulation of social networking services (EC Social Networking Task Force, 2009). One key issue is ensuring appropriate privacy protection for children,⁴ leading the European Network and Information Agency to consider a range of means to address privacy-related threats, identity issues and social risks, from awareness raising to improving transparency of data handling practices, and from authentication and consent processes to default software setting and automated filters (Hogben, 2007; see also Kesan and Shah, 2006).

Fourth, specific attention is required for 'at risk' children, given growing indications that those low in self-esteem or lacking satisfying friendships or relations with parents are also those at risk through online social networking communication (Livingstone and Helsper,

2007; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007a; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004) and, further, that those at risk may also be those who then perpetrate harm towards others. A balanced risk assessment should also note that, though dangerous, risks to children from adult sexual predators on social networking sites are very rare (Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2009), and more common is the misuse of personal information by spammers and fraudsters (Jagatic and others, 2007) and the inadvertent release of personal information harmful to young people's reputations and employment prospects (YouGov, 2007).

Lastly, in framing policies to reduce risk, children's rights must not be forgotten. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes the right to freedom of assembly and expression as well as freedom from harm and privacy from the state, commerce and individuals. Since children are concerned to maintain privacy from their parents, this challenges simplistic advice that parents should 'check up' on their children's social networking activities, with or without their permission. The balance between opportunities and risks should, arguably, be struck differently for 'at risk' children, where greater monitoring or restrictions may be legitimate – moreover, for these children especially, relying on parents to undertake this role may be inappropriate.

In all, the evidence to date suggests that, for most children, social networking affords considerable benefits in terms of communication and relationships, less proven benefits as yet regarding learning and participation, and some transfer of bullying and other social risks from offline to online domains. While there is, therefore, much left to do for policy makers if children are, overall, to gain substantial benefit from social networking, there is also much left for researchers to do. In writing this article, we have struggled to find sufficient empirical research on which to ground our claims. Research must keep up to date with children and young people's social practices online, as their enthusiasm for social networking is undeniable and their future uses of this technology may, as so often before, still surprise us.

Notes

- 1 These figures from Ofcom (2008) have been rebased for all UK 8–17 year olds and recalculated by age for this article.
- 2 A Pew Internet survey of American 12–17 year olds found that two-thirds keep their profile wholly or partially private and that, of the information that is made public, much is either non-revealing or false (Lenhart and Madden, 2007).
- 3 Bringing together the British Youth Council, Children's Rights Alliance for England, National Children's Bureau, National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, the National Youth Agency and Save the Children England, Participation Works (<http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>) uses social networking to give children a voice; see also Digizen.org, a project 'designed to investigate how social networking services can and are being used to support personalised formal and informal learning by young people in schools and colleges' (<http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/>)
- 4 In one study, one in six university students expressed high concern that a stranger might know their class schedule and address but these same students had provided exactly this information on their Facebook profile, having misunderstood Facebook's privacy policy (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Tufekci, 2008). Emerging tools which enable users to broadcast their locations and activities online automatically represent a particular threat.

References

- Acquisti A, Gross EF. 2006. *Imagined Communities Awareness, Information Sharing, and Privacy on the Facebook*. Paper presented at the Privacy Enhancing Technologies Workshop: Cambridge, UK.
- Anchor. 2007 *The Anchor WATCH_YOUR_SPACE Survey: Survey of Irish Teenagers Use of Social Networking Websites*. Anchor Youth Centre: Dublin.
- Boneva B, Quinn A, Kraut R, Kiesler S, Shklovski I. 2006. Teenage communication in the Instant Messaging Era. In *Computers, Phones, and the Internet: Domesticating Information Technology*. Kraut R, Brynin M, Kiesler S (eds). Oxford University Press: Oxford; 201–218.
- boyd d, Ellison N. 2007. Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13: 210–230.
- Bullying UK. 2006. *National Bullying Survey*. Bullying UK: London.
- Byron T. 2008. *Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review*. Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport: London.
- CEOP. 2006. *Understanding Online Social Network Services and Risks to Youth: Stakeholder perspectives*. Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre: London.
- Clench J. 2008. Knife a Pal on Facebook. *The Sun* 28 July 2008: 1.
- Crook C, Harrison C. 2008. *Web 2.0 Technologies for Learning at Key Stages 3 and 4*. Becta: Coventry.
- EC Social Networking Task Force. 2009. *Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU*. European Commission: Luxembourg.
- Ellison N, Steinfield C, Lampe C. 2007. The Benefits of Facebook “Friends:” Social Capital and College Students’ Use of Online Social Network Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12: 1143–1168.
- Giddens A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Gill T. 2008. Space-oriented children’s policy: creating child-friendly communities to improve children’s well-being. *Children and Society* 22: 136–142.
- Green H, Hannon C. 2007. *Their Space: Education for a Digital Generation*. Demos: London.
- Gross EF. 2004. Adolescent Internet use: What we expect, what teens report. *Applied Developmental Psychology* 25: 633–649.
- Hall S. 1996. Introduction: Who needs identity. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Hall S, du Gay P (eds). Sage: London; 1–17.
- Hargittai E. 2007. Whose Space? Differences Among Users and Non-Users of Social Network Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13: 276–297.
- Harris Interactive. 2006. Friendships in the Age of Social Networking Websites [Electronic Version]. *Trends & Tudes*, 5. http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_k12.asp (accessed on 5 August 2008).
- Heverly RA. 2008. Growing up digital: control and the pieces of a digital life. In *Digital Youth, Innovations, and the Unexpected*, Vol. 4. McPherson T (ed.). The MIT Press: Cambridge; 199–218.
- Hinduja S, Patchin J. 2008. Personal Information of Adolescents on the Internet: A Quantitative Content Analysis of MySpace. *Journal of Adolescence* 31: 125–146.
- Hinduja S, Patchin J. 2009. *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*. Corwin Press: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Hogben G. 2007. *Security Issues and Recommendations for Online Social Networks*. European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA). Retrieved from http://www.enisa.europa.eu/pages/05_01.htm [Accessed 6 May 2009].
- Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet. 2008. *Good practice guidance for the providers of social networking and other user interactive services*. Home Office: London.
- Hope A. 2007. Risk Taking, Boundary Performance and Intentional School Internet “Misuse”. *Discourse* 28: 87–99.
- Internet Safety Technical Task Force 2009. *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of*

- State Attorneys General of the United States*. Internet Safety Technical Task Force. Retrieved from <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/> [Accessed 6 May 2009].
- Ito M, Horst HA, Bittanti M, boyd d, Herr-Stephenson B, Lange PG, Pascoe CJ, Robinson L. 2008. *Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation: Chicago.
- Jagatic TN, Johnson NA, Jakobsson M, Menczer F. 2007. Social phishing. *Communications of the ACM* 50: 94–100.
- Juvonen J, Gross EF. 2008. Extending the school grounds? Bullying experiences in cyberspace *Journal of School Health* 78: 496–505.
- Kesan JP, Shah RC. 2006. Establishing software defaults: Perspectives from Law, Computer Science and Behavioral Economics. *Notre Dame Law Review* 82: 583–634.
- Lenhart A, Madden M. 2007. *Teens, Privacy & Online Social Networks: How Teens Manage their Online Identities and Personal Information in the Age of MySpace*. Pew Internet & American Life Project: Washington, DC.
- Livingstone S. 2008a. Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation: Teenagers' Use of Social Networking Sites for Intimacy, Privacy and Self-Expression. *Media & Society* 10: 393–411.
- Livingstone S. 2008b. Internet literacy: Young people's negotiation of new online opportunities. In *Unexpected Outcomes and Innovative Uses of Digital Media by Youth*. McPherson T (ed). The MIT Press: Cambridge; 101–121.
- Livingstone S, Bober M. 2005. *UK Children Go Online: Final Report of Key Project Findings*. London School of Economics and Political Science: London.
- Livingstone S, Helsper EJ. 2007. Taking risks when communication on the Internet: the role of offline social-psychological factors in young people's vulnerability to online risks. *Information, Communication & Society* 10: 619–643.
- Livingstone S, Helsper EJ in press. Balancing opportunities and risks in teenagers' use of the Internet: the role of online skills and family context. *New Media & Society* 11.
- Mesch GS, Talmud I. 2007. Similarity and the quality of online and offline social relationships among adolescents in Israel. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 17: 455–466.
- NCH/Tesco. 2006. *Get I.T. Safe Children, parents and technology survey 2006: NCH*. Retrieved from <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Education/documents/2006/07/17/NCHreport.pdf> [Accessed 6 May 2009]
- Ofcom. 2008. *Social Networking: A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use*. Office of Communications: London.
- Patchin JW, Hinduja S. 2006. Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: a preliminary look at Cyberbullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 4: 148–169.
- Salaway G, Caruso JB, Nelson MR, Ellison N. 2008. *The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology*. Educause Center for Applied Research: Boulder, Colorado.
- comScore. (2008). Social networking explodes worldwide as sites increase their focus on cultural relevance. <http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=2396> (accessed on 15 September 2008)
- Smith R. 2008. Facebook spells end of lasting friendships, says expert. *The Daily Telegraph* 4 July 2008: 5.
- Thelwall M. 2008. Social Networks, Gender and Friending: An Analysis of MySpace Member Profiles. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59: 1321–1330.
- Tufekci Z. 2008. Can You See Me Now? Audience and Disclosure Regulation in Online Social Network Sites. *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 28: 20–36.
- Valkenburg PM, Peter J. 2007a. Internet communication and its relation to well-being: identifying some underlying mechanisms. *Media Psychology* 9: 43–58.
- Valkenburg PM, Peter J. 2007b. Preadolescents' and adolescents' online communication and their closeness to friends. *Developmental Psychology* 43: 267–277.
- Valkenburg PM, Peter J, Schouten AP. 2006. Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 9: 584–590.
- Webster N, Edwards D. 2007. Myspace Invaders: Evil Lurks on Teen Sites. *The Mirror* 26 July 2007: 8.

- Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ. 2004. Online aggressor/targets, aggressors, and targets: a comparison of associated youth characteristics. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45: 1308.
- Ybarra ML, Mitchell JK, Finkelhor D, Wolak J. 2007. Internet Prevention Messages: Targeting the Right Online Behaviors. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 161: 138–145.
- Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ. 2008. How risky are social networking sites? a comparison of places online where youth sexual solicitation and harassment occurs *Pediatrics* 121: e350–e357.
- YouGov. 2007. *What does your NetRep say about you? A study of how your internet reputation can influence your career prospects*. YouGov. Retrieved from <http://www.viadeo.com/netrep/> [Accessed 6 May 2009].

*Correspondence to: Sonia Livingstone, Department of Media and Communications. London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK Tel: 02079557710; Fax: 02079557248. E-mail: s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk

Contributors' details

Sonia Livingstone is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Media and Communications and Project Director, EUKidsOnline, www.eukidsonline.net <http://www.eukidsonline.net/> She researches children and young people's engagement with the internet at the Department of Media and Communications, LSE.

David R Brake is completing his PhD on web 2.0 usage practices at the Department of Media and Communications, LSE.