



## Abstract

**Purpose:** With increased social media use, families face novel challenges around maintaining interpersonal digital privacy. Previous research on digital victimization has focused mainly on bullying, concerns of “stranger danger,” and identity theft. This study examines concerns of family members regarding other forms of interpersonal digital privacy and safety in rural Appalachia.

**Method:** Our sample included 65 adults and adolescents who participated in focus groups and 24 adults and adolescents who completed individual cognitive interviews exploring digital privacy concerns and practices. Focus groups and cognitive interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded using grounded theory analysis. This poster focuses on comments pertaining to family privacy.

**Results:** Parents and adolescents exhibited concerns about interpersonal victimizations in the form of pranks. Adolescents displayed boundary concerns of parents viewing their online activity. Parents’ main concerns were children’s privacy and security online and the use of technology as a source of information about their child.

## Introduction

- Even younger family members have unprecedented access to technology compared to other generations: 88% of teens have a cell phone or smart phone, and 87% of teens have access to a desktop or a laptop computer (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Lenhart, 2015).
- Due to a lack of impulse control, vulnerability to peer pressure, and desire to be accepted by peers, some teens may not consider the wide range of risks and consequences of their actions online (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015).
- As adolescents seek autonomy online and in their social lives, parents often struggle to allow an appropriate amount of freedom while still ensuring their child’s safety online (Goldstein, 2015).
- Parents frequently must find a balance between monitoring their child’s online behavior and not being too intrusive or restrictive (Goldstein, 2015).
- The “digital generation gap” between younger, native technology users and older generations poses additional problems for parents seeking to monitor their children online. Today’s youth exhibit significantly greater knowledge of technology in comparison to their parents (Vaterlaus, Jones, & Tulane, 2015).
- Existing literature on the potential risks of technology frequently focuses on cyberbullying or other potential dangers for youth. It fails to address the complexities of parenting in a digital age and the impact on family relationships, which are a major source of other forms of victimization (Sadhir, Stockburger, & Omar, 2016).
- This study examines the challenges faced by parents concerning the online digital privacy and safety concerns for their children.

## Method

### Participants

*Focus Groups:* Our sample consisted of 65 participants from rural Appalachia as a part of a larger study. The sample included adolescents ages 12 years and older and adults. Our sample identified as 58% female and 42% male. The majority identified as White/European American (non-Latino) (92%), as Latino(a) (3%), as more than one race (3%) and as African American/Black (non-Latino) (2%).

*In-depth Cognitive Interviews:* Our sample consisted of 24 adult and adolescent participants from rural Appalachia. Age of participants ranged from 12 to 70 or older, and the sample identified as 61% female and 39% male. The majority of the sample (88%) identified as White/European American (non-Latino), as 8% Latino(a), and as 4% African American/Black (non-Latino).

### Procedure

*Focus Groups* In semi-structured focus groups, participants answered questions regarding technology use, online privacy concerns, online victimization, and online safety practices. Participants received a \$20 Walmart gift card and information on local resources at the conclusion of the focus groups. Focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

*In-depth Cognitive Interviews* In one-on-one narrative interviews, a preliminary survey on online victimization and digital privacy was presented to participants. Participants were asked to comment on the questionnaire, as well as give their answers. Participants were compensated for their time with a \$50 Walmart gift card and received information on local resources at the conclusion of the interview. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

*Grounded Theory Analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)* Focus group and interview transcripts were read and coded for the most commonly occurring themes in order to best capture participants’ experiences.

## Results

### Digital Knowledge Transfer to Parents

“I told them when I got Snapchat, and they were more concerned about Snapchat because I don’t think they knew how it worked, so I kind of showed them how it worked...”-Adolescent Male

“I think when you’re my age, and you didn’t grow up with it, you constantly need some advice about some new something that you’re trying to do. Certainly. my millennials have been a huge help.”-Adult Female

### Parents’ Fears and Concerns

“It does concern me when they get older because it seems like it’s almost impossible for parents to keep them off websites and stuff that you don’t want them on.”-Adult Female

“Not even talking about pornography or anything, but, even if the kid has a Netflix account, and they watch *House of Cards*... that’s almost too adult for me to watch, or, *Game of Thrones*, or something where the heads are rolling.”-Adult Male

### Boundaries

#### Creating Boundaries for Youth

“They tablets have a mommy mode on there...but they have a safe browser too that only allows them (kids) to look at certain websites within that...The tablets have time limits too. So, it will shut off at a certain time, and there’s no fuss.”-Adult Female

#### Crossing Boundaries to Monitor Youth

“Well I just found out yesterday what my daughter’s password was and everything, so I was thinking of going on today and looking to see what’s going on...”-Adult Female

“My uncle took my phone one time and locked himself in the bathroom and read my messages.”- Adolescent Male

“One of my friends Facetimed their mom to ask if they could stop, like, ‘Can you stop looking at my texts?’”-Adolescent Female

### Technology as a Method of Surveillance

“My mom can always text me, like and she always expects a text directly back and so the technology makes check-ins instantaneous, so yeah there’s a little bit of that surveillance there...”-Young Adult Male

### Management of Sharing

“I just text from my phone, but I don’t care to give my mom my phone. I don’t trust my parents”-Adolescent Female

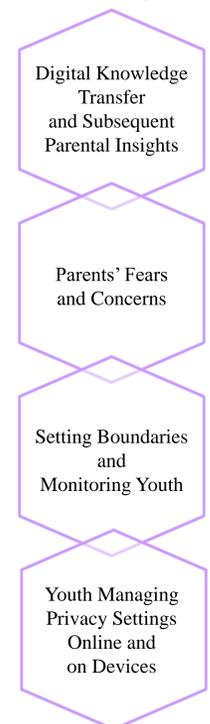
“You can’t really say no (to being friends with your parents on Facebook) because that would offend them, so, that’s why you just message people and don’t post.”-Adolescent Male

### Mutual Concern: Pranks and Loss of Social Capital

“And that’s why I leave mine in my pocket...Because I go to the gym, and I have exercise with a bunch of guys that are practical jokers, and there’s no telling what they’d put on there.”-Adult Male

“One day I was sleeping, he [uncle] grabbed my phone and took a picture of himself...I just laughed it off, but, from now on, I make sure my phone is like in my pocket when I’m not using it. I don’t do that anymore.”- Adolescent Male

Figure 1:  
Overlapping Elements That  
Affect Family Digital  
Relationships



## Discussion

- Our results support Correa’s (2014) theory of bottom-up technology transmission, where youth are the primary source of parent’s technological information. Our findings suggest this is part of a complex dynamic of parent responses, usually fears and concerns, and youths’ subsequent reactions.
  - Some youth resisted parents attempts to monitor and sometimes became increasingly secretive and restrictive in allowing parental access to their digital lives.
  - Varying degrees of parental monitoring online can be perceived as a boundary violation by adolescents. Current thinking has not produced a consensus as to whether monitoring is within a parent’s “right to know” (Rote & Smetana, 2015).
  - Some parents viewed technology as a medium for learning about adolescents’ activities, especially their whereabouts and saw these as being within a parent’s “right to know.”
  - We were surprised about the number of pranks and bullying incidents that occurred between family members in the reports of these participants.
- ### Limitations and Future Directions
- Although family privacy was frequently mentioned, few questions specifically asked about these instances. Future research should investigate the intent and perception of boundary violations.
  - Prevention programs for online victimization and for family violence should both take into consideration that technology can be a source of intra-family victimization.
  - More attention is needed on the ethical balance between a parents’ right to know and youths’ right to digital privacy.

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