



The National Association for Media Literacy Education's
Journal of Media Literacy Education 2:2 (2010) 124 - 150

Fostering Cross-Generational Dialogues about the Ethics of Online Life

Katie Davis, Shira Lee Katz, Rafi Santo, Carrie James
Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Abstract

Today's youth inhabit new digital spaces that seem foreign to many adults. These spaces offer unprecedented opportunities for interpersonal connection, but community can break down when people are emboldened by anonymity through pathways that are fast and highly public. Interested in how teens and adults view these ethically charged issues, our three partner organizations – Common Sense Media, the GoodPlay Project, and Global Kids – convened a three-week long series of online conversations with more than 150 parents, teachers, and teens. Our analysis of these conversations revealed that adults exhibited stronger and more consistent patterns of moral and ethical thinking than youth, who tended to show greater concern for the personal consequences of their online actions. These findings suggest that adults have an important role to play in helping teens to become responsible digital citizens.

Keywords: ethics, digital citizenship, online discussion, digital literacy, social networks

Introduction

“It’s like [in the movie] *Spiderman* ... with great power comes great responsibility.” This is the voice of Henry, a 14-year-old boy who is featured in a curricular video produced by Common Sense Media, a national non-profit organization that works on the family, school, and policy levels to help parents and educators teach young people how to be safe and smart online. By invoking Uncle Ben from the 2002 movie *Spiderman*, 14-year-old Henry points to the immense power afforded by digital media. New media technologies have expanded youths’ powers of creation, self-expression, and communication. Many youth are putting their powers to good use, developing their writing skills through fan fiction and organizing rallies around important social issues like immigration, gay rights, and climate change. Yet, as the news media often remind us, some youth abuse their powers. The story of the Massachusetts high school student who committed suicide after months of harassment by classmates through text messaging and Facebook is just one example (Eckholm and Zezima 2010). Though bullying is by no means a new phenomenon among young people, its effects appear to be intensified by new media technologies that make it easy to spread rumors farther, faster, and more surreptitiously than ever before. When the power of technology is abused in this way, the effects can be disastrous.

Why some youth use their digital powers responsibly while others do not remains unclear. Little is known about the moral and ethical stances that young people adopt as they contend with the unique dimensions of online life. To shed light on this under-researched area, three partner organizations – Common Sense Media, the GoodPlay Project, and Global Kids – convened the Focus Dialogues, a series of online asynchronous discussions about digital ethics. During the course of three weeks, a diverse group of teens and adults came together virtually to discuss five categories of issues that are particularly salient online: identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation (James et al. 2009). The decision to include both adults and teens in these conversations came from our groups’ recognition that adults are often absent from youths’ online spaces (Bradley 2005; Hobbs 2006; Palfrey and Gasser 2008), a concerning reality when one considers the important role that adults have traditionally played in promoting the moral and ethical stances of young people (Fischman, Solomon, Greenspan, and Gardner 2004).

In this article, we report on findings from our analysis of the Focus Dialogues discussions. Many of the adults and teens expressed common perspectives with respect to an individual’s rights and responsibilities online, though our findings did uncover notable distinctions in the way adults and teens approached the

ethically charged questions and dilemmas we posed to them. We consider how these findings might inform scholars' and educators' efforts to expand the field of media literacy education to take into account youths' interactive experiences with new media technologies. In the following literature review, we 1) explore the distinct features of today's online environments; 2) identify the salient ethical issues that arise within these environments, as well as how youth approach them; and 3) consider how the core principles of media literacy education could be used to promote youths' ethical thinking online.

Literature Review

The New Digital Media Landscape

With the advent of web 2.0 tools, the Internet no longer resembles earlier forms of mass media, such as broadcast television and radio, in its one-way delivery of content from producer to consumer. Social media tools such as blogs and wikis have restructured the traditional relationship between author and audience by making it possible for audience members to respond to and expand upon the work of authors and thus become authors in their own right (Jenkins 2006). This interactive dynamic of web 2.0 has given rise to what Jenkins calls a "participatory culture" that engages people in active collaboration around common interests. The types of collaborative practices supported by social media are numerous and wide-ranging. One can observe *Harry Potter* fan fiction authors critiquing each other's work on sites like fanfiction.net and LiveJournal; game enthusiasts forming cooperative guilds in multiplayer online games like *World of Warcraft*; and extended families sharing their pictures and daily updates on Facebook.

Today's youth constitute the first generation to come of age in the context of this new media landscape. Indeed, much of their social development appears to be mediated by mobile phones, social networking sites, and instant messaging services. These digital technologies provide youth with new opportunities to express their identities, as well as avenues to explore their personal interests in online communities. Ito et al. (2009) found that today's youth enjoy unprecedented opportunities to explore a broad range of interests. Whether they choose to try their hand at photography or music composition, young people can readily connect with a community of people who share their interests.

Digital technologies also play a prominent role in the way youth experience their friendships and romantic relationships (boyd 2007). With "always-on/

always-on-you" communication devices such as mobile phones, friends and romantic partners can maintain a constant connection to each other despite being physically separated (Turkle 2008). And, through social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, they can display these personal connections publicly (boyd 2007).

The mediated forms of communication enjoyed by today's youth exhibit distinct features that set them apart from face-to-face communication. Exchanges through text messaging, Facebook, or email do not require people to occupy the same geographic or temporal space in order to communicate with each other. As a result, certain social cues that typically accompany face-to-face conversations, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, are typically missing from text-based, asynchronous forms of communication, though emoticons and punctuation marks are sometimes used as imperfect substitutes. Absent these social cues, it is easier for individuals to achieve a sense of distance from the people with whom they communicate online. Without having to confront others directly, they may feel less inhibited and say or do things they otherwise would not say or do offline (Suler 2004).

boyd (2007) discusses four technical properties of networked publics that complicate the sense of disinhibition associated with mediated communication. *Persistence* concerns the difficulty of erasing information that is posted online, while *searchability* pertains to the ease of retrieving that information, particularly with the emergence of powerful search engines like Google. Once found, this information can be *replicated* with little effort, and scalability allows for the possibility that it will reach a vast audience. According to boyd, these technical properties give rise to three distinct social dynamics: invisible audiences, collapsed contexts, and the blurring of public and private realms. With respect to invisible audiences, boyd observes that some of the audiences who will eventually see a person's online content are not visible or thought of when that person initially creates material for the web. Second, due to the collapsing of contexts online (Facebook is a prime example), it becomes an increasing challenge to maintain boundaries between different aspects of one's life. Lastly, the blurring of public and private realms makes it difficult to ensure that information intended for a few close relations does not inadvertently become accessible to a much broader audience, especially as web 2.0 platforms may change privacy settings after content is posted.

Ethical Dimensions of Online Life

The disinhibition effects of computer-mediated communication, together with the technical properties and social dynamics associated with networked publics, give rise to distinct ethical issues online. James et al. (2009) have identified five categories of ethical issues that are particularly salient in online environments. These ethical “fault lines” are: identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. *Identity*-related issues pertain to the authenticity and integrity of one’s online self-representations. Recognizing that identity play can provide opportunities for personal growth, James et al. nevertheless contend that youth must be mindful of the boundary between play and deception. *Privacy* issues arise when individuals are confronted with decisions about how to manage their own and others’ personal information online. With respect to *ownership and authorship*, the ability to create works collaboratively and appropriate the work of others complicates the way people give and receive credit for their creations. The fourth ethical fault line, *credibility*, relates to the strategies individuals use to assess others’ trustworthiness and to establish their own trustworthiness online. Finally, *participation* addresses the rights and responsibilities that individuals assume as they participate in online communities.

Researchers have recently begun to investigate the way in which young people conceive of and approach these ethical issues. Through in-depth interviews with over 60 “digital youth” – young people ages 15-25 who are highly engaged in one or more online activities, such as blogging, social networking, and gaming – researchers on the GoodPlay Project identified three ways of thinking that exist, to varying degrees, among youth online (James and Flores, in preparation). Their findings suggest a ladder of thinking that bears a resemblance to stage theories, such as Kohlberg’s (1981, 1984), which posit that individuals move through a series of increasingly complex stages of moral development during the course of childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. The three ways of thinking are: 1) Consequence thinking, 2) Moral thinking, and 3) Ethical Thinking.

Consequence thinking. James and Flores (in preparation) argue that consequence thinking is most prevalent among youth when they discuss their online activities. Consequence thinking is focused on the potential consequences to oneself, positive or negative, associated with different actions online.

Moral thinking. James and Flores discuss moral thinking as somewhat prevalent among youth. In this way of thinking, youth display respect for others and possess a belief in principles such as fairness and justice, and the Golden Rule of the Internet (“Online, do unto others as you would like them to do to you”). While moral thinking suggests awareness of and respect for known others, it does not necessarily entail awareness of the group or community.

Ethical thinking. Ethical thinking is characterized as the highest plane of thinking and is evident when someone thinks about the good of the group, community, society, or the larger world. Ethical thinking involves taking the perspective of others, awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in the online communities in which one participates, and reflection about the more global harms or benefits of one’s actions to communities at large. James and Flores found that this way of thinking is rarely displayed by youth when they discuss their online activities.

The distinction made here between moral and ethical thinking is grounded in psychological—as opposed to religious or philosophical—conceptions of morality and ethics. To explain this distinction, Gardner (2006, in press) uses the concepts of “neighborly morality” and the “ethics of roles.” He describes neighborly morality as constituting those understandings and relations that govern a person’s connections to those whom he sees every day and with whom he has a reciprocal relationship. In contrast, the ethics of roles relate to those individuals—both known and unknown—to whom relations are more formal, more tied to roles, and may not even involve person-to-person contact. Gardner’s distinction between morality and ethics departs somewhat from traditional social scientific accounts, which have typically placed morality in the realm of conduct and ethics in the realm of reflection (cf. Gibson and Landwehr-Brown 2009; Hague 1998). At the same time, these accounts further delimit the boundary between morality and ethics by associating the former with conduct deemed acceptable by specific groups (e.g. Christians, Confucians), whereas ethics is described as an attempt to extract universal principles governing moral conduct (Lee 1928). It is this distinction—between the particularity of morality and the abstraction of ethics—that Gardner evokes in his account of neighborly morality and the ethics of roles.

Though in the past, the ethics of roles typically did not assume relevance until adulthood, this has changed in the Internet era (Gardner, in press). Wheth-

er they intend to or not, today's youth may assume a variety of roles as they participate online. Given their potential reach, these roles call on youth to consider how their actions may affect a broad community that extends beyond their group of close relations. Whether youth answer this call depends on their ability and inclination to engage in the third way of thinking—ethical thinking. The research conducted by the GoodPlay Project suggests that, while youth may be capable of ethical thinking online, few are inclined to actually engage in it.

Role of Media Literacy Education (MLE) in Promoting Ethical Thinking

Educators have begun to recognize the need to provide youth with guidance as they navigate digital terrain that has, to this point, been marked by a lack of explicit norms of behavior and a scarcity of adult mentors. One field, in particular, that recognizes this need is media literacy education (MLE). The National Association for Media Literacy Education's Core Principles for Media Literacy Education (CPMLE) reflect the way in which MLE has evolved to address the opportunities and challenges associated with today's distinct media landscape (NAMLE 2007). According to these principles, a central purpose of MLE is to develop students' ability to engage in active inquiry and critical thinking about their experiences with all forms of media. These critical thinking skills are important when trying to decipher the intent behind targeted advertising on MySpace, for instance, or the quality of information produced by an online blogger. It is particularly important that youth acquire these types of skills in light of the complex ethical issues that arise as they navigate relationships online, synthesize vast amounts of information on the web, and become active online participants.

To develop students' critical thinking skills, MLE educators adopt a pedagogical approach in which adults and youth co-construct knowledge through reciprocal, authentic dialogue. As youth use digital media increasingly across a wide variety of contexts, these conversations do not have to be limited to the classroom. Indeed, Hobbs (2008) argues that there is an opportunity now for MLE to occur in all facets of life, across platforms, and with people (e.g. parents, teachers, friends) from various parts of youths' lives. Through such discussions, young people are more likely to encounter and grapple with topics that are meaningful and authentic to them. With respect to their

online activities, youth might be encouraged to share the ethical dilemmas they have faced in various online spaces and explore appropriate courses of action with others who have confronted comparable situations.

In short, both the substantive focus of and pedagogical approach promoted by MLE—and the CPMLE framework in particular—provide a framing that is well-suited to the development of educational interventions designed to promote youths' ethical thinking online.

The Research Study

In this article, we describe a particular educational intervention whose design aligns with many of the core principles for media literacy education. In our empirical investigation of this program, we sought to determine the extent to which the three ways of thinking identified by James and Flores (in preparation) would emerge within the context of online dialogues involving groups of teens and adults. Given the cross-generational nature of these dialogues, we also sought to compare teens' and adults' dominant ways of thinking about the ethics of online life. Drawing on moral development theory as well as more recent work concerning youths' online practices, we hypothesized that differences would emerge between the two groups.

Theorists of moral development contend that individuals' moral reasoning abilities become increasingly complex as they move from childhood, to adolescence, and into adulthood (Damon 1988; Kohlberg 1981, 1984; Piaget 1932). Kohlberg (1981, 1984) claimed that individuals begin with an egocentric view of morality, equating goodness with that which avoids punishment. Gradually, their perspective shifts outward from the self to reciprocal relationships, the social system, and, finally, universal ethical principles. This view of moral development raises the prospect that the adults and teens who participated in the online dialogues may approach the issues under discussion in different ways. Recent work around youths' online practices supports this hypothesis. Scholars observe that adults are often absent from young people's online social spaces, whether because youth actively seek out adult-free spaces online, or because adults intentionally refrain from engaging with youth around new media technologies, fearing they will appear incompetent beside technically savvy "digital natives" (Bradley 2005; Hobbs 2006; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). In either case, the result is the same. Youth are left largely to themselves to contend with and develop their own normative responses to the various ethical issues they encounter online. This state of af-

fairs is concerning given the important role that adult mentors play in promoting youths' moral and ethical stances (Fischman et al. 2004).

In this article, we add to the emerging research on patterns of moral and ethical thinking among youth and adults in online contexts by reporting on findings from our analysis of the Focus Dialogues, a three-week program that brought together adults and teens in a virtual space to discuss issues surrounding the ethics of online life. In our analysis, we seek to explore the following two research questions:

Research Question 1: What patterns of moral and ethical thinking do adults and teens display as they engage in online conversations about digital ethics?

Research Question 2: Can such cross-generational discussions promote genuine dialogue between teens and adults?

Methodology

Program Structure and Goals

Three partner organizations, Common Sense Media, the GoodPlay Project, and Global Kids¹, designed the Focus Dialogues with the aim of bringing together parents, teachers, and teens in a text-based, asynchronous online environment where they could discuss emerging social and ethical issues related to digital media, technology use, and online life. The dialogues were predicated upon a belief held by our organizations that there is a lack of cross-generational conversation regarding digital media usage (Bradley 2005; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). In an analysis of a previous, youth-only iteration of the Focus Dialogues held in March 2007, a lack of mentorship and communication between adults and teens on these issues emerged as a key theme (Pasnik 2007).

Members of the three partner organizations created the Focus Dialogues to function simultaneously as an educational program and a research project. From an educational standpoint, they wanted to provide teens and adults with the opportunity to share their perspectives on the salient ethical issues associated with online life. From a research perspective, they had an interest in documenting these perspectives and comparing teens' and adults' moral and ethical stances online.

Participants

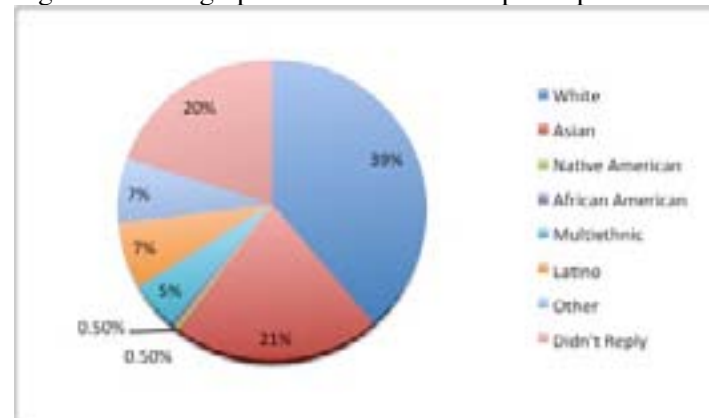
The three partner organizations recruited participants through their respective organizational networks. Recruitment methods were varied, and included face-to-face outreach via afterschool programs, mass

email outreach directed at prior program participants and the organizations' affiliates, posts to various online educator listservs, direct email to interested parties, and promotion of the program using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Incentives for "top participants" were offered to teens and adults, contingent upon exemplary participation. Top teen participants received a \$100 gift certificate to Amazon.com, while top adult participants received a Common Sense Media Education Kit, valued at \$100, in addition to a \$25 gift certificate to Amazon.com.

A total of 277 people, representing 19 countries and 24 states within the United States, registered for the Focus Dialogues on the Global Kids website. A small subset of nine teen participants had been prior participants in either the first round of Focus Dialogues that took place in 2007, or were active or former participants in Global Kids programs. Of the 277 participants, 152 people actively participated, as defined by having posted to at least one discussion thread during the three-week period. These active participants averaged 16 posts over the course of the dialogues, with 54% posting 10 or more times. This group of high-frequency posters accounted for approximately 90% of the total posts.

Active participants included 82 teens (39 females, 43 males) between the ages of 12 and 21 years ($M = 16.5$ years), and 70 adults (59 females, 11 males) between the ages of 22 and 55 years ($M = 42.3$ years). A sizable minority were non-U.S. citizens, including 13 teens and 10 adults. The sample was racially and ethnically diverse, as well (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of participant



¹ Global Kids runs educational programs that aim to promote youth voices on social and global issues.

Data collection

The Focus Dialogues lasted three weeks, during which time participants engaged in both structured and unstructured asynchronous online conversation. The program's designers devised the structured conversations around question prompts that addressed the issues that the GoodPlay Project identified as being particularly salient online: identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation (James et al. 2009). On each day of the 21-day program, participants logged into the Focus Dialogues website and, prior to encountering existing conversation threads, were presented with one of these prompts framed as a "Debate of the Day" (see *Figure 2* for a sample prompt).

Figure 2: Sample "Debate of the Day" dialogue from the Focus Dialogues

Dilemma: Photo Sharing on Facebook

Imagine that you are invited to party by a new friend Alex. You already have plans that night with your best friend, Chris, but you really want to go and you don't feel comfortable asking Alex if your best friend can tag along. You tell Chris that you don't feel well and need to cancel your plans. You go to the party and have a great time.

The next day, you find that Alex (who is also your Facebook friend) has tagged you in several photos from the party. You fear that Chris will see the photos and know that you had had about being sick and had secretly gone to a party instead of sticking to your plans.

What would you do in this situation? (Would you ask Alex to remove the photos of you? Untag you from the photos? Would you untag yourself? Would you speak to Chris who might have already seen the photos?) Why?

What would you do if your child or student were in this situation and asked you for advice?

Initial prompts centered on the social effects of digital media, such as what participants perceived as general benefits and drawbacks, and then progressed to specific ethically-oriented subjects. The topics moved outward from the individual to the societal realm, with questions about identity and self representation followed by those relating to privacy, moving into credibility and trust, creativity and ownership of intellectual property, and finally into public and community participation. The final set of prompts aimed to broaden the conversation again, asking questions about if and where perspectives aligned across generations, what common ground could be established, and how it might be achieved. See Appendix A for a complete list of measures.

While participants saw the pre-determined prompts as soon as they logged in, the online space also allowed for and encouraged organic, user-driven conversation topics. Indeed, user-generated conversation threads outnumbered threads based on prompts by a ratio of approximately two to one, creating a space that, while framed by the program designers, was not limited by them.

The three partner organizations did not participate themselves. Rather, their involvement was limited primarily to responding to technical queries from participants in private help discussion threads, monitoring the discussions to ensure that a safe space was being maintained, and sending occasional group emails to promote participation – particularly among inactive participants.

Participants engaged actively in the Focus Dialogues, creating 157 unique conversation threads and responding to 21 structured prompts. In total, participants posted 2,869 times over the course of the three weeks, with messages varying in length from one-line responses to multi-paragraph tracts. Participation rates, however, varied along generational lines. Despite higher registration rates (165 adults registered as compared to 112 teens), teens accounted for the bulk of all posts (73%). Teens also maintained higher rates of conversation thread creation, with 72% of all threads created by teen participants. This discrepancy between adult and teen participation may be attributed to a number of factors, such as teens' greater fluency with the technical and social aspects of online conversations, and adults' greater time constraints in the offline world.

Online Dialogue Platform

For the Focus Dialogues, the program organizers employed a custom online discussion tool called Small Group Dialogue (SGD)². SGD boasts a number of unique features that made it a promising technical context for the project. SGD, as its name implies, divides participants into small discussion groups within a broader dialogue, as opposed to grouping all users into one large, undifferentiated mass. The system administrator determines the size of groups, as well as precise dates to mark the beginning and end of the discussion period. In the case of the Focus Dialogues, there were approximately 90 participants per group

² There are numerous other noted use cases of the SGD tool in promoting deliberative discourse around substantive issues (see Noveck 2004; Pyser and Weiss 2008, and Yankelovich, Rosell, Gantwerk, and Friedman 2006),

with three total groups participating over three weeks. A lack of active and interventionist moderation encouraged greater participant ownership of the space. In addition, participants were asked to select consistent pseudonyms as a means of lessening levels of anonymity. These design features helped to mitigate the pitfalls associated with online conversation, such as belligerent “flamewars,” or vitriolic personal exchanges that can detract from productive discussion (Dery 1994). In addition, the shared timeframe prevented participants from experiencing the sense of disorientation that commonly results from joining a conversation midstream (Pyser and Weiss 2007).

The program organizers felt that the online context was particularly well suited to the Focus Dialogues due to the cross-generational nature of the project. We had concerns that traditional adult-youth power dynamics that exist during face-to-face interaction might be a barrier to open and honest conversation. To mitigate these effects, we chose an online context in which the participants did not already know each other, and where the usual demarcations of power and status are not immediately apparent. The SGD software was, however, modified so that participants could distinguish between adults and teens via an unobtrusive tag next to a participant’s username.

Figure 3: The Small Group Dialogue environment



Data Analysis

We focused our analysis on the prompts developed by members of the GoodPlay Project. We followed an analytic strategy that was both emic and etic, meaning that we drew on the words of the dialogue participants themselves (emic) as well as on our interpretations of these words (etic). Drawing on findings from the GoodPlay Project as well as relevant literature on moral development, we created an initial “start list” of etic codes (Miles and Huberman 1994) to categorize participants’ ways of thinking as either consequence-based, moral, or ethical. We coded participants’ statements as consequence-based, or individualistic, if they focused on a concern for the personal consequences of a particular situation or course of action. Statements that took into account the effects of one’s actions on people known offline or with whom one interacts online were considered evidence of moral thinking. For example, if a teen said she would not share a friend’s personal information online out of respect for her friend’s privacy, such a statement would be coded as an instance of moral thinking. Lastly, participants were classified as ethical thinkers if they thought in abstract, disinterested terms about the effects of their actions on the online community at large.

Next, we drew on our line-by-line readings of the discussion threads to create a series of emic codes that captured emergent themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In the discussions about illegal downloading, for instance, a line-by-line reading of participants’ responses revealed a broad range of justifications for engaging in this practice, from claims that teens do not have enough money to buy music, to assertions that the onus is on the creators to protect their content. Two researchers were involved in this coding process and met frequently to discuss emergent themes as well as areas of alignment and misalignment within and across the groups of teens and adults.

Findings

The adults and teens who participated in the Focus Dialogues expressed a number of common perspectives with respect to an individual’s rights and responsibilities online. At the same time, we ascertained that, compared to teens, adults generally exhibited stronger and more consistent patterns of moral and ethical thinking in the way they responded to the online prompts, although certain prompts did elicit impressive ethical thinking on the part of many teens. So that we can provide an in-depth account of adults’ and teens’

responses, we report here on findings from three of the 21 prompts that the program organizers presented to participants over the course of the three-week program. The GoodPlay Project designed 15 of the 21 prompts to directly address the five ethical “fault lines” of identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. The prompts we discuss in this section center around two of these fault lines: ownership and authorship, and participation.

The themes that emerged from our analysis of these select prompts are representative of the major themes that we identified across the entire group of prompts. Specifically, the first two prompts illustrate adults’ tendency to draw on moral and ethical ways of thinking to a greater degree than teens, while the third prompt reveals that many teens did, at times, display ethical thinking that was on par with the adult participants. We conclude this section with an examination of specific exchanges that illustrate that the online dialogues provided adults and teens with a unique opportunity to share their perspectives with one another and find common ground.

Perspectives on Illegal Downloading

The program organizers attempted to uncover participants’ views on ownership and authorship by asking them to respond to two quotes on the topic of illegal downloading (see Appendix A, Day 10). The quotes represent the perspectives of two young people who had participated in the GoodPlay Project’s study of “digital youth” – young people ages 15-25 who are highly engaged in one or more online activities, such as blogging, social networking, and gaming. In the first quote, 15 year-old Trey³ explains why he sees nothing wrong with downloading music illegally. In the second quote, 22 year-old Carlos, a musician, discusses the negative effects of illegal downloading for musicians and the music industry. In addition to responding to these quotes, participants were asked to reflect on circumstances under which it may be permissible to download and share files, and circumstances under which it is not. (See Appendix B for an excerpt of one of the discussion threads on illegal downloading.)

Teens were split about the acceptability of illegal downloading. Of the 25 teens who took part in the discussion, eight were generally accepting of it, seven were against it, and six expressed ambivalence⁴. Of the ambivalent teens, four said they engage in downloading anyway. The 10 adults who responded to the prompt were somewhat less divided. Only one adult

was generally supportive of illegal downloading, while four were against it and two expressed conflict about the issue⁵.

Individualistic, consequence thinking was most prevalent among the eight teens who believed downloading is acceptable and the six teens who expressed ambivalence. Instead of considering the effects of illegal downloading on others, these teens focused primarily on their own needs and desires. For instance, Neil, a 17 year-old boy from the Midwestern United States, wrote, “As a teen I don’t have much money to spend on music and movies and so I just download them.” Andrea, a 19 year-old girl from Mexico, echoed this sentiment: “I too pirate because I can’t afford most of these things. One can’t simply afford all the latest albums, DVDs and software.” For Neil and Andrea, their inability to pay for content serves as sufficient justification for engaging in illegal downloading.

Another popular teen argument in favor of illegal downloading pertains to the ease and convenience of accessing content online. Several of the teens who offered this explanation were living in countries in which it is difficult to access content any other way. Azhar, a 14 year-old girl from Oman, explained, “We don’t get [movies] here, I have to travel 1.5 hour to go to the capital and watch new movies in the cinema or buy them from there as well, so it’s much easier to watch them online.” Similarly, Trevor, age 14, discussed the restrictions he faces living in Canada. “I download most of the TV shows I watch mostly because they aren’t broadcast on any of the TV channels I have and because I’m in Canada I can’t watch them on Hulu.” U.S.-based teens also cited the ease and convenience of accessing content online. Nadira, an 18 year-old girl from the Northeastern United States, was one of four teens who download illegally despite their ambivalence about the practice. She reflected, “I usually like buying my music to give myself some mental ease, but sometimes when I’m doing something last minute (like a film analysis) I will just download the film or watch it on a source on the internet.” Like Azhar and Trevor, Nadira’s decision to engage in illegal downloading is based on the desire to satisfy her own personal interests. Indeed, even when she purchases music legally, she does so “to give myself some mental ease,” a decidedly self-focused point of view.

³ All names in this section are pseudonyms.

⁴ The remaining 4 teens did not express a clear viewpoint.

⁵ The remaining 3 adults did not express a clear viewpoint.

The teens who opposed illegal downloading were more likely to display ethical thinking that aligned with the statements made by most adults. These teens reasoned that illegal downloading is unfair to creators and is the equivalent of stealing. Layla, a 16 year-old girl from the West Coast of the United States, explained, "Its not right to file share and download things illegally because then the authors/creators are not getting full credit like they do when you buy their CD from a store etc." Instead of focusing on herself, Layla considers the impact that illegal downloading has on an entire group of creators whom she does not know personally but whose rights she nevertheless respects. Evelyn, an 18 year-old girl from the Northeastern United States, also displays ethical thinking in her discussion of illegal downloading:

Pirating, illegal downloading, whatever you want to call it...in my mind, it's just as much stealing as walking out of Walmart with a cd that you didn't pay for. Sure maybe the artist has "too much money" or something. But does that give you a right to steal? I don't think so.

Teens like Layla and Evelyn reflect the viewpoints of most adult respondents. In fact, only Leslie, a 55 year-old woman from the West Coast of the United States, saw little wrong with illegal downloading. She argued, "You cannot blame people from doing it when it is so readily available." The other adults, like 48 year-old Amanda, also from the West Coast, equated the practice with stealing and considered its effects on creators: "My view is that [illegal downloading] is no different than walking into a store and shoplifting a CD. It is stealing...At the very least, I think it is very unethical, and is unfair to the artists."

Deception in Online Gameplay

In addition to asking participants to respond to quotes from young people, the program organizers also presented them with hypothetical scenarios. In one of these scenarios, they were asked to imagine that fellow players of an online multi-player game were taking advantage of new players by selling them worthless green rocks, called pseudogems, for very high prices (see Appendix A, Day 13). The prompt asked participants if they would join in and sell the pseudogems to new players. Through this dilemma, the program organizers aimed to probe adults' and teens'

conceptions of individuals' rights and responsibilities and the place of morality and ethics in the context of an online game world.

The teen sample was fairly evenly split on whether or not to sell the pseudogems. Of the 34 teens who participated in this discussion, 14 said they would sell the pseudogems, 11 said they would not, and nine were unsure or did not respond in a direct or clear way. While only seven adults responded to the dilemma, all of them agreed that selling the pseudogems was wrong.

The teens who would sell the pseudogems defended their decision by using a combination of "it's just a game" and "buyer beware" arguments. Jenson, a 15 year-old boy from the West Coast, reflected the view of several teens when he commented, "well it is just a game. Scams are going to happen all the time. The new players will need to learn sometime or another." Similarly, 17 year-old Brian, also from the West Coast, justified his position with the following argument:

Its just a game. the point of the game is to progress yourself and get up there in that game. we could sell the gems and its up to the person to buy it with what ever they have. you cant really compare this to a real life event because the game is just a game, it isnt real life.

Both Jenson and Brian believe that, because "it's just a game," they bear no responsibility to other players. This type of individualistic thinking was prevalent among the teens who said they would sell the pseudogems.

The majority of teens who would not sell the pseudogems showed evidence of moral thinking in their reasoning. Like most of the adults who responded to this dilemma, these teens referred to moral principles such as fairness, respect for others, and the time that other players have committed to the game. Vivian, an 18 year-old girl from Peru, displayed moral thinking in her response to another teen who said he would have no qualms about selling the pseudogems:

Personally I would never do that to newbies; I live by the principle of doing as I please as long as I don't disrespect someone else. And scamming another person is, well, a BIG sign of disrespect! I'd feel like I'm using a newbie for profit!

In addition to moral thinking, ethical thinking was also apparent in the responses of two teens and two adults who would not sell the pseudogems. Jason, a 16 year-old boy from the West Coast, considered the situation from the point of view of the entire game

community and concluded that selling the pseudogems “would be immoral and the cycle of things would continue.” Cheryl, a 38 year-old woman from the Southwestern United States, argued that experienced players should collaborate with newbies in order to create a “more robust learning experience for everyone.”

Roles and Responsibilities in Online Communities

We asked participants to reflect on their roles and responsibilities in online communities and how they compare to the roles and responsibilities they assume offline. Most of the 38 teens and 15 adults who responded to this prompt named multiple responsibilities, including responsibilities to themselves, to others, and to the online communities in which they participate. In discussing their approach to online participation, several teens and adults underscored the importance of maintaining consistency between their online and offline worlds. These participants spoke about holding consistent values and responsibilities across spheres, and behaving in similar ways.

The most frequently mentioned responsibility, cited by 12 teens and five adults, was to think and act morally in online spaces. These participants believed that it is important to treat others with whom you interact online with respect and courtesy; to be supportive and help others; and to operate with integrity. Neil, age 17, reflected on his approach to online participation in the following way:

By agreeing to be in an online community I believe all members should first be respectful of each other. This is no different offline as every individual earns the same amount of respect. Next, there shouldn't be any bullying/trolling to hurt someone's feelings. If someone is wrong about something acknowledge it and move on. No need to keep on bantering the person just as you wouldn't do so offline.

Neil's final comment, that one should not say things online that one would not say face-to-face, was echoed by several teens and adults and might be considered the “Golden Rule of the Internet.”

While not the most prevalent form of thinking, ethical thinking was found among eight teens, or nearly a quarter of teens who responded to the prompt. This occurrence matches the proportion of adults who mentioned ethical responsibilities online. Some participants spoke about a responsibility to contribute to community-level benefits and prevent community-level harms – for example, by collaborating in prosocial

ways or not quitting in the middle of a multiplayer game. Cheryl, age 38, displayed ethical thinking in her response:

I think communities are collaborative so my primary responsibility in any community is to contribute to the cohesion and sense of camaraderie. I think it is my responsibility to learn the “rules” of the community – the way group members interact, communicate and regard one another.

Other participants spoke about a responsibility to adhere to principles of right vs. wrong. They stressed the importance of being truthful, presenting an authentic self to others, respecting copyright, and not engaging in hate speech. In fact, four teens argued, in an ethical way, that our responsibilities are greater online due to properties of mediated communication, such as opportunities for anonymity and fewer accountability mechanisms.

As with other prompts, the primary differences between adults and teens emerged around the prevalence of consequence thinking. While none of the adults named responsibilities to or for themselves, 12 teens (or nearly a third) engaged in individualistic, consequence-based thinking when discussing their responsibilities online. For example, Owen, a 17 year-old boy from the West Coast, echoed the feelings of several teens when he wrote, “I think that being a responsible person online means that you do not give your personal information online.” For teens like Owen, one's primary responsibility online is to oneself, whether that means protecting one's privacy by not sharing too much personal information, or taking steps to “be safe” and protect oneself from potentially dangerous consequences.

Two teens used individualistic, consequence thinking to argue that they have little to no responsibilities online. Chris, a 16 year-old boy from the West Coast, claimed, “i dont think anyone has a responsibility for the internet and the communities people participate in because the internet is a way for people to do what they want without gettin in trouble.” Unlike the many teens and adults who spoke about the intertwinement of online and offline worlds, Chris sees a disjunction between these two contexts. His perception that consequences are suspended online leads him to endorse the view that individuals have license to behave as they please.

Finding Common Ground

The program organizers hoped this initiative would provide adults and teens with the opportunity to share their perspectives with each other and engage in genuine dialogue. Our analysis of the discussion threads suggests that these goals were indeed met. In one instance, Cathy, a 38 year-old woman from the Northeast, started her own discussion thread and solicited the opinions of teens regarding the “digital footprints” that individuals create online:

I'll be the first to admit that I did some things when I was a teen that I'm happy to forget as an adult. I'm glad there are no permanent records! I'm curious what teens think about the fact that everything you post online could be around for generations to come. Do you worry at all about that? Are you concerned that someday your kids might see what you were doing? Or is that just something that parents worry about for our kids? Are you careful about what you share on places like MySpace or Facebook?

This prompt elicited responses from several adults, who shared their own concerns about the content that young people post online. Mira, a 31 year-old woman from the West Coast, spoke about an experience she had once had interviewing a job candidate. The candidate, a recent college graduate, impressed Mira with her resume and articulateness during the interview. However, Mira was prompted to rethink her decision to hire the candidate when a Google search uncovered inappropriate content on her Facebook page. She asked participants what they would have done had they been in a similar situation.

The teens who responded to Cathy's thread discussed their understanding of the permanence of their digital footprints, as well as the strategies they have adopted to protect their privacy online. For instance, Julia, a 16 year-old girl from the West Coast, explained her approach to posting content online:

Oh, I always worry about what I post online coming back to bite me later on, haha. It's partly why I've decided to keep my identity more underwraps on certain sites...I'm very aware that the things I post on some sites are public and can be stored on other sites as cached without notification.

While these teens expressed confidence in their own ability to manage their digital footprints online, they did express concern about the ability of younger children to do the same. After describing her own approach to posting content online, Julia reflected, “I know there

are even middle school kids out there who post tons of personal information online via social networking profiles and blogs without a thought to how this could affect them in the future.”

This discussion thread gave teens like Julia the opportunity to inform adults about their awareness of and concerns about posting content online. For their part, the adults provided teens with insight into their own concerns and uncertainties, such as how they should handle the information they uncover from a Google search of prospective employees.

In another discussion thread that also dealt with the limits of posting personal information online, Rosaria, a 54 year-old woman from the Northeast, reflected on her perception of a generational divide with respect to conceptions of privacy:

I think one of the hardest things about this generationally, is a completely different sense of Privacy. To me, privacy means not wanting anyone else except those FEW with whom I decide to share, to know. Putting it on line has no guarantees/no personal control. It's not that Mom wants to know necessarily, but how can you prevent it? Why would you dare someone to look? You have no idea what gets back to anyone or who will see it. To me that's not private, it's extremely public. I find that lack of personal control and not knowing a bit scary.

Rosaria's post prompted Jeff, an 18 year-old boy from the West Coast, to respond with the following comments:

[Rosaria], if you have read my posts, then you would know that I totally agree with you. However, I don't see the public space as scary, I see it as an opportunity. You have access to millions of people. It's only scary if you don't know what you're doing, and once you realize exactly the scope of a website, it's easy to use it properly for the best effect with minimal risk.

In his response, Jeff acknowledges the common ground that he shares with Rosaria. He proceeds to explain to her why it is that, despite his agreement with her, he does not share her fear about the public nature of online spaces. Excited by the opportunity to connect to so many people online, he takes care to educate himself about the websites he visits so that he can enjoy their benefits while minimizing the risks. Exchanges such as these illustrate how the Focus Dialogues engaged

adults and teens in meaningful discussions that allowed them to voice their distinct perspectives and become aware of the common ground they share.

Discussion

Our findings offer insight into teens' and adults' patterns of moral and ethical thinking in online contexts. Through our analysis of the Focus Dialogues, we found that adult participants drew on moral and ethical ways of thinking to a greater degree than teen participants as they responded to various ethical issues concerning online life. Compared to adults, teens exhibited a higher degree of consequence thinking, as many of their comments revealed a concern for their own well being rather than the well being of others or the broader community. To be sure, there were teens who provided community-minded solutions and adults who displayed opinions driven primarily by self-concern. Generally, though, adults provided responses that reflected a mentality of care for the online community and its unspoken ethical code of conduct.

These findings comport with stage theories of moral development, such as Kohlberg's (1981, 1984), which claim that individuals' moral reasoning abilities become increasingly complex as they progress through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Specifically, the consequence thinking that was prevalent among many teen participants bears resemblance to Kohlberg's early stages of moral reasoning in which an egocentric view of morality dominates. The moral and ethical ways of thinking that were found to a larger degree among adult participants are consistent with Kohlberg's later stages of moral thought, which are characterized by a shift in perspective from the self to reciprocal relationships (moral thinking) and broader social systems (ethical thinking).

Despite the differences we identified between adults' and teens' responses to various ethical issues concerning online life, our analysis of the Focus Dialogues indicated that the two groups were able to engage in genuine dialogue and find common ground. In the first example we reported, one adult actively sought teens' perspectives on the persistent nature of the material they post online. This discussion thread generated dialogue between adults and teens in which they shared with each other their concerns about the persistence of online content and the strategies they have adopted to manage their personal information and protect their privacy online. In another discussion thread, Jeff, a teen, found that he shared similar

perspectives with Rosario, an adult, regarding shifting concepts of privacy. He used this common ground as an entry-point to explain to her the basis of his views on the opportunities associated with participating in online life.

These findings suggest to us that the Focus Dialogues may serve as a promising model for the field of media literacy education (MLE) as it expands its focus to take into account youths' experiences with new media technologies. Hobbs (2006) observes, "educators and scholars are only just beginning to develop instructional approaches that encourage reflective, critical examination of the complex positive and negative ways that digital media shape and structure interpersonal behavior" (102). The structure of the dialogues promoted the type of reflective practices and critical analysis that MLE has emphasized from its inception (Hobbs 2008). Moreover, the dialogues provided opportunities for genuine, reciprocal exchanges between adults and teens, a core pedagogical approach of media literacy educators (Hobbs 2008). It is often the case that adults point out the problems and risks with media. The questions posed in the dialogues provided an opportunity for adults to engage in a more balanced conversation with youth in which they explored both the risks and promises of digital media. Such exchanges are well aligned with the expanding vision of the MLE field. By engaging participants in discussions around the ethical issues associated with today's distinct media landscape, the dialogues addressed the types of concepts, such as co-operation, trust, and self-disclosure, which educators and scholars have begun to incorporate into the field of media literacy education (Hobbs 2006).

Limitations

Certain methodological limitations of the study should be noted. First, because the sample was not drawn randomly, we are limited in the extent to which we can generalize our findings beyond the group of participants in the study. In particular, the gender composition of our adult sample was skewed towards women. This is not surprising, since Common Sense Media, which spearheaded the adult recruiting efforts, is connected to a user-base that consists primarily of women. While recruiters made an effort to reach outside their user-base, the final adult sample nevertheless reflected this female bias. The teen sample was more evenly balanced in terms of gender. However, the teens introduced another form of sample bias, since many

of them were recruited from technologically-oriented educational programs offered by Global Kids. Thus, teens may have participated more actively than adults because they were more comfortable using computers and were already familiar with the format of online discussion forums.

Another drawback to the study design pertains to our inability to probe participants' responses more deeply. The organizers of the Focus Dialogues purposely did not insert their questions, comments, or voice into the discussions once they began, believing that a too visible presence would deter participants from open and free discussion. Participants often asked probing questions of others, or offered follow-up comments to their own posts. While these contributions were helpful, there were several comments made by participants that we would have liked to explore in greater depth with our own follow-up probes.

Lastly, it is difficult to determine the impact that participants had on one another's opinions. Participants did not see a given discussion thread until after they had entered their response to the related prompt. Consequently, it is likely they had limited influence on each other within a given prompt. It is possible, however, that participants influenced each other's opinions over the course of the three-week period. It could have been that, within a particular discussion group, stronger voices to the earlier prompts influenced the way in which other members of the group responded to later prompts.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the study's methodological limitations, we nevertheless believe our findings contribute new insight into youth's digital media practices that will inform the work of media literacy educators. Historically, media literacy education has been taught by teachers in formal school settings. Yet, with the proliferation of digital media products in the home environment (Scanlon and Buckingham 2004), it seems that it is also important for parents to encourage critical thinking about the moral and ethical facets of online life with their children. To this point, however, it appears that adults—both inside and outside the classroom—have remained largely disengaged from teens' online experiences (Bradley 2005; Hobbs 2006; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). As digital media become increasingly interwoven into the many contexts of youths' lives, it becomes critical that they receive the necessary supports to help them navigate the distinct challenges that arise for them online.

While some adults may feel hesitant to broach this aspect of teens' lives due to a perception they are less technically savvy, our research suggests that adults demonstrate sophisticated ways of thinking about the types of problems and questions that are authentic to teens' online experiences. Given this finding, we believe more opportunities like the Focus Dialogues should be created for adults to model for teens the types of moral and ethical stances they need to become responsible digital citizens.

- boyd, danah. 2007. "Why Youth (heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life." In *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume*, edited by David Buckingham, 119-142. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bradley, Karen. 2005. "Internet Lives: Social Context and Moral Domain in Adolescent Development." *New Directions for Youth Development* 108: 57-762.
- Damon, William. 1988. *The Moral Child: Nurturing Children's Natural Moral Growth*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dery, Mark, ed. 1994. *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Eckholm, Erik and Katie Zezima. 2010. "6 Teenagers are Charged After Classmate's Suicide." *New York Times*, March 29, U.S. Section.
- Fischman, Wendy, Becca Solomon, Deborah Greenspan, and Howard Gardner. 2004. *Making Good: How Young People Cope with Moral Dilemmas at Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gardner, Howard. 2006. *Five Minds for the Future*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gardner, Howard. In press. *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the 21st Century*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gibson, Kay L. and Marjorie Landwehr-Brown. 2009. "Moral Development in Preparing Gifted Students for Global Citizenship. In, *Morality, Ethics, and Gifted Minds*, eds. Don Ambrose and Tracy Cross, 301-312. London, New York: Springer.
- Hague, William J. 1998. "Is there moral giftedness?" *Gifted Education International* 12(3): 170-174.
- Hobbs, Renee. 2006. "Reconceptualizing Media Literacy for the Digital Age." In *Literacies for learning in the digital age*, eds. Allan Martin and Dan Madigan, 99 - 109. London: Facets Press.
- Hobbs, Renee. 2008. "Debates and Challenges Facing New Literacies in the 21st Century." In *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*, eds. Sonia Livingstone and Kristin Drotner, 431-447. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Ito, Mizuko, Sonja Baumer, Matteo Bittanti, danah boyd, Rachel Cody, Becky Herr, Heather A. Horst, Patricia G. Lange, Dilan Mahendran, Katynka Martinez, C.J. Pascoe, Dan Perkel, Laura Robinson, Christo Sims, and Lisa Tripp with Judd Antin, Megan Finn, Arthur Law, Annie Manion, Sarai Mitnick and Dan Schlossberg and Sarita Yardi. 2009. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out: Living and Learning with New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- James, Carrie, with Katie Davis, Andrea Flores, John M. Francis, Lindsay Petingill, Margaret Rundle, and Howard Gardner. 2009. "Young people, Ethics, and the New Digital Media: A Synthesis from the Good Play Project." Chicago: The MacArthur Foundation.
- James, Carrie, and Andrea Flores. "Morality and Ethics Behind the Screen: Youth Perspectives on Digital Life." Manuscript in preparation.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1981. *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 1: The Philosophy of Moral Development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1984. *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 2: The Psychology of Moral Development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Lee, Harold N. 1928. "Morals Morality, and Ethics: Suggested Terminology." *International Journal of Ethics* (38)4: 450-466.
- Miles, Matthew B. and Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

National Association for Media Literacy. "Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States." <http://namle.net/publications/core-principles/>

Noveck, Beth S. 2004. "The Future of Citizen Participation in the Electronic State." Presented at the 9th International Working Conference on the Language-Action Perspective on Communication Modeling, Rutgers University, May 29.

Palfrey, John, and Urs Gaser. 2008 *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. New York: Basic Books.

Pasnik, Shelley. 2007. "FOCUS: Teen Voices on Digital Media and Society." Report Submitted to the MacArthur Foundation.

Piaget, Jean. 1932. *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. New York: The Free Press.

Pyser, Steven N. and Marc N. Weiss. 2007. "Web Lab's Small Group Dialogues on the Internet Commons." in *The Change Handbook*, eds. Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, and Steven Cady. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Scanlon, Margaret and Buckingham, David. 2004. "Home Learning and the Educational Marketplace." *Oxford Review of Education* 30(2): 287-303.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Suler, John. 2004. "The Online Disinhibition Effect." *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 7: 321- 326.

Turkle, Sherry. 2008. "Always-on/Always-on-you: The Tethered Self." In the *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, ed. James E. Katz. PAGES? Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Yankelovich, Daniel, Steven Rosell, Heidi Gantwerk, and Will Friedman. 2006. "The Next Big Step in Deliberative Democracy." *Kettering Review* 24(3): 54-66.

Appendix A: List of Prompts used in the Dialogues

Framed for users as a “Debate of the Day,” a new measure was made available each day of the project, for a total of 21 days.

Day 1

Title: Life, Digitized.

Body:

Welcome to your first day in the Focus Dialogues!

Over the course of the next couple of weeks we’ll be exploring different issues relating to life in the digital age, and providing the space for you to be in conversation with others in a way that’s safe and can let you in on how people in the world are thinking about these things. Each day, we’ll have a different question that greets you when you sign in, but we also encourage you to start your own threads! So, to start off, we have something on the general side, about the shift to having a world of interaction online.

Questions:

Has going online to socialize with friends, play games, etc. added to your life? In what ways? How would your life be different without the internet and digital media? What wouldn’t change?

Day 2

Title: The Positive and the Negative

Body:

Most people have a general inclination to avoid harmful things in the world and move towards things that are positive. Obviously though, the world is full of both, and as the world moves online, people are experiencing both positive and negative things on the web.

Questions:

Can you recall a time online when you observed or experienced something that troubled you?

Day 3

Title: Virtually You

Body:

The online world allows us to present ourselves in different ways, and even to recreate ourselves. Two young people we spoke with shared the following thoughts:

I think when [people] create their Facebooks, they get to reconfigure their personality so that if they have any faults they could just edit [them] out. And then they won’t have any problems showing themselves. I mean I kind of think you have to meet someone in person to actually know them.

-18-year-old male

I basically sort of developed my current personality based on the game [Runescape]. Because people are really more free to be themselves or what they actually want to be. So, I’ve sort of learned how people reacted to certain things I say and sort of built myself around it.

-15-year-old male

Questions:

In what ways can it be fun or useful to experiment with your identity online?

In what ways can it be harmful to experiment with your identity online?

Day 4

Title: Digital Dilemma: Different 'Paiges' of Her Life

Body:

Consider the following scenario:

Jaime is in high school and is very active on Facebook. One day he decides to browse MySpace to see how it compares. He comes across a photo that resembles a close friend of his named Paige, except that the way Paige presents herself in this profile is somewhat different than how she does on Facebook and offline. In her MySpace profile photo she looks a bit more edgy--kind of 'goth.' As Jaime looks further at Paige's MySpace profile and postings, some of the content differs somewhat from the image he has of Paige. Paige includes links to poetry she has written, some of which is pretty depressive. Jaime doesn't think of Paige as a 'happy-go-lucky' kind of person, but this is definitely a more edgy side of Paige than he's seen before.

Questions:

Why might Paige present herself differently online than offline?

Why might Paige present herself differently on Facebook than on MySpace?

Is it important that people's online 'selves' be the same as their offline ones?

Day 5

Title: Sharing Ourselves With the World

Body:

Consider the following quotes from young people about sharing and connecting with others online.

'My mom always uses the excuse about the internet being 'public' when she defends herself. It's not like I do anything to be ashamed of, but a girl needs her privacy. I do online journals so I can communicate with my friends. Not so my mother could catch up on the latest gossip of my life.'

-17-year-old from danah boyd's (2007) paper, 'Why Youth (Heart) Social Networking.'

'My LiveJournal is exactly who I am; it's exactly what I'm feeling, exactly what I think about everything, things that you don't really feel like you can trust people to tell or that you can express to someone. Like if I have a problem, it's really hard for me to talk to someone face-to-face so, through there, I can just let it all go.'

-19-year-old female

Questions:

What's fun about sharing information about yourself online? What do you see as the benefits of being able to share with people in your life (friends, co-workers, etc...)?

Day 6*Title:*

Digital Dilemma: Photo sharing on Facebook

Body:

Imagine that you are invited to party by a new friend Alex. You already have plans that night with your best friend, Chris, but you really want to go and you don't feel comfortable asking Alex if your best friend can

tag along. You tell Chris that you don't feel well and need to cancel your plans. You go to the party and have a great time. The next day, you find that Alex (who is also your Facebook friend) has tagged you in several photos from the party. You fear that Chris will see the photos and know that you had lied about being sick and had secretly gone to a party instead of sticking to your plans.

Questions:

What would you do in this situation? (Would you ask Alex to remove the photos of you? Untag you from the photos? Would you untag yourself? Would you speak to Chris who might have already seen the photos?) Why?

What would you do if your child or student were in this situation and asked you for advice?

Day 7

Title: Boundaries in online 'Friending'

Body: <n/a>

Questions:

What do you think about parents and teachers friending their kids on social networks? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?

Day 8

Title: The Final Word?

Body:

The following questions are about Wikipedia, the online 'free-content' encyclopedia written collaboratively by people from around the world. High school and college students say that they often use Wikipedia for school assignments, although most say that they use it only as a starting point for their research.

Questions:

What are the benefits of using and contributing to a community-created information site like Wikipedia? What are the difficulties and risks? Have you ever been 'burned' using Wikipedia or another online source? How do you decide whether or not information and websites you find online is reliable or not?

Day 9

Title:

Digital Dilemma: Sizing him up

Body:

Consider the following scenario:

Sixteen-year-old Sam loves to go on World of Warcraft (WoW), a multiplayer online role-playing game set in a fantasy world that allows players from around the world to interact with one another through avatars (i.e., graphic representations of themselves). Sam's parents have seen WoW and they think it's a good outlet for him since he's kind of shy. One day, Sam mentions to his mom that he's going to meet one of his online buddies from WoW in person. His mom is worried because she doesn't know the person, but Sam insists, "He graduated a couple of years ago from our high school and now works fixing computers. I've been friends with him for a long time on WoW. He knows how to write his own computer games, so he can teach me. And anyway, my friends are coming with me to his place."

Questions:

Do you think Sam's parents should let him meet this online friend in real life? If so, under what terms? If not, why not?

Day 10

Title: Perspectives on Illegal Downloading

Body:

Illegal downloading is a very controversial issue today. What do you think about the beliefs that these two young people have about downloading?

"I pirate a lot. I pirate everything. WHY? Because I don't have money...[and] most of them have more money than they could ever spend...I mean I love him, Eric Clapton [but] he has more money than God, and I don't think that he needs anymore. But, yet, if it's a self-recorded, home-burned CD or an up-and-coming band, I will support them. And I'll buy the CD or movie if it's an up-and-coming filmmaker. ... [The recording industry] is way too harsh. I think they should lighten up a little bit. I mean, I understand it's copyright violation but, yet, I think somehow that the [music and movies] get more exposure through BitTorrent even if they are downloaded illegally than if they were to be paid for. Because someone probably wouldn't want to pay \$35.00 for a DVD, but yet, they'll see the movie and maybe buy it." (Trey, age 15)

"I kind a have my own morals about downloading...probably 90% of my friends download illegally still. I'm not happy with it, but I know they aren't going to stop. It's still wrong...It concerns me deeply. Professionally, musicians are losing their jobs because of this, and it is a staggering rate—the number of illegal downloads to legal downloads is 20:1. It's incredible. It is changing my life as a musician, it's changing the music industry, it's changing everything...I don't think the recording industry should be doing what they are doing, suing people for downloading 3 songs, or whatever. But I think we need to attack the source of these things—just get rid of the programs." (Carlos, age 22)

Questions:

What are your reactions to these two perspectives on illegal downloading? When is it okay to download and share files? When is it not okay? Why?

Day 11

Title: Digital Dilemma: Who Owns My Photos?

Body:

Alison Chang, a 16-year old from Dallas, has a photo snapped of her and friends at a church fundraiser by her church youth counselor, Justin Ho-Wee Wong. Wong posts the photo on his large public album on the photo-sharing site, Flickr. He marks the photo under a Creative Commons 2.0 Attribution license, which allows use of the image by the public, including corporations.

An Australian advertising agency sees the photo of Chang on Flickr and decides that it fits perfectly for a new campaign for Virgin Mobile Australia. Chang's image soon appears on billboards throughout Australia.

The ads credited Wong and his Flickr account as the source, but did not get permission from Chang. When Chang becomes aware of the ads, she responds that she finds the ad insulting. Her family soon files a lawsuit against Virgin Mobile.

Questions:

Was it fair of Virgin Mobile to repurpose this photo of Allison for an advertising campaign?
 Virgin Mobile's use of the photo was technically legal but should Allison's rights and feelings have been considered?

Day 12

Title:

What does creativity mean in a digital age?

Body:

The video above takes footage from the classic superhero cartoon, Super Friends, and matches it with dialogue from the TV sitcom, Friends, to create a parody.

Creators have always found inspiration from other creators' works. It is fairly common today for musicians to sample from, remix, or mash-up other musicians' songs. Digital media makes it easy for anyone to create in new ways – to sample and remix content, to co-create with others near and far, and to share content with a broad audience.

Questions:

What are the benefits, for young people and everyone, of these new opportunities to create? What are the potential harms?
 Are the meanings of being a “creator,” and of creativity and originality, changing because of digital media?
 Does ownership mean something different today too?

Day 13

Title: Digital Dilemma - Life in the world of Games

Body:

Consider the following scenario:

For the past two weeks, you have been playing an online multi-player game that has about 30,000 members and takes place in a 3-d world. Just yesterday, you joined a club within the game. Your fellow club members, none of whom you know offline, seem very nice and have already given you lots of game advice as well as some useful equipment for your character. Buying, selling, and trading such equipment with other players is a fun and important part of the game, but there are few rules about trading, and exchanges don't always end well for some players. You've noticed, for example, that many of your club mates brag to each other about

taking advantage of new players by selling them worthless green rocks, called pseudogems, for very high prices. After finding some pseudogems while doing a joint quest with two of your club mates, you are invited by one of them to travel to a nearby town to try and sell the pseudogems to inexperienced players for a big profit.

Questions:

Would you go with your teammate to the nearby town to sell the pseudogems? Why or why not?

How does selling another player something worthless in an online game compare with...

Selling a physical item (such as a CD or tickets to a Red Sox game) to a schoolmate for more than its worth?

Selling an item for more than its worth through craigslist or ebay?

Selling an item for more than its worth in an online game where players can exchange in-game currency for dollars?

Selling a property for more than its worth while playing monopoly?

Day 14

Title: Digital Dilemma - Cyberbullying

Body:

Consider the following scenario:

Something is bothering Josh. He's been quiet and withdrawn lately. You suspect it has something to do with the time he's spending online, because sometimes he appears frustrated and walks away from the computer abruptly. Concerned, you check the history of the web sites visited to see where he's been online. He was on MySpace a lot. One MySpace page was a profile that showed a picture of his head morphed onto a dog's body with some other degrading content. After your initial shock, it made you reconsider some of your views about MySpace, but helped you to understand what Josh was experiencing.

Questions:

What steps should you take in this situation?

Who do you think it's most appropriate for Josh to turn to for help? Parents? Friends? Myspace administrators?

How does cyberbullying show it's face in your life, and how do you think you should respond? Do you know of steps that people are taking to prevent cyber bullying before it happens?

Day 15

Title: Digital Dilemma - I hate Mr. Garrett

Body:

Consider the following scenario:

A bunch of 8th graders start a public group on Facebook about one of their teachers called, 'I hate Mr. Garrett'. Several students join and began to write mean things about this teacher--stuff about him being 'the worst teacher EVER' and being 'awkward and dorky.' The page comes to the attention of the head of school. She calls an assembly of all 8th graders. She begins by talking about how small acts of cruelty (e.g., a racist remark) can balloon rapidly into huge societal ills like segregation, systemic discrimination etc.

Questions:

What do you think the consequences should be for the student(s) who created the webpage? How should the students themselves respond? How about other teachers and parents?

How would the situation be different if Mr. Garrett was black, or gay, and the facebook group was used to make racist or homophobic comments?

When does socializing and banter on the internet cross the line?

Day 16

Title: What does it mean to be a responsible person online?

Body:

Participation in communities happens online as well as off, and there are ways that the two are similar and dissimilar, connected and unconnected.

Questions:

What do you think your roles and responsibilities are in regards to the online world and the communities you participate in there?

How does your participation in this online world connect to your participation in the offline world?

Day 17

Title: A better world through... the internet?

Body:

Many have hailed the web as a new force in creating a more democratic, more equal, more socially conscious and better informed world. Others don't necessarily think that it can be significant in helping to solve the problems the world is facing.

Questions:

How do you see the online world as a means to create change and better the society around you? What are its limitations?

Are there things that you've already done online that you think make a positive contribution to your community, society, and/or the world?

Day 18

Title: The Generational Difference

Body:

Consider two quotes taken from a conversation here in FOCUS:

Sunny234 (adult)

The consequences of online cruelty, bullying or defamation should not be any different than when done in person. When comments are made that are harmful to another person...teachers and parents, as appropriate, need to be involved.

Anu30March (teen)

[There's] nothing wrong in creating a group against a teacher you hate. You can share your experiences and grievances about the teacher with others. Thanks to the internet, we have a place where we can express our anguish!...Creating a group to vent your frustrations against a teacher whom most people dislike and who does a lousy job is harmless. But making racist...or homophobic comments is never justified.

Regardless of your opinion on the issue being discussed in the quotes, what they do tell us is that there are going to be differences of opinion about the online world, and those differences can often happen more between adults and teens.

Questions:

What are the places where you think there is real difference or disagreement between adults and teens about life online? What are the places where you think there is consensus?

Day 19

Title: What are you taking away from the Dialogues?

Body:

We've had three weeks of dialogues, and during that time have heard a lot of different views about the world we live in, both on and offline.

Questions:

What are things that surprised you?

What have you learned?

What are you going to take back into your life from this?

What, if anything, might you do differently going forward?

Day 20

Title: The Question of Common Ground

Body: <n/a>

Questions:

Given the sometimes conflicting views that parents and teens have, is there common ground to be found in terms of online behavior? If so, what should it look like? If not, why not?

How can common ground between adults and teens be achieved?

Day 21*Title:*

Shout outs, Closing Thoughts and Favorite Quotes

Body:

We're officially at the last full day of dialogues here at FOCUS, and we want to thank everyone for the incredible conversations that you've created!

You can use this thread as a place to give props and shout-outs, voice final thoughts, share favorite quotes or threads, etc. Looking forward to seeing what you have to share!

Appendix B: Excerpt of one discussion thread on illegal downloading

Evelyn (TEEN)	08:43AM Apr 22, 2009 EST
<p>Pirating, illegal downloading, whatever you want to call it...in my mind, it's just as much stealing as walking out of Walmart with a cd that you didn't pay for. Sure maybe the artist has "too much money" or something. But does that give you a right to steal? I don't think so.</p> <p>Illegal downloading is something I am glad to say I have never done. I owned a couple copied cd's for a while. But my music is a huge enough part of my life that I am willing to pay for it!</p>	
April (ADULT)	12:39pm Apr 22, 2009 EST
<p>I think that two very contrasting approaches have been given.</p> <p>My personal view is nearer Carlos' - as I'm not a real music fan; I tend to listen to talk shows on the radio & rarely have the music on. (That said, when I do put it on, I think I ought to more often!)</p> <p>However, I do have some audio books on an MP3 player that someone recorded for me; so I guess it's the same really as downloading them. But that's all I've got.</p> <p>From a TV point of view, I know that many people find it annoying that it's not possible to (legally) access things like the BBC iPlayer from outside the UK, or things like Hulu from outside the US. That's more of a difficult one; in the UK we have to pay a licence fee - but then you feel if you've paid it; you ought to be able to watch iPlayer anywhere in the world. I guess sorting out authentication & tying people to licences (though you have one per household, rather than one per person), could start to address that.</p> <p>Equally, US feeds, which rely on US advertising, were I to watch them, I wouldn't be likely to buy something from the US - so the advertising is even more wasted on me than UK commercial channel advertising is!</p>	
NEIL (TEEN)	05:39PM Apr 22, 2009 EST
<p>I grew up having any song or movie at my fingertips by just downloading it illegally. As a teen I don't have much money to spend on music and movies and so I just download them. Usually though I download things that I had never intended on buying. I don't understand why people are so uptight about it. I agree with what mabel said about walking out of walmart without paying for the CD, but I probably wouldn't have gone to walmart to get that CD in the first place. I buy a good amount of movies that I want to keep on bluray, other than that and a couple games most of what I have was downloaded. I'm just so used to it as being second nature that I don't think I'll ever stop nor do I really intend on doing so.</p>	
Radha (ADULT)	07:18pm Apr 22, 2009 EST
<p>When people want to make a name for themselves they often give their product for free - Once they are famous and have a market they can charge market prices. If the practice of downloading music could be legitimised - like giving ratings to new artists it would create a way to pay the money to the artist and not the middle man (i.e. publisher). It may be a way to make the technology useful.</p>	
Alistair (TEEN)	02:02am Apr 23, 2009 EST
<p>Honestly I think it's more of the person allowing it to be downloaded's fault rather than the downloader.</p>	
Evelyn (TEEN)	09:26am Apr 23, 2009 EST
<p>Ha! Yes! Definitely. There ARE ways to protect such things. However, if a woman on the park bench next to me left her purse sitting there and I walk off with it, is it her fault that I stole it? Kind of! Ahhhh I don't know, I guess RL and the internet don't quite match up a lot of times. :)</p>	
Cheryl (ADULT)	02:01pm Apr 23, 2009 EST
<p>I have never pirated anything - music, software, movies. I don't plagiarize. Ever. I have pursued relief against people who have used my work without my consent. Last summer I battled a local not-for-profit for distributing marketing materials with quotes from my original spoken word. Even though they are a not-for-profit and even though I am certain they meant to harm, those words were penned by me and they did not have my permission to use them. My art was never intended for their marketing campaign.</p>	

I'm a software designer and a writer. My intellectual property is how I earn my living. I think it would be really hypocritical if I pirated the work of others when the theft of my own works impacts me so deeply.

Eric (ADULT)

02:11PM Apr 23, 2009 EST

Pirating isn't any less illegal just because it is easy to do. I agree that that laws about copyrighting and intellectual property are woefully out of touch with the new age of digital media, but until someone figures out a better way to legislate this, we're stuck with the laws we have. This isn't a new issue. Teachers are some of the worst copyright offenders, photocopying entire books, articles, and watching movies in school auditoriums for recreational purposes, wrongly claiming "fair use" exceptions and giving the same reasons (I don't have the money, the publishers are making plenty of money, etc.). No one seems to get their shorts in a knot about this despite its having gone on for years. I hope we aren't supporting a double standard here.

Amanda (ADULT)

02:20pm Apr 23, 2009 EST

My 18-year-old son and I have debated this endlessly. My view is that it is no different than walking into a store and shoplifting a CD. It is stealing. His view is that the person that made it available for download is guilty of a crime, but he is not. At the very least, I think it is very unethical, and is unfair to the artists. However, since it is so commonplace, my son has very little money, and he believes the artists make enough off legal downloads and sales, he will continue to do it until someone stops him.

Neil (TEEN)

07:37pm Apr 23, 2009 EST

ITguy: How can someone be a copyright offender for just showing a movie to a larger audience? I have never seen a teacher with a burned movie and I'm not sure if you meant that teachers showed illegal copies of movies. Also, if a teacher photocopies an article, how can it be bad that they are using that article in class? I don't quite understand your reasoning.

Trevor (TEEN)

02:08am Apr 24, 2009 EST

In response to the comment that downloading is like walking into a store and stealing a CD, it really isn't anything like that because if I steal a CD from a store that store can no longer sell that particular CD as they no longer have it however if I download a copy of a game the developer can still continue to sell the game as if it had never been downloaded. Regardless of what the industry thinks or tries to make us think a download doesn't equal a lost sale. It just means that it was downloaded. There are a few groups of people when it comes to the topic of downloading; the group that will download it regardless of if it is worth the money, if they can download it they will if not they will buy it, another group is the group that wasn't going to buy it in the first place, this group will only download it and shouldn't be counted as lost sales because they had no intention of buying the product in the first place and if they can't download it they just won't have it and finally the last group is similar to the second group but is unsure about it downloads it and then either buys it or not. The rest of the people will either buy it or not and won't download it. As a teenager who focuses on school rather than getting a job I don't have a lot of money to spend on games and stuff so if I download a game tend to fall between the second and third group depending on the product.

Now on the topic of downloading TV shows, I download most of the TV shows I watch mostly because they aren't broadcast on any of the TV channels I have and because I'm in Canada I can't watch them on Hulu. One thing companies really need to stop doing is restrict websites by geographic location. The Internet spans the entire world companies and countries need to get over this old mentality and move on. With the Internet being global and near instant it really isn't feasible to even try and control the flow of data across borders so why even bother? If I can't watch a TV show on a site like Hulu which has advertisements or so I've heard, I'll just go somewhere else which in this case happens to be a torrent site to download the same show except without any advertisements. Now which sounds like a better idea let anyone anywhere in the world watch a show with advertisements on a site like Hulu or block everyone except for a particular geographical area and force the rest of the world to find somewhere else to watch the show which will most likely not have any advertisements. The same goes for anything really, if people can't get it locally some will get it regardless even if it isn't legal.

To put it simply until the content creators can either A. Create a non-invasive, non-intrusive, self-contained and uncrackable copy protection (Which is impossible as if you make it they WILL find a way to crack it and this does not include systems like the Awful SecuROM or Starforce Malware as it are neither non-invasive, non-intrusive or self-contained as they use validation servers and background processes) or B. Figure out a way to make their product good enough to make everyone want to buy it rather than download it. Also the argument that companies are losing money due to download isn't really valid as if a company is going to release a product they should be accounting for what they expect their sales and budget accordingly. It shouldn't be surprising or put a company into financial trouble if the ratio of downloads to sales is 20:1 if they knew that to begin with. If a company has at least a rough estimate on that ratio and budgets accordingly they shouldn't have an issue while I agree it would be nice if that 20:1 ratio was a 0:21 ratio but that just won't happen and any company that thinks it should be a 0:21 ratio is just being greedy.

Evelyn (TEEN)

09:06am Apr 24, 2009

Yes, you have a valid point there...the cd would be gone. And the downloads would still be available. But does having an unlimited supply of something make it ok to steal it? Or is illegal downloading actually stealing after all?

April (ADULT)

11:33AM Apr 24, 2009 EST

Nate asked: "How can someone be a copyright offender for just showing a movie to a larger audience?"

I'm not sure what ITguy was thinking of, but I would guess that he was thinking about videos/DVDs that state in the blurb at the start that they're designed for home use, and not use in public places. I've forgotten the exact wording, but certainly in the UK when you rent a DVD from the local DVD shop, it's got wording to that effect at the start.

I've not come across too many teachers photocopying whole books, generally it's a section, which, (again, I'm UK based so may differ in other places) - you're allowed to, as long as it's for teaching only & is less than 10% of the original.

For digital resources (e.g. academic papers) we're not meant to save them as .pdf - we're meant to just give the students the link to the original site - and they have to read it on site.

That's actually got some additional benefits ... if I download an article & make it available for my class of 200 students, the library sees it as one download, so wonders if it's worth subscribing to that journal. If even 25% of the class bother to read it (and, realistically, if they're going to read it, clicking on a pdf link to download it & one to the live site - won't make much difference to them) - then that's 49 extra reads ... so makes the journal seem more worth the money. (And, I live in hope that a few of those 25% might actually go & see what else is in that journal & do some extra work!)

Lindsay (ADULT)

08:43am Apr 30, 2009 EST

I agree with Ivy and also feel that downloading without paying is unethical. I was surprised recently when a friend offered to let me put some of her music on my ipod...I didn't go into the whole moral issue of it, just said no thanks.

We had no money in the 70s and 80s either, but I have a great memory of the first album I bought with my own money (Rolling Stones' "Tattoo You")

Is it going to be a great memory, the first song you downloaded illegally?

My kids aren't buying that much music yet, but I feel like I will look at this in a black and white way.

Evelyn (TEEN)	09:21am Apr 30, 2009 EST
<p>Oh wow what an amazing point! Lauramom, you are like me. To me, a cd is usually special enough to save up for. It's a big thing! I like good quality music and I am willing to pay for it! Because it is important to me. Even though we live in a world that wants everything NOW and really cheap, some things still matter to some people! Like ethics. And I'm thrilled to hear about someone else who absolutely will NOT participate in the illegal download world. :)</p> <p>That said, I would guess that most teens do it out of ignorance at first. Because all their friends do it. So they start. And by the time someone points out that it's wrong, well, it's too late b/c it's become a part of their lives.</p>	