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Australian children's experiences of parents' online mediation

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Abstract

This paper draws on the work of the 'EU Kids Online' network funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet plus Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803); see www.eukidsonline.net, and addresses Australian children's online activities in terms of risk, harm and opportunity. In particular, it draws upon data that indicates that Australian children are more likely to encounter online risks – especially around seeing sexual images, bullying, misuse of personal data and exposure to potentially harmful user-generated content – than is the case with their EU counterparts. Rather than only comparing Australian children with their European equivalents, this paper places the risks experienced by Australian children in the context of the mediation and online protection practices adopted by their parents, and asks about the possible ways in which we might understand data that seems to indicate that Australian children's experiences of online risk and harm differ significantly from the experiences of their Europe-based peers.

In particular, and as an example, this paper sets out to investigate the apparent conundrum through which Australian children appear twice as likely as most European children to have seen sexual images in the past 12 months, but parents are more likely to filter their access to the internet than is the case with most children in the wider EU Kids Online study. Even so, one in four Australian children (25%) believes that what their parents do helps 'a lot' to improve their internet experience, and Australian children and their parents are a little less likely to agree about the mediation practices taking place in the family home than is the case in the EU.

The AU Kids Online study was carried out as a result of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation's funding of a small scale randomised sample (N = 400) of Australian families with at least one child, aged 9-16, who goes online. The report on *Risks and safety for Australian children on the internet* follows the same format and uses much of the contextual statement around these issues as the 'county level' reports produced by the 25 EU nations involved in EU Kids Online, first drafted by Livingstone et al (2010). The entirely new material is the data itself, along with the analysis of that data.

Introduction and methodology

EU Kids Online has revolutionised the evidence-base informing policy, research and analysis around children's opportunities, risks and harm regarding internet use in Europe. Naturally, such research attempts to hit a moving target. The context changes quickly and in Australia, 60% of 9-16 year olds surveyed for this research say they access the internet using a mobile phone (14%) or other handheld held device, such as a iPod touch, iPhone or Blackberry (46%). (Green et al 2011, p. 15) This level of 'smart' mobile access is higher than that recorded in any of the participating EU countries and could by itself account for some of Australian children's exposure to risk, discussed below. Notwithstanding changes in context of online access, some things stay the same. The internet remains a major tool for learning,

creativity, skill development and the promotion of opportunity. Children continue to use the internet to do and access things that they find fun, but that their parents and caregivers might consider risky. Sometimes that exposure to risk is not the child's choice, but results from accidental, inadvertent or unwilling contact with material they find upsetting. It is here that mediation can play an important role in supporting the child, building resilience and mitigating the impact of negative internet experiences. This paper takes parental mediation as its primary subject.

In the summer of 2010-11, from November to February, IPSOS Australia conducted a random survey of 400 children aged 9-16 who have ever been online, and one of their parents. Unusually, for Australia, the survey research was conducted in a face to face context. The questions to be covered were too personal to be asked over the phone and, given the linked parent and child data collection, most survey visits took about an hour. The survey was also unusual in that it used the same questionnaire and methodology that had been used in 25 countries six months earlier, and it created comparable data which positioned the 400 Australian cases alongside 25,142 cases from the parallel EU Kids Online study. The first overview report on the Australian dataset was issued in October 2011 (Green et al 2011): this paper introduces the findings around the issue of the mediation of Australian children's internet use by their parents. Future publications will address the mediation by teachers, peers and other influential figures in children's lives.

The methods used by EU Kids Online were developed through the collaborative processes of the network of researchers and research teams, subject to the ethics environment and work practices of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The project has been in progress since 2005 when the first application for funding was submitted, and is led by Professor Sonia Livingstone and Dr Leslie Haddon, both of LSE. The first stage of the project, EU Kids Online I, made recommendations concerning appropriate methodologies for research with children and families (Lobe et al. 2007). These recommendations were followed in planning the cross-country survey that constituted much of the work of EU Kids Online II.

The EU Kids Online network includes researchers from some 33 European countries, with participation growing with each iteration of the research. November 2011 sees the commencement of EU Kids Online III which involves 33 EU-related countries and which will run until 2014. EU Kids Online II had 25 participating nations whereas EU Kids Online I had 21. The countries involved in the EU study are all linked to a broader conception of 'Europe' and include members of the European Community, accession countries seeking to join the EU, countries in the European Economic Area and, with EU Kids Online III, Russia. The 25 EU countries involved in the EU Kids Online II survey were Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Ireland (IE), Lithuania (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PO), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Turkey (TU), and the United Kingdom (UK). The abbreviations become relevant in interpreting some of the comparative data, for example, Figure 1 below. In this paper, for convenience, the EU kids Online II nations are referred to as 'the EU countries', since these are the countries from which the EU children studied in the Phase II research were drawn. The EU Kids Online II project was funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme, and the details of this work are at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/ activities/sip/ from 2009-2011 (contract SIP-KEP-321803). The reports, outcomes, materials used and updates are available from www.eukidsonline.net. The site includes the Australian report.

Seeking consistency, the methodology followed for AU Kids Online was as close as practicable to that used in the EU study. It had been decided in Europe that the survey component of EU Kids Online II would use one market research company to coordinate data collection across the board. IPSOS MORI won the tender to conduct the research in all 25 EU countries. In each case, while IPSOS MORI coordinated the research and managed the resulting database, the IPSOS affiliate in that country carried out the work and adapted it to the specific national context. In Australia, this meant that the research was conducted by IPSOS Social Research Institute and I-view, referred to hereafter as 'IPSOS Australia'. The ethics environment in Australia was overseen by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University within the context of the ethics environment already overseen by LSE.

EU Kids Online research uses face to face delivery of a survey questionnaire and the methodology adopted for participant selection was that of the 'random walk' approach. Forty Australian electoral districts were identified at random by IPSOS Australia to seed the recruitment of 10 families each, allowing the construction of a 400 family dataset. The starting address within each electoral district was also identified using principles of random selection.

> Families within the locale are approached and asked to participate according to a pattern of walking around the district in relation to the starting address. The questionnaires used with children, in two separate age categories (9-10, and 11-16), and with their parents, were made publicly available (LSE Survey 2010) and the ethics environment in which the research was conducted was rigorously monitored by the London School of Economics. (Green & Brady, forthcoming)

A survey family is recruited on the basis that the household is identified within the pattern of calls made under the random walk protocol and that the family includes a child who has ever been on the internet, aged between 9 and 16, who is willing to be interviewed, and whose parent/caregiver is willing to be interviewed and also to give permission for the child to be interviewed. The parent and the child are interviewed separately, although the parent has to remain in the home during the child's interview, ideally in a separate room so that neither child nor parent is influencing the other's response. Where there is more than one child in the household, the child with the next birthday is selected. Basis demographic data including age and gender are collected for parent and child; socio-economic status (SES) information is deduced from the occupation and education of the primary wage-earner. A more detailed description of the protocols for interviewing the child and parent is included in Green (2010).

Importantly with respect to the risks experienced by children, the notion of harm was explored in terms of whether the children felt 'bothered' by what they encountered online. The subjective sense of being 'bothered' was explained to the child by the interviewer in terms of whether the material experienced online "made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it." (Livingstone et al 2010, p. 8) The Australian understanding of 'bothered', and some other complex concepts, was explored through cognitive testing carried out by IPSOS Australia. Results were compared with the cognitive testing conducted for the 25 EU countries and words were slightly adjusted in the interviewer's script in order to create a consistent meaning for 'bothered' across national contexts. In all cases, consistency of the survey was maintained, however. Although the Australian survey was administered only in English, 23 of the EU country surveys used a national language other than English and

this multi-cultural, multi-lingual context raises some issues around reliability. While consistency across languages and cultures is always a challenge, the inclusion of cognitive testing, and double-translation protocols for non-English surveys, helped to ensure rigour in this respect.

As indicated below (Table 1), six areas of risk were investigated at a basic level. In the full development of the research, four of these areas were further investigated in terms of the extent to which children were bothered (duration) and for how long they were bothered (duration). Two risk areas were additionally considered in terms of locating the risks experienced online in terms of the same risks encountered offline. The risk of meeting strangers online was further probed to explore whether the child had subsequently gone on to meet that stranger in a face to face context creating, in effect, a seventh risk. For ethical reasons and because of issues around the length of the interview for younger children, some risk areas were only investigated with children aged 11 years and older.

The risks investigated at a basic level concentrated upon misuse of personal data (11+ only) and potentially harmful user-generated content (11+ only). Such user-generated content includes hate sites, anorexia sites and sites promoting drug use, suicide and/or self harm. The two issues where the risk was investigated in terms of the child's perception of harm, but without comparing online risks with the same risks offline (and/or communicated using other communication channels such as mobiles), were: sending/receiving/seeing sexual images ('sexting' 11+) and meeting in offline contexts persons/'strangers' who were first met online (9-16). The two areas where risks were considered both in terms of children's perceptions of harm, and in terms of comparing exposure to the risk in a totality of online and offline contexts, were: seeing sexual images (9-16) and bullying (9-16). Older children were also asked whether they have bullied other children in the past 12 months, and whether they have sent sexual messages ('sexted'). In the research, 9-10 year olds were only asked about the intensity of their feeling, moving from bothered to upset: 'very upset', 'fairly upset', 'a bit upset', 'not at all upset', 'don't know', rather than being asked how long they felt upset for. Information about the duration of feeling bothered was collected from children aged 11+.

The child was offered the opportunity to say to whom they turned for help in the event that something they experienced on the internet bothered them. Parents and children were both asked about the parents' mediation of their child's online experiences in terms of what the parent did and how helpful it was. The child was also asked about whether they had received help with their internet use from friends, or offered help to friends; or whether teachers, relatives and other significant figures in the child's life had helped them to use the internet well, or safely. This paper is primarily concerned with the matter of parental mediation, but it is to the subject of children and online risk that it now turns.

Children and online risk

The notion of risk, as distinct from harm, has been extensively explored by the EU Kids Online network over the first two phases of the project, Phase I (2005-9), and Phase II (2009-11). Risk is seen as activity which has the potential to bring harm but which can also, in the right circumstances, be part of a necessary foundation for resilience. The difference between risk that builds resilience, and risk that leads to harm and possible long term avoidance of the internet, hinges upon the content experienced, the context within which that content was experienced and the individual factors of the child exposed to, or exposing themselves to, risk. It is the subject of extensive further research. In a desire to explore these parameters of risk and harm, alongside opportunity, EU Kids Online I constructed an accessible dataset of

over 400 instances of existing good-quality European research across 21 nations to discern what was already known about European children's experiences online, and what gaps were evident in the research that urgently needed filling. As a result of this research into existing knowledge, a commercially-administered survey was funded by the commissioned to address the gaps in the evidence base. 25,142 children, alongside one of their parents, were surveyed in 2010, leading to a refinement of the model of the three forms of risk to which children are exposed: Content, Contact and Conduct. (Livingstone et al 2011, p. 13) In basic terms:

1. Conduct risks are where the child is the actor, offering content or acting in personal contacts [contexts]. These risks include activities that reveal personal identifying information enabling others to contact and possibly harm the child; copyright-infringing downloads; and recognise that children themselves may be the major perpetrators of risks that other children encounter.
2. Contact risks are where the child is a participant in peer or personal communication. The implications of this risk category include the possibility that a child will choose to meet in real life someone they have got to know online.
3. Content risk are where the child is the recipient of mass communication and include children's exposure to pornography; hate sites; gambling; self-harm, suicide and anorexia sites. (Hasebrink et al 2008, p. 8)

In discussing this model of risks faced by children during their internet use, Hasebrink et al (2008, p. 8) note that "issues of privacy and personal information cut across cells" and "some categories [of motivation] (e.g. sexuality) cover rather different kinds of risk". Australian children scored comparatively highly on the number of risks to which they are exposed:

Table 1: Summary of online risk factors shaping children's probability of experiencing harm

%	Age				All	ALL
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	AU	EU
Seen sexual images on websites in past 12 months	11	17	25	56	28	14
Have been sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet in past 12 months	6	15	14	15	13	6
Seen or received sexual messages on the internet in past 12 months	n.a.	9	9	27	15	15
Ever had contact on the internet with someone not met face to face before	18	23	35	53	34	30
Ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that first met on the internet	2	2	5	9	5	9
Have come across one or more types of potentially harmful user-generated content in past 12 months	n.a.	27	33	43	34	21
Have experienced one or more types of misuse of personal data in past 12 months	n.a.	20	17	14	17	9
Encountered one or more of the above	24	57	63	84	58	41
Acted in a nasty or hurtful way towards others on the internet in the past 12 months	0	5	7	8	5	3
Sent or posted a sexual message of any kind on the internet in the past 12 months	n.a.	5	0	5	4	3
Done either of these	0	8	5	8	5	4

Note: for the exact questions asked of children, see earlier sections of this report (indicated in the text next to this table).

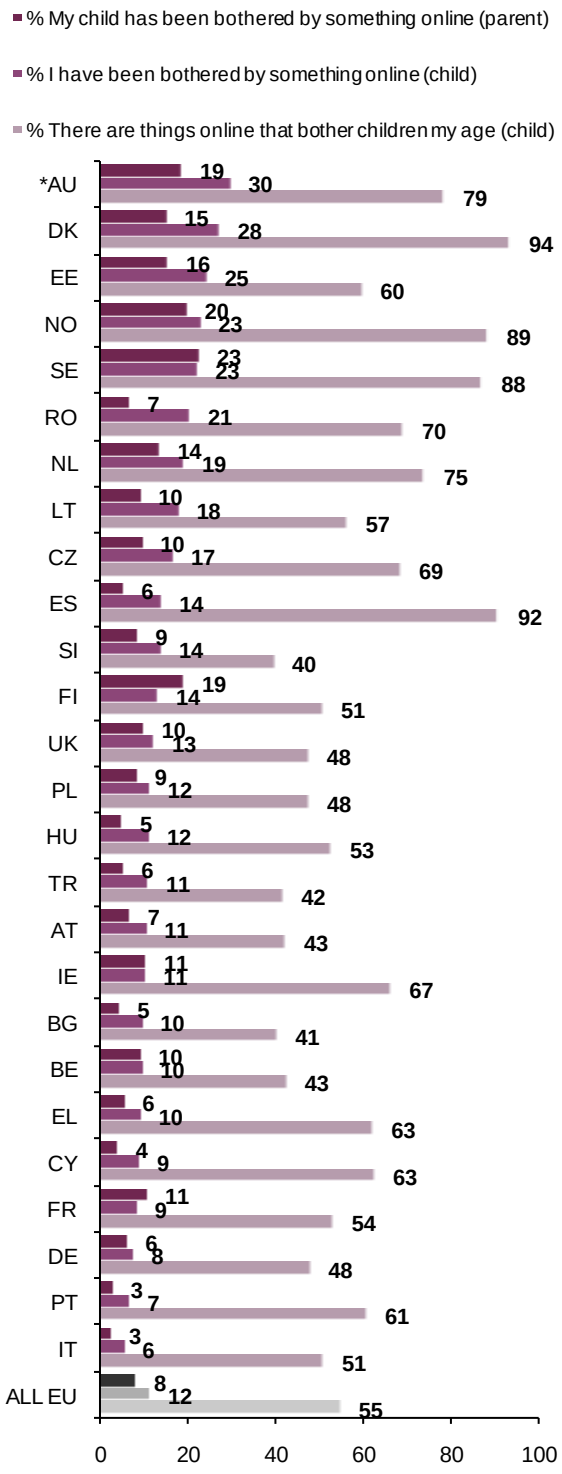
Base: All children who use the internet. (adapted from Green et al 2011, p. 59; Livingstone et al 2011, p. 134)

While some caution is advisable on the basis of the smaller Australian sample, and the small cell size of some of the less common risks, this Table indicates a range of possible differences between the experience of the average Australian child and the experience of their counterpart from the EU study. The figures are indicative only but tend to show that Australian children are twice, or almost twice, as likely to experience risks around seeing 'sexual images on websites in past 12 months', being 'sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet in past 12 months', and experiencing 'one or more types of misuse of personal data in past 12 months'. AU children are substantially more likely than EU children to 'have come across one or more types of potentially harmful user-generated content in past 12 months', to have 'encountered one or more of' the risks listed, and to have 'acted in a nasty or hurtful way towards others on the internet in the past 12 months'. A higher proportion of Australian than EU children have 'sent or posted a sexual message of any kind on the internet in the past 12 months'; doing

either or both of the negative or hurtful online actions investigated by the research. EU kids and AU kids have more or less equivalent exposure to seeing or receiving ‘sexual messages on the internet in past 12 months’ and to having ‘contact on the internet with someone not met face to face before’. The only area in which AU children are substantially less likely to have been involved in a risky activity than the average EU child is in terms of meeting ‘anyone face to face that [they] first met on the internet’.

Exposure to risk need not necessarily lead to an experience of harm. The notion of whether the child had been harmed or not by the risky experience was judged by the number of children who said they had been ‘bothered’ (see below) by some (specific) thing online. Australian children are not only more likely than the average EU child to have experienced online risk, they are also more likely to say they have been bothered by their internet experiences. The magnitude of AU child respondents’ perceptions of feeling bothered by their online experiences is such that, compared with the children from 25 EU countries, more AU children are likely to say they are bothered than children from any of the 25 EU Kids Online II study nations. 30% of Australian children say they have been bothered by their internet experiences. The Figure below is ranked according to the child’s statement as to whether s/he has been bothered, but it also includes the child’s estimation of whether there are things on the internet that would bother a child of the same age, and the parents’ estimation of whether the child has been bothered.

Figure 1: Online experiences that have bothered children, according to child and parent, by country



QC110: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it. QP228: As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered them in some way? QC322: Do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents. (Green et al 2011, p. 62)

These issues of experiencing risky material online, and being bothered, raise questions around Australian parents' mediation of their child's internet activities. Is there any evidence that AU parents have a different approach to the challenge of mediating their child's online activities

when compared to their EU counterparts? Parental approaches to mediation are a key focus of this paper and are considered below.

Mediation of children's online activities and risks

As well as refining understandings around risk, the research of the EU Kids Online network has also revolutionised discussions of mediation – ways in which people other than the child can support the child in their safe internet use and help protect the child if the risks encountered prove problematic (Livingstone & Helsper 2008). The EU kids Online II survey, conducted in Europe and Australia, investigated "eight sources of social support and mediation available to children:

- Active mediation of the child's internet use - the parent is present, staying nearby, encouraging or sharing or discussing the child's online activities.
- Active mediation of the child's internet safety – the parent guides the child in using the internet safely, before, during or after the child's online activities, maybe helping or discussing what to do in case of difficulty.
- Restrictive mediation – the parent sets rules that restrict the child's use (of particular applications, activities, or of giving out personal information).
- Monitoring – the parent checks available records of the child's internet use afterwards.
- Technical mediation of the child's internet use – the parent uses software or parental controls to filter, restrict or monitor the child's use.
- Teachers' mediation – these questions included a mix of active mediation of the child's internet use and internet safety, plus a question on restrictive mediation.
- Peer mediation of the child's internet safety – it was assumed that children talk about their online activities in general, so here the focus was on peer mediation of safety practices in particular. These questions were asked bi-directionally – do the child's friends help them, and also do they help their friends.
- Other sources – There are other sources of safety information apart from those mentioned above and both parents and children may benefit from accessing a range of sources of guidance, from the media, or from experts in their community. We also asked about the use of such sources" (based on Livingstone et al 2010, p. 37).

This paper considers the first five forms of mediation, relating to parents. Unlike the case in some other countries, Australian parents' internet skills are comparatively well advanced and parents are often confident about their capacity to help their children. Parents of 9-16 year old Australian children were slightly more likely than their kids to go online daily or almost daily: this was true of 79% of parents, and 76% of 9-16 year olds. Younger parents are more likely to go online more often: 82% of parents of 9-12 year olds, and 75% of parents of 13-16 year olds, go onto the internet almost daily, or every day. Interestingly, and in an affirmation of government policies promoting internet access through schools, there are family differences around internet use relating to SES rankings. Whereas the SES of children indicates little difference in the likelihood of the child using the internet daily, there are large differences between parents. Only 49% of low SES parents go online every day, or almost every day, while 74% of medium and 86% of high SES parents do so. One implication of this data is that older children are a little more likely than their parents to use the internet daily, as are children from lower SES households, and this may have an impact upon their parents' mediation practices, as well as upon the relevant online skills and competencies of the different respondent groups.

Parents and children were both asked about the five specific forms of parental mediation identified by Livingstone and Helsper (2008): parents' active mediation in terms of encouraging and supporting use of the internet; active mediation in terms of encouraging and supporting safe internet use; restrictive mediation in terms of setting rules about internet activities; the monitoring of internet use in terms of the child's activities – websites visited, friends on their social network site, the content of emails and messages; and technical mediation through the use of filters and virus checkers. While all parents and children were asked about active mediation for both safety awareness and internet use, the questions relating to rules, monitoring and technical restrictions were only asked of parents and children where the child said they used the internet at home.

Table 2: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet use*, according to child

% who say that their parent does…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Talk to you about what you do on the internet	68	70	69	59	67
Stay nearby when you use the internet	73	74	54	52	63
Encourage you to explore and learn things on the internet on your own	49	48	42	36	44
Sit with you while you use the internet	46	41	43	31	40
Do shared activities together with you on the internet	45	47	31	31	38
One or more of these	89	96	94	86	91

QC327: Does your parent / do either of you parents sometimes… *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet. (From Green et al 2011, p. 40)

91% of Australian children report that their parents use one or more of these mediation strategies: a little higher than the EU average, which is 87%. Even so, this indicates that about one in ten parents does not offer positive mediation. Two-thirds (67%) of AU children say they have a parent who talks with them about what s/he does on the internet, making this the most frequently adopted mediation strategy relating to use, with 'staying nearby' a close second choice (63%). The proportion drops to two in five for the next set of mediation activities; encouraging the child to use the internet (44%), sitting with the child (40%) and doing shared activities (38%). Interestingly, older boys, 13-16, report more active mediation by their parents than do older girls.

Previous research (Livingstone & Bober 2006) has indicated that parents perceive themselves as more active mediators than their children are willing to admit. Table 2 compares parents' and children's accounts of parental mediation, demonstrating that there is general agreement of between 60% and 70% of parents and children (column 1 + column 4), depending upon the mediation strategy concerned. This is slightly lower than the EU average which is 70%

agreement. When the figures are considered in detail, between 20% to 31% of parents (column 3) claim a mediation practice unacknowledged by their child; and 5-12% of children (column 2) perceive mediation that the parent does not claim.

Table 3: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet use*, according to child and parent

% who say that their parents sometimes…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Talk to you about what you do on the internet	4	5	29	62
Stay nearby when you use the internet	17	12	20	51
Encourage you to explore and learn things on the internet on your own	25	9	31	35
Sit with you while you use the internet	37	11	23	29
Do shared activities together with you on the internet	40	8	22	30

QC327 and QP220: Does your parents/do either of your parents sometimes [which of the following things, if any do you (or your partner/other carer) sometimes do with your child]…

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents. (From Green et al 2011, p. 41)

Active mediation of the child's internet use is differentiated in the EU Kids Online research from active mediation to encourage the child's safe engagement with the internet, again according to the child's reports of their parents' activities. Comparison of the data for active mediation of use, compared with safety mediation, indicates that Australian parents are more likely to engage in activities associated with safe internet engagement. Around three in four children perceive their parents as 'helping when something is difficult to do or find' (79%), 'suggesting how to use the internet safely' (75%) and 'explaining why websites are good or bad' (74%). Two in three parents have helped their child if they felt bothered by something online (67%), while 64% have talked with their child about ways in which they can respond online experiences that have bothered them. On the other hand, fewer than one in two parents have suggested ways in which their child might respond to others online (44%).

Table 4: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet safety*, according to child

% who say that their parent does…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	83	88	75	71	79
Explained why some websites are good or bad	72	78	80	67	74
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	76	78	72	76	75
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	60	75	69	64	44
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	41	51	35	48	67
Talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	57	72	61	67	64
One or more of these	94	99	95	90	94

QC329 Does your parent / do either of your parents sometimes… *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet. (From Green et al 2011, p. 42)

Comparing Australian data with that collected in Europe, and noting that the Australian data was collected six months after the European study, and involved 400 families rather then the 1,000 per country as in Europe, Australian children report parental mediation around safety in a high proportion of families. With rounding, 95% of families practice one or more strategies of safety mediation. Ranked against the 25 countries participating in EU Kids Online, this would indicate that Australian safety mediation practices are ranked second in an overall comparison of 26 nations, with only the Netherlands reporting a higher safety mediation rate (98%). Such a result indicates that many positive messages around children's safe internet use have been successfully adopted in Australian homes.

Parents and children are more likely to agree with each other about the parental commitment to active mediation of the child's internet safety than they are about active mediation of the child's internet use. Whereas there was between 60% and 70% agreement on whether or not the parent promoted use of the internet, there is between 68% and 76% agreement on mediation around safety, indicating that parents and children disagree between a quarter and a third of the time, depending upon the internet safety strategy under consideration. This is addressed in Table 4.

Table 5: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet safety*, according to child and parent

% who say that their parents sometimes…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	9	12	11	67
Explained why some websites are good or bad	7	7	19	67
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	8	14	16	61
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	15	13	18	54
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	39	16	16	29
Talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	16	13	19	52

QC329 and QP222: Has your parent/either of your parents [have you] ever done any of these things with you [your child]?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents. (Green et al 2011, p. 42)

In combination with the two positive approaches to mediation strategies, parents tend to adopt a range of negative mediation approaches. These strategies can be as simple as placing a limit on how much time the child may spend on the internet each day to saying that the child cannot upload photos of themselves for public access online. Sometimes parents insist that the child undertakes a particular internet activity under supervision, such as watching online videos.

Table 6: Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say that rules apply about…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Give out personal information to others on the internet	95	100	83	79	89
Download music or films on the internet	89	91	42	32	63
Upload photos, videos or music to share with others	84	83	36	34	59
Have your own social networking profile	72	75	26	27	49
Use instant messaging	73	71	25	21	47
Watch video clips on the internet	54	64	20	19	39
One or more of these	99	99	83	83	91

QC328: For each of these things, please tell me if your parents CURRENTLY let you do them whenever you want, or let you do them but only with your parent's permission or supervision, or NEVER let you do them.

Note: The latter two options are combined to calculate the percentage for whom rules or restrictions apply.

Base: All children who use the internet. (Green et al 2011, p. 43)

This Table makes clear that children face the greatest restrictions around the online disclosure of personal information. Nine in ten children (89%) are either not allowed to do this, or may only do it with specific permission or under a parents' supervision. This is slightly higher than the EU average of 85%. Some significant way behind the issue of giving out personal information, 63% of AU children have rules around the downloading of content and 59% are not permitted to upload materials. Social networking (49%) and instant messaging (47%) are regulated in the homes of one in two Australian 9-16 year olds, while 39% have rules around the watching of online video clips. Interestingly, younger girls generally perceive more rules than younger boys, but older boys are more likely to be subject to restrictive mediation than girls of the same age.

Table 7: Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

% who say that rules apply about …	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Give out personal information to others on the internet	3	7	0	88
Download music or films on the internet	28	9	12	51
Upload photos, videos or music to share with others	27	14	6	53
Have your own social networking profile	39	12	6	43
Use instant messaging	44	10	7	39
Watch video clips on the internet	45	16	9	30

QC328 and QP221: For each of these things, please tell me if your parents CURRENTLY let you [your child is allowed to] do them whenever you want, or let you do them but only with your parent's permission or supervision, or NEVER let you do them.

Note: The latter two options are combined to calculate the percentage for whom rules or restrictions apply.

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents. (Green et al 2011, p. 44)

Compared with children's perceptions around active mediation, above, there is relatively high agreement between parent and child about whether or not there are rules about the child's online activities. 91% of children (i.e. 3% + 88%) say that they are subject to rules related to giving out personal information. The proportion of children who perceive rules around online behaviour drops to 75% in the case of watching video clips. There is a strong decline in restrictive mediation with the child's age, and this is also indicated in Australian research related to television viewing, mobile phones and gaming (ACMA 2007, p. 14). Even so, most Australian teenagers are expected to abide by one or more rules when going online.

When compared with the 25 EU countries, Australia would be among the small group of countries most likely to favour restrictive mediation. Using the child's perception as a guide, Ireland and Portugal would head the Table with 93% of parents imposing some restriction upon their child, followed by Denmark (third, at 92%). Australia would be joint fourth, with France and Cyprus, on 91%, marginally higher than the average score of 90%. Consequently, it is fair to say that there is no evidence to support an assertion that Australian parents are less likely than their European counterparts to restrict some aspects of their children's internet experience.

The next set of data gathered related to the parents' monitoring of the child's internet activities. The difference between restrictive mediation and monitoring is that the latter moves from setting rules to checking compliance through active surveillance. The parent might check what the child is or has been doing through, for example, looking at the history of websites visited, or logging onto a child's internet account. Monitoring is rather less common than rule-setting and other restrictions, possibly because it may seem like a breach of trust to

one or both parties, particularly as relates to older children. Even so, it is still used by approximately three in five Australian parents, mainly with children in younger age groups.

Table 8: Parent's monitoring of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say parents check...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Which websites you visited	61	62	49	42	53
Your profile on a social network or online community	60	61	48	42	49
Which friends or contacts you add to social networking profile	46	56	29	35	38
The messages in your email or instant messaging account	41	28	15	8	18
One or more of these	54	64	60	60	59

QC330: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home. (Green et al 2011, p. 45)

ACMA research (2007, p. 127) indicates that 52% of 12 and 14 year olds, and 43% of 13 year olds, have their search histories checked by their parents, and this is in line with the AU Kids Online findings of 53% across the 9-16 age range. Close behind in terms of the popular monitoring strategies adopted by parents is the checking of their child's profile on a social network site (SNS) or online community (49%) and the vetting of new friends or contacts (38%). Given that the most popular SNS in Australia is Facebook, with a putative minimum age of 13, parents are particularly active in monitoring SNS activity for this age group. Further, the vigilance is useful in that 29% of 9-10 year old Australians, and 59% of 11-12 year olds, say they have a SNS profile (Green et al 2011, p. 8) In monitoring, as in restrictive mediation, parents worry more about younger girls than younger boys, (apart from being more likely to check boys' messages). With older children the opposite is true. Teenage boys are more closely monitored than teenage girls, except for parents checking the friends their daughters add to their SNS profiles.

Table 9: Parent's monitoring of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

% who say parents check…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Which websites you visited	**28**	**11**	**19**	**41**
Your profile on a social network or online community	**31**	**8**	**19**	**43**
Which friends or contacts you add to social networking profile	**41**	**9**	**21**	**29**
The messages in your email or instant messaging account	**63**	**5**	**20**	**13**

QC330 and QP223: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents. (Green et al 2011, p. 45)

As Table 9 indicates, in about one in five families for each of the areas investigated parents claim to monitor their child's online activities and the child indicates that the parents do not do this. Contrariwise, in approximately one family in ten, across the different monitoring dimensions, the child says they are monitored but the parent denies this. Overall, 74% of parents claim to monitor their child in some way, and 59% of children perceive themselves as being monitored (Green et al 2011, p. 46). If these figures were aligned with those from the 25 EU nations they would rank fourth most likely to monitor in terms of parental statements, after Norway (78%), Poland (77%) and Ireland (75%). In terms of children's perceptions, they are the second most monitored of the 26 countries, after Poland (61%) and above Ireland (57%). There is little doubt, therefore, that Australian families are more likely than most families in the EU Kids study to use monitoring as a means of mediation. For some parents, the choice is not so much whether or not to follow their child's digital footprints online, but to use technical methods to restrict where the child is able to go. The final area of parental mediation investigated was the use of filters and other technical devices to mediate internet use. These findings are presented in Tables 10 and 11.

Table10 : Parents' technical mediation of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say parents check...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses	74	73	80	80	78
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites you visit	57	54	31	27	36
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	50	34	29	34	35
A service or contract that limits the time you spend on the internet	28	21	19	20	21
One or more of these	83	68	85	84	81

QC331: Does your parent/either of your parents make use of the following?

Base: All children who use the internet at home. (Green et al 2011, p. 46)

As is the case in Europe, the most common form of technical mediation reported by the child is the use of software to protect their computer from viruses, and to filter out spam. This is used in 78% of AU families, and in 73% of EU homes. Over one third of children say their parents use technical means to keep track of websites visited (36%) and to block or filter the visiting of other websites (35%). Although this is consequently the least favoured means of mediation, according to the child's perception, it is still relatively common. These figures are far higher than is the case in the EU study, where 24% of families are recorded as tracking websites and 28% as using blocks and filters. When the 25 EU countries are ranked according to parents' accounts of the use of 'parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of websites', Australia would rank as third most likely to do this with 45% of parents claiming to use this mediation strategy, after the UK (54% of parents) and Ireland (48% of parents), ahead of France (44% of parents). Turning to children's perceptions, 35% places Australia in sixth place after the UK (46%), Ireland (41%), Turkey (38%), France (38%) and the Netherlands (37%). As with other restrictive mediation strategies, younger children are more likely to report that their internet use is subject to technical restrictions, leaving aside the widespread reliance upon the use of software to control spam, junk mail and viruses.

Table 11: Parents' technical mediation of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

% who say parents check…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses	5	5	16	74
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites you visit	49	8	15	28
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	51	7	15	28
A service or contract that limits the time you spend on the internet	69	8	10	13

QC330 and QP223: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents. (Green et al 2011, p. 47)

Table 11 indicates that technical mediation is an open strategy in that there is greater agreement between parents and children whether the child's internet use is moderated by technical means than is the case with any alternative parental mediation strategy. Approximately four in five parents and children agree whether the family uses the various technical means of mediation.

Other aspects of parental mediation were investigated in the research, particularly whether the parent and or child felt that what the parent did made a difference, and whether or not the parent was doing something differently now as a result of the child having a negative experience online in the past 12 months. As an indicator of these dimensions, 25% of children say that what their parents do make their internet experience 'a lot' better; 49% say that it makes the experience 'a little' better; and 26% say that it does not make their experience better (Green et al 2011, p. 48). Other questions explore whether the child feels that their parents' actions restrict what they can do since this may also have an impact on their online skills and opportunities. The raw information concerning these issues are contained in the full report *Risks and safety for Australian children on the internet* (Green et al 2011), and they will be explored in greater depth as the analysis is further developed.

Conclusion

This research has discovered that Australian children are more likely than the children in any one of 25 other countries to say that something online has 'bothered' them in the past 12 months. In particular, as a means of explaining what it might have been that bothered them, Australian children are more likely to have experienced risks around seeing sexual images online, being bullied online, experiencing misuse of personal data, accessing potentially harmful user-generated content and seeing or receiving sexual messages.

Far from indicating a lack of interest or awareness on the parts of their parents, however, the research has also indicated that Australian parents are particularly committed to monitoring

and mediating their children's online experiences. The Australian children's feeling of being bothered is consequently not a result of parental indifference. At the same time, it appears that Australian children are no more likely than their EU Kids counterparts to experience a greater intensity of feeling bothered, or a longer duration of feeling bothered. This will be investigated as the research progresses, although the comparatively small sample size may mean that the data lacks validity for these nuanced details.

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