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High Tech or High Risk: Moral Panics about Girls Online

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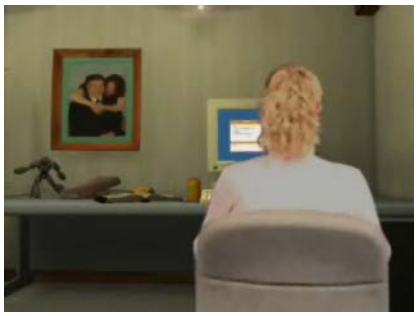
Introduction

Imagine a suburban neighborhood at sunset. A police car drives past a quaint one-story home. The children inside are so precious; their parents would do anything to protect them. When children are at home, they should be safe. But what about the internet?



A man at the end of the internet superhighway sits in a dark room and with glazed eyes, he sits typing this to someone's blond daughter:

Scott16:
When can we meet 4 real?
LizJones13:
Tomorrow after soccer?
LizJones13:
Let's meet at 4
Scott16:
I'll be there.

The images and dialogue above come from a public service announcement from NetSmartz Workshop, an online interactive, educational safety resource. Like many Internet safety campaigns and news reports, the PSA warns parents of terrible danger: "When your children are at home you think they are safe. But are they? What about the internet? Have you taught them how to protect themselves online?" (NetsmartzWorkshop, 2006, p. 233). And parents are indeed afraid. According to a recent CTIA Wireless Survey, cited in PC Magazine ("A Dangerous Net", 2006), 85% of U.S. parents believe that the Internet is the medium that poses the most risk for teens.

According to the oft-cited Youth Internet Safety Survey from 2001, whose respondents comprised 1500 teenagers, approximately one in five American teenagers have been sexually

solicited online (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005, p. 439). Dateline NBC's "To Catch a Predator" quotes law enforcement officials as estimating that "50,000 predators are online at any given moment" (Hansen, 2005). Based on these warnings and these statistics, it's not surprising that parents are scared, and that government officials are feeling pushed to act, as witnessed by President Bush's July 27, 2006 signature of the Sex Offender Bill which, among other programs, will fight online porn with 20-year minimum prison terms for participation in "child exploitation enterprises" and criminal prosecution for "deceiving children into viewing obscene material" ("Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006", 2006).

But, does the Internet pose as much of a constant -- and unusual -- danger to online teens as these descriptions suggest? If so, what is the actual nature of the danger – is it exposure to inappropriate images such as pornography, or is it also risk of kidnapping, rape or murder? Are the eleven million American teenagers who use the Internet daily unknowingly subjecting themselves to certain danger? Are the eighty-seven percent of teens who are online more at risk of victimization than the thirteen percent of teens who are not online? In this chapter we argue that there is much more to the story than teens, computers, and criminals. It is not by chance that the viewer of the Netsmartz PSA sees a nice suburban house, a cop car, a fence, a window with a security system logo, two white parents, a large screen television and a clean, average living room. If there is panic surrounding the dangers of the Internet, it is also a moral panic. However, the panic over young girls at risk from communication technologies is not new rhetoric in America. There has been a recurring moral panic throughout history, not just over real threats of technological danger, but also over the compromised virtue of young girls, parental loss of control in the face of a seductive machine, and the debate over whether women can ever be high-tech without being in jeopardy.

In what follows we first look to the facts -- the crime statistics which diverge in a number of important respects from the way in which many people seem to believe child victimization takes place on Internet. In fact, contrary to popular belief, the percentage of single offender crimes against girls where the offender is an adult and a stranger has *declined*, not increased, since 1994 . . . concurrent with the rise of internet use. And, even online, the number of stranger offenders is on the decrease. Given this good news, why do we hear only bad news about the Internet in the media? In order to explain a widespread fear on the part of parents, educators and politicians, we look at the point-to-point communications technologies of the past, and the parallels between public responses to their use with today's moral panic. Then we will address the perspective of the users themselves, the young women who have been the object of so much concern. Like the representation of Liz Jones, who literally has no face in the Netsmartz PSA, the female users have virtually no agency in the media responses to crimes. While they are ascribed roles of naiveté, innocence or delinquency in the media, in actuality, they turn out to be active and informed consumers and producers of mediated conversations and texts. The important identity construction, self-efficacy, and social network production work that they do online is not only largely ignored, but too often condemned. In sum, in this chapter we argue that the dangers to girls online are not as consequent as they have been portrayed, and that the reason for this exaggeration of danger arises from adult fears about girls' agency (particularly sexual agency), and societal discomfort around girls as power-users of technology.

One in Five

It is common to hear, on the news or at the water cooler, that parents and schools must regain control and oversee their children on the internet, for the risk to unsupervised children is very very high. And the reality, of course, is that there does exist a risk for teens on the Internet. In

the same ways that teens have used the internet to network, construct more robust identities, and gain feedback on their transgressive activities, so too pedophiles have used the Internet for much the same purposes (Eichenwald, 2006).

Yet, teens are also at risk in the mall, walking home from school, and spending a vacation with distant relatives. And, as we will discuss further below, family members and friends, rather than strangers, are still the most frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Why therefore do the media and many parents seem so obsessed with the dangers of the internet, so unbridled in their condemnation, so overstated in their description of the risk? The following snippet of an interview with Internet activist Perry Aftab illustrates well the tendency to exaggeration:

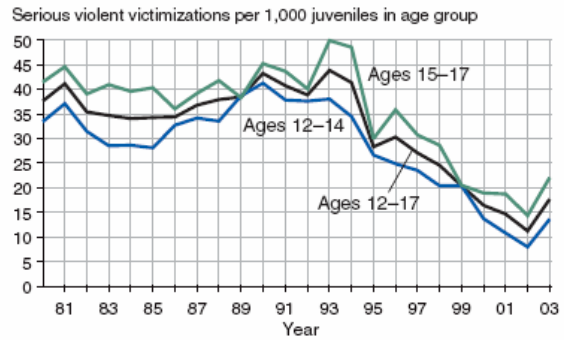
> Aftab told co-anchor Julie Chen: "Sadly, (those stories don't) surprise me. We're having a huge growth of anybody who's ever thought about molesting children getting online and talking to anyone they think is a young teen. … Anybody who's ever thought about it can do it quite easily, they think, anonymously." (Chen, 2006)

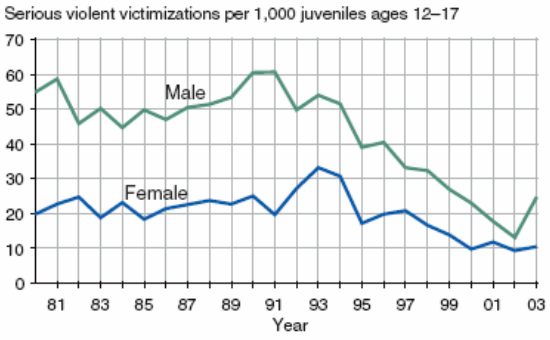
MSNBC similarly stirs up fear without a source:

> Experts interviewed for this article could not cite a single case of a child predator hunting for and finding a child through a blog. But there are cases of children being lured through other Internet services, such as chat rooms.
>
> "I don't see why pedophiles wouldn't use this tool, if this is where kids are," said Ann Coulier of Net Family News. (Sullivan, April 29, 2005)

So what are the facts? In fact, the bottom line is that sexual exploitation and other offenses against children remain tragic, whatever their numbers, but those numbers have been diminishing, not increasing, since the advent of the Internet. That is, in looking across the board, aggregating Internet-initiated and real world crimes, according to the Juvenile Offenders and Victims 2006 National Report, the non fatal violent victimization rate of youth ages 12-17 was half the rate in 2003 than it was ten years earlier (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006, p. 27).

Overall, serious violent crime rates that includes aggravated assault, rape, robbery and homicide, is on the decline for ages 12-17 for both boys and girls (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006, p. 27), as can be seen in the two graphs, and summary, below.





Percent Change in victimization rates - 1993-1995 to 2003-2005

Type of Crime	Ages 12- 14	Ages 15-17
Nonfatal violence	−59%	−50%
Robbery	−66	−53
Aggravated Assault	−69	−61
Simple Assault	−57	−46

(Snyder & Sickmund, 2006, p. 28)

The serious violent victimization decline in the graphs above combines the rates of aggravated assault, rape, robbery and homicide. However, the crimes most feared by parents, and most cited by those in favor of restricting girls' access to social networking sites, are rape and sexual assault, and so we assembled statistics on these crimes by compiling data from eleven years of National Crime Victimization Survey data, as put out by the U.S. Department of Justice / Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict.htm). These statistics show a clear decrease between 1992 and 2004 (the most recent date for which statistics are available). The decline has been so well-documented by different types of evidence, and involves so many different kinds of children, offenders, types of abuse, and areas of the United States, that Finkelhor and Jones. (2004, p. 10) believe the decrease to be due at least in part to a true decline in instances of sexual abuse (as opposed, for example, to a decrease due to diminished reporting of sexual abuse). In fact, as Finkelhor and Jones report, diminished instances of sexual abuse appear to account for a large part of the 15-percent decline in child maltreatment in general (2004, p. 2). Additionally, in the years when young people would have begun using social networking sites (Friendster in 2002, MySpace in 2003), the rape and sexual assault crime rate has been lower than in the 1990's.

Given these statistics, it is difficult to believe, as Aftab claimed above, that anybody who has ever considered child molestation is getting online and talking to teens, for if that were the case, we would expect the overall statistics to rise and not decrease. However, perhaps it is the case that the bad guys are migrating from the physical world online, and so whereas the overall statistics are decreasing, perhaps there is a leap in child sexual solicitation and victimization by adults online.

In order to examine that question, we are lucky to have the brand new Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS) statistics, released on August 9, 2006. The YISS survey was first administered to 1501 young people between August 1999 and February 2000 (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000) and was administered a second time, to a different sample of 1500 young people, between March and June 2005 (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). The earlier survey, the YISS-1, has often been quoted in the media as proof of the risk of child predators on the internet, since the data showed that one in five youth online had been sexually solicited. In fact, a closer look revealed that the majority of these sexual solicitations in 2001 were not from adult predators, but instead came from other youth. The questions posed to the youths in the current study concerned experiences of sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment via the Internet in the past year. The results of YISS-2 do show increased exposure to unwanted sexual material (for example through obscene spam) and increased non-sexual harassment (for example through cyber-bullying from peers). However, the category of actions that is most often held up as a danger – solicitation to meet off-line from a stranger adult -- is smaller today than it was five years ago -- one out of every seven youths online reports being solicited in 2005 (Table 1). And, once again, the data show that the majority

of these solicitations come from family, family friends, and peers, rather than strangers. In fact, the ratio of acquaintances to strangers is growing. In YISS-2, 14% of solicitations were from offline friends and acquaintances compared to only 3% in YISS-1. As the authors of the study state, "as in YISS-1 many of the YISS-2 solicitors did not match the stereotype of the older male 'Internet predator'" (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006, p. 17).

Table 1: YISS-2 Internet Sexual Solicitation of Youth

Age of Youth	All Incidents	Aggressive incidents	Distressing incidents
10	0	0	0
11	3%	1%	5%
12	7%	5%	10%
13	9%	14%	10%
14	15%	14%	18%
15	23%	27%	15%
16	24%	16%	25%
17	19%	22%	16%
Gender of Youth			
Girl	70%	79%	81%
Boy	30%	21%	19%
Gender of Solicitor			
Male	73%	84%	86%
Female	16%	16%	7%
Don't Know	11%	0%	7%
Age of Solicitor			
Younger Than 18 Years	43%	44%	40%
18 to 25 Years	30%	34%	31%
Older Than 25 Years	9%	15%	15%
Don't Know	18%	7%	14%

While solicitors often do not match the stereotypical offender that is so often feared, it is also the case that the victim is not the stereotypical teen girl. Of the youth in the study girls ages 14-17 have the highest rate of online solicitation. This is not surprising as most juvenile victims of violent crimes are female (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006, p. 31). Online, however, these girls are experiencing a change of solicitation rates in the past five years that is larger than that of boys of the same age, and boys and girls, 10-13. Where solicitations for boys 14-17 only dropped 5%, solicitations for girls of the same age dropped 11%. As for the increased exposure to unwanted sexual material since 2000, the rate of increase was the least for girls 14-17, at +7%. In 2005 boys surpassed girls in their rate of exposure to unwanted to sexual material (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006, p. 13).

In addition, interactions between a teen and a person soliciting sexual behavior are not always carried out in the relative privacy of the online interaction. Forty-one percent of youth who received online solicitations in 2005 were with a friend or a group of friends at the time of the incident. The authors of the YISS-2 hypothesize that "it may be that some youth tend to

ignore Internet safety guidelines when they are in groups. They may be more likely to do things such as going to questionable chatrooms or engaging in risqué conversations with people they know only online, situations in which solicitations may be more likely to occur" (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006, p. 38). As youth negotiate group structures and their own behavior according to the social conditions, they are likely to explore and test out adult scenarios. Youth may be more daring in groups and they also may be more self-regulated.

Despite the clarity of the data reported here, strikingly, the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which funded the report, buries the good news about reduced stranger solicitation, and trumpets on the front page of their website "new study shows youth online subject to more sexual material and harassment."

A final interesting statistic concerns the four percent of online youth who experienced an aggressive solicitation in 2005. Aggressive solicitation involves offline contact with the perpetrator through regular mail, by telephone, or in person or attempts or requests for offline contact, and this percentage has remained constant since 2001. The statistic is small, however it is still interesting to investigate how teens dealt with these solicitations. In fact, sixty-six percent of those solicited removed themselves from the situation by blocking or leaving the computer; 16% told the solicitor to stop, confronted or warned the solicitor; and 11% ignored the solicitor Social networking site users themselves tell us that they interact primarily with their peers online, and eschew stranger adults, so these results should not come as a surprise. As Henry Jenkins and danah boyd have argued:

> "The fear of predators has regularly been touted as a reason to restrict youth from both physical and digital publics. Yet, as Barry Glassner notes in *The Culture of Fear*, predators help distract us from more statistically significant molesters. Youth are at far greater risk of abuse in their homes and in the homes of their friends than they ever are in digital or physical publics."(H. Jenkins & boyd, 2006)

Sadly Jenkins and boyd's statement is true. The offenders of youth violent crime are not likely to be adult strangers, unless the crime is robbery. The most common offender in juvenile victim crimes is a family member or an acquaintance. Only eight percent of violent crimes committed against female juveniles (ages 0-17) are carried out by strangers. As juveniles age, offenders are less likely to be family members and more likely to be acquaintances, but the number of offenders in sexual assault that are related to the victim remains high. Around one out of every five sex offenders is a relative for victims aged 12-17. And an additional third of juvenile sexual assaults are perpetrated not by adult strangers, but by juvenile offenders. As we have seen above in the YISS-2 study, teens are ignoring predators and solicitations online. The majority are not inviting the potential molester into their homes or meeting up with them. Often, children who do begin online relationships with an abuser fit a particular profile – the profile fit by Justin Berry, the young man who operated a teenage pornography Internet site featuring his own erotic performances beginning at the age of 13. "Children in contact with online molesters may have a greater tendency for conflict or lack of communication with their parents; high levels of delinquency including committing assault, vandalism or theft; or have a trouble personality due to depression, peer victimization, or a distressing life event"(Dort, 2005, p. 874). But it must be remembered, that, sadly, many children are more at risk in their homes, with their families and friends, and during times of the day when children are often not alone. These statistics are horrifying, and it would be terrible if panic over the use of the Internet came to obscure the real

danger posed to young people by those close to them, and if legislation came to ignore this familiar danger, in favor of the often mythic online predator.

What is behind the fear of predators, if not a rise in the number of predators? What is the fear of going online, when the risks it poses are trumped by the actual statistics about victimization? What function does the fear serve, and who is its object? In order to answer this question, we look at a number of parallels from the past.

Panic at the keyboard… the dial… and the transmitter…

The telegraph network criss-crossed the world. As Tom Standage has shown in *The Victorian Internet,* although the equipment was different, the responses to the telegraph and the modern internet are strikingly similar (Standage, 1998, p. viii). The telegraph provided users with faster responses to their communication with others, more frequent interactions and more access to others around the world. It improved access to goods and services, and to knowledge of all sorts. And yet, even while the telegraph (and the internet) led to a revolution in business practices, it also gave rise to new ways to commit crimes (Standage, 1998, p. viii), and it was quickly adopted beyond business to the communication needs of everyday people. In the techie magazines of the times (such as *Electrical World,* the historical parallel to *PC Magazine*) many authors alluded to a possible loss of a world they idealized, a world threatened by new modes of electrical communication. As Carolyn Marvin writes "electrical communication made family courtships, class identities and other arenas of society suddenly strange, with consequences that were entirely spun out in electrical literature" (Marvin, 1988, p. 64). The telegraph was felt to have limitless potential, for business and for men. Because the telegraph was supposed to radically improve business, the effort it took to send every letter of a message was deemed worthwhile to expend only when the message held military or commercial importance, realms that were at that time controlled and dominated by men. The telegraph used in other ways was a concern. 'Frivolous' messages, messages that conveyed social gossip or home-life, did not warrant the time and cost of instantaneous telegraphic communication. Thus, while the limitless access to communication possibilities was praised in the context of commerce, at the same time the limitless access to communication for women was condemned. Media critics of the times described the telegraph as used by "talkative women" who had "frivolous electrical conversations" about "inconsequential personal subjects" (Marvin, 1988, pp. 22-24). Novels, like the 1879 *Wired Love,* and other popular culture texts expanded on this theme. The women portrayed in these narratives were naïve and incapable in the face of technical advances, and when they made forays into the world of the telegraph they ended up needing to be rescued, to be protected from technology, in sum. Nor were the women portrayed in these novels capable of learning about technology; they rarely learned from their mistakes or corrected their misconceptions. This technical ignorance was a virtue of "good" women. The moral was that women's use of men's technology would come to no good end (Marvin, 1988, p. 23).

Paradoxically, in the early stages of mass communication, the only women who were able to use non-domestic technology were those employed as telegraphers. Most other women had very little exposure to machines outside of the domestic sphere. Women telegraphers had less technical ignorance than their peers who did not enter the work force, but they were nevertheless the object of discrimination and technical scrutiny. While at first the telegrapher position was not gender stereotyped, as men returned from the Civil War, women found themselves defending their presence in the industry. It was felt that men needed to protect their jobs, keep women out of the union and off the lines. (Jepsen, 2000). Published in Electrical World in 1905, the article "Women as Telegraphists" states: "Were it not for the docility of

women there is no sufficient reason apparent to justify the favour with which they are viewed by administrative officers and others responsible for their employment." The author goes on to critique the role of women in managerial positions as he recounts his research in Italy's telegraph offices:

> Despite the fairly broad academic education which they possess… this higher class of women is stated by the administration to not come up to expectations. They are found to be lacking in authority over their staff and unable to respond to heavy and sudden requirements of the service. From exhaustive inquires which I made on the spot in 1899, they would appear to be lacking in judgment and decision, and unable to apply effectively the technical knowledge they possess.(Garland, 1901, p. 255)

Not only were they incapable of technical competence, young women, most vulnerable to losing their virtue, were also thought to be the most vulnerable to the vice of the telegraph. Interestingly, these very same young women were the most likely to be hired as telegraph operators, and the quickest to pick up the technical skills, despite the rhetoric about women's incompetence in the face of the technology. But for the operators themselves, the job had double value – it was a job outside the home, and it was an opportunity for romance (Standage, 1998). Operators had relationships with each other, although most had never seen each other in the physical world. The same journals that published novellas about women's technical incompetence also published stories of mistaken identity, and clandestine affairs over the wire. In 1886 an article called "The Dangers of Wired Love" recounted the real-life story of Maggie McCutcheon, who helped her father run a newspaper-stand in Brooklyn, and operated the telegraph in her father's store due to his lack of technical skill. Soon Mr. McCutcheon found out she was "keeping up a flirtation" with a number of men, and in particular one married man whom she had met online. She ultimately invited "Frank Frisbee" to visit her in the real world. Mr. McCutcheon found out and forbade his daughter to meet with the man. But Maggie nevertheless continued to meet him in secret. The father followed his daughter and threatened to blow her brains out for her bad behavior (Marvin, 1988, p. 74).

These themes of parental technical deficiency and ensuing parental loss of control in the face of a daughter's appropriation of the technology for her own ends are common in the literature and publicity surrounding all the communications technologies. The telephone produced anxiety to an even greater extent than the telegraph.

In the early twentieth century, AT&T advertising campaigns associated the telephone to practical ends like saving time. In the early years the telephone promised ease for doing business; and later, when the telephone was marketed as a residential device, it was still for the household's efficient management (Fischer, 1992, pp. 62,67). Telephone companies knew about the telephone's potential to encourage sociability but were tentative about promoting it as a tool for such conversations. Fischer explains that some industry men "worried about that the telephone permitted inappropriate or dangerous discussions, such as illicit wooing"(Fischer, 1992, p. 78). Malcolm Willey and Stuart Rice in 1933 worried that the telephone had made social contacts brief and impersonal. Telephonic communication suggested a loss "of those values that inhere in a more intimate, leisurely, protracted personal discussion" (Willey & Rice, 1933, p. 240). The telephone increased the pace of life and made privacy rare and difficult to achieve (Willey & Rice, 1933) 152. And, once again, the telephone threatened parental control over youth:

> Again, while the result of modern communication may be to strengthen certain aspects of localism, it may simultaneously serve to break down the control hitherto exercised by

> relatively closely knit primary groups over individual conduct. For example, the telephone, utilized by the adolescent in "making a date," and the automobile, utilized in keeping it, may remove him from strict parental supervision to which he was formerly subject even within the same local community. Control may be further lessened through travel and increased mobility, as also through those agencies of mass impression which may easily lend themselves to the spread of patterns of delinquency no less than to the spread of more sociably desired patterns (Willey & Rice, 1933, p. 154).

As early as 1905, co-extensive with the era when apologies were made for not owning a telephone, an issue of *Telephony* attacked women's telephonic relationships with male suitors (As cited in Marvin, 1988, p. 70). "The invention of new machinery, devises and processes is continually bringing up new questions of law, puzzling judges, lawyers and laymen," the article stated. "The doors may be barred and a rejected suitor kept out, but how is the telephone to be guarded?" As Marvin describes it, the telephone not only created "unprecedented opportunities for courting and infidelity, but for romancing unacceptable persons outside ones own class and even ones own race in circumstances that went unobserved by the regular community" (Marvin, 1988, p. 70). "The potential for illicit sexual behavior had obvious and disquieting power to undermine… moral authority and social order." Once again, media pundits were uneasy and fascinated in equal measure with this new breed of women who were excited about the new contact between the sexes. It was commonly feared that these women might attract the wrong sorts of men, and that they were unaware of the powerful consequences of their appropriation of the technology (Marvin, 1988, pp. 71-72).

With the telephone there was once again a contradiction between the push to employ women and girls as the operators of these new technologies, and a moral reaction of fear and condemnation of women using telephones and telegraphy. An Ontario newspaper, *The Watchman*, gave this account of female operators: "In the first place the clear feminine quality of their voice suits best the delicate instrument. Then girls are usually more alert than boys, and always more patient. Women are sensitive, more amenable to discipline, far gentler and more forbearing than men."(Rakow, 1992, p. 59). Boys, on the other hand, were dismissed for bad behavior or promoted to higher paying positions. (Rakow, 1992, p. 59). Companies insisted that women operators follow a course of "moral education" to make them pleasant 'hello-girls' when interacting with subscribers. The purpose of such education and strict rules was to increase call volume but also served another function: to keep employee attitudes consistent with the ideal values of society. (Rakow, 1992, p. 65).

As well as societal regulation of female telephone operators, women subscribers were subjected to regulation by husbands and to societal scrutiny. For example, an etiquette column in 1930 warned "Patty" that to ensure that her boyfriend would "respect and admire her, she does not call him up during business or working hours…[and at home] she should not hold him up to the ridicule of his family by holding an absurdly long telephone conversation" (As cited in Frissen, 1995, p. 234). Frissen explains mildly

> In spite of the crucial role the telephone seems to play in women's everyday life, the uses women make of the telephone are not taken very seriously. Even the industry had a blind spot for women's uses of the telephone. Domestic telephone use, particularly for sociable reasons, was not only weakly promoted, but even disapproved of… Although many people, particularly women, used the telephone mainly for sociable reasons, it took the industry about twenty years to realize that sociability was a goal worthy of being advertised and marketed. (Frissen, 1995, p. 80)

Despite companies' efforts to direct how the telephone was used, women nevertheless cultivated their own purposes or "delinquent activities" as they were thought of-- primarily social interaction. (Martin, 1988, p. 233). It should be clear that women using technology for social purposes did not, and carry high social prestige (Frissen, 1995, p. 87).

As we have seen, new communication technologies have always brought with them the hope for a society of open communication and unlimited access to knowledge, goods and services. "All the inhabitants of the earth would be brought into one intellectual neighborhood" proclaimed Alonzo Jackman, advocating the Atlantic telegraph in 1848 (As cited in Standage, 1998, p. 143). Much like automobiles and trains, when the telegraph and telephone were new, each increased the users' mobility. But access to others, access to information, access to opportunity – all this access, however partial (since it was only available to people of means who had access to the telegraph and telephone in the first place), also meant loss of social control (Starr, 2004). Electronic media "lead to a nearly total dissociation of physical place and social 'place'. When we communicate… where we are physically no longer determines where and who we are socially" (As cited in Frissen, 1995, p. 11) Uncontrolled movement in each case challenged the social order, particularly with respect to the role of young women.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it was the very same utopian characteristics of telegraphic and telephonic communication, where the symbols of status, gender, race and ethnicity were putatively more difficult to discern, that fueled an increased panic over the loss of social control, and rather than making gender disappear, centered it in the public eye (Rakow, 1992, p. 3). The promise of new communication technologies was supposed to be realized by men, but upheld – encouraged and supported, even rendered more gentle and less machine-like – by the female telegraph and telephone operators. But when these same women appropriated the technologies to their own social and labor needs, the discourse soon turned to misuse of technology, and the danger of the machine rather than its promise. Women's talk was negatively contrasted with the "efficient task oriented, world talk of business and professional men" (Marvin, 1988, p. 23).

Historical evidence demonstrates that women and young people have long appropriated technology to their own ends in important cultural ways. But that very appropriation has proved a danger to the established social order, and by proxy has diminished in particular the female users in the eyes of those around them; has rendered them, in fact, "a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen, 1972, p. 9). In the next section, before we turn to the modern "deviant activities" of female use of technology, we first take a more general look at the topic of delinquency among girls, and hence at the Victorian moral panic over the physical liberty of young teenage girls.

Victorian Predators and "Delinquent Daughters"

Victorian women were the subject of much scrutiny under the moral consciousness of social reform in the United States. Although a highly publicized "moral downfall" of women was at first thought by reformers to be the direct result of male vice and exploitation, women themselves soon came to be thought of as the deviant ones. The Purity Movement, which was launched by feminist women from various political and ideological backgrounds, and which worried about the effects of industrialization on the working class girl, was soon replaced by a more conservative model of reform which held girls to be responsible for a perceived increase in sexually deviant behavior (Odem, 1995; Platt, 1969).

This new model of social reform acknowledged the sexual agency of teenage girls, but emphasized the deviance of their behavior, and the need for social control. The awareness of

female immorality, and the perceived role of technology, intensified during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Sexual promiscuity (often thought to lead to prostitution) among young working-class women in American cities was thought to pose serious moral, social, and health threats to the rest of society (Odem, 1995, p. 96). Alan Hunt argues in *Governing Morals* that "prostitution displaced poverty as the social evil which characterized, symbolized, and thematised Mid-Victorian society" (Hunt, 1999, p. 79).

New technologies of the time, such as the steam loom, meant that increasing numbers of women and girls worked outside of the home. In 1913, authors Woods and Kennedy wrote in their preface of *Young Working Girls* that "the problem of the adolescent girl of the tenement house family and the city factory or department store has come to be so keenly felt" (Woods & Kennedy, 1913, p. v). "Women have not only had to meet the general moral uncertainty of the age, but in addition have had to face the serious moral problems forced upon them by the reorganization of their sphere of life through its invasion by modern industry" (Woods & Kennedy, 1913, p. 1).

In 1925 Winifred Richmond wrote in *The Adolescent Girl A book for Parents and Teachers* that "as would be expected, the most common form of delinquency in girls is antisocial sex behavior"; this was one of the only characteristics of delinquency which led to promiscuity, prostitution and the lack of sexual hygiene (Richmond, 1925, p. 113). In this new atmosphere where girls were felt to be at least in part responsible for general societal moral delinquency, it is perhaps not surprising that the conception of the sexual predator was also under debate. At about the same time, attention came to be focused on molestation by strangers, and away from incest and familial sexual abuse, and male sexual predators were considered as suffering from an illness which needed to be cured, rather than a moral evil which required punishment (P. Jenkins, 1998).

In the classic American study, *Middletown*, the Lynds gave a then striking account of average adolescence: "in such a grown up atmosphere it is hardly surprising that the approaches of the sexes seem to be becoming franker. 48% of junior and senior boys and 51% of 315 junior and senior girls marked true to the extreme statement, "nine out of every ten boys and girls of high school age have 'petting parties'". 44% of boys and 34% of girls signified that they had taken part in a petting party." (Lynd & Lynd, 1929, pp. 138-139). The Lynds attribute to the rise of the telephone an important role in the shift to a greater frankness between the sexes, especially among youth. The telephone affords "semi-private, partly depersonalized means of approach" (Lynd & Lynd, 1929, p. 140). The mothers of Middletown agreed: "Girls are far more aggressive these days. They call the boys up to try to make dates with them as the never would when I was a girl" and "Girls are much bolder than they used to be. It used to be that if a girl called up and asked a boy to take her somewhere she meant something bad by it, but now they all do it."(Lynd & Lynd, 1929, p. 140). One parent wrote, in a 1905 issue of *Telephony*

> The doors may be barred and a rejected suitor kept out, but how is the telephone to be guarded. [It's providing] unprecedented opportunities for courting and infidelity (quoted in Marvin, 1988, p. 70).

New technology, it was believed, removed girls from the safety of the home and invited sexual immorality. As Marvin documents, it was felt that allowing girls to be trained in the technology of the telephone was simply setting up opportunities for "seduction of the vulnerable by the cunning" (Marvin, 1988, p. 72). Consequently, its use needed to be controlled or restricted. What was largely ignored was the feminine use of the telephone for social

networking, interpersonal relations and extensions of identity beyond domestic life – the agency of the female telephone user.

As should be clear, the politics of both the Victorian era and early 20th century -- of rapid modernization and technological advancements -- has many parallels with today's societal response to the advent of the Internet. Control did not just exist within families or at the work place. Women's new mobility and technical capability, even though it was not approved of, sparked a very broad-ranging societal response and was a large part of the Purity reform movement of the era. Several major elements of this movement, from blaming predators to blaming society, mirror current panic rhetoric about the Internet.

Contemporary Moral Panic

Both boys and girls are subject to sexual exploitation, online and off. And sons, to a lesser extent than daughters, also worry parents when it comes to Internet dangers. Thus the fearful talk among adults can sound gender-inclusive on the surface. But our argument is, on the one hand, that girls significantly more than boys bear the effects of being the target of the moral panic, and on the other hand, that the moral panic about girls use of the internet is obscuring the positive benefits of girls using the internet. We do not mean that more girls than boys are sexually victimized (although that is the case). Nor do we claim that we should somehow care more about girls than boys. Rather, in what follows we intend to demonstrate the unique psychological and social effects of the moral panic on young women.

In July of 2006, the House of Representatives passed the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) with a vote of 410-15. DOPA is based on three suppositions, of which the final is that

> with the explosive growth of trendy chat rooms and social networking websites, it is becoming more and more difficult to monitor and protect minors from those with devious intentions, particularly when children are away from parental supervision (Fitzpatrick, 2006).

The bill's response is to require schools and libraries that receive federal aid to monitor a minor's use of the Internet and to put in place filters that disallow any access to commercial social networking websites and chat rooms "unless used for an educational purpose with adult supervision." In addition, parents are to be informed of the dangers of sexual predators on the Internet via a "consumer alert" and a website is to be created

> regarding the potential dangers posed by the use of the Internet by children, including information about commercial social networking websites and chat rooms through which personal information about child users of such websites may be accessed by child predators.

DOPA is the official governmental response to widespread fear in the US concerning the potential harm to young people of being online. The local and national news frequently quotes parents decrying the risk to the children of wayward, deviant men trolling the Internet. But, reading the stories more closely, we find that the parents see their own children – primarily their daughters -- as equally deviant, and that the attribution of blame is shared between the predators and the girls themselves, leading to a pattern of familial and societal reform similar to the Victorian era. For example, an article on MSNBC quoted a mother saying

> "And their pictures are very provocative," Marcy said. "There's shots with their butt in the air, with their thongs sticking out of it. They squeeze their elbows together to make their boobs look bigger." (Sullivan)

The local school technology coordinator added

> "The girls are all made up to look seductive . . . Parents have no clue this is going on," she said. "You think your kid is safe because they are in your house in their own bedroom. Who can hurt them when you are guarding the front door? But (the Internet) is a bigger opening than the front door." (Sullivan)

Note that in these quotes highlight an image of girls that is explicitly eroticized. Adults describe the need to protect girls from their own sexual nature – to convince them to wait until they are older before they flaunt their bodies or describe their sexuality to their friends, for example. Little girls in the media, as Valerie Walkerdine has argued, embody this social conundrum of being objects both of desire and protection: "Are the little girls to be saved from this eroticization the very ones who are endlessly fetishized by adult desire when they are barely a few years older?" She claims that it is not over little girls and perverted pedophiles that there is a panic, but over adult suppressed and ever-present desires (Walkerdine, 1997, p. 167) It is no surprise, then, that parents' panic over girls' growing connection to a network outside the family, and their own nascent sexuality, is bound to obscure those same parent's desire to encourage girls' confidence in the computing and interest in technological fields. As one young woman said, in telling us about her relationship with a man she met online, and her parents' reaction, "Well, my parents like to blame him for everything bad that I have ever done, everything bad that has ever happened in my life ever since. If it's his fault, then it can't be my fault. And, if it's my fault then it would have to be either my genetics or my upbringing, which makes it their fault. ….I think they've gone totally the wrong way with my sisters and not letting them chat. My sister, she actually chats online at her friend's place at the computer." This young woman is highlighting the ways in which parents may displace their fears about their daughter's growing sexuality onto the machine, and how the ultimate outcome may be not diminished use of the computer, but lying about that use.

The term "moral panic" was first introduced by Stanley Cohen to refer to the perceived threat to societal values and interests posed by the 1960s Mods and Rockers. Intrinsic to his argument was the role of the media in producing a stylized and stereotypical representation of the deviants, and the role of the broad audience that consumed that representation (Cohen, 1972). In the case of the current internet moral panic, there is much to be said about the deviants, the online predators and child pornographers, and the audience, the parents and otherwise normal public, who feast on the sensational elements of cybercrime. Adults who prey cause moral panic; adults who have children become fearful (Mazzarella, 2005).

But, what of the seduced and vulnerable youth? While every one of the sensational news stories on this topic is harrowing, it is the girls rather than the boys who come across as victims. For example, one of the more well-known online child pornography tales is that of Justin Berry, who operated a child pornography Internet site featuring his own erotic performances, beginning at the age of 13. Justin is certainly a victim, but he is not portrayed in the media as helpless. He is described as an active producer of his own website, who helped other young people by turning himself in to authorities, so that he can now help catch other online child pornographers and solicitors (Eichenwald, December 19, 2005). The *New York Times* website devoted to his story is told primarily from Berry's perspective, and indeed videotapes of interviews are available on

the site that show Berry telling his own story. Berry's story in this way stands in stark contrast to the majority of news items, which deal primarily with the potential victimization of girls, and which rarely if ever quote the girls themselves. Instead, the majority of news articles about online predators rely on the police as key informants, not the victims, and these articles consequently highlight the magnitude of crime and play on parental anxieties (Edwards, 2005).

In Cohen's definition of a moral panic, the media relies on bias, exaggeration, and distortion to manufacture news (Cohen, 1972, p. 44). In the contemporary case, the news has once again framed girls as victims in need of protection from cybercrimes, and from technology itself (Edwards, 2005). In this way, they are "further marginalized by their absence as sources [in the articles] and by the police methods used to protect them." Edwards shows that "by appropriating girls' identities in cyberspace, and by extension, in the news, law enforcement officials substitute their voices and their experiences for those girls, effectively making these girls and the crimes committed against them, invisible to us." (Edwards, 2005, p. 41) It is time, therefore, to look to this often silenced group of players, beyond the parents, police and predators- young women online. For when girls are forbidden from posting profiles of themselves on blogs and social networking sites in order to prevent them from making contact with potential predators, they are also prevented from exercising some key skills in the online world.

In the next section, we will look at some of young women's online activities in terms of their role in adolescent development.

What girls do online

Today's young people spend on average over 6 hours a day in front of some form of media, and of that time at least 1 hour is spent in front of a computer (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). Eighty-seven percent of US adolescents ages 12 - 17 are online (compared to, for example, 75% of British teens), for a total of 11 million adolescent users (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). This online activity takes place primarily in the home or at school. Fifty percent of US families with online teens have broadband at home, while one hundred percent of US public elementary and secondary schools (and 93% of classrooms) have Internet connectivity (Parsad, Jones, & National Center for Education Statistics., 2005). What are young people doing on the Internet? In order of frequency, they send instant messages, get news about current events, look for information about politics, purchase things, seek spiritual information, or look for a job.

A 2000 study reported that girls between the ages of 12-16 were the fastest-growing group of internet users (Ricket & Sacharaow, 2000). Girls may use the internet differently than boys (Mazzarella, 2005, p. 141). While boys are more likely than girls to play online games, girls are more likely than boys to send email, use text messaging, read websites about movie stars, get information about school, and to look for health or dieting information. In fact,

> Older teenage girls (aged 15-17) have driven the growth in many of the communication and information-seeking categories since our last survey. Older teenage girls have a much higher level of engagement with a wide array of these activities than do either boys of the same age or younger boys and girls (aged 12-14). (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005)

Girls vs. Boys

The percentages of online teens who do the following activities, by gender:

	Online Girls N=496	*Online Boys N=475*
What online girls are more likely to do:		
Send or read email	93%	84%
Go to websites about movies, TV shows, music groups, or sports stars	88%	81%
Get info about a school you might attend	61%	53%
Send or receive text messages with a cell phone	45%	33%
Look for health, dieting or fitness info	37%	26%
Look for info on a health topic that's hard to talk about	27%	18%
What online boys are more likely to do:		
Play online games	76%	86%
What online girls and boys do at about the same level:		
Send or receive instant messages	77%	74%
Get news or info about current events	77%	75%
Look for news or info about politics and the presidential campaign	57%	53%
Buy things, such as books, clothing, or music	42%	45%
Look for religious or spiritual info	29%	24%
Look for info about a job	28%	32%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Teens and Parents Survey, Oct.-Nov. 2004. Margin of error is ±5% for online girls and ±5% for online boys.

In similar research, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that girls also are most likely to be blogging. 25% of online girls ages 15-17 write a blog, compared to 15% of online boys at the same age (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). What are girls doing in these blogs? In a parallel to earlier primarily female fan cultures surrounding television content (H. Jenkins, 1992), today's girls often appropriate media conventions and media content in their blogs to create "riffs" on mainstream television, music, advertisements, and other kinds of mainstream media content (Mazzarella, 2005, p. 156). Many of these girls choose to expose aspects of themselves that are often ridiculed, dismissed and denigrated by mainstream society, to an online audience of potentially millions. In one example, in a study of message boards in an online, all-female forum, researchers found girls performing sexuality in and through verbal expression. Posters shared feelings and stories "bringing sexual identities into being in the context of a community" (Grisso & Weiss, 2005, p. 45). They found that the forum filled information gaps and encouraged exposure to diversity, not just of cultures but of ideologies. The research claimed that "in sharing a free affirming self expression girls enact agency demonstrating and performing their ability and their right to make their own choices" (Grisso & Weiss, 2005, p. 47). In another study, it was found that online magazines encouraged girls to become active seekers rather than passive recipients of information through the use of rhetorical spaces. Girls used the magazine to negotiate, resist and reject dominant ideologies (Walsh, 2005, pp. 80-81). In a study of instant message conversations, likewise, girls were able to project themselves as stronger and more forceful than how they presented themselves in person (Mazzarella, 2005; Thiel, 2004). Looking at a teen chatroom, Subrahmanyarn et al.(2004) found that the teens focused primarily on the nexus of identity and sexuality in such a way as to allow them to engage in the all-important adolescent activity of "pairing off". They argue that the virtual world of teen chat offers a safer environment for exploring emerging sexuality than the real world, in particular for adolescent girls, who may find it easier to inhabit an authoritative, agentive and in-control

persona online. Writing about social networking sites, danah boyd has described the ways in which teens use these online fora to reproduce, iterate and refigure identity:

> The dynamics of identity production play out visibly on MySpace. Profiles are digital bodies, public displays of identity where people can explore impression management . Because the digital world requires people to write themselves into being , profiles provide an opportunity to craft the intended expression through language, imagery and media. Explicit reactions to their online presence offers valuable feedback. The goal is to look cool and receive peer validation. Of course, because imagery can be staged, it is often difficult to tell if photos are a representation of behaviors or a re-presentation of them (boyd, 2006).

It is not clear, however, whether the authors of these different genres of online content realize the extent to which their writings are public. Teenage blog and social networking site users describe their writings as read only by their peer network, express surprise that the writings are easily findable by others, and comment on the blogs that they feel comfortable exposing their innermost feelings in these contexts because of their anonymity (even though, the same author, may give identifying information in a neighboring post) (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). In another example of young women leading the charge with new communication technologies, in our own work (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006) on a closed (not visible to outsiders) teenage online community, we discovered that the girls were more likely to be elected leaders of the forum, and more likely to set the tone of the discourse. That is, over the course of the forum, the girls' interaction style stayed constant, while boys adopted the language and interaction style of the girls, by using more emotion words, and also referring more to social process. However, our work has also shown the discomfort with which adults respond to children's sense of agency in these communities(Cassell, 2002).

It is clear that online participation is a key way of engaging in developmentally important activities for all young people, in the relative safety of the internet, where web profiles can be erased and replaced with new and different representations of the self (Tynes, 2006). Teens' use of instant messaging, emailing, game playing and website creation are key ways for growing into adults who manage, produce and consume technology intelligently on an everyday basis. In particular for young women, the Internet appears to be a way to explore aspects of identity that may not be welcome in the real world, to project more forceful agentive personalities than they feel at liberty to do in the physical world, and to explore their technological prowess. With luck, there will be a single difference between the moral panic surrounding the telegraph and the telephone, and that surrounding the Internet: that we will come to recognize young women as more likely to be empowered by technology than damaged by it. The internet allows for a tremendous potential of creative expression – expression that has not necessarily first been vetted by adults. Ultimately it is when young women construct sexualized images of themselves, or contact strangers, that communication technologies are felt to become dangerous.

The Geography of Girls' Online Space

Learning and development do not just take place in schools, or under the tutelage of adults. Much of teen enculturation takes place in informal venues outside of school and outside of adult-constructed activities (Bettis & Adams, 2055, p. 277). Young girls' behavior is often dependent on the space they exist in, and space, defined by social and cultural norms, is not stagnant. "Places are contested, fluid and uncertain" and both shape and are shaped by those who use them (McDowell, 1999, p. 4). Adults, who tend to be afraid of digital media and how

youth manipulate it, cannot ignore the important cultural function of the Internet as a space for social and cognitive development. And yet, "identities are grounded in (if not tied to) the specificities of particular locations" (Hall, 1999). Local contexts and discursive practices influence how girls construct their identities. In many of the studies on teenage girls the way they presented themselves shifted according to the kind of online venue in which they found themselves, and how they used that space as a stage (Bettis & Adams, 2055, p. 4). As we have described above, young girls appropriate their space on the internet with fluidity. This "play" requires them to make a private space in a public sphere and often uses much of the social constructions of womanhood, sexuality, and consumerism. Parental responses to girls' identity play on the Internet has primarily concentrated on the *product* of the play – text and photos that represent the girls in more or less transgressive poses. But the *process* of content production is rarely addressed. Navigating the complexity of modern life as a girl is a full time job (Bettis & Adams, 2055). The work girls do online is legitimate work, that should not be denied or ignored.

In fact, one useful way of thinking about girls' process-oriented work online is to construe it as a part of the developmental imperatives of adolescence (Eckert, 1994). In other words, there are a certain number of developmental milestones that young people must meet during their teenage years in order to pass into adulthood: they must come to rely less on the familial network and more on a peer network; they must explore alternative options for their future, and competing visions of their identity; and they must begin to engage in a sexual identity. These developmental imperatives will be met regardless of the technology that is to hand, or the era in which the young person is growing up. Girls will disobey their parents in order to be seen as cool by their peers, they will dress in a manner their parents deem too sexual, and so forth. And each of these activities serves an important role in the child's socio-cognitive development. The internet happens to be an extremely effective way in which to pursue these imperatives – to construct networks of peers, to explore alternate versions of identity, to behave in sexual ways. At the same time these girls are engaging with cutting edge technology, and learning to be producers of media as well as consumers.

And yet, as we have seen in our examination of girls' uses of communication technologies throughout history, when girls move into spaces where they can – independently of adults -- construct their identities, an alarm is sounded. Women have traditionally been limited by their movement and while social, political and economic activity is taking place in a distant public space, women are trapped in a shrinking private sphere (Scott, Semmens, & Willoughby, 2001) In some cultural contexts this limitation on mobility is a crucial means of subordination. "Moreover the two things -- the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment / confinement to particular places on the one hand and the limitation on identity on the other-- have been crucially related" (Massey, 1994, p. 179). Simply put, limitations on movement equate to limitations on identity.

Because the Internet is a public resource, that requires knowledge of technology, women are underrepresented in many areas of what would be considered legitimate online activity. And attempts to bring women into the field of technology can backfire. While the "girls games movement" in the late 1990s was slated to get girls into Computer Science and other technology fields, the numbers of girls and women in Computer Science have gone ***down*** over the last 10 years. Contrary to what we might have expected the girls game movement seems to have solidified a sense among both boys and girls that computers were "boys' toys" and that true girls didn't play with computers, while true computers were just for boys. As in so many domains, the marketplace has a hard time changing gender stereotypes on its own. Without a more general

cultural sense of the diversity of gendered experience, girls games were just another tool with which to construct a gender divide (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998, in press). The Internet, on the other hand, has hardly suffered from a gender divide. And web 2.0, where media creation trumps media consumption, seems to have brought the participation of women and girls to the fore.

Adolescent girls may alarm adults, in part, because as a group in transition, they frequently breach the confines of appropriate behavior (Sibley, 1995, pp. 33,35). Sibley argues that "moral panics articulate beliefs about belonging and not belonging, about the sanctity of territory and the fear of transgression." Danger, or at least uncertainty, lies in liminal zones where individuals and groups make their own spaces; where rather than viewing themselves as in transition, they stay a while (Sibley, 1995, pp. 33,43). The Internet is a playground for this kind of activity because it is so easy to transgress spatial and social boundaries. When young girls go online to negotiate their identities, sexual and otherwise, they produce creative texts that are incompatible with the social space of either adulthood or childhood. Content is often private in nature, but public in exposure. Their bodies look like children, but they are producing images of themselves as adult and fully mature. All the while they use traditionally male-dominated communications technology to perform this work. In a culture where the established rites of passage into adulthood are confusing or nonexistent, the activities of teenaged girls in transition threaten disorder. Whatever the threats that predators pose to young people online, it is the girls leaving their traditional domestic space and exploring the boundaries of their identities that may pose the greatest risk to the social order.

Conclusion

In this chapter we hope to have demonstrated that the current panic over girls online is not new. Vulnerable (usually young) women, unaware of the dangers of a new technology, fall victim to harassment and assault from sexual predators lurking on the wire. This same story was told about the telegraph and the telephone, and today it is being told about the Internet and social networking sites like MySpace. In each case, unfortunately, the myth of girls vulnerability online has unfortunate consequences, because it may result in positioning girls as disempowered with respect to technology. Our research shows that there has been a recurring moral panic throughout history about the putative danger of communication technologies to young women. However, when we investigate the kinds of statements made about the nature of the danger, in each instance it is less the technology per se that turns out to be the culprit (or even the kinds of relationships made possible by the technology), and more the potential sexual agency of young women, parental loss of control, and the specter of women who manifest technological prowess.

In each case that we have examined, when a new communication technology is introduced, upper middle-class Americans become afraid for their children – especially afraid about the noxious effects on girls. This is particularly the case when those technologies permit a kind of metaphoric mobility on the part of girls – movement outside the sphere of adult control. And in each case, whereas initially the anxiety is leveled at bad and transgressive predators, it quickly becomes displaced to the girls themselves who use technology. The girls' own behavior comes to appear counter to the image of a 'good' girl, a non-sexual and non-erotic girl. As Marvin says

> "In expert eyes, some of the most radical social transformations appeared to be brewing not around people at a distance, but around those close to home. Particular nervousness attached to protected areas of family life that might be

> exposed to public scrutiny by electrical communication. How would family members keep personal information to themselves? How could the family structure remain intact? …. The escape from parental supervision made possible by the new communications technologies carried great risks."

And in each case that we have examined, from the telegraph to today, the result of the moral panic has been a restriction on girls' use of technology. As we have described above, the telegraph, the telephone, and then the Internet were all touted for how easy they were for young women to use, and how *appropriate* it was for young women to use them. Ineluctably, in each case, that ease of use and appropriateness became forgotten in a panic about how *inappropriate* the young women's use of these technologies was, and how dangerous the women's use was to the societal order as a whole.

In the current case, the panic over girls' use of technology has taken the form of believing in an increased presence of child predators online. But, as we have shown, there has been no such increase in predatory behavior – on the contrary, the number of young women who have been preyed on by strangers has *decreased*, both in the online and offline worlds.

Finally, as with uses of communication technologies by women in the past, it is clear that participation in social networking sites can fulfill some key developmental imperatives for young women, such as forming their own social networks outside of the family, and exploring alternate identities. Girls in particular may thrive online where they may be more likely to rise to positions of authority than in the physical world (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006), more likely to be able to explore alternate identities without the dangers associated with venturing outside of their homes alone, more likely to be able to safely explore their budding sexuality, and more likely to openly demonstrate technological prowess, without the social dangers associated with the term "geek". And yet, when moral panics about potential predators take up all the available air time, the importance of the online world for girls is likely to be obscured, as are other inequalities equally important to contemplate.

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