

**PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT:  
EXPLORING PARENTS' USE OF  
INTERNET MEDIATION  
STRATEGIES WITH  
PRETEENS**

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## ABSTRACT

This document presents a dissertation research study that examined parents of preteens and the protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation and media literacy strategies they reported using to guide their child's use of the Internet. Parents' use of protectionist and empowerment strategies, their confidence level in enacting these strategies, their attitudes about efficacy of these strategies, and the relationship among their attitudes about children's use of the Internet to these areas were examined.

The study used an online survey (N=236) of parents who have preteens with Internet access at home, and parent interviews from a sample of the survey respondents (N=40), to gather data from a nationwide sample of parents. Parents were asked questions about their use of, confidence in, and perceptions of effectiveness of protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies, what topics related to Internet use they have discussed with their child, and overall their attitudes about the Internet and children.

The survey results show that the majority of parents use a combination of protectionism and empowerment strategies, but more heavily use protectionist Internet mediation overall. Parents reported high confidence in using most of the strategies, with slightly less (but still notably high) confidence in using empowerment strategies. Even though parents reported feeling confident using empowerment strategies, they used them much less than protectionist strategies. Protectionist strategies were also ranked as more effective than empowerment ones.

Parents' attitudes about the Internet were also associated with behaviors. Parents' level of comfort in using the Internet and computers was positively associated with their overall engagement in their preteens' Internet use, whether protectionism or

empowerment. Parental attitude about the Internet being a good place for their child was associated with the likelihood to use protectionist strategies. However, parents who did not believe the Internet was a good place for their kids tended to talk about more Internet behavior topics with their child.

The interviews with parents revealed a typology of protectionist and empowerment strategies with three major themes and several subthemes. The first theme included strategies for monitoring the Internet, the second illustrated the types of protectionist and empowerment behaviors parents use, and the third theme encompassed the values that emerged regarding parents' family communication and roles, comparisons to other families, and hopes about the potential benefits of the Internet in their child's life. Among the three themes parents voiced their life experiences, feelings, and concerns and how those influenced their decisions around protectionism or empowerment. Similar to the survey results, the interviews show that most parents used protectionist strategies, with the most widely used strategies including "POS" (parent over shoulder), and having the child use the Internet in a public space in the home. Few parents who were interviewed co-surf online with their preteens, ask questions about the websites their kids visit, or encourage their kids to create things online. However, parents who worked in fields related to media and technology were more likely to use empowerment strategies. The interviews revealed that parents' use of protectionist or empowerment strategies is complex, and is interwoven with their attitudes, values, concerns, and hopes for the potential of the Internet for their child.

This study challenges the field to consider four myths about parents and Internet mediation, including: 1) Parents are either protectionist or empowerment, but not usually

both; 2) Parents who are more confident using Internet mediation strategies will use them more often; and 3) Parents who think the Internet is not a good place for kids are more likely to use protectionist strategies; and 4) Parents who are uncomfortable with technology are more likely to use protectionist strategies. Possible reasoning for these misconceptions about parents, and how this speaks to research in the field, are explored.

This study encourages parent media literacy education efforts to include a balance and progression in protectionist and empowerment strategies by proposing a Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation framework. This framework explains an aspirational process for parent education around the Internet to guide future efforts for those who work in parent media literacy education.

*To my dear daughter Meadow, keep singing and let the world hear you.*

*To my loving husband Patrick, who supported me through each  
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## CHAPTER 1

### PARENTING AND THE INTERNET: AN INTRODUCTION

A busy father is unfamiliar with the websites his preteen daughter visits—he feels like he can't keep up with where she goes and what she does. A mother is intimidated by using the computer, whereas her son knows more than she does and often helps her navigate or solve problems. A boy spends hours daily on a multi-player online role-playing game where he talks to other players online, while his father worries that it is affecting his face-to-face social life. A mother worries that her daughter is sharing too much information online. With the proliferation of computers in homes, faster and easier Internet access, and increased online access through mobile technologies, parents face challenges in monitoring and managing their children's Internet use.

Many children today live in media-saturated homes where they are increasingly likely to have media in their bedrooms (Lenhart, Rainie, and Lewis, 2001; Livingstone, 2002; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001), multitask with media (Foehr, 2006), and use the Internet to communicate with others (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999; Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001; Roban, 2002; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2000). In 2005, young people aged 8-18 spent an average of 6.5 hours per day outside of school engaged with media, including TV, videos/DVDs/movies, print media, music, computers, and video games (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005), while this amount of time has increased to 7.5 hours per day in 2010 for the same population (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Media multitasking has increased overall media exposure per day from 7.5 hours in 1999, to 8.5 hours in 2004, to 10.5 hours in 2010 (Rideout et al., 2010). The presence of computers, Internet access, and online devices in homes is increasing. From



1999 to 2005, in homes with children aged 8-18, the proportion of homes with Internet connections rose from 47% to 74%, where 20% of children in 2005 had Internet connections in their bedrooms (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). In 2010, 84% of 8-18 year old children had Internet access in the home, 36% had computers in their bedrooms, and 70% went online everyday. (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). The prevalence of the Internet in the lives of youth is of interest to media literacy scholars, who are interested in how media literacy can help youth develop critical thinking skills about the Internet to enrich their emotional, physical, and social development (Silverblatt, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004).

Although all children should receive guidance with their Internet use, preteens are an important population to reach. This is because tweens are heavy media users (Rideout, et al., 2010), are likely to be getting their first cell phone and their first computer at home, and are increasingly using the Internet at school and for schoolwork. Tweens are exploring more online, they are joining social networks, and starting to take more risks online. Developmentally, they are starting to pull away from parents and become more independent.

Today's generation of youth are described as media savvy, whereas some parents are less knowledgeable about computers, online media, and understanding what their kids are doing online. This generation of youth, labeled in terms of their media competence, has been called the "net generation" (Tapscott, 1998) or "digital natives" versus their parents who are "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001), emphasizing the generational rift in new media between parents and their children. Today's parents of preteens did not grow up with the Internet, and many parents find it challenging to oversee their children's

use of the Internet. Parents are bombarded by news reports and public fear about Internet predators, cyberbullying, and adult content such as online pornography and violence, which increases anxiety about their children going online. Yet at the same time, parents are hopeful about the educational potential of the computer and Internet, believing digital media will help provide their children 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to help them in school, and facilitate the development of competencies in college and as future workers (Clark, Demont-Heinrich, & Webber, 2005; Turow & Nir, 2000).

Parents have mixed feelings about the Internet: their kids can connect with friends and family, but also with strangers. They can search for information and learn new things, but also come across inaccurate, inappropriate or harmful content. The Internet can be a great resource for schoolwork, but it can be difficult to find quality information among the sea of blogs, opinion, and misinformation. The Internet is a vast entertainment resource, but parents worry about their kids spending too much time online. And, the Internet can be a great place for kids to create and express themselves, but parents have worries about their children's online privacy. Yet overall, parents feel positive about the Internet, as the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2007) reported that over half of parents of online teens aged 12-17 (59%) say that the Internet has been a good thing for their children. However, this number decreased from 67% in 2004.

#### Parent Media Literacy Education Resources

In response to parents' challenges with their children's use of the Internet, organizations that focus on media literacy education have created resources for parents ranging from curriculum and programs available online (Common Sense Media, NetSmartz, WiredSafety, iKeepSafe, Center for Media Literacy, PBS Parents), and

popular press (Goodstein, 2007; Magid & Collier, 2007). Strategies that are often advised to parents on how to handle their children's Internet use include rules and restrictions; Internet filtering and monitoring; and discussion or inquiry with their kids to help them think critically about their online behavior. Although all of these approaches could be effectively used by parents, it is important to explore which techniques parents resonate with and feel confident using, and also which strategies have the most positive impact on their children's Internet use.

There is no known scholarly research that has examined the effectiveness of media literacy education materials for parents, nor are there studies that have examined which type of media literacy education approaches are most effective in helping parents manage their children's digital lives. Media literacy scholars, who focus on K-12 or after school settings rather than in the home, have not largely examined parents and media literacy education. However, the majority of media consumed by youth occurs at home, which highlights the important role parents can play in helping shape their children's understanding of the value, use, and enjoyment of media (Browne, 1999).

#### Media Literacy: Protectionism and Empowerment

Media literacy educators recommend Internet mediation strategies that are embedded in two different theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical perspectives: protectionism and empowerment. Protectionist strategies are those that aim to inoculate children against the potential dangers and negative effects of media, while empowerment strategies aim to strengthen the positive benefits of media and empower children to be critical media consumers and creators. Most media literacy practitioners recommend parents use a balance of protectionist and empowerment strategies, because it is

important to protect kids from risks or harm, but it is also important to empower them to harness the potential benefits of the Internet. Of these two approaches, it is unclear just how parents receive them or which is more effective for parents to use.

Protectionism in media literacy involves implementing strategies to keep kids safe and protecting their health and well-being in a world of media and technology (Bergsma, 2004; Gonzales, Glik, Davoudi, & Ang, 2004). Hobbs (2008) identifies this approach as “media management,” where the goal is to counteract negative media effects and promote a healthy lifestyle. Parents who use media restriction tend to have more negative attitudes towards media, and use restriction more with younger children and girls (Nathanson, 2001; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Pasquier, 2001; St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, & Eakins, 1991). This approach is in part fueled by fear-mongering in media coverage, is concerned with online risks such as Internet predators, cyberbullying, privacy violations, pornography, sexting, and violence.

In contrast, other educational approaches focus less on protecting children per se, but more on helping children think critically about their choices online and encourage the positive uses of the Internet. This approach, labeled *empowerment*, is more concerned with developing informed media consumers. The empowerment approach emphasizes understanding of and inquiry about media and popular culture (Hobbs, 2008). This model also acknowledges pleasure and play in consuming and creating popular media, which the protectionist model does not emphasize (Buckingham, 1998; Jenkins, 2006). Empowerment and protectionism refer to the parental pedagogy within media literacy, and of course, parents can simultaneously protect and empower.

Although many parents use parental mediation to guide and regulate their child's use of the Internet (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), the literature indicates that little is known about parents' responses to protectionist and empowerment approaches of media literacy, nor how their responses relate to their attitudes, confidence, perceived effectiveness, and current mediation strategies. This study examines parents' perceptions and uses of protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies for their preteen children. Based on a survey measuring protectionist and empowerment parental mediation strategies for the Internet, and in-depth phone interviews, this study will explore the following questions:

RQ1: What protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies do parents use to guide their preteens' use of the Internet?

RQ2: How confident are parents in enacting protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies?

RQ3: Which strategies do parents believe are the most and least useful to them in guiding their preteens' use of the Internet?

RQ4: How is parental attitude about children's Internet use associated with parents' strategies, confidence, and perception of the usefulness of these strategies?

While both protectionist and empowerment approaches are based in media literacy education, each are grounded in a different theoretical foundation about the role of the parent, child, and expected outcomes. The protectionist approach is couched in media effects, while the empowerment approach derived from cultural studies. Due to the difference in purpose and outcomes—for parents and children—the division between protectionist and empowerment-based approaches is a continuing “great debate” in the media literacy community in the United States (Hobbs, 1998). This debate lies in the very heart of the split between theoretical foundations of media literacy. This split in

philosophical orientation of media literacy influences what type of educational resources and programs are created for parents, what kind of information they have access to, what type of parental education programs will be funded, and what programs will be supported by the government, schools, the media industry, and other stakeholders. Thus, it is important for media literacy educators to understand how these approaches—both of which are advocated by media literacy scholars—are perceived and practiced by parents to guide their children’s Internet use.

### Significance of the Study

This research will contribute to the scholarly literature of media literacy by being a groundbreaking exploration of Internet mediation strategies of parents or preteens, informing media literacy scholars about what kinds of strategies parents are using, why, and how this can impact parent media literacy education, as well areas of future research. Exploring how parents respond to protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies for preteens is important for several reasons.

First, parental Internet mediation is different than television mediation, which most of the research on parental mediation has focused on to date. Compare the use of television to the Internet: the Internet is often used by an individual, is self-directed, and computer screens are not the centerpiece of American living rooms like televisions. There is less commonality between the websites that children visit and the sites their parents visit (as compared to shared television shows and movies). Parents need different strategies for Internet mediation than television mediation. The often-touted “talk to your kids about media” is vague and difficult with dealing with Internet media use—parents often don’t know what to say or where to begin, and their children are exposed to risks,

opportunities, and behaviors very different than television. While parental mediation researchers study what strategies parents currently use, they have not yet examined how parents respond to specific media literacy approaches, what parents find useful, and how this relates to their attitudes, confidence, and current mediation behaviors. Media literacy education advocates need to understand how parents respond to—and use—these different approaches.

Furthermore, media literacy educators often do not self-identify what kind of philosophical approach they fall under, which often results in a range of protectionist to empowerment approaches beneath the umbrella of media literacy. For instance, media literacy educators focused on the media's effect on health tend to take a protectionist approach, because they are trying to protect the well-being of children from the possible negative effects of media. Avoidance is their pedagogical goal. On the other hand, media literacy educators that focus on children learning media production tend to focus on self-expression and message-making skills, not necessarily on protecting children from the possible harms of media. Engagement, rather than avoidance, is their pedagogical goal. Both approaches come from different values towards media, advocate different strategies, and expect different outcomes. Media literacy educators, teachers, and curriculum developers should design curriculum that best works with their audience and that provides the most effective education. This study will provide organizations that create media literacy education resources and programs for parents with research about parents' responses to protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation approaches, and how this relates to their confidence in using these strategies, perceived effectiveness of the strategies, and attitudes about children's use of the Internet. In turn, curriculum and

program developers can create useful resources for parents by understanding what parents are and are not doing. Thus, findings from this study will contribute to academic literature in mass media, communication, media literacy education, Internet mediation, family and child studies, and teacher education.

Another reason this study is significant is that although media management and restriction tools are available (V-Chip and television ratings, web “nanny” and Internet filtering software systems, etc.) most of the current systems are unknown or unfamiliar to parents, confusing, an additional expense, and a commitment to set up and use. Although there are independent ratings services for online media (i.e., high-quality or parent-approved websites), they are not universally understood or used by parents. The history of ratings and regulatory systems for parents does not show that this is an effective “cure-all” for monitoring children’s media. It is important, then, to explore parental mediation an avenue for guiding children’s use of the Internet.

Moreover, the federal government has created a handful of laws that serve to regulate the media industry and protect children, including the Children’s Television Act of 1990, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA). The V-Chip, for instance, was an attempt to help parents regulate television content for their children. However, according to a 2004 phone survey of parents, only 15% of parents have used the V-chip (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

COPPA is designed to help parents protect children’s online privacy by requiring parental permission for websites collecting private information from children under the age of 13. However, one study found that 78% of parents allow their underage kids sign up for Facebook, even assisting them in the account creation process (boyd, Hargittai,



Schutlz, & Palfrey, 2011). Although there are government attempts of regulating the Internet for children, currently it is parents who face the responsibility for managing their children's Internet use. The government tries to provide parents media regulation to help protect children, but these regulations cannot force parents to use the tools provided to them, or to be responsible or engaged in their kids' media use.

Lastly, this study is significant because it will benefit parents. Examining Internet mediation is a pressing issue to study in an age when online media are increasingly pervasive, and where parents face challenges in helping their kids to be critical, informed, safe, and educated online. Accordingly, a plethora of websites and resources for parents have emerged, offering them varied advice. Media literacy education strategies within Internet mediation have not been explored, and it is not understood how parents understand or use this information. Identifying how parents perceive, and use, protectionist and empowerment approaches will help clarify the goals of parent media literacy education and hopefully create more effective programs and resources for parents. Parents need online media literacy education strategies that work in guiding their children to be safe, responsible, and informed participants online.

#### Outline of the Study

In order to explore these research questions, the dissertation is organized into the following chapters. Chapter one introduces the study, including the background and research questions, definition of terms, and significance of the study. Chapter two provides a review of literature that draws from research on in media in the home, parents and media, parental mediation, media literacy, media effects, and cultural studies. The third chapter explains the rationale and choices for the research methods, including

research design, data collection, and data analysis, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of these methods. Chapter four describes the significant findings of the survey, including descriptive statistics and regression analyses, and conclusions about the data. Chapter five explains the significant results of the interviews, falling under three main themes of a larger typology: Monitoring the Internet, Online Behavior, and Assessing Values. To conclude, chapter six synthesizes the findings into conclusions, addressing four myths about parenting and the Internet. A working model of parenting and the Internet, the Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation, is offered, and implications for practitioners, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research are provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The research questions posed for this study draw upon four areas of scholarship: 1) literature on parents, children, and the Internet, including child media use, parent and child views of the Internet, and media privatization; 2) parental mediation of children's media, including emerging research on Internet mediation; 3) protectionism and empowerment in media literacy, including an overview of media literacy in the United States, connections between protectionist media literacy and the media effects paradigm, and connections between empowerment media literacy and a cultural studies paradigm; and 4) parent media literacy education programs.

The vast and interdisciplinary literature available in each of these areas does not warrant a comprehensive review of the literature in each category, nor would this be helpful for the purposes of this study. Thus, a synopsis of the literature in each of these areas is provided to highlight the most relevant areas to this study.

#### Parents, Children, and the Internet

A first body of research that is useful to this study is the relationship between children's uses of Internet in the home and parent's mixed feelings about their children going online. With the increase Internet access in homes and young people's overall access and use of media, parents face challenges dealing with media and their children. Young people aged 8-18 spend 7.5 hours per day outside of school with some form of media (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Children are living in increasingly media-saturated homes, where an increase from 1999 to 2005 in the proportion of homes with

computers rose from 73% to 86%, and the percentage with Internet connections rose from 47% to 74% (Roberts et al., 2005).

### *Preadolescent Online Behavior*

Preteens are increasingly communicating on social networking sites, as the percentage of 10-12 year olds who used a social networking site doubled from 9% in 2006 to 22% in 2007 (Harris Interactive, 2008). Preteens who go online are in a unique place. They are starting to expand upon their online skills, explore, and take risks. Most young people do not generally use the Internet for civic engagement or educational purposes, but for trivial forms of information retrieval, surfing on fan or celebrity Web sites, playing games—many which have embedded advertising, social networking and chatting with friends, downloading music and movies, and shopping (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Roberts et al., 2005; Seiter, 2004; Woodland & Gridina, 2000).

### *Generational Differences*

The current generation of youth is often defined in terms of media. Youth in this generation are content consumers, content creators, media-morphers, multitaskers, and have a mobile lifestyle (Eisenstock, 2007). Today's youth "find empowerment in a fragmented media landscape that confused and overwhelms adults" (Harris Interactive, 2003, p. 11). Parents of preteen children range anywhere from approximately 28 to 52 years old, with the average age approximately 36 to 40. The current parent of preteens generation is a TV generation. While this generation of parents likely grew up with television, they likely did not grow up with personal computers and definitely not the Internet.

Several scholars have noted this generational difference between parents, children and their experiences with computers and the Internet. Papert (1996) notes that the shift to digital technologies caused a “digital generation gap” which emerged as a consequence of adults’ fears about social change and anxieties about a loss of continuity with the past. Prensky (2001) labels the current generation of parents “digital immigrants,” as compared to their children who are “digital natives.” Digital natives are “the native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet” (p. 1), while their parents and other adults are “digital immigrants” because they were not born into the digital world but have “become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology” (p. 1-2). Howe and Strauss (2000) labels the current generation of youth the “millennial generation,” the most media and technology-saturated culture to date, where media is an integral part of their lives. Tapscott (1998) labels youth the “net generation” and argues that this generation has different values and beliefs based on expectations of technology and interactivity. Tapscott’s technological determinist standpoint claims that technology rather than other social, historical, or other forces produce these changes in youth. Children are seen to possess an intuitive relationship with technology—it is “as natural as breathing” (Tapscott, p. 40).

Although dividing adults and children by assumptions about their competencies with digital technology is one way to conceptualize generational differences, arguments such as Prensky’s digital natives vs. digital immigrants dichotomy has been criticized as too simplistic. Bennett and Maton (2010) argue that these labels lump young people together and do not allow for a more nuanced understanding of their use of and experiences with technology. The “digital native” rhetoric has been powerful, as the

authors note, “There remains a need to engage with the Net Generation and digital natives discourse because it continues to have an influence on policy and practice in education, despite the lack of clarity in the use of the terms and in the definition of generational boundaries” (p. 317-318). Similarly, Helsper and Enyon (2010) provide evidence that generation is only one predictor of Internet competency. They argue that breadth of use, experience, gender, and education are also important factors aside from generation, and that it is possible for adults to become digital natives.

Buckingham reminds readers that arguments about generational difference arguments are utopian in tone, in which the authors view computers and the Internet as an inherently positive for youth. He says, “For all those who believe, like Tapscott, that technology is liberating and empowering children, there are many others who see it as destroying or betraying the essence of childhood” (Buckingham, 2006, p. 9).

Buckingham advocates taking a cautious approach and considering the broader social and cultural context of technology. Contemporary development in technology may present new risks and opportunities for children, but this must be understood in the everyday realities of children. Buckingham (2006) notes that there “may indeed be broad systematic differences between what adults do with technology and what young people do with it. However, it is important to note that the meanings and uses of technology are variable: We need some fine distinctions to capture what is happening here” (p. 11).

#### *Parent and Child Views of the Internet*

As any new technology is introduced in society, a wave of fear and uncertainty arises in the public, and a historical pattern shows that youth are more responsive and flexible adjusting new technologies into their lives than adults (Marvin, 1988). Mazarella

(2007) discusses recurring patterns of adult moral panics of media influence on youth, from:

Adults' fears of losing control over vulnerable youth; the need to find a simple solution to a complex problem involving youth (whether real or perceived); the perceived link to popular culture often grounded in a focus on manifest content of media/culture (for example, song lyrics); little or no actual evidence of a link between this content and the perceived problem of youth; claims made by elites (doctors, politicians, and the like); a wave of often exaggerated press coverage; government hearings to investigate the so-called problem; and media-industry fears of government regulation leading instead to voluntary self-regulation. (p. 49)

The Internet poses dozens of concerns for parents, but these concerns can be divided into four camps: content, communication, privacy, and addiction. First, parents are worried about what kind of content their children have access to, and what kind of information (and misinformation) they are receiving, including exposure to adult content (violence, sexual content and pornography, drugs, etc.), exposure to negative content (hate speech, suicide help sites, pro-anorexia sites), and commercialism (advertising, advergames, sweepstakes, contests). Another concern is communication—children can communicate with anyone online, at any time. News stories generate fear of Internet predators, solicitations, stalkers, harassment, and cyberbullying. Some children have been abducted and/or abused by a stranger they met online, while others have committed suicide due to cyberbullying and harassment. The concern of Internet predators was initially by far one of the main concerns of parents, although this has now shifted to a concern about cyberbullying and privacy. Parents fear for their children's privacy, such as personal information and photos their children might be sharing, and what information companies collect for tracking and marketing purposes. The private has become public, and parents, who previously could more easily control who children communicated with

and what information they could share, lack control over their child's online privacy and identity. Finally, a concern of some parents is addiction: children using the Internet so much that it interferes with their physical, psychological, and social well-being.

However, while many parents fear their children's use of the Internet, kids are not as concerned with these issues, as Livingstone and Bovill (2001) found:

Students were not interested in the wider issues that preoccupy adults...nor are they fazed by adult fears about the anarchic nature of the Internet or how it may be used for criminal or exploitative purposes. They tend to see it as offering them new freedoms and opportunities for control and self-expression. (p. 8)

Jenkins (1999) states that adults are so caught up on concerns about children that they fail to see potential in what kids are doing with media: "We are afraid of our children. We are afraid of their reactions to digital media. And we suddenly can't avoid either."

Many parents are not as fluent as their children in using computers, and do not spend as much time with computers—particularly for leisure or entertainment.

Livingstone (2002), in extensive empirical and ethnographic research with media with children and families in Europe, found that there were tensions among children wanting to use new media for entertainment, socialization and to combat boredom, and parents wanting their children to use new media for educational purposes. Albero-Andres's (2004) research on families in Italy found the Internet was generally not a part of parents' daily routine, they did not express curiosity or interest in the technology, the Internet was associated with work and not leisure, and parents reported to have no time to learn about new technologies. Similarly, a poll based on a nationwide telephone survey with children and adults found that 85% of children reported keeping up with computers and 14% felt they were being left behind; while 49% of adults reported they were keeping up and 49% felt left behind (National Public Radio, 1999). Eighty-nine percent of teens aged 12-17



say that the Internet and other digital technologies have made their lives easier, yet 71% of parents agree with this statement (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2007).

Although parents might not personally value the Internet as much as their children, they see computers and the Internet as valuable educational resources for their children. Of parents with Internet access in their home, 89% agreed strongly and somewhat strongly that “access to the Internet helps my children with their schoolwork” (Turow & Nir, 2000, p. 12), and 74% strongly agree and somewhat agree that “children without Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers” (Turow & Nir, p. 12). Clark, Demont-Heinrich & Webber (2005), in interviews with diverse parents of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, found that all parents agreed that ICT (information communication technologies) were important for their child’s future, but this differed for higher income and lower income families. Some middle and lower income parents faced barriers when it came to offering their children ICT competence, such as lack of knowledge, lack of knowledgeable experts in their social circle, and lack of ability to get to places that provide access. All parents were concerned about negative effects of ICT as entertainment rather than for education, and for lower-middle income families, this objection justified limits on use or access among children. Some lower-middle income parents expressed the belief they were not the “type” of people for whom ICT competence would be beneficial, but believe it would be for their children (Clark et al., 2005). As some children are often the experts in the home on how to use the computer, parents often mistake children’s technological knowledge as knowledge on how to deal with risks. Livingstone (2006) found that children who have higher ICT skills have more opportunities to encounter online risks. The child’s level of

technological capability requires different strategies for parental mediation and media literacy education.

A family's patterns of social practices often determined how they manage computers at home. For instance, how a family decides that a computer is shared and a social resource - or for private use - influences how children use computers (Lei, Conway, & Zhao, 2007, p. 145). In an ethnographic study with families in the U.K., Facer, Furlong, and Sutherland (2003) found three different metaphors to distinguish computer use in the home. The first is "the children's machine," where the computer is seen as an intrinsic part of family life and work, embodying parents' aspirations of the children's future (this attitude was most prevalent where parents have the least experience with computers). The second metaphor is "computer as interloper" where the computer is seen as in conflict with dominant family values, manifesting in arguments between parents and children or among siblings about its role. The third metaphor is "computer at the heart of the family" where the computer played a significant role for work and leisure, served as a source of new relationships between family members, and promoted involvement in collaborative activities and sharing expertise. Thus, how a family conceptualizes and views the computer in the home will affect practices and behaviors with it.

Even though parents are interested in the educational potential of the Internet, they lack knowledgeable about children's educational websites or software or how use them. Buckingham's (2007) ethnographic study of family use of educational media in the home found that most parents who buy Internet software for their children do not spend time using it with them. Although the families in Buckingham's study had Internet

access, he found little evidence of intensive use of educational websites due to “parent’s lack of knowledge of the sites available; the limited nature of homework assignments; the greater appeal for children of other uses of the computer (e.g., entertainment); technical difficulties in accessing sites; and the lack of engagement offered by the sites that were known to be available” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 141). One final reason educational software and websites were not used is that “children were unlikely to enjoy a didactic approach to education in the home” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 138).

### *Privatization of Internet Use*

One reason to explain why parents are not generally knowledgeable or comfortable with their children’s online life is because young people increasingly have media in their bedrooms, making their media consumption more individualized and private. Among 8-16 year-olds, 20% had a computer in their bedroom and 54% of these computers had Internet access (Woodland & Gridina, 2000), while 12% of 8-14 year-olds have their own laptop (Roberts et al., 2005). Having media in the bedroom leads youth to consume more, as it is linked with an additional two hours per day exposure (Roberts et al., 2005). Boys (35%) are more likely to have a computer in their bedroom than girls (26%) (Roberts et al., 2005). Teenagers who have Internet access in the bedroom spend nearly double the amount of time online (Eastin, Greenberg, and Hofschire, 2006).

There are several reasons to explain the increase of media in the bedroom. One reason is that as a family upgrades the television, computer, or video game system, the “old” media are placed in children’s bedrooms (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). Another reason is that there has been a decline in children’s “street culture,” where hanging out in neighborhoods or on the street is discouraged, and youth clubs and leisure facilities are

not funded or too expensive to attend (Jenkins, 1998; Livingstone, 2002). The decline in public spaces for youth, combined with an increase in parents' fear for children's safety, means the home has turned into a "safe" site for the entertainment and occupation of children. Pasquier (2008) discusses how the social space of the home is changing, where "Paradoxically, children are now more welcome in their parents' rooms than parents are welcome in their children's rooms, a veritable irony of history" (p. 450). In addition, more democratic families with non-traditional views about parent-child power relations have emerged, shifting power relations and parental authority, and changing socialization patterns and use media in the home, allowing children more independence and risk-taking in media consumption (Livingstone, 2002, 2006). And the shift of "wired" desktop computers to wireless mobile devices lessens the control parents have over what their children do online, "giving children the official right to develop social links with friends away from home and without parental regulation" (Pasquier, 2008, p. 451).

On the one hand, a media rich bedroom allows children to freely explore their identities and interests, and to communicate with family and friends. However, with the decrease in opportunity for parents and children to use media together, the more unaware parents are about what their children are doing online, and the less opportunity for engagement, discussion, and cultivation of media literacy skills (Livingstone, 2002).

Thus, the privatization and individualization of media "may reduce both the amount and the quality of experiences families share in common and limit the exchange of information and perspectives" (Bachen, 2007, p. 244). However, Livingstone (2005b) notes that parents are using media with their children, such as eating in front of the television, watching favorite shows together, or interacting through a website or instant

messaging “to counter the individualizing effects of diverse multiple media so as to sustain some degree of common culture in the home” (p. 47). And becoming increasingly common is parents who text their children to stay in touch.

#### *Parents Unaware of Children’s Online Behavior*

Research shows that parents are largely unaware about what their children are doing online. Livingstone’s (2006) study of online risk-taking found that children aged 9-17 and their parents reported different experiences of what’s happening online, revealing that parents did not know about the risks their children face. For instance, 45% of children reported coming across pornography online, while only 16% of parents thought their child experienced this, 38% reported giving out information they shouldn’t have online, while only 5% of parents reported their child did this. And 26% of children reported being bullied online, but only 4% of parents said their children experienced cyberbullying. Livingstone summed up that “children are—perhaps because their parents feel they can rely on children’s expertise—encountering certain online risks that their parents are completely unaware of” (p. 223).

Due to the reasons discussed in this section, such as parents’ lack of knowledge about what their kids are doing and experiencing online, an increase of computers in children’s bedrooms, and a shifting family climate where children are allowed private, individualized use of the Internet, Livingstone (2006) recommends that parental guidance needs to be more specific to focus on how to cope with risk in different contexts, rather than blanket bans such as “avoid chat rooms,” “never give out personal information,” and “no-email” that parents are currently advised to use. Parents need to become more

involved in their children's online lives—both to protect them from harm, but to empower them to reap the positive benefits of the Internet.

### Parental Mediation

A second body of research that is helpful for this study is the practices parents use to help guide and manage their children's media, or *parental mediation*. Families differ in terms of their “media norms,” which in turn, affects children's access and behavior. Some families have strict rules about media use, while other families pay little attention to what or how much media kids consume, and in some homes parents are avid gamers, whereas in others games are ignored (Roberts et al., 2005). Young people aged 8-18 report spending 2 ¼ hours per day just “hanging out” with parents (Roberts et al., 2005). TV watching is the most common media activity families do together, although siblings are more common viewing partners (57%) than moms (41%) or dads (27%). Fewer young people use computers with parents, only 17% use computer with mothers, 8% with fathers, while 27% use with siblings (Roberts et al., 2005).

Family norms are expressed through media restrictions for kids, unspoken behavioral norms, and in allowing kids to have or use different media devices. The most comprehensive body of research on parenting strategies regarding children's media use is the literature of parental mediation, which has examined the existing media intervention behaviors of parents. Parental mediation is “any strategy parents use to control, supervise, or interpret [media] content” for children and adolescents (Warren, 2001, p. 212). By and large, the parental mediation literature is situated within a media effects paradigm, drawing on developmental psychology and cognitive development perspectives. This body of research extends from an assumption that different forms of

mediation can serve as tools for parents to mitigate negative media effects. Nearly all of the research has examined television mediation (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006).

The interest in parental mediation research, largely based in the United States, increased in the 1980s when deregulation of the media industry by the federal government was in effect and standards of children's television were low. Mediation research continued in the 1990s, when increasing emphasis was placed on parents as responsible for media in the home, especially as the government moved the responsibility of youth media intervention from the media industry to parents and educators (Livingstone, 2002).

Parental mediation has been described as one of the most effective ways in managing television's influence on children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005), and includes the role parents play in consuming, discussing, and managing media with their children. However, scholars know very little about mediation, or why certain kinds of mediation are associated with certain effects (Nathanson, 1999, 2001). The work of Nathanson (2002) and (Nathanson & Botta, 2003) provide the most clear and consistent definitions and labels of mediation, categorized as either *coviewing*, *restrictive mediation*, or *active mediation*.

### *Coviewing*

In simple terms, coviewing is watching television together without any discussion about it. Coviewing was found to be the most common form of mediation practiced by parents (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Parents who coview objectionable content (sex, violence, drugs) with their adolescents encourage them to develop similar viewing habits (Nathanson, 2002), because coviewing

can actually be read as a “silent endorsement” of objectionable content (Nathanson, 1999, 2001). If parents make their opinions known (using “active mediation”), sharing values about media with children helps them to think more critically about the messages they receive (Fujioka & Austin, 2003).

### *Restrictive Mediation*

Restrictive mediation is when parents control a child’s media use through rules and limitations. Parents, even though many have strong concerns about children’s exposure to media, do not seem to be taking an active role with restrictive mediation in the home, as 54% of youth report their families have no rules about TV watching, and of those who have rules, under 20% say those rules are enforced (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Restrictive mediation was shown to be used by parents some of the time. Although the evidence is mixed on whether restriction is effective, parents who restrict tend have a negative attitudes towards media, and use restriction more with younger children and girls (Nathanson, 2001, Nikken & Jansz, 2006, Pasquier, 2001; St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, & Eakins, 1991).

### *Active Mediation*

Active mediation is talking with children about media by discussing programs, content, advertising, and form. The most positive effects on children have been attributed to active mediation. Children whose parents use active mediation learn more from educational TV and increase their pro-social behavior (Nathanson, 2002), have more skepticism towards television news (Austin, 1993), are more engaged in political socialization (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001), experienced decreased aggression (Nathanson, 1999), and have a decrease in negative effects of violent and sexual content with teens



(Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Active mediation is the most effective strategy in mitigating negative media effects (Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Warren, 2002). Active mediation, the type of mediation most closely aligned with media literacy, is recommended as the most effective form of parental mediation (Nathanson, 1999; Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Livingstone, 2002; Pasquier, 2001).

From this review, the parental mediation research is concerned with factors that try to predict who mediates and why, and for what outcomes. But researchers are not concerned as much with the “what” of mediation—what exactly parents say or do. Nor have they explored the “why” question—why some parents mediate and some don’t, or why some parents use certain strategies while others don’t. If active mediation is shown to be effective, mediation research fails to explain exactly how to do it, or develop tools to educate parents about active mediation. Nathanson and Botta (2003), note that the effectiveness of active mediation may depend on the nature of the content and how parents communicate, so they recommend future research explore what parents say, “the actual content of parents’ mediation” (p. 325). The parental mediation literature, although it has identified different mediation styles, fails to connect to the research and practices in the media literacy field – although the two have much in common. It is unclear whether covieing, restriction, or active mediation can be used in the same way or have the same effects for children using the Internet.

#### *Parental Mediation of the Internet*

Little is known about the effects of parental mediation on Internet use. Of children aged 8-18, 86% have a computer in the home, and of these, 28% have rules about how much time they can spend on the computer, and 32% have rules about what they can do

(Roberts et al., 2005). Preteens report having more rules than teens, and rules decrease as a child gets older (Roberts et al., 2005). Livingstone (2006) found that adolescents aged twelve and above experienced less parental regulation than 9-11 year olds. Anxious parents may restrict their children's use of the Internet, which also restricts their use of interactive sites—seen as the most risky (Livingstone & Bober, 2006). Turow and Nir's (2000) national study on Internet in the home found that more than 75% of parents who had Internet access in their home were concerned about privacy issues and access to sexually explicit content. Sixty-five percent of parents of teens aged 13-17 reported setting rules regarding what websites their children were allowed to visit and what times of day they could go online. Some parents use using filtering and blocking software to restrict where their children go online (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001), from Net Nanny to Cyber Sitter.

Although studies of parental mediation of the Internet are just emerging, other organizations have asked questions about parental mediation behaviors such as rulemaking and time restriction. The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2007) found that, among parents of 12-17 year olds, over half report having rules about content and time use of the Internet. Sixty-eight percent of parents reported they have rules about websites their children can or cannot visit, and 55% have rules about how much time their child can spend online. Furthermore, they report that parents are fairly involved with their children's online lives, in that 65% report they check to see what websites their child has been on, and 74% can correctly identify whether or not their online teen has ever created a social networking profile such as MySpace or Facebook.

Parents' fear of the Internet and lack of control over what their children are doing online has resulted restrictive mediation strategies, including putting the computer in a social space, limiting amount of time, limiting what sites kids can visit, limiting communication with others online (no email, no chatting, etc.), blocking and filtering software, tracking, spying, and looking at history and records, to name a few. Media literacy educators, many who develop materials for and advise parents on guiding their children's Internet use, need to understand what strategies parents are using, what the most effective, and provide helpful and accurate advice to parents to both protect and empower kids.

Cable in the Classroom, Common Sense Media, and Harris Interactive (2007) conducted a telephone poll of parents of children aged 6-18 regarding their Internet management behavior. Eighty-five percent of parents report talking to children about "any safety, ethics, or media literacy topic" where the most common topics included not sharing too much personal information (78%), avoiding contact with dangerous people online (69%), and the least common was how to legally download and share files (39%). There is a trend in more parents monitoring 11-14 year-olds (92%) rather than 6-10 year olds (86%) or 15-18 year-olds (85%). Of 11-14 year olds, 72% of parents report visiting a website with their child, and 58% report using filters or blocking software. This study also found that mothers and fathers have different views of the online activities of their children, where 56% of mothers versus 38% of fathers thought a having a searchable profile/webpage was "very inappropriate" and 27% of mothers versus 14% of fathers thought playing online games with others was "very inappropriate." A final interesting finding is that parents who are more engaged with their children's Internet use have

stronger beliefs that the Internet helps their children connect to others with similar interests, express creatively, access current events and news, learn about different cultures, learn about things they are interested in, and learn skills needed to succeed in school.

A few studies have emerged that are measuring parental mediation of the Internet. Youn (2008) analyzed the impact of parental influence on teen's attitudes towards online privacy. In a survey of 395 teens aged 14-18, teens were asked about their family communication style, parental mediation behavior, and concern for their privacy online. Teens were identified as from socio-oriented families, with an emphasis is on harmony, avoiding argument, conformity, and rules; or concept-oriented families, where an emphasis is on expressing personal views, give-and-take discussions, open communication style, and independence. Youn used the television-based parental mediation model, paralleling "cosurfing" to co-viewing, "rulemaking" to restriction, and "discussion" for active mediation. Youn found teens in high concept-oriented families engaged in discussion about privacy-sharing practices, increasing teens' concern for their online privacy. Teens in high socio-oriented families tended to have more family rules and surf the Internet with parents. Although rules were not found to increase teens' level of privacy concern, co-surfing did increase teen privacy concern. The study concluded that family communication style, which influenced mediation strategies, had an impact on making online privacy concerns relevant to teens.

Lee and Chae (2007) explored how parental mediation influences children's Internet use. They found that parents who are actively involved in their children's Internet use recommend good websites for their children, and the more parents used the

Internet with children, the more frequently their children used the Internet for educational purposes. Restrictive mediation, including time limits and web site restriction, was not related to any beneficial outcome to children's Internet use.

Eastin, Greenberg, and Hofschire (2006)'s survey of mothers of teenagers found a relationship between parenting styles and Internet access. They found that authoritative parents relied on evaluative and restrictive techniques, including technological blocking, more than authoritarian and neglectful parents. They also found that interpretive and covieing techniques were used more frequently with younger teens. Of all parents, 45% reported never using technological restriction (blocking/filtering software), 21% did not use time restrictions, 7% had no content restrictions, 5% did not coview, and 2% did not use interpretive or discussion techniques. The authors argue that one of the major differences in Internet mediation versus television mediation is the ability to critically evaluate online content, and how it can be created, manipulated, and forced on the user (Eastin, Greenberg, and Hofschire, 2006).

Livingstone and Helsper (2008), in a European survey of parental regulation of children and teen's online activities, identified four types of Internet mediation styles: active co-use, interaction restrictions, technical restrictions, and monitoring. These mediation styles share some features with television mediation, but parents are adapting these strategies to the Internet. They found that two thirds of parents use active co-use, talking to their children about Internet use. Nearly 50% watch the screen, and one third stay nearby when their child is online. Interaction restrictions were found in 43% of parents banning their children from using email, 17% from downloading, and 13% from using chat rooms. Technical restrictions were implemented by 33% of parents who used

filtering software, 23% with monitoring software, but 20% did not know how whether software was installed. Parents used more rules and restrictions for younger than older teens. And, parents who used the Internet more and who had a higher skill level were more likely to be engaged in their children's Internet use.

Overall, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) found that parents are attempting a range of mediation strategies, adapting from television strategies. Parents also prefer active co-use over technical restrictions, interaction restrictions, and monitoring practices. However, increased mediation was not found to decrease risks. The authors hope to find effective strategies that allow teens the freedom to communicate with peers online, but with less risk. In their concluding remarks, they note, "The simple assumption that introducing forms of parental mediation will reduce the risks young people encounter online, especially while protecting their opportunities, is misguided" (p. 597).

#### Media Literacy: Protectionism and Empowerment

A third body of research—and theoretically essential to this study—is the foundations of empowerment and protectionist approaches in media literacy education, and how these approaches relate to parent media literacy education. This literature will connect the deeper foundation of media literacy protectionist approaches to media effects, and empowerment approaches to cultural studies. I will also share the few studies that have examined media literacy and parents, and explain briefly the landscape of parent media literacy education programs.

#### *Media Literacy in the United States*

Media literacy is the ability "to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p. xx). This widely

used definition upholds that "a media literate person . . . can decode, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media" (Aufderheide, 1997, p. 79). Based on models from British, Australian, and Canadian educators, the following core concepts of media literacy include: 1) media messages are constructed; 2) media messages are produced within economic, social, political, historical and aesthetic contexts; 3) the interpretative meaning-making processes involved in message reception consist of an interaction between the reader, the text and the culture; 4) media have unique "languages," which are characteristics that typify various forms, genres and symbol systems of communication; and 5) media representations play a role in people's understanding of social reality (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p. 2). Variations of these concepts have been adopted by major media literacy advocates such as the Center for Media Literacy, the National Association for Media Literacy Education, and the National Telemedia Council (Considine, 2002).

Media literacy expands traditional conceptualizations of literacy to include reading and writing through new communication tools, and offers a new way to learn through an "inquiry-based, process-oriented pedagogy" (Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p. 21; Tyner, 1998). Most advocates agree that critical inquiry, the asking of questions about media, is (as Hobbs, 1998, p. 27, described) the "center pole of the media literacy umbrella" and that critical inquiry is the foundation of media literacy pedagogy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Hobbs 1998; Pailliotet, Semali, Rodenberg, Giles, & Macaul, 2000; Rogow, 2004; Silverblatt, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Tyner, 1998). Application of critical inquiry skills to assess both the production and content of media serve as the foundation of media literacy.

The advocacy and practice of media literacy over the last 25+ years lies primarily in K-12 education. Forty-eight of the 50 states have one or more element of media literacy in their core curriculum, although transfer to the classroom leaves much to be desired (Kubey and Baker, 1999). Thus, teacher training is a common practice by media literacy educators. Although scholars advocate that parents practice media literacy with their children, it is typically of secondary concern. Rather, scholars in media literacy tend to focus on expanding media literacy standards and practices in schools and educational settings. Organizations such as Common Sense Media and the Center for Media Literacy have produced print and online resources for parents about managing their children's media use. However, there is no scholarly research measuring the effectiveness of these programs, how they are used, or whether or not they're effective in protecting and empowering kids and teaching them media literacy skills.

The field of media literacy in the United States has been praised—and criticized—for its diverse goals, motives, and instructional practices (Hobbs, 1998). There are many stakeholders in the media literacy movement who come from a variety of fields, including teachers, after-school educators, religious educators, media practitioners, those in the media industry, parents, and concerned citizens. Although the definitions and aims of media literacy have been debated (Buckingham, 1998; Hobbs, 2008; 1998), this debate has been particularly significant in the United States.

Here, media literacy scholars and advocates can be seen as falling into one of two camps: (1) *protectionist*: those who see media literacy as a way to reduce risk of harmful media effects to promote health and well-being; and (2) *empowerment*: those who see media literacy as cultivating creativity, self-expression, inquiry, and even emphasizing



pleasure in engagement with media. These two camps historically emerged from theoretical work in media effects (which influenced protectionist) and cultural studies (which influenced empowerment). However, scholars and practitioners in cultural studies may also have protectionist perspectives on media culture, and similarly, scholars and practitioners in media effects can also be concerned with how media can be used for empowering purposes.

I would like to note that the dichotomy between protectionism and empowerment is being highlighted for the purpose of this study as a framework to explore parent Internet mediation. I am not intending to argue that media literacy, media effects, and cultural studies are this black-and-white. There are other forces at play with scholarship, for instance, scholars certainly have political reasons to take certain approaches (e.g. funders) and publish in certain journals for career advancement. I also am not intending to argue that Internet mediation is this easily dichotomized, as parents use a combination of approaches. However, for the purpose of this study the protection-empowerment framework is helpful to understand the behaviors and attitudes of parents regarding Internet mediation.

There are also other fields that have influenced both camps, including education, education technology, youth development, and youth media. Tensions between protectionism and empowerment are problematic because as media literacy is acknowledged in local and state boards of education and federal government, different initiatives and programs will develop based on the assumption that media literacy “protects” or “empowers” (Kubey, 2003, p. 363). These tensions may “limit the ability

of educators to collaborate on projects of significant national or regional scope” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 16-17).

Moreover, it is unclear just how these two approaches are received or used by parents. Due to the perpetuation of parental fear (often by the media) of potential risks of the Internet on their children, and some parents’ inexperience and unfamiliarity with computers and the Internet, protectionist approaches address parents’ fears and focus on protecting children from potential dangers online.

In contrast, empowerment approaches focus less on protecting children but more on providing children tools for critical thinking and inquiry, media creation, communication, collaboration, participation, and self-regulation. The empowerment approach emphasizes understanding of and inquiry about media and popular culture (Hobbs, 2008). This model also acknowledges pleasure and play in consuming media (Buckingham, 1998; Jenkins, 2006).

Before moving forward, it is important to define the phrase “popular culture” as it’s being used in this study, because this term means different things to different scholars. Real (2001), in grappling with the conflicted definitions within popular culture theory, distinguishes at least four levels of culture. First, he describes “elite culture” (also known as “high culture” or “serious culture”) which includes “that produced by known artists within a consciously aesthetic context judged according to an accepted set of rules, norms, and classics” (p. 168). Second is “folk culture” which includes “face-to-face interactions within traditional or tribal cultures” (p. 168). Third is “mass culture” which is illustrated in the sociological and critical theory of Weber, the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse. Mass culture refers to “large-scale expressions of

culture that were created for a mass market and were known for their standardization of product, commercial promotion, and mass behavior” (p. 168). Lastly, there is “popular culture” which Real describes as a “middle ground. . .between the localisms of folk culture and the grossness of mass culture” but that more generally this term “has taken on a comprehensive meaning for any cultural expressions or products that are found broadly among a population, whether the popularly shared culture has elite, folk, or mass elements at work” and that popular culture includes “mediated forms of communication, those cultural expressions relayed through technology in both interactive forms shared through the Internet or the telephone, and in the mass media” (p. 169). I am using the term popular culture in the way that Real describes, as “cultural expressions or products that are found broadly among a population” with focus on how these expressions are be shared, perpetuated, and maintained through media. Real believes that everyone is affected by popular culture, it’s like an inescapable wallpaper in people’s lives:

The evolved aesthetic of ‘the popular’—news stories in sound bites, music with predictable lyrical and melodic structures, pre-programmed emotions of movies and entertainment television, conventions and formulas known by all—this popular aesthetic plays an inescapable and profound role in everyone’s life today, from the elite sophisticate who may erroneously think herself above it to the philistine presumed too dense to express himself through it. (p. 171)

Media literacy aims to teach people the skills to be aware of, critically think about, and even disrupt popular culture.

### *New Media Literacy*

Protectionist and empowerment advocates are faced with a challenge in the field of media literacy: how media literacy is changing between “old” media literacy and “new” media literacy (Hobbs, 2008). Media literacy scholars are exploring how and whether old media approaches—largely reliant on print media and television—apply to

new, digital media technologies. And educators are exploring how to foster critical thinking and communication skills in online settings (Hobbs, 2008).

Livingstone (2004) argues that the concept of media literacy is changing from a traditional focus on print and audiovisual media to encompass Internet and new media. She questions whether and how the traditional definition of access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate applies to fast-changing, interactive new media environments with a changing role of the audience. Critical evaluation will be particularly important in new media literacy, and Livingstone (2004) argues for “changed literacies” which should explore:

How the Internet mediates the representation of knowledge, the framing of entertainment, and the conduct of communication. . .and. . .it must investigate the emerging skills and practices of new media users as they meaningfully appropriate ICT [Internet communication technologies] into their daily lives. (p. 10)

As media literacy often touts a “skills-based approach” in which people to learn how to critically analyze and create media messages, Livingstone suggests that we need to expand the notion of literacy to be plural—in terms of *relationships* between people and media, and that a “conceptual shift is from an exclusive focus on the viewer to a focus on the *interaction* between text and reader or between inscribed and actual viewer/user” (p. 8, emphasis mine).

Buckingham (2007) states that schools are out of touch with children’s at-home use of new media technologies, and that “children are bored and frustrated by their use of new media in schools” because it is “not exciting compared to the uses and multimedia experiences of media outside of school” (p. 95). He argues that an emphasis is needed on *digital media literacy* to develop critical and analytical skills for new media. This means

that parents need to help their children understand that new forms of media are not neutral teaching aids that promote technology skills, but that children's leisure practices online are a great opportunity to explore media representation, language, production, audience, and interpretation. Digital media literacy, Buckingham argues, is a means for parents and children to engage with and enjoy any form of media while at the same time, “develop rigorous and critical—but also more creative—engagement with children's out-of-school cultures” (p. 118).

Jenkins (2006) has offered a framework of “new media literacies” as a shift from traditional frameworks of media literacy to a set of “cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new media landscape” where new media technologies are being used for affiliation, expression, collaborative problem-solving, and circulation. Traditional media literacy, he argues, sees children as receivers of messages from others, when in a new media environment, they are not receivers but actively participate in selecting, creating, remaking, critiquing, and circulating media content.

#### *Protectionism and Media Effects*

Protectionism in media literacy has a strong foothold in the United States, where there is concern with protecting children from media, and where there is an established history of media effects research. The ideology of protectionism is drawn from the theoretical aims, purposes, and results of media effects research.

#### *Media Literacy and Protectionism*

The split between those who advocate a protectionist rather than empowerment approach was highlighted by Hobbs's (1998) “seven great debates” of media literacy. Hobbs identified the main tensions of conflict in the field of media literacy, and one of

them was, “Should media literacy education aim to protect children and young people from negative media influences?” (p. 18). A protectionist stance in media literacy focuses on mitigating the potential negative impact of media on youth, counteracting harmful messages, and reducing risks. Those who are drawn to this perspective seek to protect young people from the negative effects of media on their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Developmental psychologists, health educators, and media effects researchers are in this camp. Common concerns of those in this camp include the representation of violence, sex, race, gender, and drugs in the media; advertising and consumerism; and media effects on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

Hobbs (2008) revisit of the debates in new literacies (a blanket term covering media literacy, visual literacy, ICT literacy, etc.) finds these four distinct approaches have emerged, and that protectionism has moved further into its own “tent”. She labels this distinct approach *media management*<sup>1</sup>, who are “Scholars and researchers with interests in youth, media and public health” that “resist the conceptualization of media literacy as a new type of literacy or a particular approach to pedagogy, preferring to conceptualize media literacy as a *treatment* or *intervention* to counteract negative media effects” (p. 436). Media management is not just protection, however, because “this perspective emphasizes the importance of transforming passive, habitual media use to intentional, active and strategic use as a response to the negative dimensions of mass media and popular culture” (Hobbs, 2008, p. 436). Hobbs also argues that *media literacy* is a distinct approach from media management, although the two “tents” still share ideas and cross-fertilize, and affirms the foundational definition of media literacy as the ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Although Hobbs uses the term *media management* to describe protectionist practices, the term *protection*

access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate (as described above), highlighting that media literacy “emphasize[s] an understanding of mass media and popular culture, particularly news, advertising, entertainment and popular culture” (Hobbs, 2008, p. 434). For the purposes of this study, though, protectionism is viewed as a form of media literacy with a distinct set of goals and values, and a particular concern of protecting youth from media harm.

A protectionist approach to media literacy education for parents took hold in the 1970s, from Marie Winn’s (1977) famous book *The Plug in Drug*, to Peggy Charen’s move from a concerned mother to forming Action for Children’s Television (a group that pushed the media industry and government for higher quality children’s television, and who helped to pass the Children’s Television Act of 1990). Systems of parental monitoring of media developed in the 1990s, which included programs that focused on informing parents about developing responsible television and media habits, and established ratings systems for parents (Hobbs, 2008). Although the Motion Picture Association of America had established film ratings since 1968, during the 1990s ratings systems were developed (primarily for parents), including the V-Chip television ratings system, Parental Advisory sticker for music albums, and Entertainment Software Rating Board system for video games. Currently there is not an established or universal rating system for the Internet or websites, however, parental controls such as Net Nanny and other filters offer a general taxonomy (e.g., “pornography,” “weapons,” etc.).

A protectionist approach naturally appeals to many parents who have anxiety about popular culture and media, and is an easy way to “sell” them on the idea of media literacy (Hobbs, 1998; Kubey, 2003). Hobbs (1998) notes that protectionism is “often

exploited simply for its rhetorical value in conveying to parents and community members the relevance of media literacy education in schools” (p. 19). Kubey (2003) claims that parents are more likely than teachers to see media literacy as a preventative measure, and that they are more interested in having their children be computer literate rather than media literate. Kubey suggests that inoculation is not necessarily media literacy, and many others also disagree that it is one among many approaches under the “big tent” of media literacy (Hobbs, 1998).

In the United States, media literacy initiatives from protectionist aims have been supported and advocated by U.S. health officials, as media literacy is seen as a way to mitigate negative effects on children’s aggressive behavior, nutrition and eating habits, physical activity, obesity risk, sexual activity, and drug use (Hobbs 2008). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the White House National Drug Control Policy have advocated media literacy as a preventative measure for drug abuse (Kubey, 2003). The American Academy of Pediatrics advocates media literacy as a preventative measure (American Academy of Pediatrics, n. d.). The New Mexico Media Literacy Project focuses on risk prevention for tobacco, alcohol, and food marketing.

Critics of protectionism say that children are seen as victims of media without attention paid to the enjoyment and positive aspects of media use, while some do not want medical professionals recommending appropriate consumption and content (Hobbs, 2008). And, others believe social science research methods and theoretical models are ineffective in exploring the complex relationship of media in the lives of young people (Buckingham, 2003).



### *Media Effects and Protectionism*

Media literacy's protectionism has developed out of the philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical objectives of media effects research. Kubey emphasizes the connection between media literacy protectionism and media effects research, and that this is a phenomenon quite specific to the United States: "what distinguishes the U.S. situation [in comparison to other English-speaking countries] is the hue and cry over media effects—on aggression and crime, on sexuality, on alcohol and drug abuse, in promoting materialistic values, and on an ever more shallow political discourse" (Kubey, 2003, p. 363). Media literacy protectionists largely draw from media effects for their scholarship and curriculum development. Therefore, it is important to cover the history, aims, and purposes of media effects research and the intersections with protectionism.

The purpose of media effects research is to predict, test, and explain the effects of media on audiences. In the U.S., the media effects approach is often called the "dominant paradigm" of the media and communication field (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995; McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991), and has contributed milestones to justifying the field of mass communication (Lowery & DeFleur). Media effects, situated in a logical positivism paradigm, is interested in how the media impact attitude, cognition, and behavior.

McLeod et al. note that media effects research includes the following four elements: primary focus is on audiences, concerned with influence, considers the media message system as source of influence; and concerned with variables and relationships among variables.

Although media effects research is often attributed to Lazarsfeld and Katz at the Columbia Bureau of Applied Social Research in the 1940s, it was Weber, Lippman,

Dewey, and Park who were concerned about the effects of the news press long before, and who sought to use research to reform media (McLeod, Kosicki, and Pan, 1991). Major topics that have been explored include the media's effect on persuasion (mass, propaganda, political, personal), social influence, and violence/aggression. The history of media effects is rooted in a concern for the media's effect on children and adolescents. Media effects research corresponded to the rise in access and availability to media technology, including books, newspapers, movies, radio, comics, and television, and most recently, the Internet—all which are forms of storytellers to youth (Gerbner, 1998).

The period between 1900-1940 has been labeled a “direct effects era” in which media were thought to have direct and uniform effect on audiences. However, this period included study of cognitive concepts, developmental differences in children's media use, and focus on children's knowledge, attitudes, values, and moral conduct (Wartella & Reeves, 2003). The history of this view developed into Shannon and Weaver's transmission model of communication, based on a linear stimulus-response model. Early studies of media effects in the 1920s and 1930s examined effects through a “hypodermic needle” model of media impact, which assumed media messages have a direct and uniform impact on individuals, furthered by Lasswell's research on World War I propaganda techniques. However, the best known research from this era, the 1933 Payne Fund studies, contradicts the conclusion of direct effects. A conclusion of this report was that the same film affects children differently depending on developmental level, social class, experience, and parental influence, and is “similar to the most current summaries of research about children and television” (Wartella & Reeves, 2003, p. 56).

Wartella and Reeves (2003) state that although “studies about media and children do not follow the received history of media effects research” they contend this is because the “emphasis on research topics was influenced by public debate about changing media technologies. That is, as public concerns about film gave way to concern about radio and then television, academic research made corresponding shifts” (p. 59). In their review of literature on effects studies about media and youth between 1900-1960, they found “a progression from early attention to studies of mass media use to increasing emphasis on issues of physical and emotional harm, and changes in children’s knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In addition, studies about violence, sex, and advertising recur” (Wartella & Reeves, p. 63).

From the beginning, although media effects were not shown to be direct or powerful, and depended on the situation and context of the child, media effects research has developed under an assumption that children can imitate, learn, or be influenced by media in the form of violence and aggression, poor body image and low self-esteem, bad nutrition habits, and substance abuse, and consumerism (Singer & Singer, 2001; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Some, but much less of the research focuses on the positive effects of media, such as how media effects pro-social behavior, physical and emotional health, and citizenship. The majority of media effects research that focuses on children and teens is concerned with the potential risks and harmful effects the media may have, and in turn, this body of research has influenced media literacy scholars and the programs, curriculum, and techniques they advocate to parents.

Studies are emerging that illustrate the effects of media literacy interventions, and most of them are concerned with physical and emotional health. In fact, one of the

strongest lines of scholarly research in media literacy is that it is seen as a tool for alcohol and tobacco prevention. Although research on media literacy as a vehicle for health promotion is still in its infancy (Bergsma & Carney, 2008), some examples of media literacy as decreasing negative health affects include: increasing children's understanding of the persuasive intent of alcohol ads, (Austin & Johnson, 1997a; 1997b); increasing an understanding of tobacco advertising techniques (Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, & Miller, 2007); decreasing pro-tobacco attitudes (Gonzales, Glick, Davoudi, & Ang, 2004), understanding unrealistic standards of women's bodies in the media (Piran, Levine, & Irving, 2000), unrealistic portrayals of sexuality (Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, 2006); and increasing parents' understanding of television ads, food labels, and television mediation behavior with kids (Hindin, Contento, & Gussow, 2004). As previously mentioned, health agencies in the federal government have supported media literacy as health promotion (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003; Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2001); and health organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and Kaiser Family Foundation, advocate the need for media literacy education. Not to mention, a protectionist approach has been more successful in getting support and garnering interest and funding, and university researchers recognize this (Hobbs, 1998; Kubey, 2003).

*Understanding of popular culture and audience.* There are two ways that media effects and cultural studies differ, which influences their methods and theories: their views of popular culture and audience. Protectionists have a particularly critical and negative view of popular culture. On the one hand, a critical view of popular culture is important because it forces audiences to ask questions of the value of popular culture, such as what stories are being told, who is represented and how they are represented, how

commercial interests target audiences, why certain messages are popular and others are not, and the negative impact media may have on health and well-being. Maintaining moral and ethical standards about media helps to garner support. For instance, pressuring the media industry - who are accused of targeting children and adolescents in ways that can be considered unethical, objectionable and unhealthy - can lead to higher standards and better media products for children.

In media effects research, this theme of a negative view of popular culture is evident in the Payne Fund Studies, which emerged from a fear of film and comic books. Another example is the United States Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior in 1972, which reflected concern about television in promoting violence and juvenile delinquency (Robinson, Bell, & Turner, 2007). An argument can be made that "The recurring nature of public concern for and scientific study of media influence on youth thus speaks to our field's responsiveness to the wider social and cultural context of American media" (Wartella & Reeves, 2003, p. 67). Media effects research as the dominant paradigm in the U.S. reflects concerns with social change, connecting to the country's constant struggles with race, gender, and class.

On the other hand, protectionists' view that popular culture lacks values, is mindless, and is meant solely for entertainment and commercialism can be ineffective with children—and many parents—who view media in a positive light. This view of popular culture sees it as "culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture" (Storey, 2006, p. 5). This understanding of popular culture casts a tone of inferiority and an ideological distinction between "high culture" and "low culture." Thus, if protectionists devalue popular "mass" culture—which, in the lives of children, is often

synonymous with children's culture—it is more difficult to involve children by judging and resenting “their” culture. Therefore, focusing simply on risk prevention with children could serve as a barrier to developing media literacy (Buckingham, 2005).

Second, media effects researchers and protectionists view the audience differently than those in cultural studies. Protectionists see the audience as passive recipients—even victims—of media messages. Seeing the audience in this way can be helpful to understand the power of media and how they can influence receivers. Hobbs (2008) notes that this stance “positions children and youth as victims of an oppressive media culture without an appropriate level of attention to the pleasures of media consumption” (p. 11).

This passive view of audience is changing with the proliferation of new media, and may apply differently when examining the influence of the Internet—where audiences are active participants. Changes in new media challenge the passive, “mass message” reception approach of media effects. Livingstone (2004) recommends that the terms “audience” and “reception” do not work well for media which are socially diversified (rather than mass), technologically converged (rather than distinct) and interactive (rather than one-to-many). She argues that “literacy” can be an effective framework that covers all the complex symbolic texts, from old media to new media.

To sum up, the development of protectionism as a media literacy approach in the United States is tied closely to the research and theory from a media effects paradigm. Having a negative view of popular culture and seeing audience as passive recipients leads protectionists to advocate different strategies for parents based on these assumptions. In order to protect children, protectionists advocate that parents use Internet media literacy

strategies including (but not exclusively) the following: enforcing rules, restrictions, and limitations; using ratings and filtering systems to monitor children media use, talking with children about safety, privacy, and ethical conduct; placing the computer in a social space in the home, and recommending safe and developmentally-appropriate website for children to use.

### *Empowerment and Cultural Studies*

Empowerment in media literacy has less of an influence in the United States than in other English-speaking countries such as Great Britain, Canada, and Australia (Kubey, 2003). Media literacy in Great Britain emerged from film theory and cultural studies and much less, if at all, from media effects research. The ideology of the empowerment approach is drawn from the theoretical aims, purposes, and findings of cultural studies.

### *Media Literacy and Empowerment*

There is surprisingly much less controversy in the United States on whether media literacy should be used to empower children and adolescents. Empowerment<sup>2</sup> media literacy focuses on strengthening critical thinking and inquiry skills, questioning media ideology, aesthetic appreciation, and encouraging enjoyment and self-expression through media. Empowerment media literacy is more concerned with developing informed, engaged media consumers than protecting them from harm. The empowerment approach also emphasizes the understanding of and inquiry about media and popular culture (Hobbs, 2008), and acknowledges—even celebrates—pleasure and play in consuming popular culture (Buckingham, 1998; Jenkins, 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> The term *empowerment* is problematic, as it is an ambiguous term with positive connotations. In this study, it correlates to the approach of media literacy based in a cultural studies perspective. However, some media literacy scholars may not identify themselves as taking an “empowerment” approach.

Media literacy for empowerment has taken a strong foothold in Great Britain, where Hobbs (1998) notes:

The claim that media literacy can protect young people from negative media influence is problematic to many educators and scholars, and in Great Britain, this perspective has been particularly derided by scholars who believe that such approaches are elitist and based on poorly grounded social science research. (p. 19)

Buckingham (1993), one of the leading media literacy scholars in Great Britain, believes that focusing on how mass media is problematic neglects young people's emotional engagement, ignores their enjoyment of media, and substitutes cynicism and superiority rather than questioning and analysis. Buckingham is not interested in media effects on children. In fact, Kubey (2003) notes that, "the [media] effects question is not even a question for Buckingham—indeed, it is the 'wrong' question" (p. 362).

Hobbs (1998) notes that a protectionist stance is "most prevalent among those who do not directly work in school settings" (p. 19). This is due to the resistance teachers who use this kind of approach with students face, as they "oppose the rhetoric of protection on pedagogical grounds" because their students often resist instruction if "media literacy skills are positioned in opposition to media culture" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 19). Empowerment media educators advocate a different pedagogical stance and instructional techniques, including rejecting traditional notions of teacher as authority and teacher as having the "right" answers.

Kubey's (2003) personal communication with Len Masterman<sup>3</sup> nicely sums up the differences between protectionism and empowerment media literacy:

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<sup>3</sup> Len Masterman is a key figure in media literacy: "Known as the originator of the idea of media representation and the Key Concepts of Media Literacy" and has influenced media literacy educators with his popular books *Teaching About Television* and *Teaching the Media* (Center for Media Literacy, 2010).



In Britain, people do not recognize that TV itself is worth taking seriously. . . .In America, TV is seen to be a sort of infection, something that isn't part of serious discourse. I can see how it would be more difficult to convince parents in the USA of the need and value of media literacy than in any other country. . . .In American culture, I would find myself blocked at every turn. (p. 351)

This is not to say that the empowerment approach is not used in the United States. Many scholars, educators, and parents advocate empowerment media literacy, many are not aligned with the goals of protectionism.

Practitioners who advocate a cultural studies perspective in the U.S. most notably include Henry Jenkins, who founded Project New Media Literacies<sup>4</sup>. Jenkins has proposed eleven major skills and practices of new media literacies, and highlights an appreciation of children's pleasure in fan culture, gaming, and popular culture (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006) argues that parents need to avoid getting trapped in anxiety about the changing landscape of children's media and participatory culture, but that "parents play important roles in helping them make meaningful choices in their use of media and helping them anticipate the consequences of the choices they make" (p. 61).

### *Cultural Studies and Empowerment*

Empowerment in media literacy has developed out of the philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical objectives of cultural studies, therefore, it is important to cover its history, aims, and purposes.

Cultural studies situates media as an integrated and constantly changing force, rather than an outside force that produces effects (Buckingham, 1993; Hoover, Clark, Alters, Champ, & Hood, 2004). Cultural studies focuses on the negotiated relationship of media, parents, and children in the home, and is interested in how family members make

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<sup>4</sup> See Project New Media Literacies at <http://newmedialiteracies.org>

meaning from media in their lives. Although scholars have explored how media (primarily television) is integrated in the home, research is starting to emerge on how parents handle their children's use of the Internet (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001; Livingstone, 2005a).

The purpose of cultural studies is to explore how audiences negotiate meaning of media texts. Cultural studies is concerned with the processes and practices of meaning-making, and “encompasses a set of approaches that attempt to understand and intervene into the relations of culture and power” (Grossberg, 1993, p. 89). Grossberg identifies three tenets of cultural studies: 1) reality is constructed through human action; 2) popular culture is valuable; and 3) a commitment to “radical contextualism,” a concept that refers to culture, audiences, and relationships not being able to exist outside of a particular context, but articulated through multiple forces. Cultural studies is also concerned with *articulation*, “the practice by which human reality is made” where identities are products of contextually defined relationships (Grossberg, p. 90).

The inherently anti-disciplinary approach of cultural studies leads it to draw on many schools of thought (including Marxism, feminism, social constructivism, structuralism and post-structuralism, postmodernism) and various disciplines (communication, psychology, sociology, philosophy, English) to explore a wide variety of issues including ideology, hegemony, alienation, resistance, and empowerment (O’Keefe, 1993). It is also considered anti-theoretical because “no theory defined independently of the context of its intervention can predefine the relations surrounding a practice, or its specific concrete effects” (Grossberg, 1993, p. 90), thus, “effects” are

understood differently than media effects as they are considered more contextual, broader, and less determined.

The predominant scholars attributed to cultural studies include Stuart Hall, James Carey, and influencers include Williams, Marx, Adorno, Dewey, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School. Cultural studies researchers in mass media are concerned with understanding how people can uncover *ideology*, which can be defined in many different ways, including “a certain masking, distortion, or concealment” that produces a “false consciousness” (Storey, 2006, p. 2), based on a Marxist assumption that ideology is in the interest of dominant groups in a society. Thus, cultural studies is interested in disrupting ideology, as Hall (1981) is interested particularly in deconstructing racist ideologies, and Carey (1988), sees cultural studies as charting and explaining social conflict to uncover embedded meanings in social practice. Hall and Carey view media as one important component in a larger view of ideological factors (Peters, 1993).

Research on media and families that takes a cultural studies approach is more difficult to discern, perhaps because it does not label itself as “parental mediation” research, and because mediation is incorporated as a larger, multi-faceted examination of media and families. Buckingham’s (1993) study of children, television, and families emerged out of two years of field work including interviews, focus groups, and observations. Buckingham “draws on theories and perspectives developed within Media and Cultural Studies, English, education, psychology, sociology, linguistics and other related areas” (p. vii). His conclusions about how parents intervene with their children’s media are intertwined with how families, use, enjoy, tell stories about, judge the reality

of, identify with, and communicate about media, emphasizing that parents are constantly negotiating media with children.

Media literacy from a cultural studies perspective grew from educators in Great Britain who were less reactionary but more cautious about the rise in media technologies (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson developed cultural studies as an “attempt to preserve working-class culture against onslaughts of mass culture produced by the culture industries” (Kellner & Durham, 2006, p. xxv). Williams and Hoggart were involved in working-class education, moving conceptualizations of literacy to be broadened beyond “high culture” works to include works from mass popular culture, where cultural studies was seen as a tool for social change (Kellner & Durham, 2006). Len Masterman (1980) furthered Hoggart’s critical studies ideas into Screen Theory, where he called for the empowerment of students through a demystification of popular texts. Drawing on semiological analysis, “students were urged to put aside their subjective responses and pleasures, and to engage in systematic forms of analysis which would expose the ‘hidden’ ideologies of media—and thereby ‘liberate’ themselves from their influence” (Buckingham, 2003, p. 9).

In Great Britain, media literacy was first housed in English departments and media deconstruction drew from literary analysis, ideological analysis, and semiotic analysis, which encouraged students to question media messages. The intersection of literary analysis and popular culture were film texts, and that is how the British Film Institute became involved in media literacy education efforts. Curriculum that developed cultural criticism and included film studies and visual literacy skills were developed: “Recognizing the importance of film and television as building blocks of youth, these

initiatives engaged through desire rather than condemn children's taste as vulgar and unsophisticated" (Kline, Stewart & Murphy, 2006, p. 134). However, the goal was not just to emphasize appreciation of media, but to teach children to analyze representations and ideologies as a form of liberation (Buckingham, 2005).

In the United States, Communication departments were one of the first disciplines in the academy to embody the work of British Cultural Studies (Grossberg, 1993), thus, in the U.S. media literacy is aligned more with communication departments rather than English departments, as in the U.K. However, as noted previously, the larger influence of media effects theory within U.S. communication departments saw media literacy as risk prevention tool.

It is important to note that not all works in cultural studies tend to be celebratory. Scholarship, such as British cultural studies which was influenced by Marxism, and that sought to critique of the culture industry, can be considered "protectionist" in that it aimed to "protect" people by becoming aware of ideology and cultural hegemony. The aspects of cultural studies considered here lean towards the American version of cultural studies, which drew out of a concern with understanding meaning-making and practices of everyday life, including focusing on liberatory aspects such as fandom (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007).

*Understanding of popular culture and audience.*

From the description above, one can see areas of contention between media effects and cultural studies perspectives, and two are worth mentioning here: popular culture and audience. The history of cultural studies is rooted in an interest in popular culture, and a value of working class culture. As a broad statement (without recognizing

there are different definitions of popular culture within cultural studies), this paradigm views mass media popular culture in a celebratory manner, in what Storey (2006) labels, “culture which is widely favored or well liked by many people” (p. 4). Cultural studies researchers are not interested in judging the worthiness of media texts, but rather valuing appreciation and pleasure of media, and understanding how audiences create and negotiate meanings of these texts.

It is important to note that these two distinctions of culture reflect different values associated with social class, and fears of social tastes of working class culture (Storey, 2006; Wartella & Reeves, 2003). Researchers in the cultural studies paradigm have largely viewed the audience as active negotiators of media messages; selecting, manipulating, and creating meaning, and appreciating the pleasures of media consumption. The notions of active audience theory and reception studies include an “active viewer” that emphasizes the role of the audience in bringing meaning to a text and relating it to their own lives and identities. However, a weakness in conceptualizing the audience as active negotiators dismisses years of media effects research, which have shown limited effects. What cultural studies researchers who look at media in the lives of families fail to ask (but are not particularly interested in, either) is the different types of mediation that can be tested, measured, and predicted in families, and who does them and why, to whom, and to what effect. Another criticism is that cultural studies, which seeks to unmask media ideology and a socially constructed system that may reinforce hegemony, may be problematic if parents or teachers approach the child audience as the “hero—who as all the right answers and right readings” of a texts (Hobbs, 2008, p. 9).

To bring it all together, in the media effects paradigm, the audience is seen to have little agency and the approach is media-centered (rather than audience-centered), and this ignores the rich complexity of family communication and media use into summative variables. In the cultural studies paradigm, the audience is seen to have agency and the approach is audience-centered (rather than focusing on media as influence). Power, Kubey, and Kiousis (2002) argue for a reconceptualization of audience, suggesting that combining paradigms can give rise to integration and synthesis that will be productive in future theorizing and research of audiences, and the many issues raised by the debate over activity and passivity. ` also sums up this need for convergence between these two paradigms: “The important question concerns the interrelation between the two: how do people actively make sense of structured texts and events; how do texts guide and restrict interpretations” (p. 23). Peters (1993) notes that both approaches are interested in “how to understand the possibilities for organized social action in that strange collectivity we have learned to call the audience” (p. 135).

This study asserts that it is important to consider the usefulness and the intersections of protectionist and empowerment approaches when studying parents, children, and media. The differences between the paradigms of media effects and cultural studies has been described as “a very strange war; armed camps wearing ill-fitting uniforms with odd labels” (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991, p. 235). This scene, too, describes those who study media literacy and parents—the “preparationist progressives and protectionist critics” (Kline, Stewart & Murphy, 2006, p. 137). Yet, their underlying concerns remain the same: asking questions about the media we consume and create, and figuring out ways that parents can both protect and empower

their children. In looking at the genealogy of communication studies, Peters (1993) notes that “Once you shift your gaze from the proclamations of these scholars to their research practices, you find that Katz is as interested in meaning as Carey, Carey as interested in power as Hall, and Hall as interested in effects as Katz. Here empirical research can include textual criticism, humanistic studies can include political-economic analysis, and critical approaches can include counting and tabulation” (p. 135).

Likewise, media literacy struggles to search for common ground between protectionist and empowerment approaches. Kubey (2003) states:

There needs to be more give on both sides, and this is not readily brought about. Some protectionists can see little or no value in television or film art. And there are some cultural studies in media educators who are ideologically dug in, finding any notion of inoculatory goals to be at complete odds with the very theoretical and ideological underpinning of their pedagogy. (p. 367)

Critical inquiry is the core principle said to unite the field of media literacy, where open, reflective, and critical questioning toward media messages and creations is of central importance (Hobbs, 1998). As Kubey does not have much hope for a compromise on both sides, he also adds that critical autonomy is the central principle to media literacy, where the goal is “for each individual to develop his or her own increasingly sophisticated and complex responses to and interpretations of media” (p. 368). Jenkins (2006), in embedding the tradition of critical inquiry into new media literacies, argues that an inclusion of individuals’ active participation needs to be included:

An integrated approach to media pedagogy founded on exercises that introduce youth to core technical skills and cultural competencies, exemplars that teach youth to critically analyze existing media texts, expressions that encourage youth to create new media content, and ethics that encourage youth to critically reflect on the consequences of their own choices as media makers. (p. 59)



### *Parent Media Literacy Education*

Little scholarly research has examined the effectiveness of media literacy education programs for parents, and no known studies have examined which approaches to media literacy education are effective in helping parents manage and be engaged in their children's Internet use. Overall, media literacy scholars, who largely focus on K-12 school or after school settings, have not greatly pursued research examining parents and media literacy education. However, the majority of media consumption by youth occurs in the home, and parents can help shape their children's understandings of the value, use, and enjoyment of media (Browne, 1999).

A small sample of studies have explored media literacy education in the home. Marsh & Thompson's (2001) study of school-home media literacy with preschoolers and Desmond's (1996) study of first and second graders and their parents had similar findings. Both studies found an impact of media literacy education on initiating parent-child conversations about media, as well as increasing children's literacy skills by incorporating popular culture of children's media into traditional home literacy activities.

An example of a successful media literacy education program is by the British Film Institute Primary Education Working Group (2003), who offered a "media box" to parents—a box of media-related activities parents could take home and do with their for young children. Each media box contained a board game, role play items, puppets, a book, recipes, interactive writing suggestions, play dough for making models, and a video that would be the stimulus for all of the activities. The box was passed around weekly to parents by nursery school staff. This was in conjunction with home visits by staff, and parents keeping a media diary of what media their children watched.

The “media box” was a success, and parents noted that their familiarity with the characters their children knew helped to talk about them. At the same time, educators in the nursery school relied on the parents’ diaries to determine what media kids consumed and what forms of literacy they were using so they could customize classroom lessons accordingly.

Although there are many organizations that have advocated for media literacy in schools, few have offered comprehensive parent media literacy education programs and outreach. No known research has examined the effectiveness of these programs or public service campaigns in changing parental mediation behaviors, media literacy practices, or family media habits. Media literacy education programs for parents in the U.S. have largely been through national initiatives designed to promote awareness about television viewing. Although there are several parent media literacy education programs, and the point here is not to provide an exhaustive review of these programs, rather, the following programs have been selected to showcase initiatives that have rolled out nationally and offered free resources and materials to parents, schools and community centers. The programs vary in protectionist or empowerment approach, depending on the purposes and politics of the organizations that created them, and the campaigns being run.

Before covering three prominent parent media literacy education programs, it is important to note that there are an overabundance of websites, books, and resources for parents that promote Internet safety, responsibility, and the importance of protecting children’s privacy<sup>5</sup>. Most organizations who have provided parent Internet education

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, popular press books regarding Internet safety include Gregory Smith’s *How to Protect your Children on the Internet: A Road Map for Parents and Teachers* (2007), Larry Magid and Anne Collier’s *MySpace Unraveled: A Parent’s Guide to Teen Social Networking* (2006), or Donna Basts’s *Teens and*

programs are protectionist in tone due to their focus on safety and risk reduction—from strangers, predators/stalkers, abduction, inappropriate, violent, or sexual content, harassment and bullying, computer viruses, and scams. Examples of the top organizations include: Wired Safety ([www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)), which provides information on cybercrime, cyberlaw, and cybersafety; Netsmartz ([www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)), who is promoted by the National Center for Missing and Exploited children; iSafe ([www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)), who have online training that “provide parents with tools to protect their kids/teens and family online”; and the Internet Safety Coalition (<http://www.ikeepSAFE.org>), who advocate that parents “keep current, keep communicating, and keep checking” to keep their children safe online. The following parent media literacy education programs were chosen for review because they show a sample of the types of approaches to parental media literacy education. All of these programs were national in reach: the first program was developed by the cable industry, the second was created by a children’s health organization, and the last program was by an non-partisan nonprofit organization.

#### *Family and Community Critical Viewing Project*

One of the first national initiatives to promote media literacy to parents and families was launched in 1994. The Family and Community Critical Viewing Project, a joint initiative between the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Cable in the Classroom, and The National Cable TV Association, promoted responsible and critical television viewing. This coalition produced awareness through education and outreach,

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*Computers ... What's a Parent to Do?* (2007). There are also dozens of Internet filtering, blocking, and monitoring software tools available to parents, such as Net Nanny ([www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com)), Safe Eyes ([www.Internetsafety.com](http://www.Internetsafety.com)), and Cyber Sitter ([www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com))

including free critical viewing guide such as the “Taking Charge of Your TV” pamphlet. A short video hosted by Rosie O’Donnell explains four fundamental critical viewing techniques for families: 1) TV Isn’t real, 2) People—especially kids—see the same shows differently, 3) Television violence has many forms, and 4) TV shows exist to make money. This initiative spawned “Tune In to Kids and Family week,” held in 1997 and 1998 to showcase family programming and how it can strengthen family relationships through communication (not to mention show the cable industry that it can be profitable) (Albada, 2006). The National Critical Viewing Day was held in 1998 and 1999, which was promoted by public service spots from Hillary Rodham Clinton and National PTA President Lois Jean White. In subsequent years, this day turned into the week long event, *Take Charge of Your TV week*<sup>6</sup>, held every October (“TV tips,” 2000). This week is designed to promote awareness and provide media literacy and critical viewing resources for families and organizations to make TV viewing a positive and enriching experience, as well as become aware of the impact of television violence and commercialism on children. Cable leaders, PTA members, and educators have been trained throughout the years to present critical viewing workshops across the country.

Since 1994, Cable in the Classroom, the National PTA, and the cable industry have collaborated to provide updated information and resources to help promote critical viewing with families (Cable in the Classroom, 2009). In 2004, the National PTA and Cable in the Classroom released a guide to help families develop a media plan to take

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<sup>6</sup> Take Charge of Your TV Week is different from TV Turnoff Week. TV Turnoff Week (see <http://www.tvturnoff.org/>) is sponsored by the Center for Screen Time Awareness. Although this event promotes an awareness of time spent viewing television and the impact it has on one’s life, the event does not promote media literacy or critical viewing, but aims “to reduce screen-time and encourage real experiences with real people in real time.” It is promoted twice a year, in April and September.

control of their TV viewing. The plan included the following six steps for parents: 1) Identify your current family media practices, 2) Consider the unique stages and needs of your children; 3) Educate yourself about the children's media landscape; 4) Select media for your family with purpose; 5) Encourage active, creative, and open-ended use of media; and 6) Teach your children media literacy skills (American Institutes for Research, 2004, p. 4).

In 2007, the National Cable Television Association and Cable in the Classroom launched "Point Smart, Click Safe" (<http://www.pointsmartclicksafe.org/flash.html>), an extension of the "Cable Puts You in Control" initiative (<http://controlyourtv.org>). This online educational resource for parents addresses Internet safety, digital ethics, and media literacy. For parents to guide their children's Internet use, this campaign advocates "Control, Education, and Choice," including a wide variety of tips and resources that fall into protectionist and empowerment categories.

Although the Family and Community Critical Viewing Project is one of the longest-established parent media literacy education campaigns in the United States, some may criticize the underlying motives of this program because it was created and funded by the cable industry. The materials are not "anti-media" in tone, in fact, they encourage parents to promote responsible media use. The program avoids recommendations that encourage limiting media use or addressing negative health effects.

### *Media Matters Campaign*

In 1997, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) launched the "Media Matters" campaign to help pediatricians, parents, and children become more aware of the influence media have on child and adolescent health (American Academy of Pediatrics,

n.d.). The campaign encourages pediatricians to include media literacy education in child checkups, and educate parents about media balance and media effects. The Committee on Public Education of the American Academy of Pediatrics states that exposure to mass media presents both health risks and benefits for children and adolescents (Hogan & Bar-on, 1999). They believe that media literacy education has the potential to reduce harmful effects, and recommend that pediatricians become educated about the public health risks of media exposure. Pediatricians have the responsibility to incorporate questions about media use in routine visits, and encourage parents to fill out a “media history” form to examine their family media use habits.

Due to the AAP’s perception of media as a health risk and their goals of prevention, many recommendations in this campaign are protectionist in tone and emphasize lowering overall exposure, including carefully selecting TV programs, limiting media time and choices, emphasizing alternative activities, and creating an “electronic media-free” environment in children’s bedrooms (Hogan & Bar-on, 1999). The AAP offer recommendations to pediatricians, health care providers, and parents. They are known (and criticized) for recommending specific limits, such as urging physicians to recommend that parents “limit children’s total media time (with entertainment media) to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming per day,” “discourage television viewing for children younger than two years old, and encourage more interactive activities that will promote proper brain development” (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, 2001, p. 424). However, they also advocate co-viewing and discussion; critical viewing skills; using television as a launching point to discuss health issues such as violence, sex, and drugs; choosing high-

quality programs; encouraging the children's media industry to offer quality programming; and supporting media literacy education programs. But the overall approach of the AAP, being pediatricians, is one of protectionism<sup>7</sup>.

### *Common Sense Media*

Common Sense Media is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that provides resources for parents on children's media<sup>89</sup>. Common Sense Media helps parents choose media that is right for their children, as they note, "we provide trustworthy information and tools, as well as an independent forum, so that families can have a choice and a voice about the media they consume" (Common Sense Media, 2009). They are known for their independent media ratings system, which includes ratings and reviews for parents on age and content appropriateness for children. They also offer articles and advice for parents on their website. In 2005, they launched *Raising Media Savvy Kids: A Common Sense Toolkit*. This toolkit provided educators who wanted to start a parent media literacy education program with a basic starter kit. In 2008, they redesigned the toolkit and launched the *Common Sense Schools Parent Media Education Program*. This parent program, to be delivered through schools, was more comprehensive in scope. It used a developmental "age and stage" approach, dividing up media literacy issues by elementary, middle, and high school. It also divided issues by topic (sex, violence, commercialism, etc.) and entertainment type (Internet, TV, movies, video games, books, etc.). The program is a good example of one that offers both protectionist and

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<sup>7</sup> The AAP recommends that parents limit children's screen time: "Children and teens should engage with entertainment media for no more than one or two hours per day, and that should be high-quality content. It is important for kids to spend time on outdoor play, reading, hobbies, and using their imaginations in free play" (AAP, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> See Common Sense Media's website at [www.commonsense.org](http://www.commonsense.org)

empowerment recommendations to parents, from suggesting that media not be placed in children's bedrooms to recommending parents and children share and enjoy quality media together.

### *Synthesis of Protectionist and Empowerment Approaches*

In order to synthesize the similarities and differences between protectionist and empowerment approaches, based on an analysis of the media literacy literature and parent media literacy education programs, the following goals of each approach have been deduced, as listed in Table 2.1. These goals are specific to media literacy education about the Internet. Divided by protectionist or empowerment categories, the table lists the assumptions about children, goals, and recommended strategies to parents. This table was used to develop the survey for the study, which will be explained in the methods section.

Based on the previous literature review, is important to explore how parents are affected by media literacy education programs, and whether it makes positive change in protecting and empowering kids, particularly on the Internet. Hobbs (1998) argues that increased efforts in media literacy across a wide variety of settings is needed, and that in light of the challenges of making change with public education, the best sites to implement media literacy education may be in “after-school programs, community-based organizations, and at home with parental guidance” (p. 24). Furthermore, she notes that “several educators have pointed out the need for media literacy skills to be developed in the home by parents” (Hobbs, p. 23). With the increased presence of the Internet in home life, parent media literacy education is more important than ever.



Table 2.1

*Themes of Protectionism and Empowerment for Internet Mediation*

	<b>PROTECTIONIST</b>	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>
<b>Assumptions</b>	<p>Child is vulnerable</p> <p>Child needs protection</p> <p>Child needs rules</p> <p>Child should not see inappropriate content (i.e. violence, pornography, etc.)</p> <p>Child should be restricted to communicating with others online</p> <p>Parent knows what's best for child and should serve as authority</p>	<p>Child can make informed decisions</p> <p>Enjoyment of Internet is important</p> <p>Children may be media savvy, but not necessarily media literate</p> <p>Children can self-regulate from inappropriate content or activities</p> <p>There are positive benefits to social media and communicating with others online</p> <p>Parents should serve as guides, not authority</p>
<b>Goals</b>	<p>To keep child safe and avoid risk</p> <p>To have child make healthy decisions</p> <p>To have child follow rules limiting time and content</p>	<p>To use age-appropriate websites</p> <p>To enjoy uses of the Internet</p> <p>To encourage creativity and self-expression</p> <p>To develop child's critical thinking and inquiry skills about media</p>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Rules/restriction</p> <p>Filtering, blocking, monitoring</p> <p>Awareness about screen time</p> <p>Questions and discussion for the goal of safety</p>	<p>Recommending appropriate websites</p> <p>Co-surfing</p> <p>Encouraging creative and educational uses of the Internet</p> <p>Communicating with child using digital media (i.e., IM, texting, social media)</p> <p>Questions and discussion for the goal of engagement and critical inquiry</p>

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

This study used a mixed method design of an online survey of 236 parents and phone interviews with 40 parents or preteens aged 9-12. This section describes the research design and provides an explanation of data collection and data analysis procedures. Several subsections are included to describe the phases of research. The data collection section includes an explanation of the treatment, population sample and recruitment, and description of survey and interview measures. The data analysis section includes a description of survey analysis through SPSS, and interview analysis through grounded theory. Lastly, a breakdown of the phases of research is explained.

Using a mixed-method design of quantitative and qualitative methods (survey and interview) allows a more comprehensive understanding of the Internet mediation strategies of parents of preteens. Although these two methods of analysis align with different theoretical foundations, combining quantitative and qualitative data helped to better understand this under-researched issue. Media literacy scholars call for quantitative research in order to generalize (Potter, 2004), but it is also important to gather an understanding of the personal voices, experiences, and stories of parents. For this study, a mixed methods design was used to help increase generalizability and also provide deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Halloran, 1998; Shank, 2006).

#### Data Collection

This study asked parents of pre-teen children about various strategies they use in managing children's Internet use, their level of confidence in enacting these strategies, their perceptions about the effectiveness and usefulness of the strategies, and their

attitudes about children's use of the Internet. The survey was first administered, followed by the interview to explore these concepts in depth by asking participants additional questions and expanding on their responses to the survey.

#### *Population Sample and Recruitment*

A national online survey was conducted with parents. Narrowing down to this population helped increase the transferability and generalizability of findings. The target age of parent participants was between the ages of 35 to 50; a generation that grew up with television but not the Internet.

Why is it important to examine parents of preteens? Preteens differ from younger children and from teens because their online behaviors are influenced by their prepubescent life stage. First of all, preteens are the heaviest media users of kids aged 8-18 (Roberts et al., 2005 & Rideout et al., 2010). Most preteens are starting to communicate with friends (and strangers) on social networking sites, play games (oftentimes in virtual worlds with others), and experiment with self-representation and identity presentation (Turkle, 1995). They seek information on topics related to their interests, and to the curiosity of their developmental stage (e.g., sex, relationships, drugs, alcohol), Preteens also are more likely to take risks online, visit new places, and communicate in new ways (Turkle, 1995). In addition, preteens use the computer and Internet increasingly for homework and school compared to younger children. As mentioned in the literature review, preteens are increasingly using the computer in private spaces (bedroom) rather than in the living room or social spaces of the home where parents can watch over them. Furthermore, the increase of laptops and wireless mobile devices in families makes it more difficult for parents to monitor their preteens' Internet

use (Duerager and Livingstone (2012). Preteens increasingly seek independence from their parents, yet they are not quite old enough to be on their own. Most preteens are still confined to the home much of the time, and many parents—fearful of letting their children play on the street or in the neighborhood—are more comfortable having their children entertained by media within the confines of home (Jenkins, 1998). In addition, parents still show signs of engagement in their preteen’s online lives, as preteens report having more rules than teens (Roberts et al., 2005). For these reasons, it is important to examine parents of preteen children.

The majority of the target population was accessed through Common Sense Media, who solicited respondents from their subscribers in May of 2009. Common Sense Media featured the survey in a “Moms on Media” e-newsletter (800 subscribers), a flash email to Moms on Media subscribers, as shown in Figure 3.1, and featured the survey in their weekly e-newsletter on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009, which reaches 200,000 subscribers.


In addition, participants were recruited through my own social networks (e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and Cafemom) and by word of mouth. A prize drawing featuring ten parent media literacy education books was offered as an incentive for participants to complete the survey.<sup>10</sup> Those who responded to the online survey followed a series of steps. First, there was a screening question that asked participants if they are parents of a 9-12 year old child. If they answered “yes,” they moved forward to the next screen. If they selected “no,” they were directed to a page that thanked them for their interest,

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<sup>10</sup> After all survey data was collected, a random drawing was held and 10 survey participants were selected to receive incentives. Five participants received *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* by Urs Gasser and John Palfrey (2008), and five received *Totally Wired: What Teens and Tweens are Really Doing Online* by Anastasia Goodstein (2007).

M.O.M.s --

You tell us regularly about the constant challenges that you face managing your kids' Internet use. Researchers who study media and families are trying to understand these challenges; having a better understanding of parents' perspectives will help provide you with useful resources.



**We're inviting you to participate in a study that explores how parents guide their children's use of the Internet.** The survey is being conducted by Dr. Renee Hobbs and doctoral candidate Kelly Mendoza in the [Media Education Lab](#) at Temple University. The survey is for parents who have a child aged 9-12 who uses the Internet at home.

At the end of the [survey](#) you'll have the chance to enter a drawing to win one of two outstanding books either: *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (2008) by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, or *Totally Wired: What Teens and Tweens are Really Doing Online* by Anastasia Goodstein.

This research will help Common Sense Media tailor parenting advice to your family. We'll share the results of this study with you in the fall.

Thank you,  
Moms on Media

[CommonSenseMedia.org](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Donate](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)

Figure 3.1. Email Sent to Solicit Respondents for Survey

but explained their disqualification from the study. This screening question lessened the chance of respondents who did not fit the target population. Once participants clicked “yes,” they saw an orientation page that described the study and provided an online consent form. When participants finished their survey, they were asked to voluntarily provide a name and email address to receive a chance to win the gift incentive. At this point, participants were asked to indicate: 1) whether they are interested in participating in a phone interview, and 2) whether they are interested in hearing about the results of the

study<sup>11</sup>. Those who were interested in the interview were contacted during the interview phase of research. This survey took participants approximately 20 minutes to complete. A statistical power analysis reveals a population of at least 200 respondents was needed to make accurate and reliable statistical judgments.

### *Development of the Survey Instrument*

Based on the goals of this study, a two-step process was used to develop the strategies to be measured in the survey instrument. Step one was to identify the protectionist and empowerment parental Internet mediation themes, and step two involved having media literacy experts review the list.

First, the types of Internet mediation strategies that were measured were selected in two ways. I first drew from Table 2.1, *Themes of Protectionism and Empowerment for Internet Mediation*, to develop a list of protectionist and empowerment media literacy strategies for Internet mediation. I also looked at Internet media literacy education advice for parents on the websites of ten different organizations.<sup>12</sup> These websites were chosen because they vary in tone from protectionist to empowerment, and because most are well-established organizations with a strong outreach and branding presence.

Second, this list of protectionist-empowerment strategies was shared with and reviewed by a team of ten media literacy education experts to get their opinion on what the top strategies on the list should be, and whether they fall under the empowerment or protectionist paradigm. This panel included ten media literacy experts who are familiar with protectionism, empowerment, and parental mediation. After the expert review, the

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<sup>11</sup> Those who are interested in the aims and results of the study may experience slight psychological distress once they discover the purpose of the study. They could feel slightly deceived.

<sup>12</sup> A list of these organizations can be found in Appendix A.

list was finalized into 17 strategies: 8 protectionist and 9 empowerment strategies, as listed in Table 3.1. This list of strategies is used several times in the survey to measure

Table 3.1

*List of Protectionist and Empowerment Strategies*

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<b>Protectionist Strategies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have rules about how long they can be online.</li> <li>Have rules about what websites they can visit.</li> <li>Use filtering software/tools that block access to certain websites.</li> <li>Use monitoring software/tools to track my child's online activity.</li> <li>Have my child use the Internet where I can see him/her.</li> <li>Limit who they can talk to online (social networking, chat, instant messaging, etc.)</li> <li>Show my child how to keep information private (or have them show me).</li> <li>Have my child balance their online activities with other non-technology activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Empowerment Strategies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help them understand the difference between advertisements and website content.</li> <li>Ask questions to help them understand the author and purpose of different websites.</li> <li>"Co-surf" online with my child.</li> <li>Suggest developmentally appropriate websites to my child.</li> <li>Communicate with my child using online technology (Instant messaging, chat, comment on their profile or blog, as a player in a game, etc.)</li> <li>Have them describe why they like their favorite websites.</li> <li>Encourage my child to create online content in positive, enriching ways (websites, videos, music, profile pages, pictures, etc.)</li> <li>Encourage my child to use websites for civic participation and activism.</li> <li>Encourage my child to use websites to extend learning about school-related topics.</li> </ul>

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how often parents use them, how confident they feel using them, and how effective they believe the strategies to be.

The survey was designed for the purpose of exploring the relationships between protectionist and empowerment approaches to Internet mediation behavior, attitudes, and confidence. The survey questions were reviewed by the same expert panel and assessed for content validity to evaluate whether the measures represent all facets of a concept,

and face validity for judgment that an operational definition appears to measure the concept it intends to measure. The survey was revised according to feedback from the expert group (Singleton & Straits, 2005). In addition, construct validation was used to determine whether scores on the measures are related in logical ways (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). For instance, it was expected that negative attitude about children's use of the Internet would be related to using protectionist mediation strategies. It was also expected that a high confidence level would correlate with an overall higher use of empowerment mediation strategies. Unusual or inconsistent correlation was examined and certain constructs rewritten and reconsidered. The final survey reflects the outcome of these validity checks.

### *Survey Measures*

The survey<sup>13</sup> measured parents' responses to five variables: 1) use of Internet mediation strategies; 2) confidence in enacting empowerment and protectionist strategies; 3) perceived effectiveness of strategies; and 4) attitudes about children's use of the Internet, and 5) a media behavior variable, which clusters together behavior, attitudes, and self-reported strategies into a protectionist-empowerment score for respondents. Variable 1 is affective (measuring behavior), and variables two, three, and four are attitudinal (measuring attitudes and feelings), and variable five is a combination of attitudes and behavior. Each variable relates to each of the four research questions guiding this study.

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<sup>13</sup> See the survey instrument in Appendix B.



*Internet Mediation.*

This variable was measured by asking participants about the frequency of their use of Internet mediation strategies, as listed in Figure 3.2. A frequency scale measured how often participants report using each of the behaviors on a scale of never (1) to always (4). Measuring frequency follows Eastin et al.'s (2006), who used a similar scale to measure parental Internet mediation. Measuring frequency is important because just measuring whether or not a parent has used a strategy (even once) may not provide an accurate description of routine behavior. Parents were also asked to check off from a list of 18 topics they might have talked with their child about, as shown in Table 3.2. This was another way to measure their engagement.

Table 3.2

*Topics Parents Might Discuss with Children*

Online advertising	Shopping online
Cyberbullying	Instant messaging
Uploading/posting personal photos and videos	How to search safely
Digital footprint	What's okay and not okay to post
Keeping information private	Sexual predators
Netiquette (Internet etiquette/behavior)	Determining accurate from inaccurate information
Spam, spyware, and viruses	Chat rooms
Online addiction	Inappropriate/adult content (pornography, violence, etc.)
Illegal file downloading/sharing	Filling out sweepstakes or other forms that ask for personal/contact information

One would expect that a highly engaged parent would talk about more topics with their child than a less engaged parent. And, one would expect that the kinds of topics parents discuss would relate to their protectionist or empowerment leanings. For instance, parents who engage in protectionist strategies might be more likely to talk about Internet

predators and Internet addiction, and empowerment parents might be more likely to talk about online advertising and netiquette.

*Confidence.*

Parents were asked to identify confidence level in enacting empowerment and protectionist strategies (the same list of strategies shown in Table 3.1) on a four-point scale from “not at all confident” (1) to “very confident” (4). Although researchers have examined parental computer and Internet aptitude (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), no known study has explored parents’ feelings of confidence in mediation or using media literacy strategies.

*Effectiveness.*

Parent’s feelings about whether empowerment and protectionist strategies are effective or ineffective in guiding their children’s use of the Internet was measured through a ranking of the 17 empowerment and protectionist Internet mediation strategies in Table 3.1. Respondents were asked to mark an “A” for their top three choices of “most useful” strategies, and rank an “F” to the bottom three choices they think are “least useful.” (The analogy was to grading: that an A would be the best and an F would be the worst). They did not rank all of the strategies, just the top three and bottom three.

*Attitudes.*

Parents’ attitudes about the Internet were measured by reacting to a series of twelve statements about the Internet. Participants responded to each statement by selecting from a four-point scale, with 1 being strongly agree, and 4 as strongly disagree. Table 3.3 shows four attitudes of which the statements measured, including: worry for children’s safety online (statements 1-3), feeling uncomfortable with using and keeping

up with technology (statements 4-6), feeling trust in the child (7-9), and a belief that the Internet is overall a good place for their children (statements 10-12). This means that the closer to 1 (strongly agree) statements 1-6 were, the higher the worry/concern of the parent. However, note that for statements 7-12, the closer to 1 (strongly agree) the statements were, the higher positive outlook of parents about the benefits of the Internet and trust of their child's use of the Internet. But on statements 1-6, the closer to 1, the more negative outlook a parent had.

Table 3.3

*Attitude Statements about the Internet and Children*

Worry	1	When my child is online I get anxious for his/her safety.
	2	I worry that my child will be approached by an Internet predator.
	3	I worry that my child will be exposed to harmful content.
Uncomfortable	4	I feel like I can't keep up with what my child does online.
	5	I feel my child knows more about computers and the Internet than I do.
	6	I am uncomfortable learning how to use new technologies.
Trust Child	7	I believe tracking children's Internet activity – such as using filtering/monitoring software – shows that you don't trust them.
	8	I trust that my child will be safe and responsible online.
	9	I believe my child will make wise decisions when he or she is online.
Good Place	10	The Internet helps my child express him/herself and be creative.
	11	The Internet has helped my child with his/her schoolwork.
	12	The Internet is a good place for my child to socialize with friends.

Note that the “trust child” and “good place” statements are worded positively, whereas the “worry” and “uncomfortable” statements are worded negatively. This wording was

purposeful for the survey design, as I wanted to capture an authentic attitude and decrease the possibilities of social desirability bias and respondent fatigue.

In addition to measuring these variables, additional survey questions measured other significant information. For example, demographic information was collected, including participant age, age of their preteen child (and other children), education level, income level, marital status, work status, and types of devices their preteen used to access the Internet at home. These demographic questions were used to get an understanding of the sample population, and the additional questions helped to answer the research questions.

#### *Post-Survey Interview*

Forty respondents participated in a phone interview. I originally aimed for twenty, but due to an overwhelming amount of volunteers, I decided to double the original estimate since I did not want to turn away volunteers. Participants were selected as a convenience sample of volunteers who agreed, at the end of the survey, that they were interested in participating in a phone interview and provided their contact information. The participant volunteers were contacted (most by email) and provided more information about the study, and if they wanted to move forward, a phone interview was scheduled. I conducted all interviews over the phone, each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, with the shortest being 22 minutes and the longest being 1 hour 15 minutes. Prior to each interview, I looked at the participants' responses to the online survey in order to help guide and customize some of the interview questions based on patterns I noticed.

A semi-structured format was used for the interview so that I could explore the research questions and to ask the respondent to elaborate on the responses they provided in the survey<sup>14</sup>. Prior to beginning of the interview, I explained to participants' their rights under the University's Internal Review Board, and answered any questions. I then asked participants for their consent<sup>15</sup> and permission to record<sup>16</sup> the phone call. The interview was then conducted, first by asking general questions about their background and media in their household in order to "warm up" and gain rapport with the participant, and then by getting into questions about protectionist and empowerment strategies and occasionally pointing specifically to their responses in the survey.

Interviewing was a beneficial method for this study for several reasons. First of all, interviewing participants after a survey is typical when researchers want to learn more from respondents about their questionnaire answers, and also to help verify the findings in the survey (Frey et al., 2000). A semi-structured interview allowed me flexibility if I, or a participant, wanted to elaborate on an issue, but also allowed me to keep consistency throughout the interviews. In addition, using semi-structured interviews provided a deeper exploration of opinions, values, and feelings of the respondents (Kvale, 1996), where I was able to control the line of questioning and probe for more information (Creswell, 2003). Interviews allow me to unobtrusively record and later transcribe the conversations to closely analyze what was said. I was also able to take notes without the participant knowing, and thus, affecting their comfort level or self-consciousness. Phone

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<sup>14</sup> See the Interview Guide in Appendix C.

<sup>15</sup> There were no participants who refused to provide consent.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews were recorded using speakerphone and a digital recorder.

interviews allowed me to access to parents across the country, at a time that is convenient for them, from the comfort of their home.

Interviewing is a good method to help understand the experiences of women, in particular, since most respondents to the survey and interviews were mothers<sup>17</sup>.

Anderson and Jack (1998) note that oral interviews “are particularly valuable for uncovering women’s perspectives” and Fontana and Frey (1994) claim, “if we want to know how women feel about their lives, then we have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities” (p. 161).

There are limits, however, to interviewing. Interviews require participants to report on experiences and feelings that have happened in the past, the researcher’s presence may bias responses, and people have different levels of articulateness and perspective—these factors can be seen as drawbacks (Creswell, 2003). Phone interviews didn’t allow me to observe nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions or gestures. On the other hand, phone interviews provided vocal cues, such as tone, volume, and emphasis, which can provide inferences about the dialogue.

Once the interviews were complete, they were transcribed. The transcripts were then read, coded, and analyzed, along with notes taken during the interview. All data, surveys and interviews, were kept anonymous, private, and secure<sup>18</sup>. No one other than me and my dissertation chairperson had access to access the data.

### *Challenges with Data Collection*

One challenge with examining parents’ attitudes, values, and behaviors with

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<sup>17</sup> Although I could not predict before beginning the study that most of the respondents would be women, I suspected that this would be the case.

<sup>18</sup> Data was kept secure in two ways: by locking physical data (paper transcripts, for instance) in a file; and by locking electronic data (interviews and SPSS files) using password protection.

Internet mediation is social desirability bias. I was aware of this issue and used strategies to attempt to lower the occurrence of social desirability bias.

### *Social Desirability Bias*

Social desirability bias is “the tendency on behalf of the subjects to deny socially undesirable traits and to claim socially desirable ones, and the tendency to say things which place the speaker in a favourable light” (Nederhof, 1985, p. 264), or to hide something from the interviewer because it is not “socially desirable” to share it (Fontana & Frey, 1994). In exploring how media is used in the home and parents’ Internet mediation strategies with preteens, socially desirable responses might have occurred. Every parent wants to be viewed as a good parent, so it is natural that parents would want to present themselves as responsible, competent, and wise. If parents did things like use the computer as a babysitter, allowed their children to go online unsupervised, or if they just weren’t that involved in their preteens’ online life, they might have felt that it was socially undesirable to share their honest attitudes or behavior, and thus presented themselves in a better light (either knowingly or unknowingly).

Social desirability in research with parental mediation is a common challenge. In surveying and interviewing parents and their children (ages 4-7) to explore the relationship between television viewing, parental involvement, and literacy development, Browne (1999) found that many parents were embarrassed to give their survey back or to answer questions. Browne speculates that this is because they did not want to be criticized as “bad parents” for using television as a babysitter (it was found that indeed, many used it as a babysitter). Fujioka and Austin (2003) found that parents may underestimate their endorsement of television messages because it may not be seen as

socially desirable. Buckingham's (1993) interviews and discussion groups with diverse parents of children aged seven to twelve found that most parents had an "anti-television" stance and "saw it as their responsibility to restrict and regulate their children's viewing, although in some cases they admitted that they were not wholly successful in doing so" (p. 105). Buckingham also found a social desirability bias in parents' self-reports, as parents reported restrictive behavior to fit a social desirability of a good, responsible parent—despite the fact that their children report they receive less restriction than parents reported, and claimed they often could easily resist and get around their parents' restrictions.

#### *Decreasing social desirability bias*

In order to attempt to lessen social desirability bias, I used several strategies. One strategy was to design the survey and interview questions to be worded sensitively and carefully. I ordered the questions from general to specific (to increase the comfort of the participant), asked the same question in different ways, and asked similar questions at different times in the interview to approach information that might have a social desirability bias. I also used hypothetical scenarios and examples so that the participant could respond to the example, without making it a personal example. For instance, when asking about accessing inappropriate content, I provided the example of "Some parents have had issues with their children accessing inappropriate content online, for instance, sexual or pornographic material. What would you do if your child accessed inappropriate content?" This example would often spark parents to talk about experiences that have happened with their child accessing something inappropriate, define what kinds of things



they feel are inappropriate (beyond pornography), or at least share their values about this issue.

A second way I tried to decrease social desirability bias was to use my position as both an insider and outsider. I tried to use my position as an outsider—a researcher and as someone who was not a parent—as a way to help participants feel more comfortable by letting them know, “I am not a parent, but I’m trying to understand the experience of parents so that we can provide better resources for you.” However, being an insider (e.g., a woman, in my thirties, an aunt) I could relate to mothering and parenting behavior, so I could sympathize with stories and experiences. Also, as a middle-class white female, I was more of an insider in terms of having similar racial and socioeconomic background with most of my sample population. However, this can also be seen as a drawback, as Nederhof (1985) notes if the subject and interviewer belong to similar social groups, the interview could be affected because it turns into more of a social exchange, “where norms of polite interaction get the better of accurate reporting” (p. 273).

Third, I tried to prevent social desirability bias by using professionalism as an interviewer. For instance, I used ethical standards in qualitative interviewing, such as assuring participants that their answers are confidential and anonymous. For my interviewing style, I tried to incorporate aspects of being a “task-oriented interviewer” and avoided being overly “warm” or “person-centered” (Nederhof, 1985, p. 274). However, I also balanced this approach with a feminist perspective on interviewing that advocates establishing a more conversational, back and forth exchange that decreases authority and distance that can occur with a researcher and participant. Feminist researchers seek to break down the “detached” interviewing stance, lessen the “insider-

outsider” relationship, and have more emotional involvement (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Using this style requires one to “adapt [to] the world of the individuals studied and try to share their concerns and outlooks” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 371). I believe, by balancing professionalism and involvement, my approach attempted to lessen social desirability bias and participants’ willingness to authentically report their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors.

### Data Analysis

The data that was gathered and analyzed was from the online survey and interview transcripts. For the survey analysis, descriptive statistics and regression analyses were used with SPSS statistical analysis software. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory. The survey data provided a snapshot of parents’ attitudes and behaviors, whereas the interview allowed an in-depth exploration of their feelings and experiences. Using these two forms of analysis provided a multi-faceted view of the phenomenon.

### *Survey Analysis*

The survey was posted online from early May to June of 2009. Using SurveyMonkey.com, the data were collected online and were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. The data were then cleaned and coded and prepared for SPSS analysis. Using SPSS statistical software, statistical tests were run to examine descriptive statistics and regression analyses for data reduction among variables, exploring frequency and relationships between empowerment and protectionist strategies and parent’s attitudes.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in the study and summarize the sample (Trochim, 2006). Summary statistics, standard scores,

and averages provided a helpful first look at the data, a snapshot of who the population is, and a description of their Internet mediation strategies. Regression analyses were used to explore the relationships among all the variables to look for patterns in the relationships. Statistical tests provided findings for regarding the differences of empowerment and protectionist approaches.

### *Interview Analysis*

The method of grounded theory was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Grounded theory, developed by Glazer and Strauss (1967), is a systemic method of analysis as a way of building theory from the ground up, inductively, from specific data to general theory. Grounded theory allows for the data to speak for itself rather than through an applied theoretical lens. Although there are other theories of qualitative data analysis, grounded theory has been hailed as one of the most significant and useful forms of qualitative analysis. Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) identify six features of grounded theory (p. 10-12):

1. Applicable and working. "A close relationship should exist between the behaviors observed and how characterizations of these behaviors are intended and understood by subjects"
2. Localized. "The interpretation of behaviors reflects the natural environment and everyday social arena in which it was derived"
3. Patterned. "Common features unifying behaviors from different or individuals are inductively identified"
4. Emergent research design. "Because all contexts and individuals studies are unique, the method or procedure for studying a natural field must stem from and reflect the idiosyncratic nature of the field"
5. The design is refined and negotiated. "As new findings and understandings are encountered, the method and procedure employed to study the field are adjusted"
6. Prescribed application. "Because of the specific focus on information derived from a field, actions are intimately linked to the thick description obtained in the data-gathering process"

Grounded theory helps analyze the language of a text—in this case, the interview transcripts—to understand the underlying themes of what participants say (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In examining parents' attitudes and behavior regarding Internet mediation, then, grounded theory was an effective choice for this purpose.

The grounded theory approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was useful in this analysis. According to the process, I looked at the data line by line, where initial categories were extracted. Then, I used open coding to examine the transcript data for similarities and differences among categories. Next, axial coding was used to relate categories to subcategories, seeing how categories linked to each other. This was followed by selective coding, where a central category was chosen and subcategories were included in relation to the central category. In this step, theory building became clear, and the structure for my interview findings emerged into a typology of themes where the emergent categories fit into a larger picture that helped to explain parents' Internet mediation (Shank, 2006).

#### Phases of Data Collection and Analysis

In conclusion, I have discussed the methods of data collection and analysis for this study, including using survey data that were analyzed with SPSS, and interviews that were analyzed using grounded theory. Gathering data using a mixed-methods approach allowed for the research questions to be studied from two different angles using different types of data, and providing a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

Lastly, let me review the phases of data collection and analysis. In phase one, participants received an email solicitation or a call for participation on social networks (Facebook and Twitter). From this solicitation, they clicked a link to the online survey.

The survey data was compiled in the online survey database. Parents volunteered at the end of the survey to participate in an interview by providing their name, phone number, and email. In phase 2, participants who volunteered for an interview were contacted and briefed on the purpose of the study and requirements for the interview. Then, the interview was scheduled at a convenient time for the participant. In phase three, forty interviews were conducted over a three-month time frame. In phase four, the data were first prepared, which included cleaning and coding the survey data, and transcribing the interviews. The data were then analyzed and evaluated, and lastly, in phase five, the findings were compiled, evaluated, and synthesized for meaningful conclusions about protectionist and empowerment parental Internet mediation.

## CHAPTER 4

### SURVEY RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' use of protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies to guide their preteens online. The survey findings are presented in this chapter, and the interview findings will be presented in Chapter 5. For the quantitative section of this study, the purpose was to examine the relationship among the five variables: (1) use of Internet mediation strategies, (2) confidence in enacting strategies, (3) perceived effectiveness of strategies, (4) attitudes about children's use of the Internet and how they relate to mediation strategies, confidence, and perceived effectiveness, and (5) a media behavior variable which clusters together all protectionist and empowerment items into a score for each parent. The research questions will be answered using descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations, and other analyses in SPSS.

This chapter is organized first with a discussion of the survey administration, a descriptive demographic synopsis, followed by data analysis and a summary of findings. The key findings are organized by the five key variables, starting with use of Internet mediation strategies, confidence, perceived effectiveness, attitudes, and relationships among attitudes to protection and empowerment Internet mediation.

#### Survey Administration

In May of 2009, the online survey<sup>19</sup> was shared to reach a national audience. Most of the respondents were reached through the national list, (as explained in Chapter 3) while others were reached through social media and word-of-mouth. The population was

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix B: Survey Instrument.

reached through convenience sampling and is not representative of a random sample of parents.

Although some of the participants were reached through social network sites, most of the participants were reached through a solicitation from a national organization<sup>20</sup> whose mission is to educate and give advice to parents about media and their children. Although it is not possible to give a headcount of how many parents responded to this solicitation from the organization's list and not through social networking (that information was not tracked and I could not breach the privacy practices of the organization), it is likely that it was the majority of the participants. The number of subscribers on the organization's list greatly exceeds the number of participants I was able to reach on my social networks. The reason why this is significant is because these parents were already interested and tuned into advice for managing media with their kids; having signed up to receive information from this organization. This indicates that these parents could likely have a higher interest in and involvement with their children's Internet use.

#### Synopsis of Participant Demographics and Internet Use in the Home

The data revealed patterns about the parents who responded to the survey, their Internet use, and their child's Internet use at home. This section covers demographic information about the survey participants and reports of their child's Internet use.

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<sup>20</sup> As mentioned previously, Common Sense Media sent an email to their parent members to solicit responses for the survey. Their mission is "dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology." Their website is [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org). See Figure 2 for a copy of the solicitation message.

### *Privileged Parents*

It is important to point out that the majority of parents who responded to the survey are not representative of the general population. The findings indicate that respondents were mainly mothers who are white, upper class, and well-educated. At first glance, one might consider this a disadvantage to the study. However, I see this as a strength. This population distinctly is not like the national average because they have money, education, social capital, and access to information that allows them the opportunity for being available and involved with their children's use of the Internet. For instance, parents with a college or graduate degree or more likely to use news media to seek out sources for information on how to protect their children online than parents with a high school education or less (Family Online Safety Institute, 2011). In addition, as mentioned previously, due to the sampling methods of how participants were reached, most parents were already interested in media and children and expressed that this topic was important to them. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind when reading the rest of this study to consider that the majority of the survey population is the type of parent one would expect would have the resources to be highly involved in their children's Internet use.

An extensive review of literature on parental mediation (Mendoza, 2009) affirms these assumptions. The review revealed patterns in the demographics of participants in these studies. The majority of parents were white (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; St. Peters et al., 1991; Warren, 2001), mothers (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Nathanson, 1999, 2001; Warren et al., 2002), married in nuclear families (St. Peters et al., 1991; Warren, 2001; Warren et al., 2002), with higher education and income (Fujioka & Austin, 2002;



Nathanson, 2001). These factors reflect a privileged socioeconomic status and predict the likelihood that the parent will be able to stay home with his or her child and have more time and availability for parenting. These factors also predict a higher likelihood that a parent will be accessible and engaged as compared to other parents who may have less education, are of a lower socioeconomic status, are not able to be present and available, and are less accessible overall due to the circumstances of their lives.

To begin, the participants of the study were parents between ages 25 to 64 years old who participated in the online survey. A total of 236 participants answered the survey<sup>21</sup>. Table 4.1 shows the age breakdown of the participants. The majority of the participants were in the 35-44 age bracket (56.4%), as to be expected with parents of kids aged 9-12. However, the next age bracket of 45-54 included 31.4%, which means that most parents were at least 25 years old when they had their child, if not older. The participants included more women (87.7%) than men (12.3%). According the US Census (2009b), men make up 49.3% of the population and women make up 50.7%. The sampling strategy likely added to the high number of women respondents.

Table 4.1

*Age of Respondents (N=225)*

		Frequency	Percent
Age range	25-34	10	4.2
	35-44	133	56.4
	45-54	74	31.4
	55-64	8	3.4
Total		236	100.0

<sup>21</sup> The percentages in the findings may not total 100% due to responses where participants refused to answer or had a missing response.

In terms of participants' race, most of them were White (87.39%) followed by African American (5.88%), Asian (2.10%) and Hispanic (2.10%). The other 2.52% identified as mixed race. According to the US Census in 2009a, 74.5% of the population was white, 12.4% was African American, 4% was Asian, and 15.1% Hispanic or Latino. Therefore, the race of this population is not fully representative of the racial breakdown in the US population. It is possible that there are differences in Internet mediation depending on race. However, the more likely case is that historically, white women have more access to education and income than women of other races. The marital status of the participants is composed mostly of married (83.5%), with 8.1% single and 7.6% divorced. In 2002, 69% of children lived with two parents, while the other 31% lived with their mother, father, or other households (US Census, 2002).<sup>22</sup> The fact that the majority of the participants were married couples speaks to a family structure in which two parents are (hypothetically) available to share parenting responsibilities.

Most respondents lived within the suburbs of a big city (36.0%), followed by in a smaller city or town of under 100,000 (25%), 17.4% within a big city (500,000+ residents), 11.4% in a rural area, and 9.7% in a city (100,000+ residents). The fact that 53.4% lived in a big city or a suburb of a big city means that they likely have access to more resources, whether it is through school or the community. Parents in rural areas, for instance, may have more of a challenge when it comes to accessing community resources, or even just swapping stories with a range of other parents about their experiences.

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<sup>22</sup> Data from the US Census do not track enough information about the actual relationships (married, single) among households with children.

More than a third of the participants earned an annual household income between \$75,000-\$150,000 (36.0%) followed by \$150,000 and above (26.3%) (see Table 4.2). That is 62.3% of participants' earning \$75,000 or more in the household. Parents in households earning \$20,000-\$40,000 made up 10.2% of the respondents. The median household income in the United States in 2009 was \$51,190, ranging from \$70,477 at the highest and \$37,144 at the lowest (US Census, 2009b). Parents with high incomes have the ability to have more media technology and Internet access in the home than lower-income families. They can afford additional resources, such as parental control tools to help them with monitoring. In addition, most participants worked full-time (48.7%), followed by stay-at-home parents (29.2%), and the rest worked part time (22%). Warren et al (2002) notes that for a variety of reasons, including work and education, parents of a lower socioeconomic status are less accessible, less involved, and often practice restrictive mediation but are less engaged in active mediation or covieing (for television).

Table 4.2

*Respondent Self-Reported Income (N=222)*

	Frequency	Percent
Income	Under \$20,000	5 2.1
	\$20,000=\$40,000	24 10.2
	\$40,000-\$60,000	23 9.7
	\$60,000-\$75,000	23 9.7
	\$75,000-\$150,000	85 36.0
	\$150,000+	62 26.3
Total	236	100.0

The most frequent level of education attained by the participants was a college degree (36.9%) or a graduate degree (33.5%), with 11.9% reporting they completed some

college and 11.9% reporting they completed some graduate school. A small percentage, 5.1%, said they have a high school diploma or equivalent. Education levels for this population can be compared to the average education levels in the US, in which only 10% of the population has a graduate degree, 17% have a bachelor's degree, 20% completed some college, 29% have a high school diploma, and 15% have less than a high school diploma. As one can see, this population is above average for education, as 70.4% have a college degree or higher. One study found better-educated adults were more likely to use and be comfortable with computers and the Internet, or use computers for work or school (National Telecommunications and Information Administration et al, 2000). Parents who have a high education level likely value education themselves, and encourage their children to use the Internet for educational purposes and as a way to extend learning in school (Warren et al, 2002).

#### *Internet Use in the Home*

Based on the demographic information of the survey population, the following information about Internet use in the home makes sense. The majority of survey participants consist of parents who use the Internet everyday, whether it is for work or leisure. The average number of computers at home that the participants have is three or more (41.5%) two (33.9%), with 24.2% who have one computer in the household. Half of participants report they use the Internet at least two hours each day (49.6%), followed by 1-2 hours per day (30.1%), 30 minutes to one hour a day (13.6%), with 6.4% reporting they use it 0-3 hours per week.

More than half of participants responded that they use the Internet at home primarily for leisure (68.6%) whereas 30.5% say they use it primarily for work. Thus, the

majority of this population use the Internet at least two hours each day for leisure. This means that parents have the luxury to spend this kind of time online and that they are active media users. It is also possible that stay-at-home parents, which is approximately one-third of this population, have the time to use the Internet at home. A parent's identity as an "Internet user" and their modeling of Internet habits to their child is an influential factor in how their children use the Internet.

### *Preteen Internet Use*

Next, I will turn to parents' preteen child and their child's Internet use. To reiterate, I only spoke to parents who had preteens between the ages of 9-12. If a parent had more than one child of that age, I asked them to answer based on the oldest one. If a parent had twins that age, I asked them to select one of the children when responding. Most of preteen children were at the older age of the spectrum, as 38.6% of children were twelve, 22.6% were eleven, 20.9% were ten, and 17.9% were nine years old. More than half the children of the participants were boys (54.9%), while 44.1% were girls. The majority of the children do not have their own computers (72%), while 26.7% have their own computer. The top two locations for computers in the home was the living room or kitchen (44.1%) followed by the office or other room (31.8%). Just 9% of kids had a computer in their bedrooms, and 19.1% of kids had used a laptop, which could roam anywhere in the house. Almost a third of the participants' children spend 30 minutes to one hour per day online (29.2%), followed by 1-3 hours per week (28.4%), with 16.5% online 1-2 hours per day. Most kids access the Internet on a computer, although, when accessing the Internet on other devices, 31.6% access it from gaming systems such as

Nintendo Wii or Nintendo DS, or Xbox<sup>23</sup>, 10.3% on a cell phone, and 13% from other devices.

Parental attitude was measured by asking parents to respond to statements designed to assess their worry about potential online risks, discomfort with Internet technologies, trust in their child's responsible use of the Internet, and perception of the Internet as a "good place" for children. Based on respondents' answers to these statements, Table 4.3 shows the descriptive statistics for parents' attitudes about the Internet, organized by the concept groupings of the statement items. In this instrument, 1 is equated with "strongly agree" and 4 equates with "strongly disagree." Table 4.3 shows that for the statements about worry, parents were in the middle, with  $M=2.89$  meaning that parents tended to disagree that they are anxious for their child's safety when he or she goes online. The highest mean was for parents disagreeing with feeling uncomfortable using new technologies ( $M=3.28$ ). Most parents disagreed that using filtering or monitoring software shows distrust in a child ( $M=3.23$ ). Lastly, many parents agreed that the Internet has helped their child in school ( $M=1.63$ ), with this statement showing the strongest agreement of any item on the scale.

#### Data Analysis: Answering the Research Questions

Now that I have described general demographic data about who the participants are, who their preteen children are, media use in the home, and parents' attitudes about computers and the Internet, I will provide findings for the research questions presented in chapter one. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 19 and 20 for Windows and

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<sup>23</sup> Usually Internet access for game play is to compete with other game-players, rather than surf the Internet.

Table 4.3

*Descriptive Statistics of Parental Attitude about the Internet*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Worry	When my child is online I get anxious for his/her safety.	205	2.89	0.709
	I worry that my child will be approached by an Internet predator.	205	2.51	0.802
	I worry that my child will be exposed to harmful content.	205	2	0.757
Uncomfortable	I feel like I can't keep up with what my child does online.	205	3.14	0.811
	I feel my child knows more about computers and the Internet than I do.	205	3.09	0.867
	I am uncomfortable learning how to use new technologies.	205	3.28	0.832
Trust Child	I believe tracking children's Internet activity – such as using filtering/monitoring software – shows that you don't trust them.	205	3.23	0.831
	I trust that my child will be safe and responsible online.	205	2.15	0.665
	I believe my child will make wise decisions when he or she is online.	205	2.07	0.607
Good Place	The Internet helps my child express him/herself and be creative.	205	2.38	0.841
	The Internet has helped my child with his/her schoolwork.	205	1.63	0.746
	The Internet is a good place for my child to socialize with friends.	203	2.86	0.771

Microsoft Excel 2007. Descriptive statistics were used to answer research questions one through three, whereas advanced SPSS analyses were used to answer research question four.

### *Internet Mediation Strategies and Confidence*

The first research question asks: What protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies do parents use to guide their preteens' use of the Internet? And the second research question asks: How confident are parents in enacting protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies? A descriptive statistics analysis reveals that parents most often use protectionist strategies to guide their preteen child's Internet use, as listed in Table 4.4. When asked how often they use protectionist or empowerment strategies, on a scale of 1-4 in which 1 was "never" and 4 was "always," parents most often set rules about which websites their children can visit ( $M=3.74$ ), set limits on who the child can talk with online ( $M=3.54$ ), had children use the Internet in a visible place in the household where parents can see them ( $M=3.51$ ), balanced online and offline activities (Mean=3.41), and used rules on how long children can be online ( $M=3.34$ ). All of these strategies fall under the protectionist paradigm. These results are in line with a survey of parents of children ages 8-17 that found 93% of parents have set rules or limits to safeguard their child online (Family Online Safety Institute, 2011). Among this group, the most common rule used by parents (79%) was setting rules requiring the child to use the computer in a common area of the house (Family Online Safety Institute).

The top empowerment strategies include encouraging children to use the Internet to extend learning in school ( $M=2.98$ ), recommending appropriate websites ( $M=2.85$ ), and helping kids understand online advertising ( $M=2.73$ ). The least-used strategies were mostly all empowerment-oriented, the bottom three being using monitoring tools ( $M=2.05$ ), communicating with the child online ( $M=1.98$ ), and encouraging civic participation ( $M=1.74$ ). This means that parents most often rely on rules, limits, and



having children on the computer in a place where they can be seen, and one can assume that parents' conversation around the Internet mainly has to do with rules and limits, rather than the empowerment factors just listed. However, the most important empowerment strategy for parents was encouraging their child to use Internet as a learning tool for school, so parents are interested in the educational potential of the Internet.

On the right side of Table 4.4 lists the confidence level of parents using protectionist and empowerment strategies. One would think that the more confidence parents have in using strategies, the more likely they are to use them. Parents were asked to respond to a four-point scale from 1 (not at all confident) to 4 (very confident about the list of protection and empowerment strategies). The top strategies parents indicate they are confident using are protectionist, including having children use the Internet where parents can see them ( $M=3.85$ ), establishing rules on how long the child can be online ( $M=3.81$ ), establishing rules on which websites can be visited ( $M=3.81$ ), and balancing online and offline activities ( $M=3.78$ ). The top three empowerment strategies that parents feel confident using is encouraging children to use the Internet to extend learning in school ( $M=3.73$ ), helping children understand online advertising ( $M=3.71$ ), and having children share their favorite websites ( $M=3.71$ ).

The top strategies in which parents have confidence are fairly parallel to the top strategies they actually use, as answered in the first research question. The strategy of having the child use the Internet in a visible place seems like an easy strategy to implement, and may reflect why parents feel most confident about it. Perhaps parents feel most confident using rules because most parents rely on using rules as a form of

Table 4.4

*Strategies Used and Confidence Using Them*

	Strategies Used			Confidence Using		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Protectionist						
Rules About Websites	216	3.74	0.625	203	3.81	0.512
Limit Who Child Can Talk With	214	3.54	0.859	203	3.67	0.657
Have Child Use Internet In Visible Place	218	3.51	0.763	204	3.85	0.467
Balance Online/Offline Activities	218	3.41	0.776	202	3.78	0.523
Rules About Time Online	218	3.34	0.887	203	3.81	0.502
Show How to Keep Info Private	217	2.71	1.087	202	3.58	0.724
Use Filtering/Blocking Tools	216	2.65	1.328	204	3.3	0.928
Use Monitoring Tools	215	2.05	1.199	202	3.24	0.954
Empowerment						
Encourage School Learning	218	2.98	0.856	203	3.73	0.552
Recommend Appropriate Websites	215	2.85	0.957	204	3.66	0.594
Help Child Understand Ads	217	2.73	0.973	203	3.71	0.551
Question Author/Purpose of Websites	218	2.44	0.884	203	3.57	0.629
Have Child Share Favorite Websites	216	2.43	0.865	201	3.71	0.58
Co-Surf with Child	217	2.37	0.801	202	3.64	0.685
Encourage Online Creation	214	2.17	1.102	203	3.24	0.904
Communicate with Child Online	217	1.98	1.054	201	3.31	0.908
Encourage Civic Participation	215	1.74	0.883	201	3.07	0.877

parenting, and as a way to protect children and keep them safe. Parents report feeling least confident about using parental controls that filter and block (Mean=3.30) or monitor (Mean=3.24). This can mean one of two things: either parents are not confident (and not interested) in using those strategies altogether, or they might feel a lack of confidence in choosing and installing these tools on the computer.

For empowerment strategies, parents may feel confident about encouraging Internet use for school learning perhaps because they already help their child with homework and see this as a natural extension of that activity. Or, maybe the child's school gives guidance to parents on how to use the Internet in relation to schoolwork. Parents also reported feeling confident helping children understand online advertising, and this was also a theme in the interview findings. It is possible that parents feel confident doing this because they have a particular interest in protecting their kids from advertising and marketing, and maybe they already help their child understand advertising on television.

Table 4.4. shows that parents feel least confident encouraging online creation and encouraging civic participation. Perhaps parents either don't want their children creating online or do not know how to guide them to create online. Parents consistently rated the civic participation category as the lowest used and the lowest confidence in enacting. There could be several explanations for this. Perhaps parents do not allow their child to communicate with others online, which is sometimes necessary for civic engagement. Perhaps parents don't see this kind of online activity as important as other activities, or not developmentally appropriate for their preteen. Or perhaps the term *civic engagement*

was too vast and too vague of a term for parents to understand what constitutes civic engagement online<sup>24</sup>.

What is most important to point out about Table 4.4 is that the means for confidence on all strategies was very high, ranging from  $M=3.07-3.85$ . However, the mean for the actual use of these strategies was lower, ranging from  $M=1.74-3.74$ . This means that although parents report feeling confident using strategies (even empowerment ones) they don't necessarily use them. This is a significant finding because it means that it may not be as important to educate parents about the strategies available to them, or to teach them to feel confident in using those strategies. The solution might have to do more with parent attitude, and educating parents in attempt to change their negative attitude about the Internet and showcase the positive impact empowerment strategies may have on their child.

#### *Perceived Effectiveness of Protectionist and Empowerment Strategies*

The third research question asks: Which strategies do parents believe are the most and least useful to them in guiding their preteens' use of the Internet? A tally of the most and least effective strategies in helping parents' guide their children is shown in Figure 4.1. In the survey, parents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the strategies, using an "A" to indicate the top three most effective, and an "F" to indicate the three least effective strategies. The top five strategies parents reported as most effective were all protectionist strategies, including having children use the Internet where parents can see

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<sup>24</sup> The term *civic engagement* in this case means participating online in ways that promote engagement with the school or community, or with politics and activism. Examples include visiting a site to learn how to volunteer in your school or community, signing an online petition, and becoming aware of a cause, such as on [www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org). Although the term civic engagement was not explained in the survey, it was elaborated upon in the interviews.

them (116 votes), using rules on how much time can be spent online (84 votes), discussing how to keep personal information private (81 votes), balancing online and offline activities (71 votes), and establishing rules on which websites can be visited (63 votes). These protectionist strategies are in line with the results for research questions one and two, in which parents indicated protectionist strategies, particularly having children use the Internet in a public space, having rules about websites, and balancing time spent online and offline, as strategies they use the most, and are most confident in using.

Figure 4.1 also includes the strategies ranked as least effective by respondents. The least effective ranked included empowerment strategies, such as communicating with their child online (81 votes), encouraging children use the Internet for civic participation (80 votes), encouraging online media creation (57 votes), having children share their favorite websites (56 votes), and asking questions about the author and purpose of websites (54 votes). Co-surfing was the empowerment strategies ranked as most effective (57 votes) and using the Internet to extend school learning (46 votes) as the top ranked strategies. Even though the results from research questions one and two show that research questions one and two show that the main empowerment strategy parents use and have confidence in is encouraging their child to use the Internet for school, parents reported this strategy to be less effective than co-surfing. All in all, parents indicate that co-surfing is one of the top useful empowerment strategies, even though they report feeling very confident co-surfing, but not using it that often (as indicated in Table 4.4). One reason to explain this is in chapter five, which reveals that some parents don't like co-surfing because they are not interested spending their time on sites the child (i.e.,

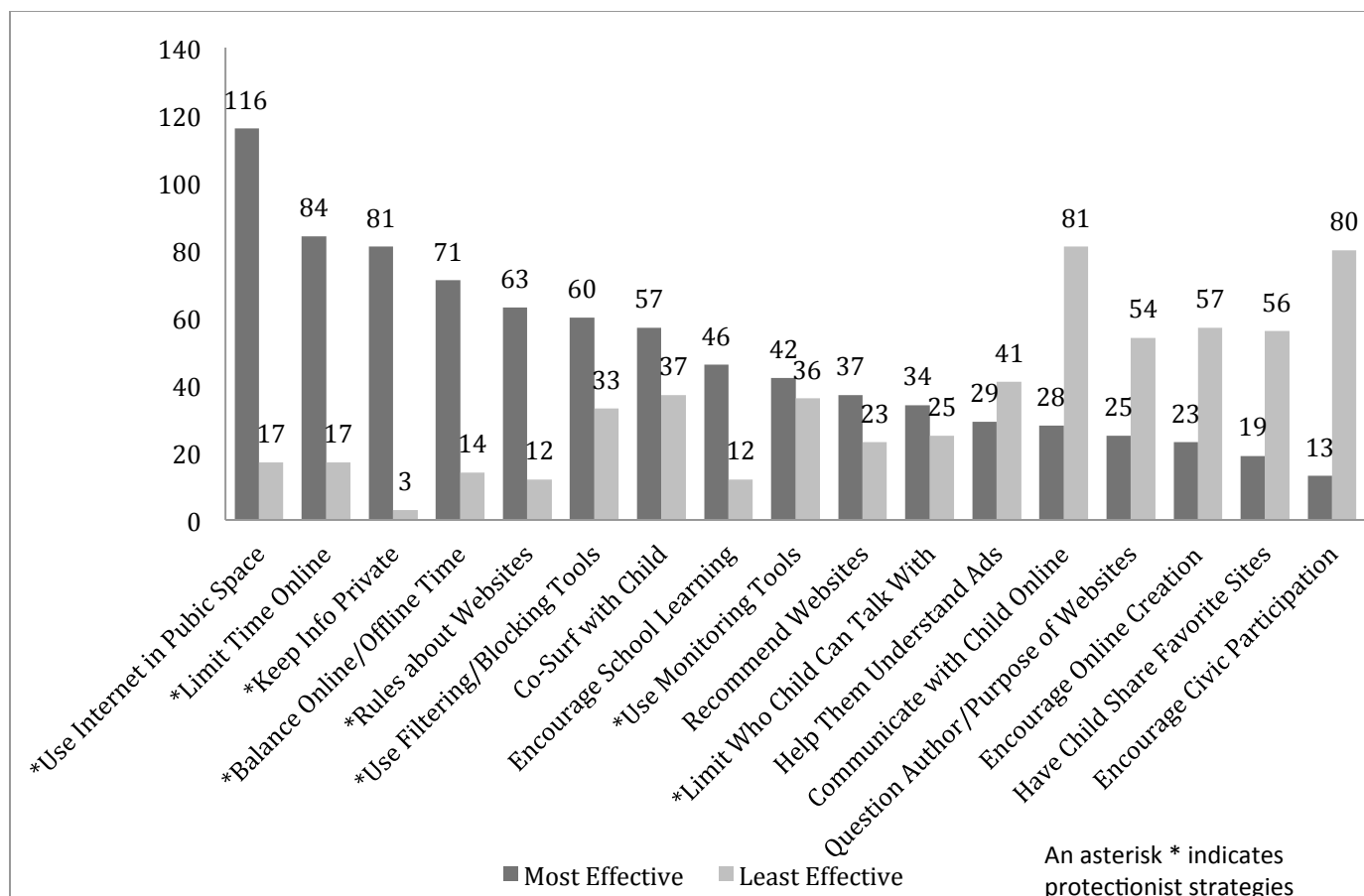


Figure 4.1. Respondent Ranking of Most and Least Effective Strategies

playing online games), or that they simply don't have time to sit down and co-surf.

Overall, parents repeatedly indicate that protectionist strategies are the ones they use most often, feel confident in enacting, and believing to be the most effective.

#### *Association of Parents' Attitudes with Strategies, Confidence, and Effectiveness*

In the fourth and last research question, I asked: How is parental attitude about children's Internet use associated with parents' strategies, confidence, and perception of the usefulness of these strategies? Parents' attitudes about the Internet were measured by reacting to a series of twelve statements about the Internet. The first step in understanding parents' attitudes about the Internet was to cluster the attitude variables into the categories listed in Table 4.5, based on a combination of each of the statements. Rubin

(1999) recommends one never measure a variable with a single item, but to cluster items together to measure the concept. The new variables measure the combination of responses to each of the three statements so that a concept is formed. These new variables will be used in a factor analysis.

The attitude variables were clustered by using a Varimax Rotation, a factor analysis that allows a collapse of the 12 items into four (per the statements and categories in Table 3.3). The factor analysis takes all of the variance in the data and finds the smallest number of categories to explain the most variance. See Table 4.5, in which there are five columns.

In column one, the worry factor shows that people who are worried are clustered together, as shown by the values (.744, .759, and .784). In column two, the statements that indicate the Internet is a good place to socialize (.783) and a good place for a child's expression and creativity (.856) clustered together, although the belief that the Internet helps with schoolwork (.554) does not seem to be clustered with the first two variables, so this item may be eliminated from future analysis. In column three, two trust factors are clustered together, including trusting the child to stay safe and responsible online (.827), and trusting the child to make smart decisions online (.829). The third item, which asked whether using tracking and monitoring tools shows distrust in the child (.149), is not strongly correlated with the first two trust items. This item may be eliminated from future analysis. In column four, two statements around being uncomfortable with technology are clustered, including feeling uncomfortable learning how to use new technology (.785), and also feeling like their child knows more than they do about computers and the Internet than they do (.798). However, the third statement around feeling uncomfortable,

Table 4.5

*Analysis of Varimax Rotation for Attitude Variables*

		Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
Worry	When my child is online I get anxious for his/her safety.	0.784	-0.1	0.13	0.151	0.052
	I worry that my child will be approached by an Internet predator.	0.744	0.088	-0.212	-0.022	0.022
	I worry that my child will be exposed to harmful content.	0.759	-0.212	-0.148	-0.039	-0.201
Uncomfortable	I feel like I can't keep up with what my child does online.	0.479	0.166	-0.189	0.419	0.363
	I feel my child knows more about computers and the Internet than I do.	0.016	0	-0.07	0.798	0.055
	I am uncomfortable learning how to use new technologies.	0.059	-0.124	0.083	0.785	-0.042
Trust Child	I believe tracking children's Internet activity, such as using filtering/monitoring software, shows that you don't trust them.	0.01	0.151	0.149	-0.005	0.876
	I trust that my child will be safe and responsible online.	-0.175	0.146	0.827	-0.016	-0.022
	I believe my child will make wise decisions when he or she is online.	-0.037	0.058	0.879	-0.002	0.08
Good Place	The Internet helps my child express him/herself and be creative.	-0.051	0.856	0.04	-0.099	0.051
	The Internet has helped my child with his/her schoolwork.	0.175	0.554	0.21	-0.069	-0.567
	The Internet is a good place for my child to socialize with friends.	-0.119	0.783	0.104	0.012	0.093

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.



measuring the feeling of not being able to keep up with what the child does online (.419) is not strongly correlated as part of the cluster, so it will be cut from future analysis. Column five does not reveal any significant correlations.

Now that the factor analysis revealed strong correlations among certain items, the next step involved creating new variables to represent the four sets of attitudes measured. The first new variable that was created is called “worry.” First, the new variable was created by combining the attitudinal statements about worry, including feeling anxious about the child’s safety when he or she is online; worrying the child will be approached by an Internet predator; and worrying the child will be exposed to harmful content online. Then, I recoded worry so that it could be more easily understandable in relation to the other variables. Originally, the scale on the worry items went opposite to some of the other attitudinal variables to prevent respondent fatigue (as explained in chapter three). A change was made in the scale so that among the three worry items, in which 1 means strongly agree with worry, and 4 means strongly disagree with worry, the data was recoded so that 1 means strongly disagree (not worried), and 4 means strongly agree (really worried). Using the recoded variable, descriptive statistics in Table 4.6 show that one quarter of respondents are high worriers.

The second new variable that was created is called “good place,” based on respondents’ attitudes about the Internet being a good place for their kids to spend time and socialize. First, the new variable was created by combining the attitudinal statements about the Internet being a “good place” for kids, including the belief that the Internet is: a good place to socialize; a good place for a child’s expression and creativity; and has helped the child with schoolwork. Then, I recoded good place so it could be more easily understood

Table 4.6

*Descriptive Statistics For Worry*

Worry		
<i>N</i>	Valid	205
	Missing	31
<i>M</i>		7.3951
<i>SD</i>		1.78638
<i>Range</i>		9
<i>Min</i>		3
<i>Max</i>		12
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	6
	50	7
	75	8.5

among the other variables. Similar to the “worry” variable described in the previous paragraph, originally the scale for good place was reversed from other attitude items to prevent respondent fatigue. Recoding the good place variable involved changing the scale on the “good place” items on the survey. Originally, the attitude scale had 1 as strongly agree that the Internet is a good place and 4 as strongly disagree with good place. This was recoded so that 1 means strongly disagree that the Internet is a good place for kids, and 4 means strongly agree. Table 4.7 shows the descriptive statistics for the recoded “good place” variable, showing that parents have widely differing ideas about whether the Internet is a good place for their kids to spend time. Note that although the mean score of 6.8 suggests that, in general, parents are slightly more positive about the Internet as a good place, the range of 8 and the standard deviation of 1.8 suggest that parents in this sample have divergent opinions about this issue. A full 25% of this sample does not agree that Internet is a good place. And even the most positive parents tend not to give

high levels of agreement to the items in this variable. Overall, Table 4.7 shows that parents are skeptical that the Internet is a good place for their kids.

Table 4.7

*Descriptive Statistics For Good Place*

Good Place		
<i>N</i>	Valid	205
	Missing	33
<i>M</i>		6.8768
<i>SD</i>		1.80473
<i>Range</i>		8
<i>Min</i>		4
<i>Max</i>		12
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	5
	50	7
	75	8

The third new variable that was created is called “trust child.” This new variable combines the three items for the attitudinal statements about the parent trusting the child to be safe and responsible online, to make wise decisions, and the belief that tracking children’s Internet activity with filtering and monitoring tools shows distrust in the child. Table 4.8 shows the descriptive statistics for the “trust child” variable. The table shows that one-quarter of parents are have high trust in their child, with the majority of parents agreeing they trust their child to be safe and responsible online.

The fourth variable that was created is called “uncomfortable with tech.” This variable combined two of the three items because, as Table 4.5 showed, the one item that measured the feeling of not being able to keep up with what the child does online was not strongly part of the cluster. The two items combined included: parents’ feeling like the

Table 4.8

*Descriptive Statistics For Trust Child*

Trust Child		
<i>N</i>	Valid	205
	Missing	31
<i>M</i>		7.5463
<i>SD</i>		1.48326
<i>Range</i>		9
<i>Min</i>		3
<i>Max</i>		12
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	7
	50	8
	75	8

child knows more about computers and the Internet than the parent, and feeling uncomfortable learning how to use new [media] technologies. The descriptive statistics for “uncomfortable with tech” are listed in Table 4.9. Note that because this variable only has two combined items, it has a range between 2-8. The low mean of 3.62 shows that this sample of parents is not uncomfortable with technology. In fact, they are quite comfortable with technology.

Table 4.9

*Descriptive Statistics For Uncomfortable with Tech*

Uncomfortable with Tech		
<i>N</i>	Valid	205
	Missing	31
<i>M</i>		3.6293
<i>SD</i>		1.3788
<i>Range</i>		6
<i>Min</i>		2
<i>Max</i>		8
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	2
	50	4
	75	5

*Index of Empowerment and Protectionist Strategies*

Based on these new variables, it is possible to separate empowerment strategies and protectionist strategies and reduce the data even more to look at meaningful relationships among the variables. In this section, I will reduce the data to further explore relationships to answer research question number four: How is parental attitude about children's Internet use associated with their current strategies, confidence, and perception of the usefulness of these strategies?

One of the survey questions asked parents, "Which of the following topics have you talked with your child about?" and asked them to check off from a list of topics related to the Internet and media literacy, as shown earlier in Table 3.2. One would assume that a more engaged parent would have talked about more of these topics with their kids, so based on this question, a new variable was created called "total talk" which sums up all of the items on this list. Table 4.10 shows that parents report they discuss an average of

Table 4.10

*Descriptive Statistics For Total Talk*

Total Talk		
<i>N</i>	Valid	211
	Missing	25
<i>M</i>		10.1327
<i>SD</i>		4.32065
<i>Range</i>		17
<i>Min</i>		1
<i>Max</i>		18
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	7
	50	10
	75	14

10 out of the 18 topics suggested. The bottom quartile of parents discussed 7 topics, while the top quartile discussed 14 topics. This suggests that some parents are only talking about a few topics with their kids, while other parents are talking about a wider variety of issues.

What is the relationship between how many different topics parents talk about and their attitudes about the Internet? In order to look at this question, a regression analysis was used as a powerful way to reduce the data and see relationships among total talk and attitude variables, and to predict possible behavior. Table 4.11 shows the results of a regression analysis in which the predictor variables included the four attitude variables (“worry,” “good place,” “trust child,” and “uncomfortable with tech”), and the dependent variable “total talk.” Table 4.11 shows that the four attitude variables are associated with the number of topics that parents discuss with their children ( $F = 2.86, p = .02$ ).

Digging deeper into the regression analysis to examine relationships between “total talk” and the attitude variables, Table 4.12 shows that parents who select a variety of topics

Table 4.11

*Regression Analysis: Total Talk and Parental Attitudes Overview*

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
	Regression	207.076	4	51.769	2.867	.024 <sup>a</sup>
1	Residual	3484.465	193	18.054		
	Total	3691.54	197			

$F = 2.86, p = .02$

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), Uncomfortable with Tech, Trust Child, Worry, Good Place

b. Dependent Variable: Total Talk

to talk about are more likely to disagree that the Internet is a good place for their kids ( $B = -.09, p = .007$ ). The other attitudes such as trust, worry, or uncomfortable with tech were not associated with a variety of talk topics.

Table 4.12

*Regression Analysis: Total Talk and Parental Attitudes*

	Model 1			
	B	SE	B	Sig
(Constant)	12.087	2.507		0
Worry	-0.128	0.174	-0.053	0.461
Good Place	-0.479	0.174	-0.199	0.007
Trust Child	0.29	0.21	0.1	0.17
Uncomfortable with Tech	0.009	0.225	0.003	0.968

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Total Talk

There is one possible explanation for the results in Table 4.12. The list of topics included a higher number of topics that are considered “Internet safety” and protectionist topics rather than topics related to empowerment behaviors. For instance, cyberbullying, online privacy, online addiction, inappropriate content, netiquette, and other topics related to safe online behavior dominated the list<sup>25</sup>. There were few topics on the list that related to empowerment behaviors, such as how to create something online, how to find appropriate sites, how to understand the author and purpose of sites, or how to use the Internet to help support schoolwork. Perhaps that is why parents who are more likely to disagree that the Internet is a good place for kids were the ones who used a variety of total talk topics, because those topics had to do with concerns about their child’s safety.

To further answer the last research question exploring the relationship among parent attitudes with empowerment or protectionist strategy use, I created two new variables: “total often empowerment” and “total often protect.” Each variable was created by combining the series of items that measured how often parents used protectionist or empowerment strategies. Since the “total often protect” variable had 8 items, and the

<sup>25</sup> See question 22 in Appendix B for the full list of topics.

“total often empower” had 9 items, the data was turned into a ratio-same proportion which summarized a global protection score and a global empowerment score on the same scale. The scale was 1 was “never use,” 2 “sometimes use,” 3 “often use,” and 4 “always use.” Table 4.13 shows the descriptive statistics for these new variables. Note that on average, most parents report using protectionist strategies (M=3.1) more often than empowerment strategies (M=2.4). For the protect column, looking more closely at frequencies in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile, (3.5 and above on the “never use” to “always use” scale), 63 out of 209 parents “often” to “always” use these strategies—this is 30% of parents I will label “high protectionist” parent engagement<sup>26</sup>.

Table 4.13

*Descriptive Statistics for Total Often Empower and Total Often Protect*

		Total Often Protect	Total Often Empower
<i>N</i>	Valid	209	207
	Missing	27	29
<i>M</i>		3.1190	2.4203
<i>Mdn</i>		3.1250	2.3333
<i>Mode</i>		3.13	2.11
<i>SD</i>		.55114	.56152
<i>Range</i>		2.50	3.00
<i>Sum</i>		651.88	501.00
<i>Percentiles</i>	25	2.8750	2.0000
	50	3.1250	2.3333
	75	3.5000	2.7778

Looking at the same percentiles for the empowerment column shows that frequencies in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile were at 2.77, ranging from using empowerment strategies “sometimes” to “often.” There were 60 out of 207 parents who fell into the 75<sup>th</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Note that frequency tables are not listed reflected here.



percentile, which is 29% of parents<sup>27</sup>. This I will label “somewhat empowerment” parent engagement, which includes “sometimes” to “often” using protectionist strategies. Yet, keep in mind that this is 30%, the frequency use overall, is lower than “very protectionist” parent engagement. And, as will be shown in Figure 4.2 below, this is not an either/or group of parents – many of these parents are using *both* protection and empowerment, and this can be called “high protection-somewhat empowerment” parent engagement, meaning parents were overall highly engaged in their child’s media use.

To explore the difference between protection and empowerment practices among the respondents and further reduce the data, Figure 4.2 shows a scatter plot chart of every parent and the strategies they report using. In a scatter plot, meaningful clusters of the dots show correlations, and darker dots indicate more parents falling into that area of the quadrant. In Figure 4.2, the y-axis is how often parents protect, and the x-axis is how often parents empower. The graph is divided up into four quadrants. These four quadrants indicate four types of parent perspectives: 1) High-Protect, Low-Empower; 2) High-Protect, High Empower; 3) Low-Protect, Low-Empower, and 4) Low-Protect, High-Empower. The chart shows that a larger cluster of dots can be seen in the upper High-Protect, Low-Empower and High-Protect, High-Empower quadrants, and lesser clusters in the bottom left Low-Protect, Low-Empower quadrant, and very few dots in the bottom right Low-Protect, High-Empower quadrant.

Figure 4.2 shows that most parents use protectionist strategies most often, but there are also parents who use a good deal of protectionism and empowerment. Fewer

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<sup>27</sup> Note that this can’t be a direct comparison to the protectionist column, because the range in the percentiles are different in each set of data.

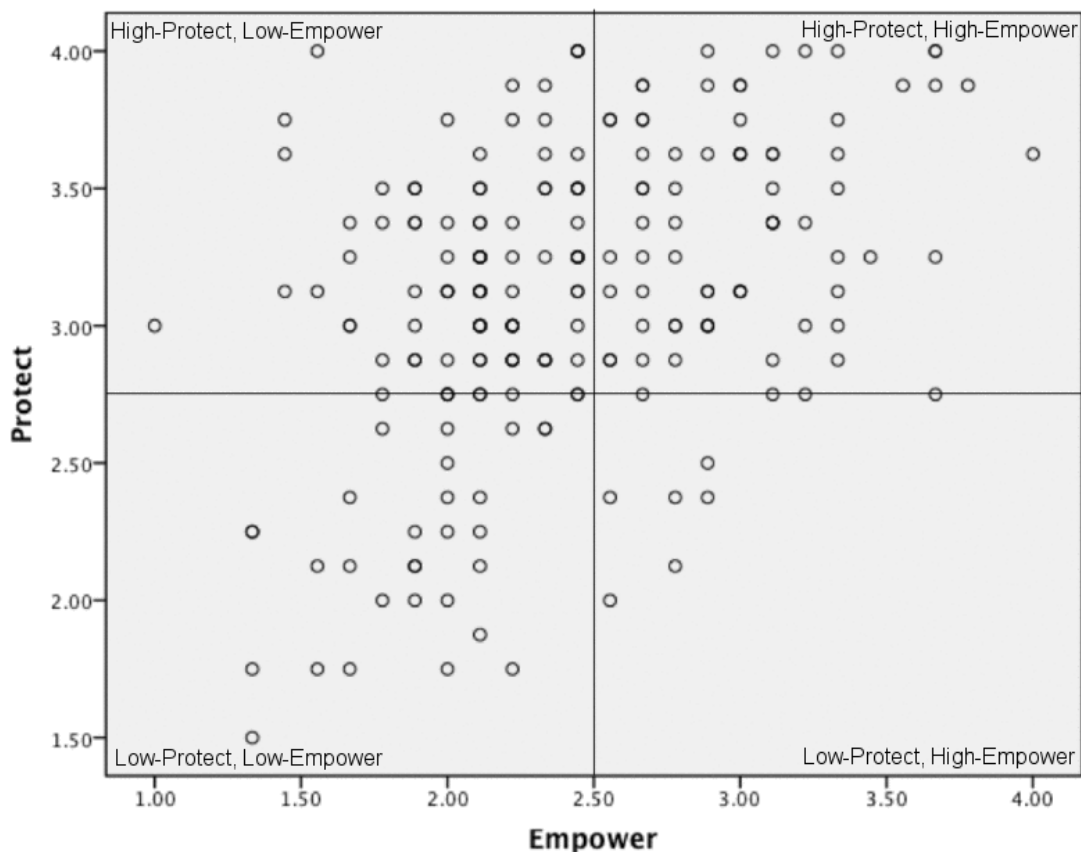


Figure 4.2. Scatter Plot of Total Protect and Total Empower Use

parents use a little protection or empowerment strategies, and a very small group uses little protection but high empowerment. The good news for media literacy educators is that there is a substantial group in the High-Protect, High-Empower quadrant, which means that these parents are highly engaged overall in a range of behaviors to help guide their child's Internet use. This shows that parents who protect *and* empower are not necessarily different groups of people. However, the majority of the upper two quadrants are, as a whole, more protectionist, as there are more darker dots in the High-Protect, Low-Empower quadrant. This means there is a substantial group of parents who are using protectionist strategies but who do not often use empowerment. And the bottom two

quadrants are a concern for media educators as well. For instance, the Low-Protect, Low-Empower parents simply have low engagement overall, and the Low-Protect, High-Empower parents (of which are the smallest group) may want to consider incorporating some protection behaviors with their kids.

Next, in looking at how empowerment is associated with parental attitudes, I wanted to see if I could predict which attitudes are associated with the empowerment parents who score highest in relation to the “total often empower” score. To do this, I used a regression analysis in which the predictor variables included the four attitude variables (“worry,” “good place,” “trust child,” and “uncomfortable with tech”), and the dependent variable was “total often empower.” Table 4.14 shows that the four attitude variables are associated with the total empowerment score of how often parents use empowerment strategies with their children ( $F = 3.67$ ,  $p = .008$ ). This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship among parents who often use empowerment strategies and their attitudes about the Internet.

Table 4.14

*Regression Analysis: Total Often Empower and Parental Attitudes Overview*

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
	Regression	4.440	4	1.110	3.575	.008 <sup>b</sup>
1	Residual	58.680	189	.310		
	Total	63.120	193			

$F = 3.67$ ,  $p = .008$

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant) Trust Child, Uncomfortable with Tech, Good Place, Worry

b. Dependent Variable: Total Often Empower

However, according to Table 4.15, the regression analysis shows that only *one* of the four attitude items is doing the explaining. Parents who score low on the “uncomfortable with tech” variable (that is, those who are *more* comfortable using

technology) are also more empowerment-oriented ( $p$ -value = .016). This finding is somewhat statistically significant (i.e.  $p$ -value equal or lesser than  $<.05$ ). This means that the more comfortable parents are with computers and the Internet overall, the more likely they are to use empowerment strategies. The implications of Table 4.15 means that using Likert scale items to measure parental attitudes, particularly worry, trusting the child, and believing the Internet to be a good place for kids do not predict empowerment. But, feeling comfortable with technology predicts empowerment, which includes a parent's disagreement with the following statements that a) can't keep up with what the child does online; b) feels the child knows more about computers and the Internet; and c) feels uncomfortable learning how to use new technologies. This also means that, in this sample of parents, more investigation is needed to figure out what attitudes predict empowerment.

Table 4.15

*Regression Analysis: Total Often Empower and Parental Attitudes*

	Model 1			
	B	SE	B	Sig
(Constant)	2.650	.336		.000
Worry	.001	.023	.002	.975
Good Place	-.040	.023	-.128	.080
Trust Child	.040	.028	.104	.157
Uncomfortable with Tech	-.071	.029	-.173	.016

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Total Often Empower

In line with the regression analysis just conducted for empowerment, I wanted to see if I could predict which attitudes are associated with the “total often protect” variable. Similarly, I used a regression analysis in which the predictor variables included the four attitude variables (“worry,” “good place,” “trust child,” and “uncomfortable with tech”),

and the dependent variable “total often protect.” Table 4.16 shows that the four attitude variables are associated with the total protect score of how often parents use protectionist strategies with their children ( $F = 6.691, p = .000$ ). This indicates a statistically significant relationship between parent attitudes and use of protectionist strategies.

Table 4.16

*Regression Analysis: Total Often Protect and Parental Attitudes Overview*

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
	Regression	7.288	4	1.822	6.691	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1	Residual	51.736	190	.272		
	Total	59.024	194			

$F = 6.691, p = .000$

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant) Trust Child, Uncomfortable with Tech, Good Place, Worry

b. Dependent Variable: Total Often Protect

Looking deeper into this regression analysis shows that, according to Table 4.17, two of the four attitude variables show some level of significance with a high “total often protect” score. The more likely parents are to use protectionist strategies, the more they agree that the Internet is a good place for kids ( $B = .15, p = .02$ ). And, the more likely parents are to use protectionist strategies, the more they report feeling comfortable with technology ( $B = -.259, p = .000$ ). The implications of Table 4.17 is that only attitudes about the belief that the Internet is a good place for kids, along with feeling comfortable using technology, can be used to predict whether a parent will use protectionist strategies. The attitudinal items of feeling worried about the child or feeling trust in the child do not show predictive power. However, note that these two attitude items—the belief the Internet is a good place, and feeling comfortable using technology—is typically what media educators do *not* associate with protectionist parents. The assumption is that is

parents who are uncomfortable with technology and who have a negative attitude about the Internet being a good place for kids are likely to be protectionist.

Table 4.17

*Regression Analysis: Total Often Protect and Parental Attitudes*

	Model 1			
	B	SE	B	Sig
(Constant)	3.772	.310		.000
Worry	-.036	.022	-.117	.097
Good Place	.048	.021	.158	.026
Trust Child	-.047	.027	-.125	.081
Uncomfortable with Tech	-.102	.027	-.259	.000

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Total Often Protect

Tables 4.15 and 4.17 indicate that comfort with technology can be used to measure a parent's likeliness to use protection *and* empowerment strategies, which can be used to measure overall parent *engagement* with kids' media use. Again, this is a surprising finding, as the assumption is that parents who are uncomfortable with technology are more protectionist than those that aren't. This finding addresses a misconception that protectionist parents use these strategies because they feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar with computer and Internet technologies. The data shows that these parents are very comfortable with technology yet still choose to use protectionist strategies.

### Summary and Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter analyzed the results from the parent survey that measured protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategy use, confidence, and perceptions of effectiveness, and also measured parental attitudes about technology and the Internet, and how attitudes were related to strategy use. An online survey of parents

of preteens was used to collect self-report data from parents about protectionist and empowerment parental Internet mediation attitudes, behaviors, and practices. The goal was to examine the relationship among five variables drawn from the research questions: (1) use of Internet mediation strategies; (2) confidence in enacting strategies; (3) perceived effectiveness of strategies, (4) attitudes about children's use of the Internet and how they relate to mediation strategies, confidence, and perceived effectiveness; and (5) a media behavior variable which clusters together all protectionist and empowerment items into a score for each parent. The sample included 236 respondents from the United States, primarily upper class, urban white mothers. Although the sample was not a typical representation from the general population of parents, this can be viewed as a strength because this privileged group of parents have many resources (income, education, and availability) which allow them to provide guidance for their preteens' Internet use, so one would expect higher levels of engagement. Data analysis involved using SPSS for statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and regression analysis to make conclusions from the data.

There are several major conclusions from this data. The first conclusion is that the majority of parents reported using protectionist strategies most often, and to a lesser degree empowerment strategies. The strategy parents used most often was having rules about websites (protectionist), and the least used strategy was encouraging civic participation (empowerment). Overall, parents reported high confidence in using all of the strategies, with slightly lower confidence scores (but still relatively high) in using empowerment strategies. Similarly, a study that looked at parents of 8-17 year-olds surveyed parents' knowledge about ways to protect their child's safety and privacy

online, and found 75% of parents feel very (44%) or fairly (31%) knowledgeable about protecting their child's online safety and privacy (Family Online Safety Institute, 2011).

However, the survey showed having high confidence does not necessarily mean parents actually use the strategies. For example, a parent may report feeling highly confident using an empowerment strategy such as helping a child understand online advertising, but may use that strategy less often than a protectionist strategy. Overall, parents ranked protectionist strategies as "most effective," with having kids use the Internet in a public space in the home as the highest-ranked effective protectionist strategy, and co-surfing as the highest-ranked empowerment strategy.

Other major conclusions had to do with how parental attitude relates to the use of protection and empowerment Internet mediation. The parental attitude measurements were collapsed into four items ("worry," "uncomfortable with tech", "trust in child," and "good place") and examined in relation to "total often protect" and "total often empower" scores. For example, one survey question examined what topics around online behavior parents reported talking about with their kids. Parents who believe that the Internet is not a good place for kids were the ones who talked about the most topics with their preteens. This result shows that parents with a negative attitude about the Internet are perhaps more concerned and willing to talk to their kids about a variety of topics to keep them safe.

The scatter plot chart in Figure 4.2 showed four types of parents: 1) High-Protect, Low-Empower; 2) High-Protect, High Empower; 3) Low-Protect, Low-Empower, and 4) Low-Protect, High-Empower. The majority of parents were in the first two categories, showing that most parents in this population are engaged in their preteen's Internet use, using some combination of protection and empowerment, but leaning much more towards



protection. Much less common were parents who did not engage in much empowerment or protectionism, and the smallest group included parents who used more empowerment strategies, but did less to protect.

Regression analysis revealed interesting findings about the association of attitudes with total use of protection and empowerment strategies. Statistically significant relationships were found between some attitudes and strategies. Parents who are more comfortable using technology are more likely to use empowerment Internet mediation than parents who are uncomfortable. However, feeling worry, level of trust in the child, or believing the Internet to be a good place for kids did not predict empowerment.

Similarly, regression analyses for relationships between attitudes and protectionist strategies found that the more likely parents are to use protectionist strategies, the more they agree that the Internet is a good place for kids. It was also found that parents who are comfortable using technology are more likely to use protectionist Internet mediation. Based on the findings for empowerment and protectionism, comfort with technology can be used to predict how likely a parent is to use both protection and/or empowerment strategies, and can be used to measure overall parent *engagement* with preteens' media use. This finding also addresses the misconception in the field that protectionist parents are uncomfortable with the computer and Internet technologies, and that protectionist parents believe the Internet is a "bad place" for their kids to spend time.

The next chapter will explain the parent interviews, and the qualitative methods, data analysis, and results from the interviews that reveal a typology of themes among protection and empowerment.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERVIEW RESULTS

For the qualitative section of this study, the purpose was to explore the research questions in depth to understand a deeper view of a parents' experiences and feelings regarding guiding their preteen's Internet use. In addition to examining the research questions, the interviews helped piece together a more detailed account of parents' feelings and experiences with protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies. The interviews also helped open up other issues that parents were dealing with, which are helpful in understanding the feelings and behaviors of parents when trying to protect and empower their children online. To reiterate, the following research questions were explored with parents.

RQ1: What protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies do parents use to guide their preteens' use of the Internet?

RQ2: How confident are parents in enacting protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies?

RQ3: Which strategies do parents believe are the most and least useful to them in guiding their preteens' use of the Internet?

RQ4: How is parental attitude about children's Internet use associated with parents' strategies, confidence, and perception of the usefulness of these strategies?

What resulted from the interviews was much more data than anticipated about values and attitudes about the Internet, and parents' fears, worries, and hopes. This section is organized first with an explanation of the interview methods and coding process, followed by a synopsis of the participants, and then the majority of this chapter that covers three main themes that emerged from coding the interview transcripts: Monitoring the Internet, Online Behavior, and Asserting Values.

## Interview Analysis

In the summer of 2009, a total of 40 telephone interviews were conducted and recorded with parents, each ranging from 20 minutes to over an hour, with the average at 45 minutes. Convenience sampling was used, as participants were recruited from the survey sample, by volunteers to be interviewed by signing up at the end of the survey. Although over 40 participants agreed to be interviewed, scheduling did not always work out. I had a target of 40 interviews to get a good percentage of the survey population, so I capped the interviews at 40. The interviews were semi-structured, with specific interview questions but flexibility to go off topic if the interviewee had an interesting tangent that I wanted to explore.<sup>28</sup>

After the interviews were complete, the recordings were transcribed. Each transcript was read and coded using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory. As I read each interview, keeping the research questions in mind, I coded the conversation based on what interviewees said. I focused on what was said by interviewees and not necessarily what I inferred from the data. Next, I extracted the codes from each interview, and sorted the codes with similar patterns into groups using open coding. As a result, I had about 80 coding categories, some of which I combined into larger groups because they went together thematically. Next, I used axial coding to take the categories from interviews, select subcategories, and see how they linked together. I explored several different coding schemas until I found one that was the most cohesive and explanatory of the wide range of data. After this process, I used selective coding to build my theory and typology, in which themes related to each other in a comprehensive way. This is the

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix C for the Interview Guide.

theory that helps explain parents' protectionist and empowerment strategies with Internet mediation that will be discussed in the final chapter.

Using grounded theory allowed me to focus on the participants' experiences and allowed parents to speak for themselves. Themes from their experiences came through an emergent research design, of which I had the ability to refine and negotiate based on my observations. In an age where technology changes quickly, and often attitudes and issues surrounding technology change along with it, this interview data provides a "slice of time" portrait of parents' attitudes and behaviors in 2009, a little over 10 years since the Internet became available to the public in the mid-1990's, and only a few years after the launch of extremely popular sites such as and Facebook (launched in 2004) and YouTube (launched in 2005).

#### Synopsis of Interviewees

An overwhelming majority of interviewees, 38 out of 40 (95%), were mothers (either birth mothers or step mothers), and two (5%) of the interviewees were fathers. The interviewees shared similar demographic information to the population from the online survey, which was 87.7% mothers. Of the participants, 12, or 30% identified as stay-at-home parents, and this also is similar to the survey population in which 30% of participants identified as stay-at-home. Thirteen parents worked in the media and technology field, for instance, six were teachers, librarians, or technology specialists at schools, two worked for Internet technology-related companies, three were bloggers or freelancers on media and technology issues, and two were researchers at Universities of related issues with youth or technology. Sixteen interviewees had jobs unrelated to media, ranging from a manager of a daycare, a manager of a pet store, a customer service

representative, an attorney, insurance sales, real estate sales, a dental hygienist, and a hairdresser. Eleven parents were stay-at-home, and this may have influenced the strategies they reported—and how often they used them. Stay-at-home parents were more likely to be present and available for mediation. Due to the high percentage of parents who were stay-at-home parents or who had jobs related to technology, I created Table D.1<sup>29</sup>, a list of participants and their occupations, so readers can view these factors. Their preteens' age, gender, and the gender and age of other children in the household are also included in this table.

In regards to the preteens that parents responded about, most reported on their older preteen (12 years old), and there were slightly more interviewees who had boys (21 total) than girls (19 total). Age and gender of the preteens parents responded about is broken down in Table 5.1. If the interviewee had more than one child who was a preteen,

Table 5.1

*Age and Gender of Interviewee's Preteen Children*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Girl</b>	<b>Total</b>
9	5	4	9
10	5	2	7
11	3	4	7
12	8	9	17

I asked him or her to talk about the oldest child. If they had twins within the age range (as in the case of two of the parents), I asked them to select one of the children to focus on.

In regards to parents' other children, 11 parents had an only child, 17 had two children,

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix D.

nine had three children, two had four children, and one had five children. The age range of their preteen's siblings ranged from infant to 21 years old<sup>30</sup>.

### Interview Themes

There are three major themes that emerged from the interviews: I) Monitoring the Internet, II) Online Behavior, and III) Asserting Values<sup>31</sup>. Beneath each major theme are several subthemes and categories that illustrate parents' experiences, beliefs, attitudes, values, and protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies they report using with their preteen child.

#### *Monitoring the Internet*

The first theme has to do with strategies parents use to monitor their preteen's Internet use, as well as more broadly their feelings and attitudes about monitoring. The subthemes beneath monitoring include themes around using rules, tools (filtering, monitoring, and blocking software), and other activities of which the purpose was to monitor children's online activity. Using rules and restrictions was a common parental strategy; therefore, it is not surprising that many parents explained how they used rules with their preteens. The strategies described in this section are examples of protectionist forms of Internet mediation, in which the parent is more concerned with blocking, limiting, and restrictions than encouraging online use and exploration.

#### *Rules*

Parents often rely on rules as a way to restrict and monitor their child's behavior, and share their values about what, where, and when it is okay to go online. Many parents talked about their "house rules" for the Internet, which ranged from having rules about

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<sup>30</sup> See Table D.1

<sup>31</sup> For a complete typology of interview themes and subthemes, see Appendix E.

where their child can use the Internet in the house, for how long, and even how they handle rules about television versus the Internet similarly or differently.

*“POS” and the Internet in a shared space.* One of the most useful strategies parents shared was to monitor their children’s Internet use by requiring that the computer be placed or used a shared space of the home such as the kitchen, dining room, or living room. Parents described being able to look over the child’s shoulder, which I will refer to as “POS”<sup>32</sup>, as a convenient and useful way to know what their child is doing online. Tiara described, “I think the most important thing is to have a computer in a common area. . .where I can walk downstairs at any given time and look over his shoulder”, and similarly Gina noted, “His rule is somebody has to know he’s online and pretty much we have to be in the room, or kind of in the living room or kitchen going back-and-forth to see what’s going on.” Debra explained the convenience of having the computer in a shared space, as she said, “It’s always in a public spot. It’s convenient for *me*, um, if I want to check on something quickly.” While Regina said that this strategy makes it easy to monitor: “That’s the easiest way to keep ‘em safe, is just not to have it be able to be totally secret.”

A couple of parents said they didn’t use parental control tools such as filters and monitors on the computer but relied on “POS” monitoring instead. Marian said, “I don’t feel that we need to do that [use monitoring software or check history.] I mean, I probably can. I’ve never done it because, like I said, I am in the room when he’s on it. . . .as far as what I consider the most useful, the most useful is ‘be present’.” Similarly, Nadia shared that her daughter “can look up things if we are around to monitor what

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<sup>32</sup> “POS” stands for “parents over shoulder” and is an acronym kids use when chatting, instant messaging, or texting friends by stating that a parent is watching what they’re doing or is nearby.

she's getting into, since we don't have any real filters on there." Moreover, Sonia declared, "Right now, I feel comfortable just that I'm, you know, right there, and I'm kind of the filter."

Even children that used laptops, which if connected to wireless Internet can go anywhere, were still required (in most cases) to use the laptop in a shared space. Fewer parents allowed the Internet to be accessed in their bedroom, the office, or in the child's bedroom. Yet interestingly, a handful of parents adamantly explained that they would never allow their child to have a computer in the bedroom because it's too difficult to monitor and is isolating. Carolyn didn't want her children to have computers in their bedrooms for fear of "them having more excuses to isolate themselves from the family." Jasmine had concerns about not having the computer in sight, as she notes of her daughter:

Often she will be on the downstairs one in the basement. And that one I'm actually not so happy that they do that, cuz we've had a couple of problems with them being down there and out of sight. Like, I can't see—I can't monitor what's going on the screens.

Later in the interview Jasmine reflected that she would like to:

Get a new portable computer, so she can take it and be in the kitchen where I'm making dinner and helping her younger sister with homework, and then I can always see the screen. I really do think it needs to be in a more public space.

*Asking permission.* Another useful rule for some parents was to have the child ask permission before using the computer or going online. Having children ask permission can be seen as a form of gatekeeping. Sonia, a stay-at-home Mom of five children, explained that her son, "Can't go on with out asking. And then when he asks, I usually kinda hang around to see what they're doing. And then, um, you know, we just set the timer. . . I'll usually kinda check in once in that half an hour and, kinda see, you know—



make sure it's all the same site and whatnot.” Rosa, a stay-at-home Mom of an 11-year old boy, said:

Now, the computer rule, because they do use it for school now—my daughter has current events articles due each week—like she'll say ‘Mom, can I go on the computer, it's school-related.’ And now I'm not going to say that they don't—maybe push it a little longer. But certainly they're not pulling up a game and playing it.

Furthermore, a couple of parents used asking permission as an opportunity to encourage discussion about what websites are okay to visit, as Sandra noted of her 9-year-old son:

I'm hoping that the open conversation we had starting at a very early age is going to eliminate that possibility [of going to sites she doesn't want him on], because he's kinda trained—‘Hey, this website says that I need to sign up in order to do something, can you help me sign up?’ That's kind of like, how our conversation goes. Um, or ‘I know that I need to come and see you before I can sign up; can you sit down and help me?’ . . . And then we'll—I'll look through the website.

Similarly, Tammy said that her 11-year-old daughter never does things online without asking:

She's always came in and said, ‘Mom, so-and-so wants me to go to [inaudible] dot com. Can I go see what it is?’ ‘Sure, let's—and we will actually look together. ‘Let's see what this is.’ And then we'll decide together ‘is this something you want to do?’

*Rules about time.* A common rule at least twenty parents used was having time limits of how long the child could be on the Internet. Parents often use rules about time with other activities such as playing, doing chores, or homework. Overall, parents who used rules about time said they let their children go online an average of 30 minutes to two hours a day, but some of these hours are total “screen time” which includes television and video games. Some parents used computer time as a reward for the child's good behavior or for getting their chores done. Nadia, a full-time manager of a pet store, said of her 12-year-old daughter:

A lot of times when she goes on, we will give her a time limit, depending on—and it, and it’s more or less earned time. So you know, if she’s got some chores to do, things like that, if she gets them done, then fine, then she can go on for like, an hour. . .sometimes she loses access for—we’ll say punishment, but you know, ‘If you don’t clean your room, you’re not gonna be able to get on there.’ We use that quite frequently now.

April, a mom who also runs a full time daycare, used a chart to track time: “I actually have a, um, a routine, a schedule, um, and a chart that they fill in, and what they’re allowed to—the times they’re allowed to be on.”

Many parents said that their rules about time depend on the time of year. A few parents noted that during the school year they were more stringent about the rules on computer time, and during summertime were more relaxed about those rules, as Rosa explained:

So sometimes, like during the summer if he wants to go on the computer, I’ll say ‘no more than an hour.’ And that’s where my hour rule comes in, ‘cause I think an hour a day is enough. It seems like, though, we have enough going on in the summer too that it never turns into a gigantic problem. But it is a little bit more so than in the school year because they have more free time.

Along the same lines, parents talked about how they have rules about the computer use during the week to have to be related to schoolwork (during the school year), and on the weekends they are more relaxed about kids playing games online or doing things that aren’t related to school. Other parents combined their rules about time for other media, such as television. Jackie, a freelance blogger of a nine-year old daughter, said “We have similar rules for TV in our house, so, sort of media influx is limited in general.” And Sandra, a Mom of a nine-year-old son, limited multitasking: “The rule in our house is that he may either watch TV or play computer, but he may not do both at the same time.”

On the other hand, there were six parents who didn’t use rules about time. Reasons for this include the child being too busy with school or extracurricular activities,

or that the child self-regulates. Barbara, a highly involved tech-savvy Mom, said of her 12-year old daughter: “My husband and I do not have rules about how much you use the computer in the household. . .She’s pretty much self-monitoring on her own, one or two hours.” And Angie, a 49-year old Mom of a 9-year old daughter, admitted to understanding how it’s easy to lose time when on the computer: “I’m pretty flexible on the amount of time; cuz when you get on those games, you could be on there for hours. I know—I do it myself!”

*Rules about content.* Of course, in addition to having rules about time, many parents expressed having rules about where their preteens could go online, and what they could do. Some of the themes regarding content parents did not want their kids visiting include YouTube<sup>33</sup>, social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, certain games, certain song lyrics and music videos (especially if they have profanity, sex, or degrade women), pornography or nudity, and not searching for certain words. Laura, a mother of 11-year old twin boys, said, “We really limited their um, exposure to the Internet. Even now we do because, we just, we’ve seen so much, we’ve seen so many things that have happened, and I just frankly think they’re too young to have full access.” And Karen, a stay-at-home Mom of a twelve-year old son, had specific rules about not allowing her son to go onto networks that have television shows online: “like *The Office*, or *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. . .what I would term more adult type of TV shows, even though some of them are animated cartoons.” But a few parents negotiated rules with their kids. Brooke said that her 12-year-old son can give her a “tour” of a website she’s never seen

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<sup>33</sup> There was particular concern by many parents about YouTube. I will specifically discuss parents’ concerns about YouTube in the next section, Online Behavior, under Inappropriate Content.

before as a way to ask her to visit beyond their agreed upon sites. Sandra explained how she talks about which kinds of games are okay with for her nine-year-old son:

My son enjoys playing online games. And most of the games, we talk about the difference between, um, like thinking games and games for fun. Um, and I like to have a balance between the thinking games and the games that are just kind of brainless.

However, just as with parents who did not use rules about time, there were parents who did not use rules about content. One reason is because they thought their child wasn't interested in venturing off to inappropriate sites, as Debra said her nine-year-old daughter "isn't interested in anything I would consider inappropriate" and Carmen said of her nine-year-old son:

He's really very much a boy that would rather be on a site that has *Star Wars* or you know, *The Flintstones*. I mean, cartoon kind of stuff than anything else. . .and most of the sites he goes to are major sites that I will trust him to go to.

And two parents said they had no reason to make rules about content, but are aware that this might change in the future. Carolyn shared, "We're sort of making up the rules as we discover stuff that's not okay," and Flora noted, "I *know* what I don't want her to do online, but it's—it's like I haven't been confronted with it yet, so I haven't really made a specific rule."

*Consistency in rules.* Seven parents emphasized that it's important to have consistency in rules and to enforce them, but that it can be challenging in doing so.

Sandra emphasized the importance of consistency:

If the rule is that you get to spend an hour doing this, then you don't get to do it for *two* hours a day. . .I think the more consistent you can be. . .why is it that when you get to 'three,' kids are—and you've clearly explained what the consequences are—they're surprised when you get to 'three,' and they have a consequence.

Carolyn talked about the importance of simply being there to enforce rules: “If you’re going to have rules like that then you have to be around to enforce them, and unfortunately when we’re not home, it’s hard to.” Liz noted, “I can’t be real self-righteous that I always give him choices, because there are times when I set down and I just say no.” Similarly, Denise explained that her dislike of having her son online makes it easier to say no: “I have a hard time saying ‘no,’ but that makes it—I don’t really want him on it, and that makes it easy for me.” Eva said that repetition is important: “I do believe, um, and we believe it would take, um many, many, many times of talking the same message over and over again before they really get it.”

### *Tools*

Using parental control tools is another form of monitoring some parents reported using. Parental controls include software and tools—some provided by Internet service providers—that filter content, block content, and/or monitor behavior.

*Use of parental controls.* Approximately half of parents believed filtering and monitoring tools were useful forms of protecting children from inappropriate content online, limiting their communication with others, and generally being able to see what their child is doing. They found it helpful that the tool kept track of searching, keystrokes, sites visited, and chat and IM scripts<sup>34</sup>. Some parents set up a different log-in for their child to be able to receive reports of behavior and sites visited, and even automatic email requests from their children asking if they could have access to a particular site. Elyse

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<sup>34</sup> Examples of the tools parents reported using include K-9 Web Protection, Windows Vista Parental Controls, Cyber Sitter, Net Nanny, Blue Coat, McAfee, AOL, Verizon, and tools offered by Internet service providers.

said that using “parental controls is very useful for me. Because what I don’t see I’m able to get a report on.”

However, many parents reported problems and frustrations with these tools.

Ayesha, stay at home mom of two sons aged 10 and 13, admitted that the tool she uses isn’t perfect:

It’s a hassle when, you know, if—like my older son has in some days sent and received inane two-letter, you know, one-sentence emails back and forth with a friend, and I’ll get a hundred, you know, of those copies in my email. And I go through basically all of them and make sure, and that’s a hassle definitely. But that’s just kinda part of it.

Furthermore, Brooke talked about how her use of McAfee blocking was an “administrative nightmare” so she took the tool off and put the computer in a shared space so she can monitor by sight. Rosa shared that her filtering tool “blocks so much” that she provided her daughter with the password. Eva said that the tool she was using “became a pain because it was restricting her from things that it really had no reason to,” and Alina said that they stopped using parental controls as it limited access for her children to schoolwork and the site where kids get homework assignments from teachers. Leslie said she quit using parental controls because it “slowed down the computer painfully and frequently would lock things up and that’s why I got frustrated with it and decided that this is a losing battle.” In addition, April found “the tools we had in place at the time were not strong enough” when her daughter came across pornography, and that “We kind of upgraded our tools at that point.” Of parents who used these tools, a couple of them said that they rely less on using rules about content and time because the tool does that for them. For example, Rosa said, “I don’t have a lot of rules about where they can go and can’t go because, Net Nanny sort of does that for me.” However, when asked

about whether she talked to her daughter about what she is doing online, Elyse reflected that maybe she relies too much on the tool: “I never really thought too much of it because I relied on the parental control.”

Another theme around filtering, blocking, and monitoring was parents who expressed an interest in using these tools, but haven’t set them up yet. Tiara said she is interested in using parental controls, but she is concerned that it will slow down her Internet connection and so she wants to upgrade her connection first. However, she thought it would be useful “as we begin to leave our kids home more alone, I think that, you know, that needs to be—I can’t be there to monitor what they’re doing, so I think we need to have something in place.” Gloria shared that she feels “illiterate” when it comes to selecting and installing parental controls, but said, “I’ve been really wanting to get a filter. So I feel more comfortable knowing that he’s a little safer.”

Finally, there were four mothers who reported that their husbands had set up parental controls; some weren’t sure whether they were in place or not. Marian said that “I’m assuming my husband set that all up”, Carolyn noted, “I think my husband has some sort of parental controls on it, I’m not real clear about that” and Nipa said “I don’t know exactly what it is. Um, my husband put it on.”

*No use of parental controls.* Conversely, there were at least ten parents who reported they do not use parental controls. This seemed to be primarily because parents would rather have their children “self-regulate” than use parental controls. Collin, a father of a ten-year-old girl, said, “I kinda feel like the solution has to be her critical faculties,” and Jasmine shared, “We just do, like, verbal teaching. Like, teaching them what to do.

Rather than relying on the software.” After describing an incident at her daughter’s school where children accessed pornography, Eva explained:

My husband and I realized that it doesn’t matter if we put a kazillion filters on the computer. If she sees it, she sees it. She might see it in the library, she might see it at someone else’s house. And so we decided, instead of filtering our own computer, we just—and because she knew about the school incident—we just use that as a teachable moment and told her, so there are bad things out—bad websites out there that you will come across anyway. So we rather teach her how to be safe. And then teach her if she comes across those sites, then she just needs to stop looking. You know, decide not to—she doesn’t want to look at them.

Karen said that parental controls are akin to censorship: “For my own family, I feel that they’re somewhat similar to censorship, if you go into a library and there are certain books that you don’t find on the shelf because people find them offensive.” Along the same lines, Liz said, “my job is to instill in him how to make good choices. If I filter things, and I censor things, then I’m not giving him the opportunity to make those choices.” Similarly, Sandra noted:

You wouldn’t take a kid to a pool and say, ‘Don’t go swimming, you might drown.’ You’re gonna take them to the pool, and you’re gonna teach them ways to be safe around water before you put them in the water. So that’s—I feel the same way about the, the Internet and the tools on the Internet.

### *Additional Ways of Monitoring*

There are additional themes that emerged in the Monitoring the Internet category, including parents who reporting checking the online history of websites their kids visited, differences regarding monitoring television versus the Internet, and many parents reported they plan on increasing monitoring when the child is older.

*Checking online history.* At least ten parents reported that they checked their child’s history of websites visited, search terms, and emails as a form of monitoring. In regards to the fact that some kids can erase their history, two parents said they expected



to see a history. Brooke said, “We have to be able at any time to click History; there’d better be a history there” and Leslie explained that if her sons clear the history, it is “an admission of guilt.”

*TV vs. Internet.* Of importance to note is the difference some parents expressed between monitoring the Internet and monitoring television. When asked whether they were more concerned about the Internet or television, some parents said that they were more concerned about the Internet. Angie talked about her concerns with her nine-year-old daughter:

I can tell her to turn the TV off. Of course I can unscrew the cable. Right? So I’m not too worried about that. There goes the danger. Poof! Just like that. But on the Internet, you know, you—she could be playing a game on the Internet and click a link that takes her somewhere else, and it—and not to say a thing to me when I’m in the kitchen with my back to her, right? And I don’t know what she can be up to. It wouldn’t be hard to be off on a tangent. So I rate the Internet higher than television.

Similarly, Gloria said: “I believe they can do more without you knowing on a computer, as opposed to if they’re watching something you can, you know, catch ‘em right there.”

Alternatively, some parents expressed more concern about television. Liz said “maybe I am a little softer on the computer than if he were also watching television,” and Fatima said of her nine-year-old son, “At this stage of the game, I would say television [is more of a concern]. But I know when he gets older, it will be the Internet.” One concern is the “passivity” of television, where Sara explained, “The TV is more of a draw right now than the computer. . . .The TV is more passive, you know, they’re just sitting there. It’s not as much work, watching it.” When asked, Barbara noted she “definitely “had more rules about TV than the Internet. She normally doesn’t limit how much they can watch TV, but she noticed a change in the behavior of her daughter after watching too

much TV: “What I find is that if she watches some of those series too much, then she starts acting like those kids—the kids in the television show.”

*Monitoring will increase with age.* Finally, there were some interesting comments about how parents perceived they will have to monitor the Internet as their child gets older. Several parents stated that they expect to get more restrictive about what their child can do online as they get older. Nipa said, “maybe as they get older and they get more friends, and I’ll have to monitor it more.” In the same fashion, Angie shared, “As she grows, she’s gonna want to explore, and do more, and well, that’s when I’m going to have to step up my parenting skills” and that she’s “waiting to see signs, when she needs to have the talk. And when she needs actual rules.” Similarly, Esther noted that as her daughter gets older, “I’m gonna have to change policy, and I’ll have to be more vigilant.” As Debra put it, the places her daughter goes are “pretty innocuous” and so she envisioned, “more blocking, more rules, more checking with me before she goes on new sites” as her daughter gets older. However, Denise, explained how she expects to be less restrictive as her son gets older: “As he gets into high school, or even asks to do certain things, we’ll get less restrictive.” What is interesting about this finding is that the parental mediation and parental media literacy education literature show that as children get older, parents actually do less restricting and monitoring overall (Livingstone 2006; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Roberts et al, 2005). So, although parents envision themselves increasing their monitoring in the future, this is contrary to what the literature shows.

#### *Online Behavior*

The second theme that emerged from the interviews with parents is concerns, hopes, and attitudes about children’s online behavior. This was by far the largest finding

of the interviews, in which parents expressed their concerns and hopes about the things their children are doing online. I divided these findings by protectionist and empowerment strategies, and beneath those categories, explained sub-categories for online behavior. It is important to note that parental media literacy behaviors, such as talking with children about what they're doing online, asking questions, and analyzing websites can be found in both protectionist and empowerment sections below. However, due to the nature of protectionist strategies being more restriction-based by limiting children's use of the Internet, more media literacy behaviors are found within empowerment. I'll begin with results for protectionist strategies around online behavior.

The categories that emerged under protectionist Online Behavior include: Seeing (accessing content and what kids see online), Sharing (private and personal information), Communicating (who kids talk to online, including strangers and friends, and how kids communicate online), Spending (issues with time spent online versus doing other things), and Cheating (using the Internet to foster cheating behavior).

### *Seeing*

The first category of parents' comments and feelings about their children's online behavior is regarding children seeing—and being exposed to—certain information online. There are four concerns about what children see online: Inappropriate content, pornography and sexual images, advertising, and YouTube.

*Seeing: inappropriate content.* The first subcategory under Seeing is a concern with inappropriate content. Although parents had different definitions of “inappropriate content,” the concerns have to do with “adult” content, in particular, sex, violence,

profanity, music videos, and song lyrics. Most parents expressed wanting to protect or shield their children from such content, as Jackie noted:

I think there's a lot more horror in the world that, than kids need to be exposed to. So we are protective of, um, things. Language, things that are, um, sexual in nature. . . I don't want her seeing people being cruel or, people intentionally hurting somebody, physically, or um, getting weird, you know, sexual images in her head, and all that kind of stuff, because I just think it stinks.

Miranda explained that anything that has “a sexual element or a dark element to it” is off-limits for her preteen. Nadia expressed that she still sees her twelve-year-old daughter as “innocent” and does not want her exposed to inappropriate content. However, some parents said that it was natural for their pre-teens to be curious about certain things, as Eva shared, “There's so much to be curious about. And so much to want to look at. . . . Do I think she will sneak that inappropriate music video in when we're not watching? *Absolutely!*” Leslie said, “I guess the way the whole Internet thing works is that for ninety percent of the adults and kids out there, if they come across something inappropriate, they're gonna go ‘ick.’”

Denise, a mother of a ten-year-old son, noted that she's more concerned with violence than sex. Liz stated more of a concern with realistic violence: “the unrealistic violence doesn't bother me, but the very realistic violence. In fact, I peered over his shoulder the other day, and I saw something, and I thought, ‘Oh, my. I've got to talk to him about this.’” A couple of parents noted that it's more natural for boys to like violence, as Liz said of her twelve-year-old son watching violent content online: “He's a boy's boy, and he does like to do that kind of thing.” Similarly, Ayesha noted of her 10-year-old son: “I don't like either [sexual or violent content], but I've also come to the reality that boys like violence!” Sara, even though she was not a fan of violence in

movies and video games, found that, with her son, “violence hasn’t really entered the picture in an online way yet.” No parents of daughters expressed concerns about their daughters accessing violent content.

Accessing sexual content was another theme of seeing inappropriate content, and both parents of boys and girls expressed this concern. Although pornography is in a separate category below, it is important to note that concerns about seeing sexual content, not explicitly pornography, was a theme. Kim said that her 12-year-old daughter went to a:

Confessional website where people write about moments when um, their life feels very fucked, basically. Like, funny or bad moments. And they were *all* about sex . . . And I told her that I really didn’t think that was a good website for her to go on, but I haven’t limited it. But I don’t think she’s gone back on it either.

April bought her daughter a book about understanding sexuality after she found her daughter had seen sexual content online.

A couple of parents shared how their children inadvertently came across sexual content. Melissa said that even in a social networking site for kids, there was an area where kids could share their creative work and she saw someone had drawn a penis: “I realized that people were creating things that, you know, I just wasn’t—I just didn’t agree with.” Ayesha said that “anything sexual is inappropriate, in my opinion, at that age.” Marian explained that she is particularly rigid with rules about the Internet because when her son was in third grade, he was with a friend who searched for “brother and sister” and got a porn shot, even though the school was supposed to have filters. Jasmine explained how her twin 9-year-old daughters looked up “beaver tails” online to find a recipe to make this sweet fried dough treat. However, she said:

It's not really fried dough that you get when you google 'beaver tails.' So we had a bit of a laugh---without showing them explicitly what comes up—we had a discussion about that. And they often do that. They'll go on and Google, like, 'red fox' or something. And you know, you get all sorts of things when you do that.

Another content concern was about inappropriate and profane song lyrics. Liz and Laura expressed concerns about their sons' love of rap and heavy metal, watching videos and listening to lyrics that they didn't like. After Laura expressed her dislike of the songs and explained why, she found her son "kind of felt regulated, according to his own values, that he didn't like those lyrics."

Concerns about sex, violence, and language mirror parental concerns and moral panics about media for the past 100 years (Cricher, 2006). However, accidental exposure to pornography and sexual content in Internet-based entertainment (such as YouTube) were a main concern for parents, as Davis (2012) found in a survey of parents. Since the Internet is not regulated like film or television, and contains an endless amount of content, it is no surprise that parents are concerned with what their kids are exposed to online.

A few parents who had more than one child said their pre-teen had seen inappropriate content due to siblings, and expressed concern for younger siblings. Ayesha reported her 10-year-old son saw inappropriate content online because her 13-year-old son had previously searched for "hot girls kissing." Similarly, April explained that her 13-year-old daughter was "sneaking around. . .going on the computer when she wasn't supposed to be" to look at sexual content online. She warned her older daughter how this could impact her 10-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter: "I said, 'This can't happen.' I said, 'If your sister had stumbled on this, or if your brother had stumbled on this, that really would have been sad.'"

Overwhelmingly, when describing what they would do or what they've done when their children have accessed inappropriate content, they preferred talking to their child and telling them why they do not approve of the content, limiting the child's Internet access temporarily, and then using a more diligent approach when they go back online, including setting up parental control tools. Tiara explained, "we'd definitely have a discussion about it, and then I think I would probably restrict his use of the Internet for a period of time," Carolyn said that she would "Explain to her why I felt it was inappropriate" and "I would tell her not to go there anymore, and then I hope I would go about asking my husband to help me set up a way to block it." Most parents emphasized having a discussion about their child first before using other strategies. Fatima shared that she would discuss with her son "As opposed to telling him, 'this is bad; you can't use this' this is inappropriate"—kind of talk to him more about, 'Well, what did you think of that content? Why did you go there? What was this interest?'" Similarly, Leslie said to her daughter, "Why were you on that site? What were you looking for? Did you just find it by accident? Did someone tell you about it and you were just curious? What was your angle here?'" Miranda said she would monitor the Internet more closely if she found her daughter accessing inappropriate content, "and my job is to monitor it until we're all back to feeling like we're doing what we need to do." Similarly, Bonnie shared how she would "put a ban on the Internet for a period of time, and you know, just start monitoring her even closer." However, Eva was in the minority in using an approach where she gives her daughter the freedom to choose:

I'm sure when my daughter goes to a website that's inappropriate, she absolutely knows that it's inappropriate. But does she want to stay on that website? It's her choice. . . We decided that in order for her to make the right choice most of the

time, we need to empower her with the freedom to choose. . . And hoping that she understands we are giving her this power because we trust her.

However, Eva also noted that “of course when we give her freedom, um, there comes the risk of her being too curious.”

*Seeing: pornography and sexual images.* Seeing pornography and sexual images is another issue that emerged under the category of Seeing. Although sexual content was discussed above, this category includes parents’ specific references to pornography and concerns about pornographic images. Both Tiara and Melissa reported that pornography is their “biggest concern” their preteen sons. A couple of parents reflected on how the Internet has offered access to pornography at younger ages. Collin, a father of a 10-year-old girl, said:

It’s a little heartbreaking to me that, you know, the first images of sex she’ll see will probably be something Internet, but that’s just life. . . I snuck into porn places when I was a teenager, and I saw Playboy, you know. But at eighteen, I saw the cover of a magazine in some porn place is an image I just didn’t need to see. It’s like, ‘Woah!’

Likewise, Ayesha noted that pornography today “is not that different from Playboy of a generation or two ago, except what’s online is so much more graphic, and is just horrible.”

Amy, stepmother of a 12-year-old son, shared how her vision of her son changed when she discovered pornography on the computer:

This is a lovely little boy. He’s also kind of small, so he looks very innocent. . . And it wasn’t until we discovered porn on the computer. Cuz up ‘til that point it was like, well, you know, they’re doing Sesame Street, right? How much trouble can they get into? My mind just didn’t go into those places.



For Amy, the solution was for her and her husband to have a conversation with her son, drawing on counselors and a priest for support. They also put parental controls on the computer, monitoring his activity without his knowledge.

Rosa was worried that for her son, there is “no way of knowing what’s legal and illegal. He has no way of knowing if those girls on there are under age.” Rosa talked with her son about not downloading this type of content because it’s “demoralizing to women” and “supporting an industry that we don’t believe in,” and also it “can lead to addictions.” She said, “Just like we teach them to stay away from cigarettes, you know—we put pornography. . .in the same talk.” However, Regina used a different approach to pornography, having a conversation with her 12-year-old son about how it can be complex:

There’s pornography that I guess I would say is just bad and horrible, and illegal. And then there’s pornography that might be interesting in a certain—certain context. . .so it’s brought up issues of, like, what is okay, and in what—what context—the things that you do. What people do in the privacy of their bedrooms. Just being consenting adults is one thing, and then, you know, exploitation and you know, stuff like that. So it’s brought up a lot of issues around sexuality.

She explained that she had already had the “sex talk” with her son previously, “but not— not issues of why would somebody want to look at a picture of a naked lady, and you know, that’s not what you do when you have the sex talk [laughs].”

Inherent in the concern with inappropriate content and pornography was a specific concern about the images that kids might see and the impact they could have on their child. Ayesha noted, “once it’s seen, some of those images are disgusting enough that they don’t easily erase from your head,” Denise said, “I’m just afraid there are images that are going get stuck in his head that gonna form beliefs for him,” and Melissa said, “Once he sees something, I can’t remove that.” Similarly, Sonia expressed that even if

her son clicks away from a pornographic image he might encounter by accident, “it’s that three seconds that’s kind of imprinted on the brain of whatever could pop up that I can’t take away. And even if I explain it, and we talk about it, it’s still there.”

Jackie shared an incident she had when her daughter was searching for an image for a school project and brought up a pornographic image. After they closed the image, she explained to her daughter, “‘You know what? The Internet is a really big place and there are lots of images.’ I mean, for her, as a kid, she just assumes that if it’s on the Internet a) it’s good, and b) it’s true.” Jackie shared that she is more concerned with the lack of control with images: “I think she could see something faster than I could get over there to click it off or something.”

Ayesha explained how her parental control tool failed to block thumbnail images on Google: “If Google is unblocked, they can go to the images and search for ‘hot girls.’ . . . And things will come up. If they click on that to try to get to a larger view, that is blocked. But the thumbnail is still there.” She would rather not have to block Google completely, but unfortunately that was the only way to block the thumbnail images. Yet, Ayesha was an example of a protectionist parent who is quite comfortable using technology, which is in line with the survey results in chapter four that showed parents who use protectionist strategies also report being comfortable with the computer and the Internet.

*Seeing: advertising.* The Internet is full of advertising. However, online advertising is a whole different animal than commercials or product placement on television and in movies. Online ads can be interactive, personalized, and pervasive. Many parents voiced a concern with their kids being exposed to online advertising and

marketing, and some helped their children understand online ads, from having their kids avoid clicking on ads to helping kids understand how advertising works online.

Having a concern about advertising also seemed to relate to parents' jobs and their attitude about marketing. Collin, who works as a media consultant, explained that he "deconstruct[s] commercials all the time" with his daughter, and that "most of the things that she's seeing [online] are brought to her by advertisers or are there to stimulate her attention so she'll see advertisements." Debra shared that she has said to her 9-year-old daughter, "'So why do you think they're doing that? Why do you think they're telling you those things? Well, cuz they want you to buy!'" Debra went on to explain, "my field used to be advertising, so I like to think I'm kind of on top of that." Esther, an Internet Marketer, helped her twelve-year-old daughter understand ads. She said her daughter "certainly understands what advertising is, because since I work in search marketing, I talk about cheaper click and sponsored listings and all that stuff all day long." Esther went on to explain how she has explained to her daughter that "Advertising is trying to *sell* you something. And I say—I tell her advertising doesn't tell you everything about anything. It only tells you the *good* side of a thing and glamorize it a little bit." Esther was an example of a parent who was comfortable using technology and who used empowerment strategies to help her child analyze online ads, but her strategies seemed to be influenced by her job.

There appeared to be two groups of parents within advertising: those who taught their kids to avoid clicking on ads and pop-ups, and those who helped their children identify online ads and explore their purpose. For the first group, Laura shared that she doesn't allow her twin boys to click on advertising, particularly if it leads them outside of

the website they are on. Nipa told her daughter not click on ads so that she doesn't fill out sweepstakes forms: "I tell them not to click on anything. You know, a lot of times things will come up saying 'You're the 105<sup>th</sup> person online, you've won this!' and I'm like 'it's crap.'" Similarly, Nadia told her daughter to "not click on, you know, other links type of thing, and never put in your –any information" and Gina reported that she had discussed the "too good to be true" online ads with her 9-year-old son. Furthermore, a few parents reported weaving in with conversations about ads with conversations about money and how they want to spend it. For example, Fatima talked about how her son wanted things he saw on the lego.com website: "We use it as a tool to teach him how to use his money properly. But I would say that's the extent as far as we've used any advertisements."

Barbara explained how she talked with her daughter about the Build-a-Bear website: "We just discussed about how that's a marketing tool, and they are trying to get you to buy this product, that product, this product. . .it was all part of their promotion."

Another group of parents used media literacy strategies with their kids to help them better understand how to identify advertising online. Several parents explained how they have taught their children to recognize online advertising, from Tammy who taught her daughter to recognize that some games on Facebook are really ads:

She goes, 'Can I do the IQ test?' And it's like, 'Honey, it's not an IQ test, it's an ad, like, they sent you to click on it.' And she's like, 'Oh, okay.' . . . Well, a lot of them usually say 'advertisement' in the corner.

In the same way, Jackie said:

We've just sort of directed visually what looks like it's part of a site and not part of the site. You know, clearly if it's blinking or animated, it's probably advertising. Um, things around the borders of the webpage are probably advertising. Any pop-ups are generally advertising.

Brooke explained, “Well, I tell them things like, with the very little kid ads, that you’ll see the word ‘A-D’ posted, and that you don’t want to click on that because they’re trying to trick you into going to an ad.” Liz shared that she explained sponsored advertising to her 12-year-old son: “For instance, when you Google something and you know, they’ve got the first things that come up are the things that people have paid for, so that they’re gonna come up on the top of the page.” Sonia expressed how identifying online advertising can be challenging for adults, as well as children:

It’s hard! I mean, it’s hard for me to see what’s an ad. And so sometimes even if I’m just getting on my email, you know, Hotmail has some ads on the side, you know, they’ll [her kids] will say ‘Oh, look at this!’ And we’ll stop and say, ‘Oh, that’s an *ad*, actually.’

In a similar manner, Jasmine said:

I’m not even sure adults are always very good at understanding ads. But I think we talk about, like Millsberry.com, for example . . . the sites—even the games themselves—even if there aren’t pop-up ads—are nevertheless marketing for their products.

Leslie, an Instructional Technologist, explained how:

Sometimes when we’re co-surfing, we’ll kind of laugh at how the ads seem to be very specifically targeted. And I guess maybe I’m just trying to build in some awareness to her that all the cookies that they set are used for a purpose. And they’re trying to make you buy something.

Not all parents brought a lot of knowledge about the media into their interactions with children. There were parents who reported having not talked about online advertising with their kids, whether it is something they just haven’t done, didn’t think was necessary, or as Alina said of her 12-year-old son who is academically advanced, “He’s savvy. I mean, he’s a twelve-year-old in high school. He knows the difference between, you know, a sales pitch and you know, an educational link.” Kim told her

daughter not to click on ads, but seemed unsure why: “I’ve told her not to click through to ads. Um, but I don’t—I’m trying to think why I told her not to.”

*Seeing: YouTube.* Of particular concern to some parents was their children seeing inappropriate content on the website YouTube. This category is noteworthy to call out because many parents mentioned YouTube specifically. On the one hand, several parents noted the positive aspects of YouTube. Barbara said her daughter goes on YouTube to find music she needs to learn for the school musical. Kim explained that “I do think there’s a really wonderful creative aspect to YouTube. I know that one of her friends is kind of into making videos and putting them up, and she’s been part of that.” However, Kim also noted she worries about YouTube because “There are things on YouTube that, you know, I might not let her watch on TV.” Eva said, “I think the biggest pet peeve for me, on the Internet, is YouTube. . . If there’s any site that we try to limit her, it would be YouTube because there are just too many provocative videos.” Rosa noted that “quite often, there’s something sexual in the title of the video, or maybe in the picture to get your interest. I would think for an 11-year old boy some of those things are really hard not to click on.” Regina also found that “YouTube is very hard to restrict parts of it.”

On the one hand, several parents said their children search for specific content on YouTube. For instance, Esther says her daughter “doesn’t just randomly search, she’ll be searching for something specific that she heard about, like you know, some kind of trumpet puppet thing, or a Lego movie, or some stuff like that. Or movie trailers, whatnot.” Bonnie shared the problems with her daughter easily stumbling across inappropriate content on YouTube, “She was watching songs—videos and stuff like that. And I just really didn’t like that cuz I just—sometimes you just wander into something

that you didn't intend to go into." Karen monitored her son's use of YouTube by checking on the website history:

What I've told him is if you—you're allowed to go on YouTube, but I'm going to look and see what you're watching. And if you're watching something that's, you know, a PG-13 movie clip or something that he's currently not allowed to watch, then the computer gets taken away from him. That hasn't happened yet.

To shield her son from inappropriate content on YouTube, Gina's approach was to screen videos before her son can watch them. She would ask him to turn his back until she made sure it was appropriate:

He kind of resisted me on that and thinks I'm crazy for making him turn his back. I said, 'You don't understand; when I click on here, it can pop up real quick, and I don't want—I want to see what it is before you do.'

Tiara and Marian explained that they preview clips on YouTube before their children can watch them. Because of the unpredictability of her 10-year-old son accessing inappropriate content, Sara also noted that, for her child, "YouTube is extremely parents-over-shoulder heavily monitored." Marian expressed her frustration that even though she limits YouTube at home, he can access it at school through a friend's iTouch: "I may be limiting at home, but it's all going on at the school!"

### *Sharing*

The next category has to do with parents' comments about sharing private information online. There are two main concerns with sharing. The first is sharing private information such as full name, age, address, location, and email, and keeping accounts secure through passwords. The other concern with sharing is the photos and videos kids are uploading of themselves. The subcategories under the Sharing category include Privacy, Uploading Content, and Passwords.

*Sharing: privacy.* Most parents viewed their children's online privacy as having to do with personally identifiable information, such as full name, address, school name, phone number, and email address. At least sixteen parents said they have talked with their preteens about not giving out this kind of information online, or at least having their child ask a parent before they do. A couple of parents reported helping their child set privacy settings, but overall the majority of parents did not allow their preteens on social networking sites.

The concern with sharing information online was around a concern with strangers and Internet predators. For example, Barbara said "We discussed keeping things like your school private and why that was so important because that's a way for people to locate and find you." Melissa said, "The fact that we don't provide detailed, specific, elaborate information about themselves because unfortunately there are adults who would portray themselves as children in these environments." Nipa noted that she told her 12 and 10-year old daughters not to give out private information: "Don't put where we live, don't put your phone number, don't put your address. And they're like, 'Ok.' 'You don't put your school.' I said, you know I tell 'em there's crazy people out there today." However, Nipa then reflected that she does not want to make her daughters feel scared:

But I don't want them to be fearful of the world either. There are people in this world that you can trust. So, I just—I try to balance it out by putting a little bit of fear but a little bit of common sense.

Debra shared that she had not talked about privacy with her 9-year-old daughter because "I think they get in school, that you know, don't give out private information. She's already chanting that to me. 'Um, I don't need to do that.'" Bonnie noted that she talked with her 10-year old daughter about privacy, "you know, don't give out your



name, don't give out any personal information" and stated, "When I've told her something once, she pretty much understands it."

A few parents described more nuanced and complex conversations about online privacy, beyond not sharing private information. For instance, Esther explained how she shared a learning moment about online privacy with her daughter:

Last weekend I commented because we were going to the zoo and she tweeted, 'We're going to the zoo.' And I said, 'I'm really proud of you for not saying what zoo we were going to, and where you live. . . And we set up her profile together so that it was very location-neutral. You know, she writes about Club Penguin so her location was 'my igloo.'

Brooke talked with her son about his digital footprint: "What I've been talking about with them so far is when we put something online, it can be permanent, it can be forever, and that even if you delete it, sometimes Google will remember a picture of it forever." She went on to describe how she talked with her kids about how people can find others through reverse phone number lookup, and how even if a social networking profile is set to private, sometimes profile photos can still be seen. She explained, "what you're doing is starting to build a history out there for yourself. . . you want to leave behind a trace of things that you'd want somebody to stumble upon someday."

*Sharing: uploading content.* To a lesser degree, parents talked with their preteens about sharing photos and uploading content online. Many parents said they do not allow their preteens on social networking sites and don't allow them to upload personal photos and videos. On the one hand, Sandra talked about how her 9-year old son uploads pictures to Flickr so that he can share them with family. Similarly, Leslie shared how her daughter loves to post pictures, "so we end up to have a lot of discussion about what would be safe to post, what would be appropriate to post, and you know, do you really

want to put that out there where anybody could see it.” Leslie also explained to her daughter how Photoshop can be used to manipulate photos:

I can say, ‘Look, Emma, do you see how I can go to this website and I can download this picture that was totally innocent, pull it into Photoshop, and turn it into something that looks very different, and a lot more dangerous. And the problem is it’s still that person’s face on it. And then I can put it right back out there, and it looks like that was what was originally posted.

However, most parents’ who talked about this issue were concerned with sharing inappropriate pictures online or through cell phones, and of these parents, most of them were referring to their preteen daughters. Tammy talked about what could happen to the photo, as she said, “We talk about the snowball effect. And it’s like, you thought you were doing something cute and funny and innocent; the next thing you know, everybody’s got it.” Tammy, Nipa, and Esther used news stories to discuss the negative consequences of sexting and sharing private photos, for instance, one example was a girl’s suicide after her nude picture was posted on the Internet by her boyfriend.

*Sharing: passwords.* Another subcategory under Sharing has to do with passwords. Ten parents said they require their kids to share their passwords with them for their email or social networking accounts so they can log in and see what is going on. Parents seemed to use this as a form of monitoring and to keep their child safe. Sara let her son know when he set up his email account, “‘Here’s the deal,’ you know, ‘I get to know your password. I see everything that comes in, I see everything that goes out.’” Regina explained, “We know the kids’ passwords which, you know, we’ve told them that’s important so theoretically I could read their email.” Tammy said she explained to her daughter the reasoning: “Mommy and Dadda don’t, you know, look at your stuff to be nosy; it’s because we love you or we want to keep you safe. And she’s like, ‘Oh yeah,

I know.’ So she *knows* it’s to keep her safe.” Fatima’s son shared his password to an account with a friend, and she used this opportunity to teach him about keeping passwords private, as she noted:

We did find out that he told his friend what his password was, so we went back and we changed it. And now he doesn’t have access to his own password because we felt that it was something very important for him to learn that if you can’t keep your information confidential, then we’re going to keep it confidential for you.

### *Communicating*

The third major subtheme beneath Online Behavior from parents’ interviews is sharing comments and experiences about their preteens communicating with others online. Overall, the tone of parents’ comments about communicating was fearful and cautious. There were three subcategories beneath Communicating: Internet predators, cyberbullying, and social networking.

*Communicating: Internet predators.* Unfortunately, the Internet is a vehicle for crimes against children, and parents are particularly concerned about keeping their kids safe from Internet predators and strangers. Although the chance of a child actually meeting with an Internet predator in person is low (Internet Safety Task Force, 2008), parents were worried about “stranger danger” on the Internet and protecting their kids from being contacted by strangers. News stories and programs<sup>35</sup> sensationalize stories about Internet predators, making the issue seem like a bigger danger than what the research says, as one study found that “the research about Internet-initiated sex crimes indicates that the stereotype of the Internet ‘predator’ who uses trickery and violence to assault children is largely inaccurate” and explained to the socio-emotional risk factors of

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<sup>35</sup> The news drama *To Catch a Predator* is a show premised on baiting, catching, and prosecuting child predators.

kids who are more likely to get involved with an Internet predator, including risky online talk about sex, a history of sexual or physical abuse, emotional problems, low self-esteem and isolation (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008, p. 125). The point here is not to say parents should not be concerned about Internet predators, but rather, some parents were quite concerned about this issue when the risk is lower than other risks like cyberbullying or risky online talk with other kids (Internet Safety Task Force, 2008).

Nonetheless, parents' concern about strangers harming or kidnapping their children was a common fear. Amy, mother of a 12-year-old boy, shared, "I'm worried about people invading him. That's my number one worry, it's predators." Laura said, "My big fear is that they're going to be on some kind of message board where they might meet someone who's dangerous." Barbara said:

Well, you know, you hear about sick people picking up girls, the boys that trust someone else, and then they come to their town, and they leave with them or hunt them down because they know what school they want to, or that type of thing.

Some parents expressed a concern with protecting their child's innocence, as Jasmine expressed:

I worry about their vulnerability, you know, that you kind of want to preserve on their innocence. . . You want them to live in a beautiful bubble for awhile, but as soon as they are online, you can't afford to do that anymore, you know? So I will talk to them about that, you know? Like, that the people you meet online aren't always the people you think.

Similarly, Jackie worried about her daughter's vulnerability, as she said:

I think probably my fear is the fact that she would get herself into a situation, trying to be nice to somebody or trying to help somebody, you know, and not realizing that's the exact same thing as if a man comes up to you and says, 'I've lost my puppy,' that you don't go with him. . . My fear is that she's just going to be too accommodating in some degree.

To address this issue, parents talked with their kids about three things: (1) how they should use the same rules online for avoiding strangers that they use in the offline world; (2) not to share private information about themselves; and (3) anonymity and how one never can tell who someone else really is online. For instance, in regards to using the same rules about strangers as in the offline world, Carolyn said, “I would try to have those same conversations about a stranger coming to the door or being approached by a stranger on the Internet.” Parents discussed anonymity with their kids, as Eva said, “I always constantly remind her when you don’t see someone’s face, you don’t know the true identity of that person,” and April noted, “he understands that there’s a certain amount of anonymity. . .predators and things like that can—could pose as your friends.”

Barbara, who had twin 11-year old boys, said that even though she is worried about Internet predators, she recognized it might be different if she had girls: “Since they’re boys. . .I don’t have the same kind of fears I would as if they are young girls, meeting someone who’d they’d like to sneak away, to be with.” On the other hand, Jackie, who has a daughter, explained:

Part of it is just being a girl issue that, you know, a young girl in our culture is, we sort of train girls to be nice and polite. . .she just doesn’t know enough about the things that are out there in the world to have enough savvy to judge for herself and trust her instincts, like, this is not a good thing, this is not a good person.

To avoid predators, parents recommended that their children not share private information online, not to communicate with strangers online, and not to respond when a stranger approaches them. For example, when Nipa’s 12-year-old daughter was instant messaging and approached by a stranger online who said, “Hey, baby”, Nipa advised her daughter to write “Please go away.” The person went away. Nipa also explained how her daughter was on Club Penguin and some of the penguins were her writing comments like

“you’re hot,” and “where do you live?” To deal with this, Nipa told her daughter, “you look at the penguin, but you never know who’s really that penguin behind it” and advised her to move away or block penguins who were saying these things.

There were a few parents who reflected that they wanted to talk to their kids about Internet predators, but didn’t because their children were not yet allowed to talk with others online. Jackie explained that even though she hasn’t spoken to her daughter about Internet predators yet, she would say, hypothetically:

‘Remember we talked about that you know, going with strangers? Well, this is a whole other level of, you know, there are bad people. You can’t see them online. . . You don’t know they’re bad, or that they would want to do something that would hurt you.’

Liz said that she hasn’t talked about Internet predators with her son yet because, “Right now, for him, it’s not age-appropriate. . . We really keep our kids in their childhood. Very deliberately.”

Parents had a combination of media exposure and direct experience that influenced their concerns about predators. For example, I found a pattern with television and news media influencing parents’ worries about Internet predators. Amy was scared by a story she saw on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in which a boy was lured into taking nude pictures to make money. Angie was disturbed by an incident that happened in a town close to her where a girl disappeared and was later found murdered. However, Angie also mentioned she:

Writes articles for the newspaper as well, on computers and dangers. . . So I’m always reading this stuff and it’s like, oh, ugh. . . We need to be guards because the piranha of society is out there using these tools before we become aware or take them seriously.

Thus, Angie might hear more about these stories than the average parent, and that might feed her worries.

Several parents shared how they have used news stories and movies as a conversation starter to warn their kids about Internet predators. Nipa described:

I've actually showed them movies and talked about girls on the news who've gotten kidnapped. There's a movie on Lifetime about a girl with an Internet predator—and I'm like, 'They're out there. Look, watch this movie!' And they're like, 'Wow!' I'm like, 'That's why you never put any information out there.'

On the other hand, some parents had strong attitudes about Internet predators because they had a direct life experience in which their children had interactions with predatory elements. Ayesha told a very personal story about her son, who she discovered was involved with some inappropriate contact with an adult man. Her son met the man on an online game, and they started texting each other. The man requested a nude picture, which she thinks her son did not send but she was not sure. She had contacted the police about the situation, but since there was no crime (no evidence of nude pictures or pornography), the police could not do much. They told her to work with her cell phone company to try to retrieve the text exchange they were having (which her son deleted). This incident was frustrating to Ayesha: "It's like, at what point *can* the police be involved, and what *can* they do, and I think, at this point, you know, companies—Internet, cable companies, and cell phone companies—parents *want* more control." Furthermore, Ayesha said that she had talked with her son prior to this incident about not communicating with strangers online or through text, but she says, "it kind of went in one ear and out the other."

Angie, shared a personal experience where she met someone online and had a negative life experience: "I know all about the dangers that you can get yourself into,"

she says, “I believed a liar. Got pregnant. And that’s how Zoe<sup>36</sup> [her preteen daughter] came about.” Angie shared the story of how she met someone online, moved far away to live with him, got pregnant, and learned that he was a con artist:

He pretended he was—you know, he just lied. And then while I was there, he was lying to seven other women in the States! And I was pregnant with his kid! Like, come on! And I couldn’t believe it. I managed to save one of the ladies that was—he’d been chatting with.

Angie’s powerful direct life experience influenced her very real concern to keep her daughter safe from Internet predators.

Even though the research shows the likelihood of a child developing a relationship with or actually meeting an Internet predator is quite low (Internet Safety Task Force, 2008), it’s notable that Ayesha and Angie reported having negative life experiences that influenced them to be protectionist with their preteens regarding online communication.

There were a few parents who said that the issue of Internet predators was not one of their top concerns. Collin said:

We’ve kind of gone out of our way not to overdo the stranger danger thing. . . A lot of parents are all very alarmed about snatching and strangers, you know, seducing, and we’ve talked about it a little bit, but mostly to explain why other people have worried about it.

Kim said, “I am less concerned with the risk of predators or of the kids being exploited from an outside person than I am concerned with what they’re representing themselves to the community.” Both Debra and Brooke stated that the risk is too low to be worried, as Debra said, “the chance of stranger abduction is so rare, especially now, that you don’t even need to have that discussion. It’s a waste of everyone’s time, and frightens kids.”

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<sup>36</sup> Name changed for anonymity.



*Communicating: cyberbullying.* Cyberbullying, which is when children intentionally and repeatedly harass others using digital technologies, was another issue that emerged from parents' concerns about their children communicating online. In 2009, cyberbullying was not as much of a hot topic as it is in today, in which schools have put into place anti-bullying policies and certain states have passing anti-bullying laws.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, cyberbullying was on the radar of some parents. Debra said, "I worry about later on, kids being mean to each other" and Esther worried about bullying with her daughter, as she said, "I worry about cyberbullying because she's really, really sensitive."

Similar to the way parents talked about Internet predators and using analogies with the "real world," several parents used the same analogy when talking to their kids about cyberbullying. For example, April explained that she emphasized to her kids "anything that they say online, they'd better be prepared to say to someone's face." Similarly Jasmine said, "We talk about respect and stuff in the *other* spheres of life" even as specific as telling her 9-year-old twin daughters, "you don't put things in uppercase because it looks like you're shouting, and that sometimes jokes that are sarcastic jokes. . . could hurt feelings." Debra shared that she told her daughter "anything you write down will always stay there, so if you're ever mean, or if you ever do something you regret, it will always be there." Jasmine mentioned, however, that cyberbullying is "still kind of abstract for them because their friends, none of them have cell phones or Facebook sites really, yet, and so I think it's like, more of a theoretical thing." Miranda, Sonia, and Tiara said they had not talked about cyberbullying with their kids, Tiara said her son "knows

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<sup>37</sup> In 2010 and 2011, Massachusetts and New Jersey passed anti-bullying laws that require schools to implement anti-bullying policies, education and resources.

the term. But you know, we just haven't really come across any real-life situations of that because he's not communicating with other people online at this point."

A couple of parents went beyond just talking about bullying, but explaining to their kids what it might look like. Barbara went online with her daughter and looked at some examples, "and saw some different things about, you know, what kids say online to each other. . . We just kind of did a comparison to regular bullying versus cyberbullying." Eva took an anti-cyberbullying class with her daughter and watched the movie based on the book *Odd Girl Out*: "That's when we talked about, there will be someone who might do things like this and you cannot *stop* them, but *yourself*, you yourself, you should never do that." She told her daughter, "Facebook is a tool to connect with friends. It's not a tool to hurt other people's feelings." Eva and Karen talked about news stories of kids who committed suicide related to cyberbullying to help their kids understand the most severe effects of cyberbullying. Karen said she talked with her sons about cyberbullying because:

There was a story in the news recently about a teenager who killed himself because of cyberbullying. . . I don't remember the details, but I think it was, some of the kids were calling him gay, and ultimately he couldn't take the abuse anymore. He killed himself. And we had a long discussion about that.

Rosa shared a tragic situation in which one of her daughter's friends committed suicide, due in part because other girls at school created a hate blog about her. Rosa said she is "terrified" about cyberbullying, but also in the interview said she has not talked with her 11-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter about it: "We talked to them both about bullying. I don't know if I thought of, like specifically talking about the online stuff." Along the same lines, Alina realized during the interview that maybe she should become

more aware of cyberbullying with her academically advanced son, who has skipped several grades ahead in school. She said:

It suddenly struck me that he is at greater risk for cyberbullying on there because he's been subjected to in-person bullying so much in the past. . . I definitely will keep an eye on what people are posting on his page, what they're posting in general.

A few parents explained how they would deal with cyberbullying if their child encountered it. Nadia told her daughter to just ignore bullying if she encounters it, "tell us about it and we will figure out how to deal with it. . . It's not a way of life, it's something that we can help and fix," and Alina told her son to "let someone know right away" if he is communicated with in a way that makes him uncomfortable.

*Communicating: social networking.* Social networking in this section broadly refers to any online community, such as MySpace or Facebook, where people can communicate with each other. Instant messaging and chat rooms are included. Parents who talked about social networking were split in terms of their attitude about it. About half of parents viewed social networking negatively, the other half positively. There did not appear to be many parents who were on the fence and social networking brought about strong opinions in parents.

To begin, there were several parents who did not view social networking positively and who did not allow their preteens to have a profile on a social networking site. Miranda said, "We don't do MySpace and that kind of stuff. Not into that" and thought "it's just too impersonal" but noted that, "we're very active socially, obviously, just with, you know a common network of friends and people." Similarly, Tiara said her son "doesn't do MySpace or Facebook or any of those. . . I am *not* okay with that" but would reconsider when her son turns thirteen and is legally able to join Facebook.

Jasmine said she doesn't think Facebook is appropriate yet, but contemplated, "Maybe when they're twelve? I don't know. I guess I'm a first-time mom of a teenager so, I'm kind of learning along with them, you know?"

Parents who limited social networking had a variety of concerns. Nadia had a negative attitude about social networking after going on Facebook herself, "at the urging of my neighbor one day, and got the account, and I couldn't find any real useful purpose for it." Her attitude seemed to influence rules with her daughter, as she said, "Facebook, I don't think there's any real reason for her to be on there." On the other hand, Karen was concerned about cyberbullying on social network sites, and also concerned that it can be a time waster. Esther and April were worried about peer pressure and how kids will act online. Elyse was worried about the privacy of her daughter's information, as she said, "you don't know who's looking at you, and now with that a lot of people mistakenly share all their information. And that's very dangerous." Elyse also had a bad experience with Instant messaging herself, so she was not comfortable with her daughter engaging with it.

On the other hand, just about the same amount of parents thought social networking was positive and allowed their children to use these sites. Carolyn talked about the convenience of social networking, as she noted her kids, "can be in the safety of our home emailing, or IMing or whatever they're doing. They're physically still home, but they're still feeling connected to their friends." Angie thought of the Internet as a good place for her daughter to socialize with friends, and Leslie included the caveat that her daughter's online friends "have to be someone that I know personally." Alina and Tammy allowed their kids on social networking sites that were a community based

around an interest, and monitored. For instance, Tammy noted, “On Kickgen [social networking site] it’s a little different because everybody’s a martial artist, and it’s really, you know, strictly monitored.” And a few parents said they allow their kids to chat with others on online games, for instance, Gloria’s daughter chatted with others on Wee World: “She communicates with her friends basically. . .when she’s chatting, I go in to make sure, you know, to see what they’re chatting about.”

A few parents had mixed feelings about social networking sites, as Scott said, “I think the Internet is a great way if you like augmenting social interaction. You know, staying in touch with people who are your real friends. But really, the focus should be on interacting with live people and, you know, having a play date, playing sports, and talking.” In the same vein, Amy said: “I’m really nervous with all the IMing, and the texting, and how de-personalized these kids are becoming. When I was growing up, if you broke up with your boyfriend, on the telephone, you were looked at as a chump.”

There were two interesting findings to note for parents who used social networking and allow their kids to use it. The first was that parents who “friended” their child on social networking sites did so, in part, as a way to monitor them. Leslie was friends with her daughter on MySpace so that “I can see who’s on with her,” and so “I can be her friend and I can look over her shoulder and kinda see what’s going on there [in MySpace].” Kim, who helped her daughter set up her Facebook account and who “friended” her in the beginning, said:

She is very much at an age. . .where she talks a lot about privacy, wants more privacy. I’m not so interested in her personal messages between friends, though I do look at them. I’m more interested in seeing also what her friends are doing. I mean, I’ve seen things happen online that you kind of go, ‘Wow, that’s a concern.’

Kim used Facebook as a communication tool with her daughter, as she explained, “She would have never called me at eleven o’clock at night from a friends’ house but here [on Facebook] she could check up in this very sweet way and tell me something that she wanted to tell me.”

The second interesting finding was that there were a few parents considered modeling their own use social networking sites, and how to ease their kids onto them. Amy noted, “I’m LinkedIn, and Twittered, and Facebooked, and—you know so how can I use some things that I’m preventing him from using? I would be modeling incorrectly.” Eva shared that she and her husband joined Facebook so they could learn social networking before their daughter does so that “when she starts asking about Facebook, we decided we’re going to set up her account together. . .and the other rule is she and I have to be friends so I can see her page.” Eva described preparing her daughter for social networking:

We’re having discussions about Facebook and MySpace and so forth now. I’ve done a lot of things with her on a training wheel type basis. Social networking is, I think where kids are going. That’s going to be kind of a foundation fundamental part of how they interact.

### *Spending*

The fourth category beneath the theme of Online Behavior is parents’ concerns about the amount of time kids spend online, including media multitasking. There are two findings in this category: Parents who worried that the Internet was a time waster, and parents who worry about kids spending time online and not in the “real world.”

*Spending: time waster.* The first finding is several parents sharing their concern about the amount of time their kids spend online. Denise spoke to the addictive qualities that media can have, “going on the computer is like that, it’s like a drug. It just sucks you

in and before you know it, all this time has passed.” Liz, who’s twelve-year-old son plays games with friends who all bring over their computers, said:

I think that that is such a waste. It’s a waste of time. I would like him to be more inclined to go out and work at the Food Bank, or become an activist and do something that’s good for the community in some way, as opposed to deciding that’s the way he wants to spend his social time.

Along the same lines, Gina stated “computer games can be addictive and that it rewires how your brain works; that you need to give yourself—your brain—a break.” Regina compared the Internet to television with her son, stating, “he’s more likely to spend an excessive amount of time on the computer if—without me stopping him, than he is to watch an excessive amount of TV.” On the other hand, Kim would welcome her daughter playing games versus spending time on Facebook, as she shared:

I wish Facebook wasn’t such a time-suck. I mean, when I see her on Facebook, I just think, ‘Oh, what a waste of time.’ . . . I’d rather see her playing a game online or you know, watching TV than poking around on Facebook.

A couple of parents expressed their thoughts about multitasking, with Marian explained the typical scene in her daughter’s bedroom:

This-the generation of, of these digital natives, they multitask. I mean, you go in, and she’s got the TV on; she’s reading a book; she’s got her cell phone right next to her, and every now and then she’ll pick it up and make a call and put it down again; or she’ll roll over and type something on the computer and roll back over. She’s got all of these things going on at once and, and she’s well aware of all of them. If I come in and I change the channel, she’ll go, ‘I was watching that.’

*Spending: online vs. real world.*

The second finding is a concern parents expressed about how much time kids spend online versus offline. Flora talked about her daughter’s interest in horses, and the role of the Internet:

It’s one thing to dream about owning a horse and to look at classifieds [online] all day, it’s another thing to get up on a Saturday and go out to the barn and clean the

stalls and do your thing. . . I would much rather have her outside doing other things than being on the computer.

Liz talked about how she would like her 12-year-old son to use his imagination, and that “what I get worried about is, um, that he’s not using his own imagination. I mean, it’s not that different than sitting in front of a television.” She went on to explain how, although she thinks there are some great online games like Age of Mythology, she doesn’t like the “shoot ‘em up” games because she’d rather her son go outside and shoot things with his BB gun. Liz explained how every summer her family stays a cabin with no electricity and for five weeks. She shared how she sees a behavior difference in her son when they “unplug” at the cabin: “it’s really great because I feel as though I kind of get my whole boy back again when we go up there. And he’s a real outdoors kid.”

### *Cheating*

The fifth, and last, category under the Online Behavior theme is parents’ concerns about their children cheating online. I am using the term cheating broadly here to encompass plagiarism, piracy, and online scams.

*Cheating: plagiarism and piracy.* One concern that a few parents expressed was around plagiarism and piracy. This includes copying and pasting things from the Internet without giving credit to the source, and downloading content illegally. Scott talked about teaching his nine-year-old son about the difference between research and plagiarism: “It’s awfully easy to do, to find a page in Wikipedia and a bunch of other places, and cut-and-paste those three paragraphs you found and sort of say, ‘My homework’s done.’” Parents taught their kids to avoid plagiarism by explaining they need to cite their sources, and emphasized that they have to explain things in their own words. Although, Carolyn noted that the challenge in explaining to her daughter how to cite sources from the Internet: “is



hard for me because that's not how I learned, I didn't have access to the Internet." Brooke said that she talked to her son about illegal music downloading and warned him that it is "because you're not paying for it, it's also a potential source of viruses and damage to the computer." She encouraged him to use paid music sites and free Internet radio such as Pandora.

*Cheating: scams.* In the same category of cheating, a few parents explained situations in which they warned their kids of getting cheated online by a scam artist, or that their child did not understand a scam email when they saw it.<sup>38</sup> Flora described how her daughter emailed back a phishing message:

She actually emailed the person back and said, 'You have the wrong person, da-da-da.' That was, really like an a-ha for me. . . And so that's the first time that I have really felt that anything sort of dangerous has happened.

Along the same lines, Jackie shared how her nine-year-old daughter received an email asking for money from a supposed kid who lost his parents in 9/11. Jackie had to explain to her daughter:

'Well does this make sense? I mean, do you think that there'd really be a child that was sending out an email asking for money cuz both of his parents were killed in 9/11? And how many years ago was that? Do you really think that this child, that nobody was taking care of them?' . . . But she just kinda got caught up in the emotion of the story, thinking, 'Oh my gosh, this is so sad!'

To sum up the protectionist Online Behavior themes, parents expressed concerns and strategies around their children's online behavior, including the themes Seeing, Sharing, Communicating, Spending, and Cheating. Parents grappled with how to protect kids from the negative aspects and outcomes of children's behavior online.

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<sup>38</sup> Many scam emails are classified as *phishing*, which are fake messages, such as emails, that attempt to get information about a user's name, password, account information, and credit card details.

On the other hand, beneath the theme of Online Behavior, there are several subthemes that emerged as empowering strategies. These subthemes include: Engaging (parents co-surfing and sharing media with their child), Recommending (the parent recommending or bookmarking websites for their child), Learning (helping the child connect with interests and use the Internet for school), Analyzing (evaluating the credibility and content of websites), and Creating (encouraging and facilitating online creation).

### *Engaging*

The first subtheme under empowering online behavior is engaging, which refers to parents encouraging their kids to use and analyze media in beneficial ways. Forms of engaging include co-surfing and family communicating online.

*Engaging: co-surfing.* Co-surfing refers to when a parent go online together, such as playing a game, doing schoolwork, or just surfing the web<sup>39</sup>. Co-surfing alone doesn't promote media literacy skills unless the parent talks with the child about what the he or she is seeing and doing, in order to help them think critically<sup>40</sup>. However, co-surfing is an empowering behavior because sharing the experience of being online can be seen as a form of engagement.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Co-surfing means both parent and child go online together. A parent looking over the shoulder of the child occasionally is not co-surfing.

<sup>40</sup> In the research on parental mediation, co-viewing (simply watching a show or movie together) is differentiated from active mediation, in which a parent asks questions and has conversation with the child about what's being watched. Similarly, co-surfing alone does not have an active mediation component unless parents include discussion and questions about the websites visited. For a comprehensive literature review on parental mediation, see Mendoza, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> It's important to note that several parents shared how they coview or co-use other media, such as movies, television, music, and books. Examples of this include "family movie night" or having everyone bring their favorite songs on a car trip and listening to everyone's music. Parents seemed to have these types of examples more readily available than how they and their preteens share the Internet together.

There were four types of co-surfing that emerged from the interviews. The first had to do with helping the child with schoolwork and research. Several parents noted that this is the only type of co-surfing they do, as Bonnie said, “I don’t co-surf with her unless—like, if she has something to do for school and she needs to look up something on the Internet, then I’ll sit down with her and do it.” Regina explained that she and her son would sit side-by-side on their computers while doing searches related to homework assignments, and Sandra helped her son think through his research strategy: “I ask him where, like, what is he doing to gather information for this research project? Are you using Ask.com and Google?” Fatima shared an example how she helped her daughter find information about Gloria Steinem during Women’s History Month.

Within this category of searching online for schoolwork emerged strong feelings about using the Internet for research versus using more traditional means (i.e., books or the library) for research. Some parents were enthusiastic about embracing the Internet for research, as Nadia expressed, “Online you can certainly get much more detailed information about pictures and so many different sources, it would take you forever to go through books.” Amy said that her son uses the Internet like an encyclopedia, and that “I have the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* and they think it’s like going into a mausoleum. They think it’s *amazing* that anyone would actually use a book.” On the other hand, some parents would rather see their kids doing research with books, as Marian said:

I would rather he did his research with a book. . . people can go in there [on the Internet] and present something as fact, and it isn’t necessarily fact. And so that kind of bothers me. I’d rather get him an encyclopedia, or some other reference tool, than going, ‘Well I guess this is credible.’

Similarly, Liz shared:

It's challenging for me to see that the encyclopedias are never picked up. You know, it's always you go directly to the Internet. And he just sort of trusts it with abandon. . . And so the other methodologies aren't being supported. . . I see the computer is really taking the place of those other methodologies and that just makes me sad.

Nadia explained that she encourages her daughter to start with books and move to the

Internet:

If it's something that we really need to look up, we get books out first and see what we can find. And then, you know, if it's something we really can't look up that way, *then* we go online and check it out.

These comments show that some parents were not comfortable with their child searching for information online, whether it is because they were not used to approaching research in that way (likely influenced by the way they were taught to research), or they were concerned with online credibility and their child finding trustworthy information.

The second type of co-surfing that parents reported using was helping their child search for a question or a topic they're interested in. This is a typical behavior in families in which a child has a question, to which the parent replies, "Look it up on the Internet!" Nadia shared how she and her daughter "look different things up cuz we have a very curious mind—both of us have curious minds." Gina helped her son get started with searching online: "I'll help him. I'll say, you know, 'What do we want to type in? and What do we want to look at?'" Jackie helped get her daughter get started on sites that she approves of, as she explained, "I will sit with her until we had sort of established a couple of websites that were the content she was looking for."

The third type of co-surfing was helping the child connect with their interests. April explained how she co-surfed with her son to find videos of Yo-Yo tricks, "so the two of us, you know, sat and watched the Yo-Yo trick together. And then he showed me

how to do the trick. . . So things like we kinda got involved with together.” Quite a few parents reported using the Internet to look up their child’s favorite books and authors, whether to reserve a book at a library, or keep tracks of good books they read<sup>42</sup>. Tammy co-surfed with her daughter to look at karate websites, and Flora co-surfed with her daughter to look at horse videos and horses for sale, noting that she had a love of horses too: “To us, horses are wonderful.” Sandra and her son shared an enjoyment of geocaching<sup>43</sup>, which they do while hiking together. She noted, “My son said to me, ‘Oh, well, this really makes hiking more fun.’”

Lastly, the fourth type of co-surfing was playing games online together, and this was by far the category where parents reported they either enjoy doing this—or don’t. Ayesha’s son got her hooked on playing Webkinz together, Nipa and her daughter played Pet Society together, and Barbara enjoyed playing Mario World online with her daughter: “we’ll race go karts against other people from other countries, you know. It’s not my favorite thing in the world, but I will do that!” Sandra played games with her son even though she did not totally understand it:

I think it’s important for you—for parents—to have an understanding of what their kids are doing and playing and enjoying. I still don’t get Pokemon as many times as people explain it to me. But you know, he likes the challenge of having to teach me something when he’s playing the game.

Other parents explained they had no interest in playing games with their child, whether it is because they have no interest or it is seen as the child’s realm. Bonnie said she doesn’t play games online with her daughter because “It’s not really my idea of

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<sup>42</sup> Two parents in particular mentioned they visit [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com).

<sup>43</sup> Geocaching is “a real-world outdoor treasure hunting game. Players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS-enabled devices and then share their experiences online” according to [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)

spending time together. . .to me, that's sort of her personal what-she-wants-to-do, her—her activity.” Similarly Carolyn said, “I don't have an interest in playing Club Penguin with them” and Denise shared that her son “wants to play games, and I'm not into—really not into that.” Scott noted that computers are more difficult to play on together, as he said, “most of the things on the Web don't lend themselves to, sort of, two-player type of action.”

It is important to note that, just like parents who weren't interested in co-surfing and playing games, some parents said they only co-surf to help their child with schoolwork. This may be related to their values around “surfing” the Internet, as Miranda said, “I'm not into surfing the 'net. I just don't understand it,” and their online behavior, as Ayesha said, “it's not something we will sit down and *do* together.” Carolyn noted that she does not co-surf with her kids because “what I'm trying to empower my kids to do is be independent.” Carolyn and Melissa explained that their husbands do more co-surfing than they do, as Melissa said, “I would definitely say that my husband and him do that [co-surf] more.”

*Engaging: family communicating online.* Another form of engagement that parents shared is using the Internet and cell phones to communicate and connect with their kids. For example, Leslie said she communicates with her daughter on Facebook: “Sometimes I'll send her a private message. I won't post it for all the friends to see, but I might message her privately within MySpace and, and send her a special message.” Leslie went on to say that her daughter forwards email chain letters to her and other family members: “you know, in a way it's like she's trying to reach out. . .And she's viewing it as an extension of her family and a way to stay in touch.” Sandra said she uses

Skype to stay in touch with her kids, who were staying with grandma while she and her husband were out of the country. Several parents reported texting their kids as a way to check in because it's a convenient way to communicate, as Esther states her daughter would "check in with me [via text] when she gets home, and she'll kind of give me a rundown of her day, or tell me what she's doing as far as her chores, and that kind of thing."

These two forms of Engaging—Co-surfing and Family Communicating Online—are also empowering because parents were encouraging their kids to use online media in positive and beneficial ways. Parents were involved in facilitating their child's Internet use rather than limiting or restricting it.

### *Recommending*

The second subtheme under empowerment Online Behavior is Recommending. Recommending refers to parents endorsing websites and online activities for their child, including investigating good sites for their child to visit, bookmarking sites for the child, or encouraging their child visit a site they heard about through school. By recommending, the parent attempts to get involved in their preteen's online life by directing him or her to quality sites.

Although a couple of parents reported they have never recommended websites for their child to visit, the majority of parents reported encouraging their child to visit educational sites they found out about on their own, or through the child's school. Carmen shared how she recommended websites that help her child learn: "I'm big on education. . . that's pretty much where I get it, because if there's something that I'm interested in teaching him, I'll look it up." Esther tried to recommend educational sites to

her daughter, but she says her daughter “seems to very clearly, though, think of the Internet as entertainment. . .She just kinda leaves it [Esther’s recommendations] in her inbox and I’m like, “Did you ever check it out?” ‘Mm, no.’” Similarly, Sonia said, “there are some [sites] I try to promote. . .some more educational ones and things that I’ll suggest. . .but to be honest, they wouldn’t pick that on their own.” Ayesha noted that her son said of her recommendations, “This is boring, Mom.”

To a lesser degree, parents recommended mainstream and commercial websites.

Scott said that, with his son:

Basically everything that he goes to is something that I have introduced him to. So the sites I mentioned before—the Nick Jr., Lego.com, Conceptis puzzles, um, the Beanie Babies website—those are things that we’ve—or I have—consciously introduced him to, rather than things that he has explored and found on his own.

A few parents reported they found recommendations by looking on parent advice websites. Jasmine, who writes for a parenting magazine, gets information about new and interesting sites for kids, and that is how she learns about sites to recommend. She said her twin daughters were “interested in checking them out, and I’ve got a chance to check ‘em out, and yeah, generally they do like them.”

Several parents reported bookmarking or having a list of links to appropriate and recommended sites for their preteen. Bookmarking was also a form of monitoring and making sure their child doesn’t visit inappropriate sites, as Nadia said,

We get on together and check ‘em and either bookmark ‘em or be sure that she can go right to them, and that way we don’t have to worry about her looking for them or putting in the wrong terms or things like that.

Parents who used recommending took an active interest in their children’s Internet use by looking for websites that they are comfortable with their child visiting,



and that have possible beneficial outcomes for the child, whether for learning or entertainment.

### *Learning*

The next theme under the main theme of empowering Online Behavior was Learning, which includes strategies parents used to encourage their child to learn via the Internet. This subtheme is divided into two categories; the first is about how parents see their child using the Internet for schoolwork, and the other is parents' concerns and comments about how their kids are using the Internet at school.

*Learning: Internet for schoolwork.* Most parents who talked about their child using the Internet for schoolwork reported that their child uses the Internet for research or as an 'information resource.' Amy, parent of a 12-year old boy, said, "for all the research he's been doing, and now in middle school he uses the Internet an *awful* lot. So it's a wonderful tool in *that* respect." Jasmine said, "I know the school definitely uses it as a reference tool, so they'll have homework and they need to find information." A few parents talked about how research is now easier because of the Internet, such as Brooke, who stated, "It's made some research projects easier. You know, whereas instead of having to haul ourselves out to grab a newspaper or go to the library for research, it's helped him with doing research for projects."

A couple of parents noted that their jobs influence how they help their child with schoolwork. Tammy explained, "I'm actually her [daughter's] literacy teacher, and so some of the things I've assigned they've had to go online for." Laura reflects that maybe she is too helpful in assisting her son with research for school:

I always tend to want to be the one that actually sits there and pulls the information out and have him put it together. . . I should really more or less be

coaching them and saying, ‘Okay, you want to look up this, you want to look up that, get your information from here. But I guess it’s ‘cause I do a lot of research in my job and to me it’s just second nature to go on there and do that.

Another way that parents encouraged their kids’ to use the Internet for school was as a tool for organization for and connection with school. Rosa explained how the Internet has been a great tool to help her son stay organized in school, helping stay on top of homework and check grades.

Furthermore, several parents talked about how their child was interested in extending learning from school at home, such as playing educational learning games, to composing a symphony online, to wanting to learn more about ancient Egypt. Sandra said that her son learned about the solar system in school, but that she helped extend learning by exploring more online because “he didn’t necessarily make the connection in school. . .He says to me, ‘When we go home, can we look up more of this stuff?’”

An interesting finding is a smaller group of parents who believed that the Internet does not help their children in school. Flora said, “Does she use it for school? I would say not really. . .I mean, I think that she has, but that the time that she’s used it for school has been so inconsequential in comparison to the time that she uses it recreationally.” Similarly, Elyse felt that the Internet had not helped her 11-year-old daughter in school: “I wouldn’t say it helped her. I wouldn’t say it’s negative.” And both Angie and Denise simply stated that they don’t believe the Internet has helped their child in school.

*Learning: Internet in school.* In the previous category, I discussed parent’s comments about their child’s use of the Internet for schoolwork. Along the same lines, some parents shared their feelings about how children are using the Internet at school, and how this has either helped the child or conflicted with their values.

On the positive side, Nipa said her daughter is learning Internet safety in school, and Eva talked about how her daughter's school has an Internet Safety program that includes:

Teaching them there are things that you would absolutely do not say over the Internet, no matter what. . .and teaches them to do research using the Internet. . .ways you can find information on the Internet, to use it in a positive way.

Brooke was a literacy teacher who teaches Internet safety at her school, so her kids were more primed to be aware of these issues.

On the down side, a few parents expressed how their beliefs clash with how their child uses the Internet at school. Sandra, a technology specialist at a school, said that her “worry of [her son] being online is that the schools aren't necessarily training kids the way I'm training my kids at home.” She went on to say that she wishes her son's school was less restrictive, “I feel that because of the filtering there, they're not given the opportunity necessarily to utilize. And I think the teachers are afraid to try things.”

Collin, a media consultant, also felt conflicted:

I kind of have a big pushback with her school because it's a progressive school. . .I think there's a rush by administrators and teachers to embrace technology to show that we're with it—when I don't think there's any proven pedagogy of any kind that has shown any value for elementary school kids doing computer stuff.

Along the same lines, Denise expressed her attitudes about media technologies in school and how she wishes her son was still attending a Waldorf school: “I feel like that's my philosophy, just intuitively, and so when I read about Waldorf, it kind of matched what I sort of believe.” There seemed to be mixed feelings, then, from parents about the use of the Internet for schoolwork—and within school.

### *Analyzing*

The fourth subtheme under empowering Online Behavior is Analyzing, which refers to behaviors in which parents helped their preteen evaluate the credibility of websites, along with understanding the author and purpose of sites, and the relevancy of websites when searching for information. In this category, media literacy skills such as being able to access, analyze, and evaluate information are highlighted. Two sub-categories that emerged include: parents sharing how they've helped their child analyze the credibility of websites, and parents' use of question-asking behavior to help their child analyze websites.

*Analyzing: credibility of websites.* The main form of analyzing that parents engaged in with their kids is determining the credibility and trustworthiness of websites. Since anyone can publish online, it can be challenging for kids to determine credible information from misinformation. Barbara shared how she helps her daughter “find out if the material is authentic or not,” and she talked with her daughter about “what is invaluable information that may be on a website. You know, what’s trusted, what’s not trusted.” Eva said, “we tell her all the time and say ‘not everything you read on the Internet are facts.’ . . .And you have to keep an inquisitive mind and see if you can find *other* proof supporting what they say.” In addition, Fatima noted, “Whether it’s the Internet, or the paper or a book, that you always need to be asking questions about ‘does this make sense’ or ‘is this true’—those sorts of things.”

Several parents emphasized that they discussed the importance of citing sources with their preteens. Barbara said that she tells her daughter, “you know, you need to have

a works cited page; you need to identify where your information came from” and similarly Sandra explained she requires her son to keep track of sources:

He gets very frustrated with me because I also require him to them go back and identify, well, when we’re writing the report, where did this information come from? Did it come from this source or this source or this source?

A few parents highlighted Wikipedia as an example of a learning moment and conversation starter with their kids about online credibility. For example, Sonia said:

We were talking about how really anybody can enter—they can make an entry. And so it doesn’t have to be true, and how they try to check it, but there’s so much out there that it’s not always accurate. . . .And so it’s just kind of an ongoing conversation.

Sandra pointed out the different people who contribute to Wikipedia with her son: “he’ll bring home something like a Wikipedia article, and we’ll look at all the different people that wrote it.”

A couple of parents had examples of incidents in which they had to investigate whether a claim was true or false. Leslie shared the example of her daughter doing research on snakes:

We were talking about how to decide whether or not the information given about what kind of snake killed Cleopatra was factual information or was there any way to tell? So we did have to go back a little through that website and figure whether or not that was something we wanted to believe.

Miranda explained how her daughter hearing a rumor about Miley Cyrus led to a conversation about online credibility:

So we went online and looked it up, and we talked about sometimes this is truth, or there is rumors, so we went in search of things to try and gather information. . . .So we went to various sites to try and understand the various points that were being made. . . .And it was a learning experience for me. . . .and to help me understand how you—why you think is true, or how you got to that point. It was more of an opening the dialog between them and me.

*Analyzing: asking questions.* A few parents expressed how they value asking questions to their kids about what they're seeing and doing online<sup>44</sup>. This category is where media literacy skills of asking, analyzing, and evaluating are evident. Kim said that with her daughter, "I really think it's important not to let media go by unnoticed—I don't want to say 'analyzed' because it's not—we're not that serious about it. But just to be aware of that, what's being said to you." Barbara explained how she tries to be involved with her daughter's Internet use: "If I'm around and I see what she's doing, you know, I'll say, 'Hey, why does that interest you?'" She went on to explain that, depending on the case, she would probe: "So it was more if the issue came up, I would question, and then we would go into deeper, further discussion." Brooke explained how she tries to stay involved with what her son is doing online:

As a parent, I think the most helpful things that I could do are just staying aware of what he enjoys doing online. Talking to him about it. . .to try to stay engaged in what he's talking about so that he keeps talking to me about things. . .that's my challenge as a parent.

Brooke went on to describe the kind of talk that happens with him about online games:

He likes to explain the games he's playing—the swords that he's buying, the monsters that he's slaying. Sometimes what I'll do is, as I'm passing by in the kitchen and I see something, I'll ask him about what I see on the screen.

Collin said he is trying to help his daughter think critically about media, as he noted, "I've got this big media literacy thing that I'm trying to do with her." He said he was influenced by his mass media teacher in high school and since his college degree was in media studies, media literacy is important to him. He went on to say that he has had arguments with other parents at school:

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<sup>44</sup> There was also a subset of parents who reported helping their kids analyze movies and television, from understanding the storyline, to analyzing the scary parts of movies, to being aware of gender stereotypes.

You know, people who work in television and, you know, I'm practically some strident, Marxist nightmare, by their standards; they don't get it. And you know, the whole point for me is to get her to question stuff, not to agree with me with this bent.

What is notable about parents who reported helping their kids question and analyze what they're doing and seeing online, is that they were well-educated and most of them had a job relating in some way to media. Collin was a media consultant with a degree in media studies. Barbara was a tech-savvy mom, business education teacher, and a Classrooms for the Future Coach who helps teachers imbed technology into their curriculum. Brooke was a Technology Specialist in a school. And Kim was a Psychotherapist. This could mean that, because the parents' work relates to media, having their kids analyze online media is important to them, or on the forefront of their minds since they are immersed in it at work. Thus, from their professional lives, encouraging kids to analyze may come naturally as part of their parenting.

### *Creating*

The final subtheme under Online Behavior is parents allowing and encouraging their kids to create online. Examples include: designing a website, creating a blog, shooting and uploading pictures and videos, and creating artwork online. I am using the term "creating" to include creating things using online tools, creating something on the computer (which may or may not be uploaded to the Internet), or using the Internet to inspire creativity offline. Encouraging kids to create using digital media not only teaches them about media production, but offers an avenue for self-expression. Creating media is an important media literacy skill, as media literacy includes not only evaluating and analyzing media, but creating, communicating, and collaborating with media. Media creation helps kids understand how media "works" behind the scenes.

Parents who allowed and encouraged their child to create with media described their preteens designing blogs, websites, games and animations, filming and uploading videos, artwork, and designing online posters. One example of online creation was creating avatars, as Gloria described her daughter: “when she does the avatars, she comes up with the ideas for different clothing.” Or Laura, who shared how her son designs within Club Penguin: “he likes to go on and loves to show off with the little igloos that he’s made, and the people and the penguins that he’s made, and the stories that they’ve come up with.” Brooke shared how her son creates games using Scratch, where he not only learned game programming, but also storytelling: “he was playing around with making a story. He drew his own little R2D2 character and he just learned how to do the programming to make it move.” Gina’s son likes the Powder Game, where he creates his own game and graphics. Three parents reported that their child created a website, and one parent helped her daughter foster her interest in creating a website about horses by going to the library together to check out books web design.

Three parents talked about how their children made videos and, in a couple cases, uploaded them online. Amy explained how her son made a film at school and was surprised at how easy it is with digital technologies:

So that, to me, was ‘Wow! That is so cool; you can do it all there online.’ And of course, the difference between it being tactile, when you’re holding celluloid, and you’re not. . .It’s a total ease, and I think opens up a whole new world.

Nipa shared how her daughter and friends enjoy creating videos:

I think it’s neat, you know I do think they’re able to express themselves. I mean they do comedy routines, they do skateboarding stuff, um with these other kids. My kids like to put on plays or pretend they’re doing commercials.



Barbara explained how her daughter, who is interested in musicals, “heard on the news that so-and-so had gotten recognized because they were on YouTube, so she wanted to do that because eventually she wants to be a singer, and so she was hoping that she would get found.” She helped her daughter with filming and uploading the videos to YouTube, explaining, “we watched the whole process of converting the film so that we could upload it to YouTube.” Barbara also helped her daughter think through some aspects of her videos before she uploaded them, including “we’ve talked about guidelines and making sure other kids weren’t in the pictures and you know, why you can do some things with music and why you can’t do others, based on copyright.”

Four parents reported that their kids share writing online, whether it is through a blog or by uploading their writing on a writing-focused website. Tammy’s daughter is a junior reporter for the city’s newspaper, and she also submits articles on YourHub.com. Tammy noted the importance of her daughter writing for an audience: “it’s like a public thing; like, she’s writing for an audience.” Tammy also mentioned that her mother is a junior high school librarian who recommends websites for youth to share writing, that she then recommends for her daughter. Esther encouraged her daughter to blog, tapping into her creative interest in being an author:

She’s told me before that she wants to be an author, so blogging seemed like a really good way to get started in that. And so I think that’s one thing that she’s been able to do in terms of as a creative outlet.

Esther first started by letting her daughter set up a blog that wasn’t accessible to anybody: “you know, training wheel things like that.” Eventually the blog was open to a larger audience, and Esther is involved by leaving comments on her blog, as she stated, “of

course, she thinks any comment is cool, even if it's from her mom." Finally, Esther described how she was taking her daughter to BlogHer conference<sup>45</sup>:

I hope it opens up her eyes to see what she could do in blogging. And I know she's really young right now, but if she could just kind of see that vision, she could maybe pay her way through college! [laughs].

A couple of parents shared how their preteen was inspired to create by things they saw online, such as Fatima's son who likes Legos: "He sees videos, and he's inspired to set up his own scenes, talks about, you know, entering a picture of his new Lego creation at LEGO Magazine, and things like that." Denise described how her son likes to draw guns and so searches for images online to get ideas for his own drawings.

Parents seemed to recognize the importance of sharing online for an audience.

Brooke said her son uses Scratch.com and that he:

Likes sharing his projects online sometimes, and getting feedback from other people. And he likes downloading other people's creative projects and fooling around with the variables and seeing if he can spice up the project, or borrow code and make it different.

Similarly, Sandra shared how her son created a comic online and she encouraged him to post it so that people can see it: "That was kind of fun for him to realize that there is such a thing as a global audience."

It is interesting to point out that a few parents either said they wish their child was more interested in media creation, or that they've tried to encourage it. Regina said her son builds animated robots, but that:

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<sup>45</sup> BlogHer is a media network created for women who blog, and their yearly conference brings together thousands of women bloggers. Their website is [www.blogher.com](http://www.blogher.com).

Sometimes I think he could take it farther than he does, and I've tried to get him a little bit interested in, 'you could add a bit of programming to this.' You know, just tried to expand it into something a little bit more educational.

Sara saw potential for more creation opportunities with her son:

I would love to see him have his own blog and do more online creating. He hasn't really expressed that interest yet. But you know, I could see that someday. He and his friends do like a little neighborhood newspaper this summer, and so we've even kind of talked about, 'it might be cool, you know, if you guys put that online, instead of going around and passing it out, everyone could just log on.' So I think that it's going to be a tool for to help him be creative, but we just haven't really gotten into all that yet.

Similarly, Fatima voiced trying to get her son to be more creative, as she explained, "he's quite gregarious and he love to chat. And he has an interest in sports. We've tried to talk to him into doing kinda like a sportscast, but he won't do it."

However, some parents hesitated to embrace online creation. Jasmine explained that although she is interested in her daughter submitting her writing to an online kids-authored magazine, she said, "We'll have to talk about that, because I don't know how much personal information you'd need to divulge." Similarly, Leslie saw her daughter's talent for writing, but did not want her to have a blog, which requires having an email account. Yet she foresees allowing her daughter to share her writing online as she gets older: "I would love to see her, as she gets older, maybe start publishing some of her writing online and having discussions with other people who are interested in writing and you know see how that develops her." Denise mentioned that her son likes to create videos, but being a single mom makes it harder to encourage his creativity:

He's probably be more creative if I let him on more. . . Being a single parent, you know, while he's right in the middle without, you know, someone really kinda hands-on giving him direction, it's almost better for me to just keep him off it completely. . . But I think that he would be a lot more creative if I could encourage him in that direction.

To conclude, there were several empowering behaviors in which parents encouraged their kids to use the Internet in beneficial ways, including Engaging, Recommending, Learning, Analyzing, and Creating. In contrast to protecting strategies for children's online behavior, parents who used empowering strategies seem to be focusing on the potential benefits that the Internet could have on their preteens. Overall, the contrast between using protecting and empowering strategies for children's online behavior was nicely summed up by Rosa, who expressed her mixed feelings:

It's hard to keep them safe without feeling like I'm an overbearing, neurotic, controlling mother. You know what I mean, like I want them to have freedom, I want them to feel independent, but I also feel like when it comes to the Internet, that it's my job to keep them safe.

#### *Asserting Values*

The third main theme that emerged from the interviews is parents' asserting values about the Internet overall. The findings in this theme serve to answer two of the four research questions:

RQ2: How confident are parents in enacting protectionist and empowerment Internet mediation strategies?

RQ4: How is parental attitude about children's Internet use associated with parents' strategies, confidence, and perception of the usefulness of these strategies?

This theme focuses on parents' attitudes about their children using the Internet, and their feelings of confidence or inadequacy. Beneath this theme are three subthemes—Reflecting, Comparing, and Hoping—each with additional subcategories beneath them. The themes paint a picture of parents' attitudes and confidence in a digital world that is very different from the world in which they grew up.

### *Reflecting*

The first theme beneath the main category of Asserting Values is Reflecting. Reflecting happened when parents contemplated on their own parenting style, their relationship with their child, and their confidence level with computers and the Internet. There are several categories that fit under this subtheme: Trust in Child, Open Communication, Confidence Level, and Parenting Style.

*Reflecting: trust in child.* A strong pattern emerged that had to do with parents talk about how they trusted their child when going on the Internet. This could mean they trusted their child to follow the rules, particularly about where they can go and what they can do, and overall trusted them to be safe and responsible. At least fourteen parents discussed how they trusted their child to be safe and responsible online. Carmen said her son is “very responsible. . . If he’s anywhere but where he should be on the Internet, we have a conversation about that. So he usually just tells me,” and Leslie noted that her daughter “shows good judgment and makes good decisions.” Melissa reflected, “I don’t feel like I’m at that point where I don’t—I can’t trust him? You know, he’s a really good listener. He normally abides by any rules I implement.” Karen explained her values about trusting her son with Internet access in his bedroom:

I would like to have a trust relationship with him, and my husband feels the same way. Like when you go to a library, the books aren’t censored, and we want him to have—to be responsible—to learn being responsible on the Internet.

Some parents reflected on balance between having freedom online and being restrictive.

Tiara said that she would rather give her son more trust than be too restrictive:

I can’t keep him off that stuff [the Internet] forever. He’s just gonna go underground on me, you know, and do stuff behind my back. I mean, I trust him now but I mean, if I’m too restrictive with him, I know that’s what *I* would have done.

Similarly, Carolyn trusted that her children followed values they had been taught:

I trust that my kids in general are making decisions based on the values I think I've been teaching them. . .but it's really hard to force feed every possible hair brained idea they're going to come up with and know to warn them ahead of time not to do that.

Esther, who provided her daughter a lot of freedom and independence online, shared:

I'm a little bit unsure if, you know, I feel like I've—we did the training wheel thing for a good long time, and I feel she's gotten some lessons and she knows safety and that sort of thing. But I'm trusting her at this point. I'm trusting her an awful lot right now.

Many parents explained their child has given them no reason to distrust their use of the Internet.

There were two parents who specifically said they were not so sure they trusted their child to be safe and responsible online. Marian said, “you know, he is a kid. He is curious. So I would say, even though he's a great kid, no I don't [trust him online]. I think curiosity might get the better of him.” Similarly, Amy said:

I'm not saying I don't think he's trustworthy. . .because he's a great kid in many respects. . .I think that the computer allows a kid that age to play to his lowest common denominator. Without, sort of, guidance or even monitoring or filtering. I mean, we'd all still be wolves in the jungle, right, if we didn't have some moral compass. Or somebody telling us what was right or wrong.

Within this category of Trust, several parents explained that they trust their child because they have not done anything to break that trust, and they are too young to be doing things online that are risky. Laura summed up this anxiety:

We really haven't seized or caught them doing anything at all they shouldn't have been doing, but I keep thinking, I keep feeling like we're sort of just on the edge of it, because they're just going into middle school next year, and it's a whole new set of people and a whole new set of influences, and you know, we're just kind of feeling like we've been lucky so far.

Similarly, Melissa said, “I'm expecting that eventually he'll want more.”

*Reflecting: open communication.* The second category parents reflected about is their open communication style with their preteen. Open communication means a parent is willing, approachable, and available to talk with their kids—in this case—about what they’re doing online. A few parents emphasized that they try to keep the lines of communication open with their preteen. Ayesha said, “I think probably the most important thing is to try to have a good relationship, a *close* relationship, with your kids, and hopefully they *will* tell you the truth on things, if not right at the time, eventually.” Bonnie noted that her daughter “knows that she can come to me for anything, talk to me about anything. . .that’s really important to me right now.” Elyse said she and her daughter have an open relationship, but she realized that “we want to know everything, but we have to give them space and room to grow.” Several parents mentioned that they have an open relationship so that their child would tell them if something inappropriate or uncomfortable happened, as Carmen shared, “our relationship is close enough that if something inappropriate pops up, he would probably be shocked out of his little system and come tell me.” Karen said that her son is “still at the point where we have open dialogue about what he’s doing on the Internet.” Perhaps parents realized that as their children get older, they might be less willing to share what they’re doing online, or less willing to come to their parent to talk. Tammy said that she and her husband take turns during family discussions depending on the issue: “Sometimes he’ll be like, ‘Okay, I’ll do this one.’ Or I’ll say, ‘Well, I want you to talk to her about this, you know, and have it come from a guy’s perspective.’”

*Reflecting: confidence level.* Parents who took the survey reported high confidence levels enacting protectionist strategies, and to a lesser degree, empowerment

strategies<sup>46</sup>. In the interviews, most parents said they felt confident guiding their children's use of the Internet, and in learning new things about and managing the computer (e.g., helping their child with technical issues, or learning something new on the computer). For example, April said she enjoys learning something new about computers and the Internet: "Anything new I can learn, I'm happy."

A few of the highly confident parents recognized that their professional background likely influences their confidence. For example, Eva, who worked at a university research center researching youth, said, "I'm sure that my comfort level with technology is probably greater than your average parent who's not immersed in the Internet all day long" and "I tend to also be one of those early adopter types, so I end up, you know, trying things out." Angie was a computer consultant who also writes articles on media and technology for the local paper. Although Angie said she used to "hate computers with a passion" she realized she needed to have computer skills to advance in the workforce. She took computer classes and did so well she eventually was hired to teach the computer class. She lived in a rural area and provided advice to other parents on computer problems: "A lot of the parents here are calling me for help cuz they don't know how to use the computer." Scott said that he is confident about the computer, not necessarily because of his profession, but because of his personal enthusiasm and because he's an early adopter: "I've been using the Internet since, you know, 1992 or something. And have a Facebook page, Twitter account, you know, blah-blah-blah. So at the moment, you know, I'm ahead of him [his son]." But he also reflected on how it might be more challenging once his son is more "tech savvy" than him:

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<sup>46</sup> See Table 4.2.



The challenge is in many families—I'm sure it will happen in ours eventually—you know, the knowledge and skills of the child exceed the knowledge and skills of the parent. So in those circumstances it's very hard for the parent to know what's going on, and it's very easy for the child to conceal what's going on, because it's simply because the one being this, like, native territory for the child, and that's a foreign land for the parent.

Another pattern in reflecting on confidence is husbands being identified as more confident than wives, and seen as the “computer expert” in the household. Debra said that because her husband works in the computer field, he's more of the go-to person when it comes to technology: “That's his field, so he could certainly—he's a little more help to all of us.” Jackie expressed frustration that her daughter did not see her as capable with the computer as her husband:

‘Well, for questions about this, I always go to you Mom, but for questions about this I go to Dad.’ But I don't want her to think that she couldn't answer the question. Now I was starting to get like, ‘Are we creating some sort of, you know, gender role identity thing her?’ And so I insisted that she come to me for some of it first; and you know, so now she does.

On the other hand, Elyse said that her husband doesn't use the computer, so she was the main parent in charge if her daughter needs help.

A few parents had mixed feelings about their confidence. Gloria said, “It's not intimidating, but I do have my problems. You know, I just—I'm a troubleshooter, so I just go on there and give it a go.” Carolyn shared:

I'm lazy [laughs]. Ha ha, I don't know, I just think with anything that I face that's new and different it's always like, ‘oh god, it's going to be a pain.’ Learn this new thing, so it just sort of takes time. . . I probably can't keep up [with what her girls are doing online]. I'd like to think I have a good sense but I don't think I really do.

A couple of parents said they would reach out for help if they needed it, as Amy noted, “I feel confident I would know the right people to get to the information for handling it.”

In contrast, several parents expressed their feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence with helping guide their preteens online. Liz said that she doesn't feel confident teaching her son computer skills, although he needs the training:

He gets really, really frustrated [with not knowing how to do some things on the computer]. . . And the bummer is, I'm okay on the computer, but I'm no whiz at it. . . . So I end up teaching him, but he resists that, and he tries to claim that he already knows how to do it, but I'm getting uptight because he's not doing it right, and he's screwing up the computer. . . it's a real source of tension for us. Learning computer skills is a huge source of tension.

Tiara reflected that when she feels a little behind keeping up with technology:

Was younger and more freshly out of college, I had more confidence for, you know, what I could do as far as software problems or hardware problems. And you know, when you get busy with your life and technology kind of marches on, so I do think I'm a little bit behind now. . . it's kind of left me in the dust a little bit when I wasn't looking.

Melissa and Fatima noted how their husbands are the “go to” computer expert, while they feel less comfortable handling those issues with their kids. Amy explained how she would love to take classes on parenting and the Internet: “I think it would be great if there were classes. Honestly and truly. Like, once a year, you go and get another credit. Another parental Internet credit. Or whatever it is. I think it would just be fantastic.”

*Reflecting: parenting style.* Through interviews emerged general statements about parents' values about their parenting style. Within these reflections were glimpses of parents' attitudes about media. When discussing how to guide their children online, more generalized statements about what a “typical” parents' role should be came through. For example, Jackie said:

I really feel that my role as a parent is really just to teach and nurture them, and to help them sort of come up with their own mechanisms of, thinking about things and that kind of stuff. . . it's really at these ages that there's still a lot of guidance they need, and that they want from parents.

Esther shared:

As a parent, it's just as important for me to educate her about the Internet and the implications of social networks and so forth, as it is to teach her about, you know, driving car, or being safe, or self-defense, or those types of things.

Denise said that she hopes she helps her son by “giving him some good tools for life” and

Liz reflected that she hoped she was teaching her son to be a good person.

Another pattern with reflections on parenting style was a concern about balance in parenting. For instance, Ayesha said:

It's that fine line between wanting to be their friend and still needing to be in the parent's role. And you want them to have fun with you, so they will talk with you and want to be with you and that type of thing. But you also have to come down like a hammer when necessary as well.

Similarly, Jasmine explained that:

I don't want it to just be like, all fear and danger in the world, and you know, that there are lots of cool things in there, and most people most of the time are good and kind and that, you know, they shouldn't—don't want to put the breaks on their willingness to explore.

Karen shared the tension in helping teach kids to be independent:

I think parents in general—and I'm probably in this category, too—are overly involved in their kids' lives and we—we're doing them a disservice. We—they need to learn how to become independent, and if we monitor them too much and supervise them too much, then they don't develop those skills at, you know, becoming productive members of society.

In addition, Ayesha warned that parents need to be open to the fact that their child might do things they don't approve of, and not to get defensive: “Be aware that your dream child can—may not be so dreamy maybe.”

Several parents highlighted their family's attitudes about media overall; the two patterns here had to do with not being a media-saturated family and being strict. Some parents described how they're not “media-saturated.” For instance, Rosa explained that

they lived in a house where they couldn't get cable, and since then, she says, "None of us really cared that much." Liz noted, "We're sort of a non-media family, for the most part." Another value that some parents identified with was being strict about media. For instance, Sonia said, "We're pretty strict, actually. We have just one computer and it's in our main library, like our main center of our house," whereas Laura said, "we're probably the strictest parents of the whole set of parents [at their son's school]."

Finally, a few parents talked about their worries more generally about media and technology overall, as Nadia reflected, "You know, technology is good to a certain extent, but I also think that we have become a bit too connected, and there's so little time now to just sit quietly and contemplate." Collin worried that:

The main problem I have is just, like we have no idea what it does to little kids. We're just rushing to embrace it, you know. And for thousands of years, kids have been going to libraries and reading books, and we don't know that watching television is bad for them. . . I don't know why we're not being more cautious about our little kids and, these new tools that are just a few years old.

*Reflecting: siblings.* The third category under the subtheme of Reflecting is parents talking about the dynamics of Internet use among all of their children, and relationships among siblings. Most families did not offer each child his or her own computer or device for Internet access, therefore, siblings had to share the computer. Some parents talked about how this influenced what the younger sibling did online or was exposed to. For instance, Melissa explained, "when you have these—these varying ages in the house—you know, normally the younger ones will always end up watching what the older ones are—are playing with or watching." Kim said:

When you have kids who have a big age difference, one of the things that often happens is that while the younger one gets exposed to things, you know, maybe a little bit earlier than she might have, the older one can kind of play down in a very nice way.

Jasmine found that it was actually easier to have her kids follow the rules when they are on their own computers. She explained, “I find that when two or more kids are surfing together, there are more opportunities for problems to arise.”

Siblings having to share the computer also emphasized the older sibling’s responsibility to guide and protect the younger one(s), as Amy explained that she had talked to her ten-year-old son about his responsibility to his younger sister: “that something inappropriate could pop up and, and really damage her. . . So it’s sort of like a responsibility for *her*, too.” Along the same lines, Leslie, who has four children (three older than her 12-year-old), talked about how her older daughter could help teach the younger one about MySpace, such as how to block or un-friend people or set privacy settings: “And so she [older daughter] helped translate that down to the younger one when she was getting interested in doing it as well.” Fatima talked about how the younger sibling could serve as a watch over what the older ones are doing: “She’s our security. Our software security. Or our Internet security.”

In addition, a few parents shared the differences between boys and girls, and how this influenced their parenting strategies. For example, Sandra explained, “Because I have—it’s a son and a daughter—there are different, um, things that they enjoy doing online, and so I have to do different strategies with both of them.” Ayesha noticed that “boys are more—they engage in more risk-taking behaviors” and so she used different strategies with her son than with her daughter.

### *Comparing*

The second subtheme under Reflecting is parents’ use of comparing to emphasize their values about parenting and the Internet. Parents compared themselves in three

different ways: to other families; to their husband or wife; and by emphasizing generational differences between themselves and their children.

*Comparing: other families.* Many parents compared themselves to other parents, compared their kids to other kids, and overall compared their family to other families. Most of this comparison seemed to serve as validation for their parenting choices around the Internet, to express frustration with parenting styles and rules in other families, and to highlight how they have talked with other parents about these issues. Of course, as I noted in the methods section, social desirability bias is a factor in this study. No parent wants to be viewed as a “bad parent,” and parents comparing themselves to other parents they disagree with was one way parents could validate their parenting behavior.

One pattern emerged with parents’ concerns about what their kids are doing while visiting other kids’ houses, such as seeing and doing things online they are not allowed to do at home. Parents shared their frustration with other parents’ lack of parental guidance or monitoring, for example, Debra said her nine-year-old daughter “went to her friends’ house and they were—and um they were on some inappropriate sites, and I was pretty horrified that the parents were letting that happen.” Flora said she’s concerned with the parents’ of her daughter’s friend: “I’m concerned that, you know, that that’s what they’re doing, that it’s just that they’re on the computer and that—I guess that, the parents in that household, I don’t feel like they are looking over their shoulders.” Tiara worried about her son visiting other households with no limits:

This is so hard because none of his friends have any of these limits, and I think it’s hard to be the kid who isn’t allowed to do anything ever. . . . So I’m just gonna have to save my—you know putting my foot down—on things that are really important.

Similarly, Nadia explained that her daughter:

Comes home from other people's houses and tells us, you know, what—what's going on in other places, and I just—it's, it's sad to me in a lot of ways because these kids either have no guidance, or they have complete and total access to computers and the Internet, and nobody's paying any attention to what's going on or what they're doing.

Collin expressed his frustration with other parents who allow their kids to have computers in their bedrooms:

I don't like what I see with her friends who have computers in their rooms so, like, they can just shut the door and be gone for hours, and that's just not the way, you know, we sort of run our family. . . screens are just—just not private in our house.

A couple of parents within split family households voiced their frustration with their children having different rules at the other household, as Denise said “my stepson's father and I have very different rules.” Amy, a step-mother, said her preteen stepson's birth mother doesn't provide many rules about media or other things: “At their home there are no controls; at our home, it's like a prison” and that “it sets up a big split.” She worried about her role and how her stepson uses the computer in the two different households:

Well you know, you can't get into good cop/bad cop, or bashing the other parent. So we just tell them that we feel that these—that the way we are living is, uh, correct for their safety, for their well-being. We talk to them about how they have to self-parent when they're at the other home. . . when you're at the computer, you know, internally you check in with yourself. You know right and wrong.

Similarly, Melissa talked about how her sister was more “lax about her rules” than she, and that sometimes that caused conflict when their kids got together. However, a few parents shared the view that they can't control everything, as Liz said:

When he goes over to his friend's house that use a lot of computer and are far more savvy on it than he is, or we are, then he's gonna get exposed to it and you

know, that's where the whole idea of—I just can't pester that kind of stuff. . .He needs to know what's going on out there.

Similarly Marian noted, “We don't live in a bubble, you know, so there are isolated instances where I'm sure he's seeing things.”

Some parents talked about how other kids influenced their own kids to want to watch and do things they normally wouldn't. Melissa shared how other kids at school influenced her son to be interested in Webkinz: “the Webkinz was introduced to one child, and then it trickles down, and they talk about them at school, and they—I think he was curious more than anything what the Webkinz world was.” Along the same lines, Collin believed that having Internet access—along with their own computer—is how some parents showed their status: “I think they're all about giving their kids everything they want. . .and there's a little bit of, ‘Hey, *my* kid's online.’ You know. That it's something great.”

Lastly, even though some parents expressed frustration with the rules (or lack thereof) at other households their kids visit, there was a pattern of parents explaining how they talk to other parents, whether it is to share parenting advice, or to point out that they would like other parents to follow their rules when their child visits. For example, Marian said, “I know when he's at his friend's house, they're online. . .I've told those mothers how I feel about that.” Melissa shared that she:

Like[s] to hear about what other people are doing because I think there's good things and there's bad things. You know, there's things that I'm like, ‘Oh, I'd definitely not do that.’ And then there's other things you learn from families that are great information.



Tammy described how she is interested in listening to other parents' experiences, and as a middle school teacher, helping mentor other parents about problems they may face with their kids' Internet use.

*Comparing: husband vs. wife.* The second category under the subtheme of Comparing is parents talking about similarities, differences, or complimentary values to their spouse. Differences in husbands' and wives' values about Internet mediation came up previously in this chapter when discussing the use of parental controls (several mothers noted the fathers set up and know more about the controls), and when talking about mothers' confidence level with technology in comparison to their husbands (in some cases the husbands are seen more as the "technology expert" of the household). However, there were additional comments that had to do with spouses having different values about media. The first had to do with values about protectionist strategies. For instance, Ayesha mentioned how her husband is more "hands-off, unless it's really serious" when it comes to enforcing rules, and Nadia said that her husband does not watch her daughter as closely as she does: "he tends to, kind of wander off when she's on there, but you know, we trust her enough that we don't have to be looking over her shoulder the whole time." A second pattern was different values about media content, particularly violence. Carolyn described how she does not like it that her husband plays violent video games that are rated "M" for "Mature" with his 10 and 12-year old daughters: "I've been vocal about the fact that I don't think it's appropriate. Again—sometimes you don't get to always have your way." And finally, there were a few comments about differences in values about screen use, as Melissa said, "my husband

likes—he's a big-he grew up watching a lot of TV. And I grew up—I didn't watch a whole lot of TV but, you know, so we've had to balance that.”

Another issue was different values about computer security, as Carolyn talked about her values versus her husband:

I disagree with the, um, my husband is quite paranoid about security on the Internet. So he creates all sorts of passwords and additional security things that I think make our lives more complicated. And I don't necessarily agree with that, but I think he feels strongly about that so I want to support him. But he comes responsible for managing all that, I don't really understand how to do all that.

*Comparing: generational differences.* A final way that parents shared their values about Internet mediation, and media in general, is by emphasizing differences between their generation and their child's generation. One pattern that parents expressed generational differences was referencing social media—Facebook, in particular. For instance, Miranda described how she opened a Facebook account to connect with others for an upcoming reunion, but that she only found two people in her graduating class. She reflected, “You know what? Maybe my generation, isn't into it. I saw a lot of college kids, a lot of younger people in their twenties. You know, it might be a generational thing.” Liz shared her experience with her nephew:

Anything he does is computer-related, and he scoffs at me, and he laughs at me, you know, because I don't want to have a Facebook account. And I don't want to do everything on the computer. . . There's just a certain loss that comes when people sort of allow the computer to replace all other methods of being human.

Another example was Kim, who reflected on how she feels out of the loop in kids' social lives due to the technology:

Probably when your friends used to call you at home, like, your parents would answer the phone, and they'd be a little bit of a gatekeeper in your life. And we really don't have that anymore. . . I'm always astounded how, um, how much of their social lives can be planned, and then, you know, acted out without me even

knowing about it because there's no calling and saying, 'Hi, this is so-and-so, may I please speak to so-and-so?' Cuz the kids don't have that in their lives.

A second pattern had to do with parents who were older that reflected on generational differences in values. For example, Sara shared, "I'm not—we're not especially, um, pushing the computer. We're older parents, and we're old-fashioned." Angie, who is a 49-year-old parent of a 9-year-old daughter, said:

I see a huge generation gap between them and me with the tools and the gadgets and the media methods. . . I'm thinking, Man, am I behind. So the world tends to be heading in that direction, where you got a gadget for everything. And you communicate nonstop.

Laura, who was a baby boomer with grade school children but also has an older daughter with children, reflects on her unique position of being an experienced parent:

Having another set of kids when I did, you know, I've kind of been through things, I'm working in a different environment, I'm a more sophisticated person, and things are just different—things are different today than they were in the '70s. So I just approach things a lot differently.

However, she also reflected that even though she feels experienced, she was still unsure about media and technology: "maybe 'cause we're older parents, we're not real naïve about some stuff, but yet, who knows, I mean we might be naïve and we don't even realize it."

### *Hoping*

The last and final subtheme under Asserting Values is parents sharing their hopes about the benefits of the Internet for their preteen child. When asked what benefits they see the Internet having for their child, and what hopes they have for their child through the Internet, there were five patterns that emerged: Information Resource, Staying Connected, College and Job, Toy vs. Tool, and Creativity.

*Hoping: information resource.* The first pattern of parent's values about their hopes and benefits of the Internet for their child is seeing the Internet as an information resource, whether it is to foster personal interest or for schoolwork. For example, Debra noted, "it's such an easy way to get knowledge," Fatima said that she hopes the Internet really "opens up his world" and Karen pointed out, "it can be an amazing tool at finding different points of view and different sources of information that can be enriching to a child." A few parents mentioned the Internet helping to enhance schoolwork, for instance, Tiara said, "I hope it's a place where he can do research for homework and make things easier for him that way." Similarly, Regina said, "The access to know—to information for doing schoolwork is phenomenal."

A few parents offered examples of what their child has been inspired to explore. Nadia explained, "if we're gonna travel somewhere—like, last year we went to the Grand Canyon, and we did all—she and I sat down and we researched where to go and what to do." Melissa reflected how the Internet is:

Just amazing that you can be right there in your living room and just, you know, get online and get on a website and see the—you know—see a live viewpoint of a skier at the top of a Colorado mountain, or you can see, you know, the Amazon jungle.

*Hoping: staying connected.* Having the ability to stay connected to others (mainly family) was another benefit and hope parents had about the Internet for their child. Leslie was happy that her daughter is able to connect with family, especially those that live far away, and that she's:

Staying in contact with her older brother, even though he's gone off to college; and I see that as a real advantage to the Internet, that as, as kids start building their, their support network, whether it's the people they grew up with or their teachers or their church friends.

Regina said she values the Internet to keep in touch with people, “You know, we have a web cam and can talk to cousins in Massachusetts. . .so the Internet provides a lot of access to people that we never would have had before.”

*Hoping: college and job.* Many parents looked to the future and talked about their hopes for the Internet helping their children either connect with—or learn computer skills—for college and for jobs. April believed her son “could possibly have a career in something, you know, something computer-related. . .it could also help with his—whatever profession he chooses,” and similarly, Barbara said:

I know in their world it’s all going to be about the computer, about the Internet. . .When it comes time for them to find a job, the more they know, hopefully the more likely they will be able to find a job in their field of interest.

Angie said she is trying to get her daughter to:

Know how to run a computer, or how to do programs; how to watch out for dangers; how to do this; and how to do that. Cuz I don’t want her to be behind. I want her to have every possible advantage on her side when it comes to a career, or job.

Esther hoped, for her daughter, that:

The computer skills she’s learning today, I think are gonna be huge. As she gets closer to college age, we’ll be using the Internet for, you know, to find a college, to get scholarships, to apply for grants. She may even use it earlier when she’s looking for a job when she’s in high school.

Similarly, Brooke hoped that the skills her son learns help him down the line, as she notes, “he’s probably gonna be collaborating with other people online, whether it’s for business or for pleasure. So, you know, my hopes are that the skills that he *starts* using sort of grow with him into opportunities later on.”

*Hoping: toy vs. tool.* The next pattern that emerged regarding parents’ talk of hopes and benefits of the Internet for their child is hoping that their child would use the

Internet for educational value, as Liz aptly put it, “I wish he used it more as a tool, and less as a toy.” Sandra shared how she wishes her son would “take more initiative with some of those educational, um, thinking-learning types of activities online versus just, uh, things that he does for entertainment.” Similarly, Carmen said, “with him being online, the only challenges are, just having him see it as a place to get information as well; not just as this kinda fun park.” Along the same lines, Fatima reflected:

I do wish that things that he would, like, encounter at school or in his reading or his studies, would spur him on to do a little more digging. . . I really think that could inspire him, and I would love to see him use it more for gaining knowledge about the things that he’s interested in.

Bonnie realized that even though she’d like her daughter to use the Internet more for educational purposes, she understands the value of entertainment too: “If I had my way, she would use it more to look stuff up. . . you know, things that she’s interested in that are academically related or educationally related” but that:

I don’t try to be a stickler about that so much, cuz like I said, it’s entertainment when she’s on there. She’s at school all day. She’s a very good student. I’m not like, you know, homework 24/7 or you have to be learning all day. You know, sometimes she wants to have fun.

*Hoping: creativity.* The last category regarding parents’ hopes about the Internet is about children’s creativity and self-expression online. Just a few parents noted that they are excited about this potential, such as Eva who said that her daughter “can start her own blog, she can build her own website if she wants to publish her own thoughts, her own thinking, and do whatever she wants. And then that side of the Internet I think encourages creativity.” In the same manner, Scott talked about how the Internet will give his son:

An outlet—as he, as he gets interested in writing, or in design, or in photography, or whatever it is. It will give you a kind of gallery, a place to exhibit, um, that wouldn’t necessarily have been available in a totally offline world.

Lastly, it is important to note that a few parents commented that they do not have any hopes about the Internet being beneficial for their child. Amy said, “I-I’ve gotta tell you I probably have more worries. I think it has more of a shadow than, uh, opportunities.” When asked about whether she has hopes about the Internet being beneficial for her daughter, Flora stated, “I don’t. No. I just—I hope she would get bored with it and go outside.” Sandra shared how she wishes that overall there would be more focus on the positive things that kids are doing with media:

So often what we’re doing is we’re telling our parents that your kids are doing all these things and these things are terrible that they’re doing; as opposed to saying to them, these are some of the choices that, that they’re making online, and this is why you need to be informed. . . Not to scare parents into being informed, but to, it’s more—more to empower them, I think is what is really lacking.

For parents, asserting their values was an important part of Internet mediation. The strategies parents used, whether protectionist or empowerment, were intertwined with their values about children’s use of the Internet and their feelings of confidence or inadequacy. Reflecting, Comparing, and Hoping are powerful themes that illustrate parents are thinking about their values, they are grappling with the role of the Internet in their children’s lives, and they are guiding their children in ways that accord with their beliefs and values.

### Summary and Conclusion

There are several important conclusions to take away from the parent interviews and the themes in this chapter. These conclusions provide a snapshot of understanding this group of parents’ strategies for monitoring the Internet. They include: 1) Parents primarily rely on monitoring strategies to protect children’s online safety; 2) A smaller minority of parents use empowerment strategies that encourage kids to analyze, create,

communicate, and share online; and 3) Parents have concerns, uncertainty, and anxiety about children's online behavior and how to keep them safe.

The first major conclusion is that parents talked a lot about their use of protectionist strategies to guide their preteen's Internet use. Parents had so much to say about monitoring that it was clearly a major theme from the interviews. By far the most popular form of monitoring was using the "POS" (parent over shoulder) strategy by having the computer placed in a shared space where the child can be monitored by sight. This finding is in line with the results from the survey in chapter four, in which parents reported using protectionist strategies most often to guide their children. According to the survey, parents most often set rules about which websites their children can visit, set limits on who the child can talk to online, and have their child use the Internet in a visible place. The use of these strategies was coupled with concerns, values, and attitudes about their child's use of the Internet that likely guided their use of protectionist strategies.

The second conclusion is that a smaller group of parents reported using empowerment strategies that encourage kids to analyze, create, communicate, and share online. There were some common characteristics among several of these parents. They reported having a more positive outlook on the Internet overall. Their outlook possibly influenced their desire to and confidence in recommending media creation activities, age-appropriate websites, and engaging in critical thinking and analysis skills with their children. Many of these parents worked in a profession in which they have experience using the Internet or are working with children, ranging from technology teachers, a librarian, media consultant, and a psychotherapist. According to survey results, the top empowerment strategies include using the Internet to extend learning in school,



recommending appropriate websites, and helping kids understand online advertising, and these were all strategies the empowerment group mentioned using. In line with these findings, a poll of parents of children ages 6-18, Cable in the Classroom et al (2007) found that parents who are more engaged with their children's use of the Internet have stronger beliefs that the Internet helps their children connect to others with similar interests, express creatively, access current events and news, learn about different cultures, learn about things they are interested in, and learn skills needed to succeed in school.

The third conclusion from the interviews is that parents have uncertainty and anxiety about children's Internet use and concerns about how to keep them safe. As a recap of the main topics of Online Behavior theme in the interviews, most parents were concerned with their kids seeing inappropriate things online, sharing private information, communicating with strangers, communicating in mean-spirited ways with other kids, spending too much time online, and cheating or illegal behaviors such as plagiarism and piracy. It seems that these concerns influence how parents guide their preteens' Internet use. If parents are coming from a place of anxiety and uncertainty, they will be more likely to use protectionist strategies to help monitor and protect the child rather than encourage their child to be online, even if it is for creative or school purposes. Similar to these results, a survey of parents found parents' were very or somewhat concerned about their child viewing sexually explicit content (70%), communicating with a stranger online (61%), and visiting websites with inappropriate content (61%) (Family Online Safety Institute et al., 2011). Parents' anxieties also were expressed when talking about their values versus their spouse, other families, or grappling with generational differences and

the very different (and less technology-saturated) childhoods they had from their children.

The fourth minor, but notable, conclusion is that parents who have a job that in some way relates to media, technology, or education were more likely to use empowerment than parents in other positions. For instance, parents who worked in advertising or Internet marketing spoke clearly of how they've taught their child to analyze online advertising. A few parents noted how their work in the education and education technology field helped them recommend good resources and sites to help their child with schoolwork. Perhaps their experience with computers and the Internet influences their attitude. Or perhaps their work allows them to do things in which they feel more comfortable with the Internet and helping guide their kids. Note that these parents were more comfortable with technology and more engaged. Perhaps it's easier to see the potential of empowerment and have ideas about what that looks like. So of course, if a parent believes these positive outcomes are possible with the Internet, they are more likely to use empowerment strategies to help facilitate these outcomes.

Overall, the interviews provide a snapshot of parents and their attitudes, behaviors, values, and concerns in guiding their preteens online. Media literacy practitioners know that there is not a "one size fits all" approach for parents, and that protectionist or empowerment Internet mediation strategies depend on the parent, the child, and the technology at hand. However, this research can help guide media literacy and parent media literacy education practitioners in thinking about how understand the

variety of factors that influence parents' use of protectionist and empowerment strategies, and understanding how to expand the ways that parents can be involved in their preteens' online lives.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine protectionist and empowerment parental Internet mediation strategies parents use to guide their preteens' Internet use, and to connect this to parental attitudes. The protectionist-empowerment paradigm of media literacy and research on parental mediation was a starting point for the formulation of a range of Internet mediation strategies, a national survey and interview guides to explore what mediation strategies parents use, their confidence level in enacting them, how useful they believe different strategies are, and how their attitudes about the Internet are associated with these items. Since media literacy is part of parental mediation strategies, most media literacy practitioners recommend a balance of protectionist and empowerment strategies for parents, as it's important to protect kids from risks, but it is also important to empower kids to harness the potential of the Internet.

Parents of preteens who have Internet access at home were chosen as the target population for this study. This population was examined because preadolescence is a time of heavier Internet use, an increase in social networking behaviors, and a transition to more independence online (Rideout et al., 2010). To explore parents' Internet mediation strategies and how they relate to protectionism and empowerment in media literacy, two methods of research were used: a national survey and in-depth interviews. The national survey reached 236 parents, and of these parents 40 interviews provided a deep dive into their lives, experiences, and feelings of parents in regards to Internet mediation strategies with their preteens. The survey data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and regression analysis. The interview data were

recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using grounded theory to develop a schema of codes, a typology of themes, and an overall theory from the interviews. Together, this data answered the four research questions examining protectionist and empowerment parental mediation.

### Major Conclusions

The answers to the research questions in this study were discussed in detail in chapters four and five. Having already presented detailed data, overarching themes from the research and answers to the four research questions are summarized here. I found four major conclusions from the parent surveys and the interviews.

**1. Most parents use protectionist Internet mediation strategies.** The first major conclusion is that most parents use protectionist strategies to guide their preteens online. They not only use protectionist strategies most often, but also believe them to be the most effective strategies to use. The majority of parents report high confidence in using these strategies. The main strategies parents use are having rules about what websites kids can visit, limiting who they can talk to online, having the computer with Internet in a public space in the home, and “POS,” (“parent over shoulder”) in which the parent looks over the shoulder of the child to see what they are doing. The main purpose of these strategies is to monitor and the child’s Internet use, but as you can imagine, offer little opportunities to engage beyond providing the child limits and restrictions. Duerager and Livingstone (2012), in their study of parental Internet mediation in Europe, found that “Parents who practice more restrictive regulation have children who encounter fewer risks and also less harm—but also fewer online opportunities (and, because these children do fewer online activities, they also have fewer digital skills)” (p. 4).

On the other hand, parents used empowerment strategies, but to a lesser degree, even though they reported feeling confident in using these strategies. The top empowerment strategies include encouraging kids to use the Internet to extend learning in school, recommending appropriate websites, and helping kids understand online advertising. The least used strategies were from the empowerment paradigm, such as asking questions about the author or purpose of websites, having children talk about their favorite websites, co-surfing, or encouraging online media creation. Parents believed empowerment Internet mediation to be less effective at guiding their child's Internet use than protectionist mediation.

This means that parents most often use on rules and limits, especially having the computer in a visible place. One can assume, then, that parents' conversation around the Internet mainly has to do with rules and limits, rather than analyzing, exploring, understanding websites, communicating, or creating online. But this may be an overgeneralization. Perhaps parents are actually engaging in their child's Internet use more than they report by just having it in the same room and paying attention to what their child is doing online. Jenkins (2010), offering advice on parenting and the Internet, says "My core advice to parents: Kids need someone to watch their back and not snoop over their shoulders. They need adults who are as engaged as they are with their off-line lives—not less and not more." Additional research is needed to explore the nuances of what parents actually do and say when most report requiring their child use the Internet in a shared space. For their kids, are parents "watching their back" or "snooping"?

**2. Parents who are comfortable using technology are more likely to be engaged in their preteen's Internet use.** The survey data showed that parent comfort

level with technology can be used to predict how often parents use protectionist and empowerment with their kids. The interviews showed that parents who had jobs related to media and technology, who are more likely to be comfortable using computers and the Internet, tended to use empowerment behaviors than those in non-media related jobs. Thus, comfort with technology can be used to predict overall engagement with preteens. Comfort with technology was the strongest attitude variable correlated with use of protection or empowerment.

**3. Parents who believe the Internet is a good place also often use protectionist strategies, and parents who believe the Internet is not a good place talked about a variety of Internet behavior topics with their kids.** Although this finding is about two different items, it has to do with agreement or disagreement that the Internet is a good place for kids. The survey data found that parents who believe the Internet is a good place are likely to use protectionist strategies, which is not typically what media educators associate with protectionist parents. This means that even though parents believe the Internet is a good place for kids, they still choose to use protectionist strategies. Note that although these parents agreed that the Internet is a good place for their kids, there wasn't *strong* agreement with this item.

The other finding shows that parents who talked with their kids about a variety of Internet behavior topics (most of which were protection-related topics) disagreed that the Internet is a good place for kids. The interviews more deeply illustrated parents' concerns, uncertainty, and anxiety about children's online behavior and how to keep them safe. Most parents in the interviews were concerned with their kids seeing inappropriate things, sharing information about themselves that affects their safety and privacy,

communicating with strangers or communicating in mean-spirited ways with other kids, spending too much time online, and cheating, plagiarism and piracy. Parental attitudes about the Internet as a “bad” place for their preteen may have been influenced by moral panics about children and media, discourse and sensationalism in news media, and concerns about their children lacking the skills to cope with online risks (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

**4. There are philosophical differences between parents who lean towards protectionism or empowerment.** The interviews revealed that parents often have philosophical and value differences in terms of how their perspectives, life experiences, concerns, and hopes about the Internet influences whether they will likely lean towards using protectionism or empowerment. For instance, if a parent has had a particularly negative life experience with their child online, they are more likely to view protectionism as the best mediation strategy. Many parents in this camp use—or think would be effective to use—filtering and monitoring tools, since they help keep their child safe from concerns they have about inappropriate content, communication, or sharing. In contrast, a few parents who used using empowerment strategies also voiced disagreement that the Internet should be filtered, monitored, or censored, and that they trust their child to serve as the internal regulator of what they encounter online. On the other hand, parents who use protectionism reported more concern how kids use the Internet for leisure activities, but parents who use empowerment are more interested in how their kids use the Internet for school and educational purposes.



Debunking Myths about Parents: A Challenge to Assumptions about Parents,  
Protectionism, and Empowerment

The findings of this study speak more largely to the divide in the media literacy education field I have been referring to all along: protectionism and empowerment. This study shows the complicated nature of parents and Internet mediation, showing that parents have a variety of values, feelings, and rationale for Internet mediation with preteens. But, the findings of this study show some misconceptions about parents, protectionism, and empowerment that affect media educators working with parents. Media educators who design programs for, train and educate, and conduct scholarship around parenting and the Internet should consider the implications of four “myths” about parents.

**Myth #1: Parents are either protectionist or empowerment, but not usually both.** One myth I realized as I progressed through this study, from both the interview and survey data, is that parents can’t be classified as “protectionist” or “empowerment” because many parents use some form of both. Media literacy practitioners should be careful to consider the range of behaviors parents use, and not to pigeon hole parents into stereotypes. The parent who doesn’t let his child on social networks may also encourage his child to create artwork online. Or the parent who has strict rules about time spent online may also co-surf with her child for some of that time. Although it is valuable to consider the dualism in the scholarly literature and philosophical approaches of protectionism and empowerment, and to use that as a method of exploration (as I have done in this study), media educators need to keep the “blurred lines” of parents’ use of, and rationales about, protectionism and empowerment in mind.

As discussed in the literature review, the division between protectionism and empowerment is based on differences in philosophy, research methods, attitudes about media and technology, and overall views about what the role of parents should be in guiding their children online. Protectionism is based in media effects research, guided by empirical research on health effects, and takes a critical look at media for possible negative effects on kids. Empowerment derived from cultural studies research, guided by qualitative research which often looks at the potential of the Internet, and takes more of a celebratory view of the media in what it can offer parents and children.

Oftentimes parent media literacy education programs are designed by organizations or practitioners in one camp or the other, with specific views, initiatives, and goals, and the education provided to parents is skewed in one direction. For example, boyd, Gasser, and Palfrey (2009), in a Notice of Inquiry to the Federal Communications Commission (09-94) on “Empowering Parents and Protecting Children in an Evolving Media Landscape,” found in their research that organizations and practitioners who are concerned that children will use the Internet unsafely aim to educate children and parents to improve safety or restrict children’s access. Conversely, some parent media literacy education is quite celebratory without addressing safety concerns. For instance, GamesParentsTeachers.com, a resource site for parents and teachers, includes discussion prompts parents or teachers can use with kids while playing popular video games. However, many of the games featured, like Grand Theft Auto, are quite violent and rated “Mature” for adults. Although the site includes question prompts about violence in the game, the fact is that parents and kids are encouraged to play violent video games

together, exposing kids to violent content<sup>47</sup>. Parent media literacy education should aim to be balanced in its approach, recognizing that both empowerment and protectionism are necessary, important, and worthwhile for parents. Organizations such as Common Sense Media offer a balanced parent media literacy education program, celebrating the possibilities but avoiding the risks of the Internet.

Duerager and Livingstone (2012), in an analysis of parental mediation in an extensive survey of 25,142 parents of 9-16 year-olds across Europe, found that restrictive mediation, while it reduces online risks for kids, also reduces their opportunities and skills. They found that parents who use active mediation<sup>48</sup> lowered risk for their kids, and reduced 9-12 year olds' reports of being upset when they encounter online risks, but encouraged kids with more online activities and skills. This study reveals that there are benefits to both protection and empowerment:

Problematically, the approach of parental restrictions carries a significant cost in terms of children's online opportunities and risks, even though it may be appropriate if children are vulnerable to harm. . .parental efforts can empower children online by enhancing their opportunities and skills while also going some way to reducing risk and harm from online risk. (p. 4)

**Myth #2: Parents who are confident using empowerment Internet mediation strategies will use them more often.** The survey data showed overwhelmingly that parents report feeling confident using both protectionist and (to a slightly lesser degree) empowerment strategies. However, feeling confident in using empowerment strategies does not mean a parent will use them. Parents reported not using empowerment strategies

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<sup>47</sup> This commentary is meant to provide an example and not to derogate this site or its resources.

<sup>48</sup> Duerager and Livingstone define "active mediation" as "parents talk to their child about the Internet, stay nearby or sit with them when they go online, encourage them to explore the Internet, and share online activities with them" (p. 1)

as much as they did protectionist strategies, and also thought they were less effective than protectionist strategies.

The myth that parents do not use empowerment strategies because they're not confident in doing so—that's not the case. Similarly, high parent confidence in Internet mediation was also found in a study in which “four-fifths of parents (especially parents of younger children) are confident they can help their child deal with anything online that bothers them and they are also fairly confident in their child's ability to cope” (Duerager and Livingstone, 2012, p. 4).

While parents may be confident using empowerment strategies, why don't they use them as much as protectionist strategies? The interviews show that parents are worried about opening the floodgates to things online that could negatively affect their kids, such as their kids' online privacy (“Sharing” theme), exposure to inappropriate content (“Seeing” theme), communication with others online (“Communicating” theme), lacking balance with screen time (“Spending” theme), and risking being affected by online scams and schemes (“Cheating” theme)<sup>49</sup>. Parents voiced less understanding of the positive benefits of empowerment, although the ones who did reported that they are co-surfing and communicating with their kids online (“Engaging” theme), recommending good sites (“Recommending” theme), encouraging use of the Internet for schoolwork (“Learning” theme), exploring the credibility of websites and asking questions (“Analyzing” theme), and encouraging online media creation such as blogs, videos, and artwork (“Creating” theme).

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<sup>49</sup> All of these protectionist sub-themes fell under the “Online Behavior” theme from the interviews, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Even though parents are confident using empowerment Internet mediation, perhaps they don't see the value of these strategies in terms of the positive effects. Yet parents are missing a big part of what media literacy and empowerment could offer their kids. Parents know, for instance, that by restricting and monitoring, they are protecting their child from risks. They may not know, for instance, how encouraging the use of the Internet can benefit their child in certain ways. Duerager and Livingstone (2012) found that "whereas active mediation, monitoring, and technical mediation is positively associated with online activities and competencies at all stages of age, restrictive mediation is linked to lower activities and skills" (p. 4). Furthermore, boyd et al. (2009), in a review of literature, found many positive effects of the Internet on kids:

The benefits of electronic media for children include (i) accessing educational content; (ii) acquiring technological literacy needed to compete in a global economy; (iii) developing new skills in the use of technology and the creation of content; (iv) facilitating new forms of communication with family and peers; (v) improving health through telemedicine; and (vi) removing barriers for children with disabilities. (p. 2-3)

Media literacy educators, then, must focus on demonstrating to parents the positive effects of Internet use, and empowerment, on preteens. And ideally, the positive effects can be shared while at the same time showing parents how kids can engage in empowerment while also being protected and safe.

**Myth #3: Parents who think the Internet is not a good place for kids are more likely to use protectionist strategies.** Although parents did not *strongly* agree that the Internet is a good place, they did *agree*, and those who agreed also used protectionist strategies. This finding contradicts the literature in parental mediation, in which parents who restrict tended to have negative attitudes towards media (Nathanson, 2001, Nikken & Jansz, 2006, Pasquier, 2001; St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, & Eakins, 1991). What

this means is that parents, even though they believe the Internet can be a good place for their kids, still use protectionist strategies of which often aim to limit, restrict, and have rules around Internet use.

Similarly, the interviews showed that many parents had positive attitudes about the Internet, especially the potential of the Internet. One of the major categories in the interviews was “Hoping,” which includes parents’ hopes about the benefits of the Internet for their children, ranging from being an information resource, staying connected with others, planning for college and jobs in the future, being a tool for learning, and being a tool to support creativity. Even so, although many of these parents might feel positively about the potential of the Internet for their child, they’re still primarily using protectionist behaviors.

It is possible that the parents that fall into this group, also fall into the “High-Protect, High-Empower” category as described in chapter four, in which they report using both protectionist and empowerment strategies most of the time. Nonetheless, media educators tend to see negative attitude about technology as related to protectionism, and positive attitude as related to empowerment.

**Myth #4: Parents who are uncomfortable with technology are more likely to use protectionist strategies.** The survey data show a strong association among both protectionism and empowerment and feeling comfortable technology and the Internet, and keeping up with what their kids do online. There is an assumption that parents who use protectionist strategies are less comfortable or less familiar with technology, and so their fear guides them in wanting to restrict and limit, which is not the case here.

This finding contradicts findings from other studies that found a lack of parents' expertise with technology hindered parental mediation (Facer, Furlong, & Sutherland, 2003; Livingstone & Bober, 2006), or that parents' lack of "digital confidence" influenced their use of restrictive mediation (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). However, the fact that confident parents are highly engaged is shown in findings from the EU Kids Online report, that "Parents from higher SES homes do more active and safety mediation though not more restrictions. Those who use the Internet more often, or who are more confident using it, do more of all forms of mediation except restrictions" (Duerager & Livingstone, p. 2).

Although this finding contradicts some of the literature on parental mediation, the population under study was affluent, well-educated, and had higher access to technology. It could be that this finding might differ from sample to sample. Nonetheless, this finding means that parents are making deliberate choices about using protectionist strategies, regardless of feeling comfortable with technology themselves.

Debunking these myths should inspire media literacy practitioners to be aware of their assumptions about parents and consider how their deep and complex values influence their Internet mediation. Media educators should focus on demonstrating the value of using protectionism and empowerment, particularly to not leave behind children to in valuable skills and benefits the Internet offers kids (boyd et al., 2009; Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). And additional research needs to examine the benefits of empowerment. For instance, what kind of skills are do kids learn when they write a blog, or film and upload a video? What is the value of having kids share their favorite websites with parents? Or co-surfing? Just like understanding the health effects of "eating your

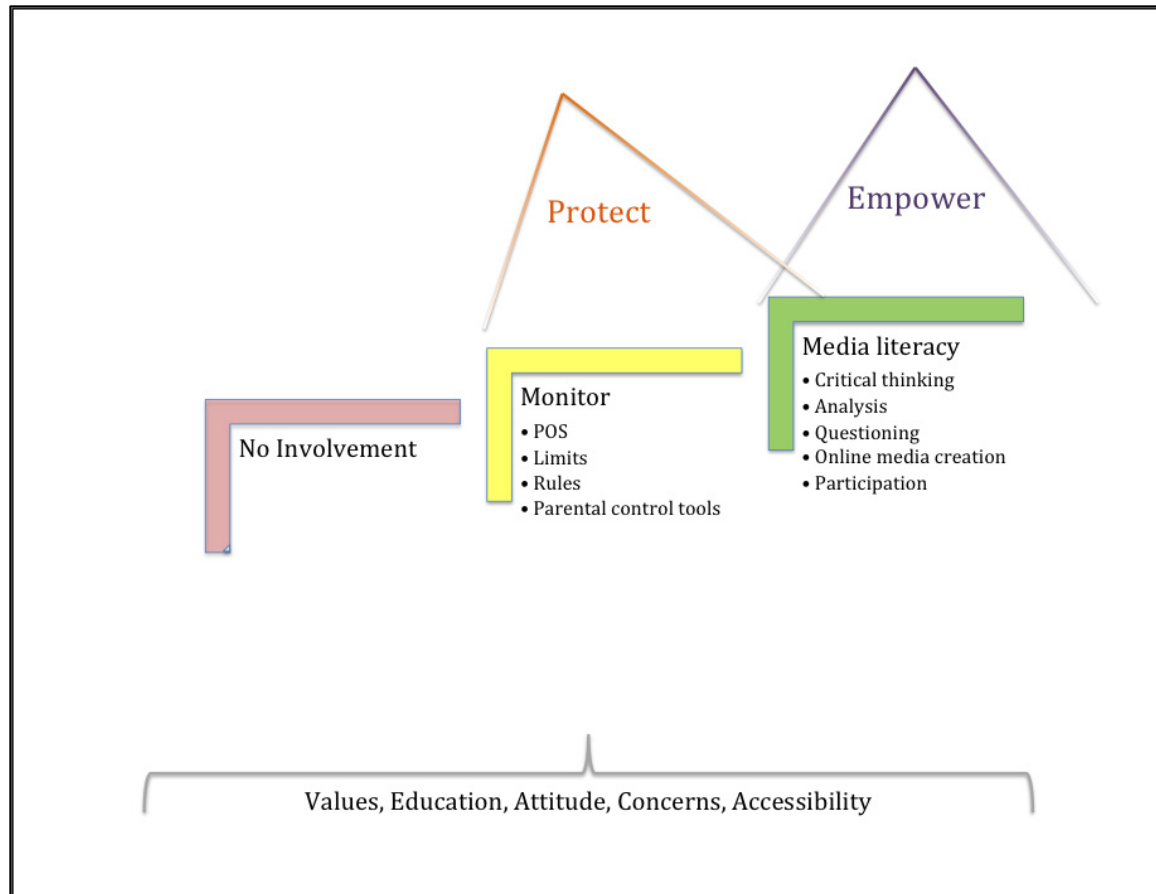
vegetables,” media literacy practitioners need to show concrete evidence of the positive effects of different types of mediation, particularly empowerment strategies. For instance, Buckingham (2007) notes that children’s leisure practices online are a perfect opportunity to explore media representation, language, production, and audience, and that parents should be expanding their children’s digital media literacy skills to “develop rigorous and critical—but also more creative—engagement with children’s out-of school cultures” (p. 118).

#### Taking Action: The Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation

Most media literacy practitioners would agree that ideally, they would want parents to not only protect kids online—as we know many parents are aiming to do based on the findings of this study—but empower kids too. Although there is value and necessity in using protectionist strategies to keep kids safe, parents need to be educated and encouraged to go beyond protectionism and to use empowerment strategies to help kids engage in critical thinking, analysis, communication, and harness the potential of the Internet.

Based on the findings of this study, I propose that there are steps—or levels—that encompass the protectionist-empowerment range of Internet Mediation strategies, and that parents should be encouraged to “go up the staircase” to both protect and empower preteens. In Figure 6.1, a model for these different levels and the relationship between protectionism and empowerment is introduced. This model illustrates the levels that a parent might engage in, and strive for, in their “toolbox” of Internet Mediation strategies.





*Figure 6.1* Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation

As Figure 6.1 illustrates, there are three levels in the staircase: No Involvement, Monitoring, and Media Literacy. No involvement means that the parent does not use any monitoring or media literacy strategies—their child has free reign. The Monitor step includes strategies to monitor the child’s Internet use, whether it’s POS (parent over shoulder), rules, limits, or using parental control tools<sup>50</sup>. The third step is Media Literacy, and this includes strategies that help kids access, analyze, evaluate, communicate, create, and participate online. Illustrated above the Monitor and Media Literacy steps are two ranges—one for Protect, and another for Empower. Note that it is possible to protect kids

<sup>50</sup> Note that this list is not exhaustive, but just offering a some examples of monitoring.

using monitoring *and* media literacy strategies. For instance, some parents want their kids to be protected from the effects of media on body image, or from advertising, and in order to do that, they taught their kids to ask questions and analyze these messages. However, it is not necessarily possible to have empowerment occur through monitoring, which is why the Empower range does not reach into the monitoring step. For instance, you can't encourage a child to be a critical thinker about what they see online by setting rules about what websites he or she can visit.

Near the bottom of Figure 6.1, there is a spectrum for negative or positive attitude. The negative attitude lies beneath the Monitor step, and positive attitude under the Media Literacy step, because as found in this study, parents who have a more negative attitude about the Internet are more likely to use Monitoring, and parents with a positive attitude tend to use more Media Literacy strategies.

At the bottom, there is a list of characteristics (Values, Education, Attitudes, Concerns, Accessibility). As found in this study, particularly from the interviews, these characteristics are included as factors that influence the Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation. They are in no particular order, but are factors that need to be considered when understanding parents' Internet mediation behaviors and their level on the stair steps.

Next, I'll go over each level of the stairs in detail. The bottom level is included as a starting point and an assumption that there are some parents with no involvement in their children's Internet use. If a parent is at this level, this calls for a need to, at the very least, go up to the next step and incorporate some protection strategies such as rules, limits, and becoming aware of what their kids are doing online. One of the main

strategies media literacy practitioners recommend to parents is a the concept of a “media diet” or “screen limits”, because it is simply unhealthy for a child to spend most of their waking hours in front of a screen, and not engaging in a variety of activities for their social, emotional, and physical development. Although this study did not find any parents who provided *no guidance*, I assume that this level is descriptive of a very small population of parents. It is important, at the basic level, to provide expectations for kids’ media use, and setting rules and limits is a basic parenting strategy most parents can relate to and easily start using.

The next step is Monitoring, which are protectionist strategies. The most common behaviors here include POS (parent over shoulder), using limits and rules for amount of time spent online and what their child is allowed to do, and using parental controls to monitor, block, and filter content. While these strategies are necessary and important, they don’t develop children’s media literacy skills; communication, collaboration, or creation skills; or their ability to be a well-informed, critical thinkers or active online participants. That’s why it’s important to move parents from this step to the Media Literacy step.

The third step, Media Literacy, includes strategies that parents use to help develop kids’ ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate online. Parents who use these strategies are helping harness the potential of the internet and helping kids develop skills around critical thinking, communicating with others, expressing themselves, self-regulation, and resiliency (Livingstone, 2011).

The Internet mediation strategies a parent uses on the Monitoring or Media Literacy step do not have to be exclusive. Parents should switch from one step to the

other, as they often do, depending on their goals. This does not mean that a parent should strive to be on the Media Literacy step and only use those strategies, because Monitoring strategies are useful too. Conversely, a parent who only uses Media Literacy strategies might want to consider incorporating monitoring, at the very least, encouraging their child to balance his or her time spent online with other activities.

#### Uses and Implications of the Stair Steps of Parent Internet Mediation

Overall, this model can be used as a reference for media literacy practitioners, technology educators, and anyone who is educating parents in guiding their children online. The model can be used as both a means to understand where parents are at, and also an aspirational model for understanding where parents should be. For the former, as a model to understand where parents are at, this model attempts to remind media literacy educators that there's not a "one size fits all" approach for parents, and that parents are at different places, influenced by different forces. The characteristics list is included at the bottom to remind educators that parents' strategies are influenced by a variety of factors, such as values, education, attitudes, concerns, and availability, which they need to be cognizant of in developing and executing parent media literacy education. Therefore the challenge here is not only understanding the factors involved in influencing a parents' Internet mediation behaviors, but designing education that moves them up the stair steps to help develop media literacy skills in their kids.

This is where the aspirational model comes in. Based on this study, we know that parents are using more protectionist than empowerment Internet mediation with their preteens. As stair steps, parents are encouraged to move up and beyond their previous level to the next one up. In this case, media literacy educators need to encourage parents

to move from the Monitoring to Media Literacy step, and to increase their range of parental mediation strategies to include empowerment behaviors. How can this be done?

There are several possibilities:

**1. Educating parents about the value of empowerment.** Even though in this study parents reported feeling confident using empowerment strategies, parents used them less and thought they were less effective than empowerment strategies. In order to help shift parents' attitudes to see the value in empowerment behaviors, media literacy educators need to share the benefits of empowerment strategies and educate parents about the valuable skills kids can learn, such as: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, analysis, creative expression, writing, and schoolwork. For instance, Lee and Chae (2007) found that parents who are actively involved in their children's Internet use, recommend good websites to their children, and used the Internet with their children, the more frequently their children used the Internet for educational purposes. If parents believe there is a positive benefit from empowerment strategies, perhaps they are more likely to use them.

**2. Sharing empowerment strategies that parents and kids can enjoy together.** Another way that media literacy educators can move parents to the Media Literacy step is by sharing strategies that parents and kids enjoy together. According to interviews with parents, some of the road blocks to parents not engaging in empowerment behaviors with their kids is that it takes too much time, it's not their idea of spending quality time with their kids, and they simply are not interested in co-surfing on the sites their kids visit or the games they play.

Furthermore, media literacy educators need to broaden the scope of what they describe to parents as “media literacy” behaviors, beyond telling parents to “talk to their kids about media” and encouraging parents to help their children “ask questions about what they see, read, and hear” (Thoman & Jolls, 2004). A variety of specific examples of empowerment behaviors should be offered to parents. For instance, Esther, an interview participant, is a blogger. She shared how she encouraged her daughter to start blogging, and even brought her to a national blogging conference. This not only helped her and her daughter share an interest in blogging, but developed the daughter’s writing and communication skills. Another parent, Ayesha, shared how her son got her interested in playing Webkinz with him, and similarly Sandra’s son got her interested in playing Pokemon, in which he enjoys teaching her aspects of the game. Henry Jenkins (2009) emphasizes that parents:

May have to accept the fact that our kids know more about this [digital media] than we do and we need to ask them questions, we need to have them teach us, we need to bring our values and morals into play as we talk to them about it.

Each parent can engage at some level with media literacy behaviors, whether it’s analyzing, evaluating, communicating, or creating, but it has to be enjoyable by both parent and child.

**3. Encouraging schools to play a larger role.** Of all the empowerment strategies examined in this study, parents encouraging their child to use websites to extend school learning was ranked highly as an empowerment strategy they use, felt confident using, and perceived as effective. This means that parents value their kids using the Internet for schoolwork, and are interested in helping their child if it benefits school. Schools, then, can play a larger role in helping educate parents how to guide kids in media literacy

behaviors that help their children learn and that benefits their schoolwork. Typically librarians have played this role, recommending good websites for learning that parents can encourage their kids to visit. But classroom teachers and technology coordinators can provide parents tips and strategies too, preferably beyond “have your kid visit these sites” to “help your kid learn by engaging with them using this site or tool together.” Although organizations such as Common Sense Media provide an education program to reach parents through schools, the demand for information from parents is typically how to protect kids online. Schools can use parents’ interest in encouraging their child to use websites to extend school learning as a jumping off point to additional media literacy behaviors.

To sum up, the challenge for media literacy educators is helping parents see the how not only protectionism, but also empowerment, Internet mediation strategies are effective in guiding their preteens online. They can do this by shifting parents’ attitudes about the effectiveness of empowerment strategies, share empowerment strategies that parents and kids can enjoy together, and encourage schools and teachers to play a larger role in building parents’ “toolkit” of media literacy strategies.

#### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

There are several strengths and limitations to this study, which include the methods used, the population sample, and changes in the media technology landscape. First of all, this study used mixed methods design, a combination of survey and interview. Mixed methods research, since it includes the strength of qualitative and quantitative research, can provide insights that might be missed when a single method is used (Creswell, 2003). The weakness of one research method can be overcome by the

strength in the other research method, and overall combining methods can help increase the generalizability of the results. One limitation of the survey and phone interview from parents is self-reporting. Both survey and interview are methods in which participants report their perceived behavior. Self-reports may have produced findings different than if I had used ethnographic methods to observe parents' behavior, or included the perspectives of children about parental mediation. In addition, social desirability bias may come into play, as discussed in chapter three. But ultimately, using a mixed-methods design helped explore the research questions at hand, with a national audience, as effectively as possible.

The population sample in this study was unique as it was heavily composed of urban, upper-class mothers, who were well-educated and knowledgeable about the media's influence on children. This is not a typical sample, but it is a unique sample that has power, influence, and resources. This population would (in theory) be the most likely to be accessible and engaged in their child's Internet use. Although the population was reached through convenience sampling and is not representative of a random sample, there is value in looking at this population, and understanding them can serve as a launching point to examine different parent populations.

A final limitation of the study is the ease of which it is outdated. As media researchers know, any study involving media technologies is quickly outdated since the rate at which new digital technologies are developed—and adopted—is fast. According to Moore's Law, digital technology advances quickly because the number of transistors that can be placed on a computer chip roughly doubles every two years (Intel, 2005). The result is that the scale gets smaller, the power of digital devices gets bigger, all at



decreased cost for the consumer. Consumer adoption of computers and the Internet has been much faster than radio or television. For example, in 2009 when data was collected for this study, Facebook was only 5 years old, and parents were much more concerned about it. Facebook was adopted primarily by college students, then spread to early adopters, and many parents did not have Facebook accounts. Today, Facebook is a household name and widely used by all walks of life, companies, and organizations, normalizing social networking and integrating it into our online behaviors. The shift in adoption of Internet technologies might also reflect a shift in attitudes about the Internet. Perhaps today, parents of preteens are less concerned about social networking than they were at the time of this study. However, looking at parents of preteens in this slice of time is important, as soon we will have a generation of parents who grew up with the Internet who will be having kids, and they might have different attitudes about, and uses of, Internet mediation.

#### Avenues for Future Research

This study opens up several different avenues for future research. One avenue is exploring more deeply parental attitudes and Internet mediation, especially in an increasing age of social media. This study found that parents' confidence using the Internet can be a predictor of their overall engagement, and that a positive attitude about the Internet as a good place for kids is related to a higher use of protectionist Internet mediation. But what about other attitudes or values? How does socio-economic status, education, culture, and religion influence Internet mediation?

Also, how has the rise in social media affected parental Internet mediation? The use of social media is the main online activity of kids aged 8-18 (Rideout et al., 2010),

and the use of social media has also increased for parents. Whereas Facebook and Twitter were once for a niche audience, now they are mainstream sites for socializing and sharing online. How, then, are parents engaging with their kids in an age of social media? How does this affect monitoring their children's online behavior? Does a social media culture provide an easy avenue for parents to communicate, share, and collaborate with their preteens online, fostering empowering uses of the Internet? One also wonders if parents' use of social media in their own lives "demystifies" the experience for them so they have a more positive attitude about the benefits of social media. As fast as technological shifts happen, I am curious whether parents' attitudes and behaviors follow.

This study noted some interesting aspects of parents who use media literacy and empowerment behaviors, and future research should explore commonalities among parents who use empowerment Internet mediation. For instance, one trend from the parent interviews was that parents who had jobs related to media and technology tended to use empowerment behaviors than those in non-media related jobs. Although employment wasn't explored as a mediating factor in this study, it warrants further investigation. Does parents' line of work influence their Internet mediation strategies? Are parents whose work life includes the use of the Internet or social media more likely to use empowerment strategies, because they are more comfortable using these technologies? Another trend of these parents is that some of them explained that they wanted their kids to learn to be independent online and deal with the challenges of the Internet on their own. These parents reported high trust in their kids, and philosophically were against filtering, monitoring, or blocking. As one parent, Eva, described, "We decided that in order for her [daughter] to make the right choice most of the time, we

need to empower her with the freedom to choose. . . And hoping that she understands we are giving her this power because we trust her.” What are the other demographic and philosophical differences from this group as compared to parents who lean towards protectionism?

Based on the myths about parents found in this study, future research should focus on exploring these misconceptions and whether they hold true in other contexts. These studies could explore questions such as, why do parents, who are confident in using empowerment, choose to use it less often than protectionism? Future studies should also examine whether other cases show that parents’ comfort level with technology is related to their overall engagement with their child’s Internet use, and further examining the relationship between confidence and parents’ use of protectionism.

Although recommendations have been provided in the Stair Step model of Internet Mediation, what exactly can media literacy practitioners do move parents from protectionist behaviors to empowerment? There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of parent media literacy education programs, whether they are effective in protecting and empowering kids, whether parent attitudes, knowledge, and behavior change, and ultimately what the impact is on kids. We need to better understand whether certain media literacy education approaches work with parents, and how educators can be inclusive of a variety of parenting behaviors and attitudes. Along these lines, future research should examine how schools are educating parents about Internet mediation. Who at the school (if anyone) is educating parents about Internet mediation, and what recommendations are being provided? What is sorely lacking is scholarly research on

parent media literacy education programs, including evaluation of effectiveness in order for media literacy practitioners to learn what is—and isn't—working.

Overall, if media literacy educators want Internet mediation to be a balance between protectionism and empowerment, and we know that protectionism is primarily the behaviors parents learn towards using, the goal is to understand how parents can shift to increase their use of empowerment behaviors, and in general, to be aware of the variety of strategies they can use to guide their preteens' Internet use.

The ultimate goal for this study is to benefit parents so that they will in turn, help preteens harness the potential of the Internet to help them learn and grow. Examining Internet mediation and parental media literacy education is a pressing issue in an age when online media are increasingly pervasive, and where parents face pressure to help their kids to be critical, informed, safe, and responsible participants in a digital world. Future research in media literacy and parental Internet mediation will help clarify goals of parent media literacy education, create more effective programs and resources for parents, and help kids harness the potential of the Internet.

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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF PARENT MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION WEBSITES USED TO DEVELOP INTERNET MEDIATION STRATEGIES

The following parent media literacy education websites were used to create the treatment. The websites include prominent organizations that target parents for media literacy education, and they range from protectionist to empowerment in tone.

American Academy of Pediatrics: The Internet and Your Family

<http://safetynet.aap.org/Internet.pdf>

Cable in the Classroom: Media Smart for Parents

<http://www.ciconline.org/mediasmartparents>

Common Sense Media

<http://www.common sense media.org>

Get Game Smart

<http://www.getgamesmart.com/>

Internet Safe Coalition: Parent Resource Center

<http://www.ikeep safe.org/PRC/>

Kids Health for Parents: Internet Safety

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net\\_safety.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html)

National Institute on Media and the Family: Parent Guides

[http://www.mediafamily.org/network\\_guides.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/network_guides.shtml)

PBS Parents: Children and Media

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia/>

Web Wise Kids

<http://ww.webwisekids.org>

Wired Safety

<http://www.wiredsafety.org>



## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

#### Parenting and the Internet

Thank you for your interest! This survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Before you begin, please read the consent form below and either agree or disagree to the conditions.

TITLE: Protecting or Empowering Preteens Online: Exploring Different Media Literacy Approaches with Parents

Investigator: Kelly Mendoza (Ph.D. Student)  
Mass Media & Communication  
Temple University  
[kmendoza@temple.edu](mailto:kmendoza@temple.edu)  
(215) 204-3255

Supervising Professor: Renee Hobbs (Ph.D.)  
Mass Media & Communication  
Temple University  
[renee.hobbs@temple.edu](mailto:renee.hobbs@temple.edu)  
(215) 204-4291

I am currently engaged in a study about the experiences of parents who have a preteen that uses the Internet at home. To help gain further insights into this area I am asking you to fill out an online survey.

The data you provide will be recorded anonymously through the online survey and will be stored securely in an encrypted file. Only I and my supervising Professor, Renee Hobbs, will have access to the data.

We welcome questions about the research at any time. Your participation in this study is on voluntary basis, and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

Questions about my rights as a research subject may be directed to Mr. Richard Thom, Office of the Vice President for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19140, (215) 707-8757.

**1. By clicking on the “I agree” button below, you are indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.**

Yes, I agree \_\_\_  
 No, I do not want to participate \_\_\_

**2. Are you a parent of a child between the ages of 9-12?**

If they select YES -> Continue onto the survey

If they select NO-> Participants are guided to a page that says “Thank you for your interest in this study. However, participants must be parents of preteen children to participate.”

The following survey will ask questions about your feelings on guiding your child’s Internet use. Your answers are anonymous and confidential, so please feel free to share your honest thoughts.

When completing the following questions, think specifically about your preadolescent child aged 9-12. (If you have more than one child aged 9-12, think about the oldest child.)

If for any reason you want to quit the survey, just close the browser button or click on the “Exit this survey” button.

**ABOUT YOU**

**3. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_**

**4. Gender**

\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_ Female

**5. Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)**

\_\_\_ White

\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific  
Islander

\_\_\_ Black or African American

\_\_\_ Other (please  
specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino

\_\_\_ Asian American Indian and Alaska  
Native

**6. Marital status:**

\_\_\_ Married

\_\_\_ Divorced

\_\_\_ Single

**7. Work status:**

\_\_\_ Full-time

\_\_\_ Stay at home

\_\_\_ Part-time

**8. Household Income:**

\_\_\_ Under \$20,000

\_\_\_ \$40,000-\$60,000

\_\_\_ \$20,000-\$40,000

\_\_\_ \$60,000-\$75,000

\$75,000-\$150,000 \$150,000+**9. Do you and your family live:** Within a big city (500,000+ residents) Smaller City/Town (Under 100,000) Suburb of big city Rural area City (100,000\_ residents)**10. Education level** Did not finish high school College degree H.S. diploma or equivalent Some graduate school Some college Graduate degree**11. How many computers with Internet access are in your home?** 1 3 or more 2**12. How often do you use the Internet at home? (including on a computer, mobile device, etc.)?** 2 or more hours/day 1-3 hours a week 1-2 hours/day Less than 1 hour a week 30 min-1 hour/day**13. Do you use the Internet at home primarily for work or leisure?** Work Leisure**ABOUT YOUR CHILD****14. How old is your preteen child?** 9 12 10 11**15. Gender of your child?** Boy Girl**16. Ages of your other children living at home?**

Age\_\_\_

Age\_\_\_

Age\_\_\_

Age\_\_\_

Age\_\_\_

Age\_\_\_

**17. Does your child have his/her own computer with Internet access?** Yes No**18. The computer my child uses to on the Internet is located in:** Living room/kitchen Laptop - it can go anywhere in the house His/her bedroom Office/other room

**19. Check all the other devices your child uses to access the Internet. (Check “None” if this does not apply.)**

- |                                                           |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Nintendo DS            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone/IPhone                | <input type="checkbox"/> Wii                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blackberry                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Cable TV               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

**20. On average, how often does your child use the Internet?**

- |                                              |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more hours/day | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 hours/week          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 hours/day       | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 hour a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 min-1 hour/day   | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know              |

**PARENTING AND THE INTERNET**

**21. When your child is online, how often do you... (Check one box per statement)**

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Have rules about how long they can be online.				
Have rules about what websites they can visit.				
Use filtering software/tools that block access to certain websites.				
Use monitoring software/tools to track my child's online activity.				
Have my child use the Internet where I can see them.				
Limit who they can talk to online (social networking, chat, instant messaging, etc.)				
Show my child how to keep their information private (or have them show me).				
Have my child balance their online activities with other non-technology activities.				
Help them understand the difference between advertisements and website content.				
Ask questions to help them understand the author and purpose of different websites.				
“Co-surf” online with my child.				
Suggest developmentally appropriate websites to my child.				
Communicate with my child using online technology (Instant messaging, chat, comment on their profile or blog, as a player in a game, etc.)				
Have them describe why they like their favorite websites.				
Encourage my child to create online content in positive, enriching ways (websites, videos, music, profile pages, pictures, etc.)				
Encourage my child to use websites for civic				

participation and activism.				
Encourage my child to use websites to extend learning about school-related topics.				

**22. Below is a list of things a child could potentially encounter online. Which of the following topics have you talked with your child about? (Check all that apply.)**

- |                                                                       |                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online advertising                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Instant messaging                                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cyberbullying                                | <input type="checkbox"/> How to search safely                                                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uploading/posting personal photos and videos | <input type="checkbox"/> What's okay and not okay to post                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital footprint                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual predators                                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping information private                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Determining accurate from inaccurate information                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Netiquette (Internet etiquette/behavior)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Chat rooms                                                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spam, spyware, and viruses                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate/adult content (pornography, violence, etc.)                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online addiction                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Filling out sweepstakes or other forms that ask for personal/contact information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illegal file downloading/sharing             |                                                                                                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shopping online                              |                                                                                                           |

**23. How confident would you feel enacting the following strategies with your child? Check the box next to each statement that best describes you.**

	Not at all confident	Not really confident	Somewhat confident	Very confident
Have rules about how long they can be online.				
Have rules about what websites they can visit.				
Use filtering software/tools that block access to certain websites.				
Use monitoring software/tools to track my child's online activity.				
Have my child use the Internet where I can see them.				
Limit who they can talk to online (social networking, chat, instant messaging, etc.)				
Show my child how to keep their information private (or have them show me).				
Have my child balance their online activities with other non-technology activities.				
Help them understand the difference between advertisements and website content.				
Ask questions to help them understand the author and purpose of different websites.				
"Co-surf" online with my child.				
Suggest developmentally appropriate websites to my child.				

Communicate with my child using online technology (Instant messaging, chat, comment on their profile or blog, as a player in a game, etc.)				
Have them describe why they like their favorite websites.				
Encourage my child to create online content in positive, enriching ways (websites, videos, music, profile pages, pictures, etc.)				
Encourage my child to use websites for civic participation and activism.				
Encourage my child to use websites to extend learning about school-related topics.				

**24. How do you feel about your child using the Internet? Check the box next to each statement that best describes you.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
When my child is online I get anxious for his/her safety.				
I worry that my child will be approached by an Internet predator.				
I worry that my child will be exposed to harmful content.				
The Internet helps my child express him/herself and be creative.				
The Internet has helped my child with his/her schoolwork.				
The Internet is a good place for my child to socialize with friends.				
I believe tracking children's Internet activity – such as using filtering/monitoring software – shows that you don't trust them.				
I trust that my child will be safe and responsible online.				
I believe my child will make wise decisions when he or she is online.				
I feel like I can't keep up with what my child does online.				
I feel my child knows more about computers and the Internet than I do.				
I am uncomfortable learning how to use new technologies.				

**25. Please read carefully: Which of the following strategies are most useful to you in helping guide your child's Internet use?**

**PRIORITIZE THIS LIST** by giving a grade to the most and least useful strategies. Type an "A" for the TOP 3 strategies you think are most useful. Give an "F" to the 3 choices you think are least useful.

	Rank
Have rules about how long they can be online.	
Have rules about what websites they can visit.	
Use filtering software/tools that block access to certain websites.	
Use monitoring software/tools to track my child's online activity.	
Have my child use the Internet where I can see them.	
Limit who they can talk to online (social networking, chat, instant messaging, etc.)	
Show my child how to keep their information private (or have them show me).	
Have my child balance their online activities with other non-technology activities.	
Help them understand the difference between advertisements and website content.	
Ask questions to help them understand the author and purpose of different websites.	
"Co-surf" online with my child.	
Suggest developmentally appropriate websites to my child.	
Communicate with my child using online technology (Instant messaging, chat, comment on their profile or blog, as a player in a game, etc.)	
Have them describe why they like their favorite websites.	
Encourage my child to create online content in positive, enriching ways (websites, videos, music, profile pages, pictures, etc.)	
Encourage my child to use websites for civic participation and activism.	
Encourage my child to use websites to extend learning about school-related topics.	

**26. Is there anything you would like to share about your experience with your child's use of the Internet? Please comment in the space below:**

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**27. Would you be interested in participating in a phone interview to talk further about your experiences in parenting the Internet?**

No thanks.

Yes, I'm interested.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Best way to reach you?  Email  Phone

**28. What's the best time to reach you by phone? (check all that apply)**

Anytime

Afternoon

Morning

Evening

**29. What's your Time Zone?**

Pacific\_\_ Mountain\_\_ Central\_\_ Eastern\_\_ Alaskan\_\_  
Hawaiian\_\_

**30. BOOK DRAWING**

Enter a drawing to win one of these great books for parents about media and children! Five copies of each book will be given away. You will be contacted by email for your mailing address if you win.

- *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* by Urs Gasser (2008)
- *Totally Wired: What Teens and Tweens Are Really Doing Online* by Anastasia Goodstein (2007)

Your email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your time!**



## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Protecting or empowering children online:  
Exploring different media literacy education approaches with parents

Hi \_\_\_\_\_, this is Kelly Mendoza calling from Temple University—we had scheduled this time for your interview. Does that still work for you?

I appreciate your interest in being interviewed. I am doing research on parents' experiences and feelings regarding their child's (aged 9-12) use of the Internet. I am going to ask you questions that elaborate on some of your survey responses and experiences as a parent in dealing with your child's use of the Internet.

Anything you say during our conversation will be held in the strictest confidence. No names will be attached to your voice and a pseudonym will be used in interview transcripts. If at any time you would like to opt out of the interview, just let me know and we can end the call. Based on these things, *may I have your permission to audiotape our conversation?* (they must confirm yes to move forward)

The interview will take approximately an hour. It would be great if you could move to a quiet place where we can talk freely without family around or distractions.

Ready to begin?

1. So, you mentioned you work (full/part) time. What do you do?

It looks here that you have a \_\_\_ year old boy/girl. Can you tell me a little bit about him/her and your family??

And you have \_\_\_ other kids in your household. (Sounds like a great family!)

2. Tell me a little bit about how the Internet is used in the home.

-How old was your son/daughter when he/she first started going online?

-Where is the Internet located that (child) uses?

-How much are they online every day (or week)?

-Do they go online using other devices besides a computer (cell phone, mobile devices, etc.)?

-What's your child favorite activities to do online? What types of sites do they visit? What do you think are you're their 3 favorite websites? Why do you think this is?

-Do you co-surf with (child)? What do you do? What websites do you visit? What do you talk about?

3. (variable: *current strategies*)

Next I'd like to talk about what kinds of things you do to help monitor, manage, or guide your child when he/she is online.

-Have you ever.... (provide protection example)?

-Have you... (provide common ground example)?

-Have you... (provide empowerment example)?

-If you found your child was visiting (or had visited) a website that you think is inappropriate, what would you do?

-If you found your child was sharing personal information online, what would you do?

4. (variable: *confidence in using strategies*)

You indicated you were very confident in doing (give some examples). Why?

You indicated you were highly confident about strategies, but chose not to use them.  
Why?

You indicated you were not as confident in doing (give examples). Explain why you feel this way.

5. (variable: *attitude about child's use of the Internet: positive, negative, computer skills, trust of child*)

What worries do you have about your child being online?

What hopes do you have about the Internet being beneficial for them?

Do you trust your child to be safe and make responsible decisions online? Anything that worries you?

If you could change anything about your child's use of the Internet, what would you change?

If your child encounters a problem on the computer (whether it is technical, something isn't working), who do they usually go to for help? How would you feel helping them?

At home, if you had to learn something new about the computer (or Internet), would this make you feel interested or intimidated?

6. (variable: *usefulness of different strategies*)

For one question on the survey, I had you rank which strategies (if you had to choose) were most and least useful to you.

Explain why you think (give examples) are most useful to you?

On the other hand, why did you say (give examples) are least useful to you?

7. Have you faced any challenges with your child using the Internet (inappropriate content, being contacted by a stranger, spyware, being cyberbullied, etc.)? What happened? What did you do?

8. How do you spend time using other media together with your child (TV/movies, listening to music, playing console video games, or reading books together)?

9. What do you think are three important characteristics of being a parent?

10. Do you have any questions for me?

Well, it looks like we're out of time. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences about this topic. Hearing about your experiences with your children's online life will help research to advance parent programs about Internet education. Thanks again \_\_\_\_\_, and enjoy the rest of your (evening/day)!

## APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEWEE OCCUPATION AND CHILDREN

Table D.1

*Occupation and Child Information of the Interviewees*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Child's age</b>	<b>Child's Sex (M/F)</b>	<b>Other children</b>
Sandra	Technology teacher, high school	9	M	Daughter, infant Daughter, 6
*Scott	Vice president of marketing at a financial services technology company	9	M	Daughter, 7
Angie	Community technology teacher	9	F	-
Amy	Runs cleaning company	12	M	Daughter, 10
Rosa	Stay-at-home parent	11	M	Daughter, 13
Elyse	Customer service representative	11	F	-
Esther	Internet marketer	12	F	Son, younger (age unknown)
Eva	University researcher on youth	11	F	-
Barbara	Business education teacher	12	F	Son, 15
Gloria	Stay-at-home parent	11	F	Son, 17 (unknown), 4
Melissa	Stay-at-home parent	10	M	Son, 8
Miranda	Manager of company that manages shopping malls	12	F	2 additional children (age/sex unknown)
Carolyn	Owns a food business	12	F	Daughter, 10
Flora	Stay-at-home parent	12	F	Son, 16 Daughter, 18
Nadia	Manager of a pet store	12	F	-
Karen	Stay-at-home parent	12	M	Son, 8
Leslie	Instructional technologist, middle school	12	F	Son, 16 Daughter, 17 Son, 19
Carmen	Family success consultant and coach	9	M	-
Fatima	Stay-at-home parent	9	M	Daughter, 6
Sonia	Stay-at-home parent	10	M	Four additional children (age/sex unknown)
Marian	PT Vice president of sales at an insurance broker	12	M	(unknown), 7 (unknown), 9
Gina	Dental hygienist	9	M	-
Kim	Psychotherapist	12	F	Daughter, 8

Liz	PT art teacher at charter school	12	M	Daughter, 9
Tammy	Teacher, middle school	11	F	-
Debra	Stay-at-home parent	9	F	Son, 21 Son, 21
*Collin	Media consultant	10	F	-
Regina	Manager of technical writing group for major tech company	12	M	Daughter, 14
Sara	Grad student in library science	10	M	Son, 7
Nipa	Office manager for accounting firm	12	F	Daughter, 10
Ayesha	Stay-at-home parent	10	M	Son, 13 Daughter, 17
Jasmine	University professor on adolescent issues	9	F	Daughter, 5 Daughter, 9
Jackie	Freelance writer and blogger	9	F	Daughter, 2 Daughter, 6
Brooke	University Professor of technology	12	M	-
Denise	PT hairdresser	10	M	-
Tiara	Stay-at-home parent	12	M	Daughter, 9
April	Runs child daycare center	11	M	Daughter, 7 Daughter, 13
Bonnie	Attorney	10	F	-
Laura	Real estate broker	11	M	Son, 11
Alina	Stay-at-home parent	12	M	Son, 10

\* Indicates participant is a father.

## APPENDIX E

## PARENTING AND THE INTERNET THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

MONITORING THE INTERNET	ONLINE BEHAVIOR	ASSERTING VALUES
<p><u>Rules</u>  <i>"POS" and the Internet in a shared space</i>  <i>Asking permission</i>  <i>Rules about time</i>  <i>Rules about content</i>  <i>Consistency in rules</i></p> <p><u>Tools</u>  <i>Use of parental controls</i>  <i>No use of parental controls</i></p> <p><u>Additional Ways of Monitoring</u>  <i>Checking online history</i>  <i>TV vs. Internet</i>  <i>Monitoring will increase with age</i></p>	<p>(Protectionist)</p> <p><u>Seeing</u>  <i>Inappropriate content</i>  <i>Pornography and sexual images</i>  <i>Advertising</i>  <i>YouTube</i></p> <p><u>Sharing</u>  <i>Privacy</i>  <i>Uploading content</i>  <i>Passwords</i></p> <p><u>Communicating</u>  <i>Internet predators</i>  <i>Cyberbullying</i>  <i>Social networking</i></p> <p><u>Spending</u>  <i>Time waster</i>  <i>Online vs. real world</i></p> <p><u>Cheating</u>  <i>Plagiarism and piracy</i>  <i>Scams</i></p> <p>(Empowerment)</p> <p><u>Engaging</u>  <i>Co-surfing</i>  <i>Family communicating online</i></p> <p><u>Recommending</u></p> <p><u>Learning</u>  <i>Internet for schoolwork</i>  <i>Internet in school</i></p> <p><u>Analyzing</u>  <i>Credibility of websites</i>  <i>Asking questions</i></p> <p><u>Creating</u></p>	<p><u>Reflecting</u>  <i>Trust in child</i>  <i>Open communication</i>  <i>Confidence level</i>  <i>Parenting role</i>  <i>Siblings</i></p> <p><u>Comparing</u>  <i>Other families</i>  <i>Husband vs. wife</i>  <i>Generational differences</i></p> <p><u>Hoping</u>  <i>Information resource</i>  <i>Staying connected</i>  <i>College and job</i>  <i>Toy vs. tool</i>  <i>Creativity</i></p>