

Final Exam

Electronic Threats and Possibilities

Experts have spent the last eight years exploring the Internet and its implications for both adolescents and adults. From the early days of chat rooms to today's **rise to prominence** of social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook, digital media has grown and changed at a rapid pace to the point where adolescents are living a large part of their life electronically - especially online.

- 5 Research shows that adolescents use a variety of Internet applications to connect with their peers and to explore adolescent concerns and taboo topics such as identity and sexuality; all issues that teenagers **try to grasp** off-line. Social networking sites are online communication tools that allow teens to create a public or semi-public profile, as well as to create and view their own and other users' online social networks. Essentially, adolescents create a social network of "friends," and post information about
10 themselves including likes, dislikes and activities, through photos, audio, text messages, blogging and more.

Media often describes social networking sites as a dangerous place where kids are stalked by callous lawbreakers. These fears are often misplaced and the truth is somewhat different. In 2009, the
15 Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University found that, in fact, peer bullying and harassment are the most frequent threats that kids face, both online and offline. In addition, those who are most at risk often have difficulties in other parts of their lives too. In other words, it is not the use of the Internet, but the teenager and his or her off-line environment that may lead to hostility. The research found that cyberspace may not function as a separate risky environment but rather as an
20 extension of the school grounds and neighborhoods. Cyber-bullying may appear especially frightening to parents because it involves communication technologies with which they are unfamiliar, yet parents should realize that they are not powerless.

Indeed, parents can have an important influence in reducing teens' risky behaviors with social networking sites. In recent research, teens who perceived their parents to be indulgent reported the most risky online behavior such as meeting someone in person they had first met online. Teens who
25 perceived their parents as authoritative reported the lowest frequency of this risky behavior. Authoritative parenting also involves open lines of communication between parent and child. A parenting style that combines warmth, supervision, and open communication between parent and child is therefore highly recommended.

In addition, MySpace and Facebook present new opportunities for parent-child communication and
30 parental supervision. Once a young person posts a MySpace or Facebook page, their lives are public and open, not kept hidden away in a secret diary. If a parent is able to access their child's page, he or she can use it as a means to interact and learn more about the child. For example, if the teenager allows the parent to be a "friend," parents can join their teenager's network and monitor their communication, just as other friends do. In order to become a teenager's "friend," a parent will need to

35 create his or her own social networking site page. Ideally, parents should be able to discuss with their children the benefits and damages of the sites, as well as what is appropriate for “public” view and what is inappropriate and should be kept private and offline. For example, an adolescent may not understand that something posted online can be accessed and exploited by future employers, college recruiters and others.

40 The Internet is not all about dangers though. Research shows that the internet can increase the self-esteem of **socially awkward** adolescents and people. Through the Internet, people may also develop a community of support following a certain sad event such as the loss of a loved one or a destructive natural disaster.

45 Because of the necessity for both an online presence and face-to-face communication, it is important that parents and teenagers fully explore the digital and the real world. On one hand, they need to make efforts to maximize family and friend offline activities. On the other hand, and equally important, electronic communication could be used to build and strengthen relationships with peers and learn more about people and the entire world.