

Children's digital landscapes: Risk, resilience, and agentic participation.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	7
1. Chapter 1: Introduction	8
1.1. Research Questions	11
1.2. Chapter structure	12
1.3. A note on Terminology	14
2. Chapter 2: Children's Digital Landscapes: A review of literature	15
2.1. Children's digital mediated practices	15
2.2. Digital natives; a useful distinction?	21
2.3. Children as Prosumers.....	27
2.4. Risk and Resilience: the digital dichotomy?	29
2.4.1. Children 'at risk' and the age of moral panic.	29
2.4.2. Benefits and opportunities to children	38
2.5. Chapter Conclusions.....	41
3. Chapter 3: Towards a Sociology of Digital Childhoods: A review of literature	43
3.1. The Social Construction of Childhood	43
3.2. The Historical Construction of Childhood: Ariès, Rousseau, Locke	44
3.3. The (not so new) New Sociology of Childhood.....	50
3.4. Human Beings or Human Becomings?	53
3.5. The UNCRC and Children's Rights	54

3.6. Conclusion: A discussion of the significance.	57
4. Chapter 4: Methodology and Ethical Considerations	59
4.1. Research Philosophies: Strategies, Paradigms and Approaches	60
4.2. Feminist Research: one does not simply do feminist research	62
4.3. Qualitative Research.....	64
4.4. Child-Centred Methodology	67
4.5. Research Design	69
4.6. Sampling and Access	72
4.7. Data Analysis.....	73
4.8. Reliability and Validity	74
4.8.1. Reflexivity.....	75
4.9. Ethical Considerations	77
4.9.1. Harm	78
4.9.2. Informed consent.....	80
4.9.3. Gatekeepers.....	82
4.9.4. Confidentiality and Anonymity	83
4.9.5. Sensitive issues in research	84
4.9.6. Legal Checks.....	86
5. Chapter 5: Digital Landscapes: A Risky Business?	87
5.1. Doom and Danger: - ‘Social Evils’ and the internet as a risky landscape ...	87
5.1.1. So, what is it that we are worried about?	90

5.1.2.	Discourses of Screentime and addiction:	94
5.1.3.	A Judgement of Quality	97
5.1.4.	Cyberbullying, Trolls and Haters.....	99
5.1.5.	Pornography and Nudity	107
5.1.6.	Sexting	114
5.1.7.	Inappropriate content and other ‘awkward stuff’:.....	121
5.1.8.	Video Gaming, a risky enterprise?	124
5.1.9.	Digital Stranger danger.....	130
5.1.10.	Footprints in the Concrete	137
5.2.	Digital Wellbeing	142
5.2.1.	Perfectionism.....	142
5.2.2.	Mental health imagery	145
5.3.	Conclusion: Risky Business: A summary.	148
6.	Chapter 6: “It’s not all bad”: Resilience and Regulation.....	152
6.1.	Introduction to chapter:	152
6.2.	Agency and self-regulation.....	153
6.2.1.	Inappropriate content.....	170
6.2.2.	Sexting case study	173
6.2.3.	Self-regulation of usage.....	177
6.3.	Parental Regulation	187
6.3.1.	Age limits and restrictions.....	208

6.3.2. Facilities, affordances, and tech support:.....	214
6.3.3. Parents own usage.....	216
6.4. Chapter conclusions	219
7. Chapter 7: “Tumblr is a Lifestyle”: Children’s Agentic Participation in Digital Landscapes	221
7.1. Digital Landscapes of Participation	224
7.1.1. Landscapes of Social Media	230
7.1.2. Landscapes of Communication:.....	235
7.1.3. Landscapes of Shared Meanings: memes and more!	243
7.1.1. Landscapes of Gaming.....	246
7.2. Children as savvy digital consumers	252
7.3. Fandom and Subculture	258
7.4. Conclusions: Agentic Participation in the Digital Landscape.	267
8. Chapter 8: Conclusions.....	273
8.1. Going Forwards: Policy recommendations and Future Research	281
9. Reference List	287
10. Appendices	305
10.1. Appendix One: Focus Group Topic Guide	305
10.2. Appendix Two: Case Studies	311
10.2.1. Case study 1: ‘Cyberbullying’	311
10.2.2. Case Study 2: ‘Sexting’	312
10.3. Appendix Three: Interview Schedule	313

10.4.	Appendix Four: Reflexive Statement.....	317
10.5.	Appendix Five: Participant and Demographic Information.....	324
10.5.1.	Table 1: Participant Information.....	325

Abstract

This doctoral research project aimed to investigate children's perceptions of digital landscapes. Taking a qualitative interpretivist stance, grounded in feminist epistemologies this research addressed questions relating to how children use digital landscapes, and what they felt was important about this. It evaluates how children's digital landscapes are shaped by, and shape childhood as a construct. This thesis looks at children's perceptions of risk, and how they mitigate that risk. Children's views were salient to this research; this was underpinned by the theories of the Sociology of Childhood, viewing children as agentic and are able and competent and therefore are expert in matters which impact them. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with eighteen young people aged 11-14 years, in order to seek children's views on the digital landscape; the risks and the opportunities it affords. This research argues that children and young people can recognise the risks of the digital landscape, they are able to show understanding of what these risks might mean. Furthermore, in understanding these risks they can mitigate them. This thesis argues that in a globally connected digital world children are accessing digital spaces in ways hitherto unimagined. Not only are children engaging with digital landscapes, but the way also they construct and co-construct these environments represents a deep engagement moving towards agentic participation. Agentic participation is argued to be a concept beyond just agency and beyond participation. It is recognising that children are central to shaping the digital landscape itself, through the process of construction in collaboration with peers. This construction process represents that not only are children shaping the digital landscape, but by extension they are shaping their

experiences and childhood as a social and cultural construct. Thus, defining what it means to grow up in the digital age.

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

With the rise of the digital age there has been a growing concern over children's experiences and interactions within the online environment. Adults see these technologies as inherently risky and there is a great deal of concern over children's digital access. This concern is often constructed as the robbing of childhood innocence, and by extension childhood in and of itself. Discourses around technological advancement are often seen as taking away from childhood in a way that was not experienced 'in the good old days'. Buckingham (2000) argues that these fears are perpetuated by adult nostalgia for a lost 'golden age' of childhood innocence. For the children in today's generations, they have not experienced a life before the internet, they have grown up in the digital age. Mark Prensky would therefore refer to them as 'digital natives' whereas adults are predominately 'digital immigrants' coming to technology later in life and having different understandings and attitudes towards digital technologies (Prensky 2001). Furthermore, this apparent intergenerational divide becomes salient when considering adults concerns about children's uses of technology and the risks that may be present in how children interact with new technologies.

This fear of the risks has given rise to something of a moral panic on the issue, whereby the media largely reports the digital world as something tricky and problematic to be navigated and fundamentally not suitable for children. It is therefore constructed as an adult landscape whereby children are conspicuous with their presence in this realm. Just as Jenks (2005a, p.74) has likened children to 'weeds',

the issue being that they are not problematic in and of themselves, but they are noticeable by their presence in public spaces, seen as “growing in the wrong places” which are defined as ‘adult’ by default. So too we can apply the same analogy to the digital space, children are conspicuous by their presence on the internet, they are weeds, growing in the wrong place, in an ‘adult-orientated space’; that space with content deemed unsuitable for child consumption. This belonging to the ‘wrong place’ is what gives rise to a great deal of public and policy discourse of concern.

The public discourses of adult concern of technological spaces as inherently risky and unsuitable for childhood, stems from the constructions of childhood as a time with a protected status, a time of carefree innocence that implies a naivety and passivity that is incompatible with notions of children’s agency and participation. The rise of the ‘New’ Sociology of Childhood (James, Jenks and Prout 1998; James and James 2004; Mayall 2002; Jenks 1996, 2005) demonstrated a paradigm shift in the field of Childhood Studies to recognise Children’s agentic capacities and participation. However, it could be argued that with the constraints on childhood spaces, children’s agency is somewhat limited by adult regulation of space. Largely concern of the digital comes into play when considering this a less regulated space, often beyond the gaze of protective adults, such as parents.

This thesis explores children’s digital landscapes and considers the role those digital technologies play in the everyday lived experiences of young people in the digital age. It critically engages with the discourse in society about digital technology which portrays the digital landscape as inherently risky to young people and by extension to the very construct and concept of childhood itself. This doctoral research sought to gain the children’s own perspectives of this. It took the view that children are agentic and expert in their own lives; therefore, they can shape their own experiences and

engagements within the digital age. The digital age means that for children and young people access to the digital landscape is a salient part of growing up, it is integrated into the very experience of adolescence. But with this shift towards the digital there comes a great deal of public and policy discourses of concern, leading to calls to further regulate and control the digital space (Phippen and Brennan 2020). This research aimed to listen to the young people themselves about how they experience the digital landscape and how they traverse the tricky waters of balancing risk and opportunity. The research adopted a qualitative approach grounded in feminist epistemology, this sought to elevate the children's voices as expert in their own lives. This research was conducted through focus group and interviews with eighteen young people aged 11-14 years, the young people first took part in a focus group with a group of their peers; these were sorted into same-sex groups with the same year group; in total five focus groups were carried out. This was followed by individual interviews, eighteen in total.

The title of this thesis is centred around 'Children's Digital Landscapes'; landscapes has been chosen as a term deliberately to demonstrate children's interactions with digital technologies as a digital 'space', whereby the experiences of childhood are shaped and shared by the young people themselves. Landscapes implies a shifting space, and this is what the digital landscape is; a vast, unknown, largely unregulated space. This space shifts, changes, and develops through young people's interactions within it. It is, therefore, not static and it is shaped through engagement and participation. Furthermore, the digital landscape offers something unique and that is the opportunity of a child-led space that has the potential to be free from the adult gaze. This thesis argues that the digital landscape is shaped by children's agentic

participation within it, and this in turn shapes the very experience of childhood and what it means to grow up in contemporary society.

Investigating children's digital lives, is particularly pertinent and relevant for contemporary society. Whilst the internet is a relatively new phenomena it has permeated every facet of everyday life. This is also true of children's everyday lives, perhaps even more so for the adolescent age group, it is a vital part of growing up today. Yet, the public discourse of concern problematises children's access to this landscape. However, through discussions with the young people it became clear that they themselves appreciate some of the risks of the digital realm and mitigate those risks effectively. Further, that the young people's shaping of the digital landscape is central to their views and experiences. This research therefore aimed to explore concepts such as risk, resilience, and agency in relation to children's everyday lived experiences of the digital landscape.

1.1. Research Questions

This research aimed to address questions relating to children and young people's use of digital technologies and how this forms a digital landscape. This research has aimed to investigate and explore the risk – participation dichotomy that is prevalent in discourse around children's use of digital technologies. Furthermore, this research has aimed to look at how young people are managing their risks and explores the importance of the digital landscape to children and young people.

Therefore, this research has investigated and addressed the following research questions:

- How are children and young people engaging with digital and technological landscapes?

- What does this digital landscape consist of and look like through children and young people's perspectives?
- What are children's and young people's experiences and perception of risks associated with digital technologies?
- How are young people mitigating and managing these risks?
- How and why do digital technologies shape the experiences of adolescence and growing up in the digital age?
- Why are young people engaging with the digital landscape, and how does this foster participation and belonging to youth culture?

1.2. Chapter structure

This thesis is structured into chapters as follows. There are two literature review chapters: chapter two is the first of these literature review chapters and seeks to address broadly the topic of children's digital landscapes. Within this chapter literature pertaining to what the digital landscape is for children and young people is explored. Furthermore, literature related to risk and resilience in children's use of digital technologies is explored. This chapter also explores the topic of moral panic, a concept applied to the subject of digital technologies in evaluating how societal discourse shapes fears about children and how they engage with the digital landscape. Demonstrated within this chapter is the diversity of the digital landscape in terms of what it offers young people and the opportunities it affords. These opportunities are balanced with discussion of the risk narrative around children's uses which leads to concerns about childhood. Chapter three is the second literature review chapter and looks at the body of literature around the Sociology of Childhood; here it is explored that childhood is a social construction, and it considers what this means for the digital

age. Further explored is children's agency as a key theme of this thesis. Children rights, particularly considering rights in the digital age are considered. The theories explored in both literature review chapters underpin this thesis and the later discussions.

Chapter four is methodology and ethics, here it is discussed the methodological choices and theoretical underpinning this thesis takes. This research was grounded in Feminist epistemologies drawing from a child-centred approach. A key methodological and philosophical decision was to promote the children's and young people's voices as expert in their own lives; this is therefore highly compatible with the child-centred approach, and with the theoretical underpinning of the Sociology of Childhood. Furthermore, the ethical considerations are outlined and discussed within this chapter. This is to demonstrate the importance of ethical considerations when researching with children, typically considered a 'vulnerable' group; this section will demonstrate thoughtful consideration and application of ethical procedures was adopted throughout this research.

Chapter five is the first of three data analysis discussion chapters. Across these three chapters the findings from the focus groups and interviews are discussed and analysed. Quotes from the transcripts of these interviews and focus groups are provided to demonstrate children and young people's views and experiences around the digital landscape. Chapter five considers risk in the digital landscape; it considers young people's perceptions of and understandings of the risk they encounter. Further, it considers the area of digital wellbeing and how young people's wellbeing may be impacted by the digital landscape.

Chapter six is the second of three data analysis discussion chapters; this chapter looks at resilience and regulation. It considers how young people are self-regulating their online experiences and considers how they mitigate the risks of the digital landscape. Furthermore, this chapter considers parental regulation of digital spaces, it considers how parents might regulate or monitor children's activities and importantly how the children themselves feel about this form of regulation or surveillance.

The final chapter of data discussions is chapter seven, this chapter evaluates children's agentic participation in the digital landscape. Here it is established what is theorised by agentic participation and how this goes beyond agency and beyond participation. It is argued that children and young people shape the digital landscape through their very interactions in it. This in turn is shaping the experience of adolescence and by extension the construction of childhood in the digital age.

1.3. A note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis, children or young people are referred to interchangeably. This is due to the definition of the child as being under eighteen years of age in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), article one. Therefore 'children' is a catch all term for this age group.

A further note, throughout the thesis I referred to myself, the researcher, using first person 'I'. This is a conscious decision to recognise that epistemologically this research is taking the view that you cannot divorce the researcher from the process; they are embedded within it. In chapter four the methodology chapter I explore this further in light of concepts such as positionality and recognising that taking an interpretivist approach drawing from feminist epistemologies means that the researcher is embedded in every stage of the research process. Thus, there is as large

role for reflexivity. By adopting a first-person style, it is recognising the centrality of the researcher in the process and the potential influence they may have.

2. Chapter 2: Children's Digital Landscapes: A review of literature

This chapter is the first of two literature review chapters which review and consider theory and research around the subjects of children's digital landscapes. This chapter particularly looks at the body of literature surrounding children and young people's use of digital media encapsulating particularly the use of the internet and mobile phone technology. This chapter discusses the use of terminology such as 'digital natives' and whether they are useful for discussions of young people's digital lives. This chapter also discusses how young people's uses of digital media can gain benefits in terms of identity formation, education, and peer relationships. Finally, this chapter looks at some of the risks and moral panics associated with digital media use and some of the concerns which are associated with a perceived loss of innocence that underpins this research.

2.1. Children's digital mediated practices

Current empirical research is showing that new media is becoming an ever-increasing important aspect of children and young people's lives (Livingstone 2002). This can be measured in terms of family income, use of time and space, or importance in regard to social relations (ibid). Furthermore, the evidence suggests that 'new' media extends

its influence throughout children's lives, so that children's leisure cannot be separated from their education, employment prospects, participation in public activities, or participation within family life (ibid). However, Livingstone (2002) argues that a focus exclusively on new media would be wrong, new media adds to and transforms leisure options, but also existing practices mediate new media into daily life. Young people are at the point in their lives where they are the most moved to construct identities, to forge new social groupings and challenge cultural understandings, new media plays an important role in this (ibid).

Mobile technology and in particular smartphone technology has become a vital part of everyday life for both teenagers and adults. Ofcom's (2021) annual media use and attitudes report demonstrates the high number of young people using a smartphone, in the age group 12-15 years, they found 91% had their own smartphone. They also specifically looked at their smartphone use. Ofcom (2011) defined a smartphone as 'a phone on which you can easily access emails, download files and applications, as well as view the websites and generally surf the internet'. Young people were likely to say their mobile phone was the device they could not live without, and this was especially true of the girls, 72% of girls aged 11-16 years said they could not live without their smartphone (CHILDWISE, cited in Ofcom 2021). Young people are most likely to be using mobile technologies to go online, this has been an increasing trend in recent years. Ofcom (2021) reports that tablets are the most popular device for going online with 70% of children accessing the internet via a tablet, 65% of children also used a mobile phone to go online. These trends show a move in recent years towards mobile technologies, something echoed in the findings of this research also, (see chapter seven). Furthermore, mobile technologies were also one of the most common ways

children were accessing television content, frequently through streaming services such as Netflix (ibid).

Ofcom (2021) also recognise that since 2018 there has been increasing trends and discussions of 'multi-screening' which is using multiple devices at once such as using their smartphone or tablet whilst watching TV; this was also something demonstrated in the findings of this research whereby young people were using multiple devices simultaneously; (see chapter seven). Online gaming is another area that was found to be an important method of entertainment for the young people, 86% of children aged 12-15 years were playing online games (Ofcom 2021), and typically it was more likely that games were played on a games console device as opposed to mobile technologies. Ofcom (2021) point out that gaming among girls was rising in popularity, becoming a top three activity for girls (from ranking seven in 2019). In chapter seven gaming is discussed further and the findings of this research indicate its popularity amongst both the girls and boys groups interviewed, however, the boys focus groups were more likely to speak for longer and in more depth about gaming, thereby showing more depth of passion about this activity.

YouTube is one of the most heavily used websites by young people, and it is also accessible through smartphones applications, tablets and personal computers. Ofcom's (2021) statistics offer that 75% of 12–15-year-olds are sharing content on Video Sharing Platforms (VSPs). 80% of 5–15-year-olds said they used VSPs for watching funny videos, jokes or pranks predominantly. The most popular of these in 2021 was YouTube and TikTok. This research was carried out prior to the launch of TikTok, however alongside YouTube, TikTok's predecessors: Vine and Musical.ly were discussed by the participants. However, as demonstrated in chapter seven YouTube was the most popular VSP discussed in this research. YouTube offers young

people the opportunity to explore their creativity by generating content through their own YouTube channel and sharing it with the world (Livingstone 2009). Children and young people spend time browsing YouTube for the latest videos they find amusing or interesting and sharing them among their peers gaining social standing and building peer relationships in the process (ibid). boyd (2008; 122) argues that music is “cultural glue” among young people and allows for identity formation and self-expression as well as peer bonding; the utilisation of YouTube is one of the ways that this occurs, through the viewing and sharing of music videos. YouTube is an open public forum; whereby young people can choose to post videos with public access in order to gain as many followers or views as possible with the aim that a video will ‘go viral’ and become hugely popular (Johnson 2008). In addition to this young people interact through leaving comments on videos; some comments available on YouTube can be deemed abusive, rude or constitute ‘cyberbullying’. Furthermore, YouTube is not a dedicated site for young people, adults use YouTube just as frequently as children and young people. Consequently, there is a lot of content aimed at adults, such as pornographic material or music videos with explicit imagery or lyrics; access to this content is denied by the need to sign in to a YouTube account in order to view, but young people know how to bypass such restrictions by signing up to an account with a falsified date of birth (Livingstone 2009). The interactivity of YouTube provides many opportunities for children and young people to embrace their creativity to generate and share content, and to interact with others about their content; therefore, it can be a great tool for helping young people to feel connected with their peers and for identity building (Livingstone 2009; Goldman et al 2008). In this sense YouTube can be considered as one of the social websites that are frequently used by young people.

Social Media is one of the keyways young people interact online; there have been many social networks come and go since the rise of the internet and which social network is currently in vogue will vary, previously MySpace and Bebo were the popular choice for young people (boyd 2014). However, according to Ofcom (2021) among 12–15-year-olds Instagram is the most popular social media service, followed by Snapchat. These were also the two most talked about by the young people in this research. How young people engage with one another through social networking can provide an insight into identity formation, status negotiation and peer-to-peer sociality (boyd 2014). The majority of popular social networks among teens allow for the building of a profile, whereby the teenager can represent themselves however they choose but often this occurs as a declaration of identity performance related to a form of popular culture, for example by citing which music, TV or films they like sometimes in an effort to declare themselves as part of a particular subculture (ibid).

Furthermore, social media networks are all about interactivity; interactivity between users, contemporary example might include writing on a friend's timeline on Facebook or commenting on a friend's picture on Instagram. These activities allow a communication between the individual and the public (boyd 2014). The public that is being communicated to is often constricted and chosen deliberately, for example to your friends list in Facebook. This is dependent on the privacy settings that are employed on that particular social networking site whereby the individual can choose to disclose the information to select few people or more widely and publicly.

Additionally social networks should not be thought of as separately from each other, Twitter and Facebook are separate applications that achieve social communication with some similarities and some differences although they do not exist independently from one another, for example there are third party applications

available which will allow the same message to be posted to Facebook and Twitter simultaneously. The content shared on social networks is beyond just textual content, but a diversity of mediums such as photos, videos, sound files, cartoons, and games (ibid). Thus, much content is shared across different networks, for example videos from YouTube can be shared to Facebook, where Facebook friends can offer comments and reactions. Photos can be uploaded to photo sharing sites such as Instagram and then shared through other mediums such as Facebook (ibid). Many websites such as news websites like the BBC, and Huffington Post, also allow the sharing of content through social networks, to allow comment and reflection as well as the individual to declare the article an item of interest. Therefore, social networks connect to one another and cannot be separated into individual formats which host unique content, as the content, context and media practices are all shared across the platforms. Furthermore, these social networks and the various sites which allow inter-network posting and sharing are all accessible via mobile technology, smartphones and tablets. This means that these abilities are not about sitting at a computer, but about sharing content and interacting with peers throughout the day on the go (ibid). There is often an idea that there is a separate between the online and offline worlds, often categorised by a difference in the virtual and the real (Woolgar 2002). However, this research agrees with the view that social networking for young people is an extension and embodiment of their social world and that to draw divisions between what is conducted offline and what is conducted online is to create a falsified and oversimplified binary of what is occurring (Wittel et al 2002; Livingstone 2009; boyd 2014). Young people interact with their peers in very similar ways off and online and there is often a continuity between the two; for example, young people will discuss things they have seen online or on social networks in person face-to-face (boyd 2014).

Young people use social networks like Facebook to discuss events with their peers that may have occurred during the school day or to make arrangements to meet up in the 'offline' environment (ibid). With the rise of the use of mobile technology young people are sharing information virtually and in the real environment, for example by viewing and surfing videos when they are physically together rather than sharing virtually (ibid). Thus, social networks and the internet as a whole are integral to the everyday lived experiences of adolescence and key in forming peer relationships.

2.2. Digital natives; a useful distinction?

Public anxieties around children and digital technology have led to concern around the type of society that today's children will grow up to live in as adults (Livingstone 2002). This leads to speculation around 'the digital generation' and children in the 'digital age' (ibid). In contrast to the common lamenting over the loss of childhood innocence as a result of digital technology, supporters of digital technology advocate it as liberating for young people allowing new forms of inter-peer communication away from adult interference (Buckingham 2008). Technology is seen to be creating a generation which is more open, democratic, creative and innovative than their parent's generation.

Often this is portrayed as a generational gap between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants'. These terms categorise the binary positions as coined by Marc Prensky in his 2001 paper entitled "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants". Prensky (2001) argued from an educational perspective that current students were fundamentally different from the students of the past, due to the rise of digital media. Prensky (2001) argued that this represented a discontinuity of this generation compared to those

previously and they have 'outgrown' America's education system. Digital Natives are defined as being 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers and the internet and it has been a part of their worlds throughout their lives typically born in the 1980s and beyond; whereas Digital Immigrants are those who have adopted digital media later in life (ibid). Prensky (2001) viewed that this constitutes a massive generational shift, which is far greater than previous shifting generational trends which have moved incrementally with fashions, slang, or music representing smaller intergenerational changes. Additionally, Kinder (1999 cited in Livingstone 2002) identifies significant differences between children and adults in their use of and adoption of new media practices. Producers of media products understand these differences and seek to create different media products that will appeal to the different generations.

Helsper and Enyon (2010) argue that the distinctions between natives and immigrants has widely been discussed in public and political debate, citing a Google and Nexis searches drawing up hundreds of results, yet academic searches drawing up 14 results. This suggests a lack of academic research in the area, yet despite this it is so heavily discussed and used in public discourse it was important to acknowledge the debates here.

This binary view is supported by Tapscott (2000) who distinguished between a 'television generation' and a 'net generation'. Tapscott argued that there was distinctive characteristics of these media and that these shape the generations to which they belong. Television is described as passive, and 'dumbing down' its users whereas the internet is described as interactive and community building. Furthermore, the differences between these mediated forms are expressed as differences in the audiences, the net generation is described as 'hungry for expression, discovery and self-development' while the television generation is described as the antithesis of this,

'conservative, hierarchical, and inflexible (Tapscott 2000). However, Helsper and Enyon (2010) refute the claims from Tapscott and Prensky that young people are fundamentally different in how they process and use digital information. Particularly argued by the likes of Tapscott and Prensky is a sense of difference in how young people quickly adopt new forms of technology, seemingly able to pick it up quickly. Helsper and Enyon (2010) contradict this as there is very little evidence to support difference in learning styles especially when applied so broadly to a whole generation.

Despite academic concerns over the distinctions, public engagement with Prensky's digital native and immigrant terminology has been high and has led to parents, policy makers and the general public to continue to distinguish between adult and young people's online usage (boyd 2014). However, there is concern over how this is used, public engagement with these terms has also led to these terminologies being used to excuse adult, particularly parental responsibility for adolescent online practices as ignorance of online technologies is often cited as the reason (ibid). This is further argued by Helsper and Enyon (2010) who recognised that drawing generational distinction could be problematic and promote 'digital disconnect' between different generations, particular parents and children. This digital disconnect becomes problematic when considering how this is used to explain a difference in understanding between adults and children, used to explain how adults struggle to regulate or mediate technology uses.

For Tapscott and Prensky these intergenerational differences are expressed as being produced by technology and fail to recognise these as the result of social, historical, and cultural changes (Buckingham 2008). Young people are represented as possessing an innate ability with these technologies whereas the previous generations are considered 'technophobes', as those without the natural ability and struggle to use

these technologies (ibid). Helsper and Enyon (2010) also argue that age or the generation you are born into is not the only determining factor, but experience, exposure and confidence are also important factors to consider.

In order to recognise how gender and generation subdivide the household research must encompass both individual and household levels of analysis, therefore it is not acceptable to ask adults about children's media consumption or opinions (Livingstone 2002). Children and young people themselves, are the experts in their own lives, this is a fundamental principle of this research project and for this research when reviewing literature, research that has been conducted with children and young people is valued highly. Furthermore, the new Sociology of Childhood values children as expert in their own lives and as active social agents (Livingstone 2002), this is explored more in the following chapter. This is in contrast with the idea of childhood being passively shaped by mediated forces; however, it also suggested a completely non-mediated childhood of carefree innocence (ibid). These ideas fit in with the ideas of a digital native as it speaks of a childhood experience shaped by the media form; this can be deemed a media-centric approach which in this case is the internet and new technologies. This can be considered a narrow view and speaks of technological determinism (Buckingham 2008) that children and young people's practices are shaped by the medium they are using and would therefore refute Prensky's claims. However, this research will be taking a practice-centred approach (Couldry 2012) in discussions of children and technologies, in that the practices shape the technology evolution as producers seek to create new methods of communication to advance what we are doing. Furthermore, these practice centred approaches are more compatible with the child-centred research methodology and sociology of childhood approach that this research project is adopting. The practice-based ideology is to look past such

discussions of generational differences which look to lament a perceived loss of childhood, and instead focus on the here and now of childhood research. To take a pragmatic view of children and young people's digital technology use without drawing arbitrary differences. Please see appendix four which is a reflexive statement which includes recognition of my own statuses as 'native or immigrant' and this in-between status destabilises and blurs the distinctions.

The media-centric approach speaks of technological determinism which suggests that our media practices are dictated by the medium in question (Livingstone 2002). An example of this comes from LaFrance (1996 cited in Livingstone 2002) who defined whole generations of media users by the medium they were utilising, e.g., 1960s children were dubbed 'the TV generation', 1970s children 'the video generation', 1980s children 'the Nintendo generation' and 1990s children 'the internet generation'. There are similarities here with Prensky's arguments in the differentiation of generation in analysis of young people and technology. The media-centric approach looks at the context specifics of different media and traces the chain of influence from innovation to marketing through to eventual consequences for children and young people (Livingstone 2002). However, this is a passive top-down approach to media studies is not compatible with the New Sociology of Childhood and Child-centred methodology that this research adopts. Such approaches tend to ignore the reciprocal nature of technological developments; media producers do not produce media in a vacuum, they respond to a need or desire established through market research. Furthermore, adopters of technologies use it in ways that was not thought of by the producers, thus, to be media centric is to ignore the transactional process of media creation and to devalue children and young people's role in the co-creation of media practices. As Livingstone (2002: 15) puts it "research must uncover the balance according to which

social contexts both shape and are shaped by technology". Therefore, this research adopts a media practice approach without getting too distracted by media formats and concentrating on the media practices of young people. Additionally, those media practices will not be viewed solely in comparison to adult practices but viewed as part of 'youth culture' generally. Nor will media practices be viewed solely as the practices of the 'net generation' or 'digital natives' as such distinctions are not useful and create further dichotomies and a fractured debate. However, the young people's media use will be considered in context

Nonetheless as each technological change emerges there are broad questions to be answered surrounding the consequences and significance of such changes (Livingstone 2002). However, we must not fall into the trap of technological determinism by attributing the social and cultural changes to the technology itself, but instead look wider at cultural meanings and practices (ibid). Livingstone (2002) gives an example that instead of looking at how television has displaced books or how the internet has displaced television, instead look at the wider historical picture which suggests that new media supplements existing media. Internet technologies do not dictate their usage; rather they are inserted over time to specific contexts and practices of use. Therefore to address the question posed in this section, whilst exploring generational difference such as between 'natives and immigrants' can offer a frame of analysis, this research takes the view that this is a narrowing determinist approach of analysis which is not fully compatible with the sociology of childhood, or child-centred approach this research adopts as it seeks to analyse children's experiences in light of difference and what they are not, through an often nostalgic adult gaze. Rather than valuing the young people's experiences and views in the present and as worthwhile of discussion in their own right.

2.3. Children as Prosumers

Prosumer is the concept of being both a producer and a consumer (Ritzer, Dean, and Jurgenson 2012). Prosumption as a term was coined by Toffler (1980, cited in Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson) and refers to the combination of production and consumption. While not a new concept it has gained new attention from social theorists with the digital age and the practices embedded on the internet (ibid).

This sociological perspective takes the constructs of consumerism and production that have dominated sociological discourse, it views that these are seemingly competing ideas; the idea that one person produces something for the other to consume. However, they are in fact some overlap and integration with these ideas, Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) argue that prosumption has actually always been part of production and consumption. They argue that being a prosumer means alternating between being a seller (producers) and a buyer (consumers), however in contemporary society these distinctions become further blurred when the lines between producers and consumers are crossed. This is particularly true of the digital economy which highlights these practices further (ibid). Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argue that contemporary capitalism is the age of the digital 'prosumer'; in the digital age there is not a clear distinction between those that produce content (or goods and services) and those that consume it (ibid). The idea of some groups being producers and some being consumers, suggests a linear one-way process of consumption: whereby one party will produce, and one will consume. However, in the digital age it is increasingly recognised that this traditional model of consumerism does not explain the digital consumptions which include user-generated content such as through social media (ibid). Therefore, the concept of prosumption and prosumerism seeks to bridge the theoretical divide between production and consumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson

2010; Ritzer, Dean, and Jurgenson 2012). In the digital age prosumers are both producing and consuming digital content, they are shaping the digital through user-generated content (ibid). Examples of this could include posts, videos, photos and memes posted through the digital landscape. This sharing of user-generated content shapes the experiences and interactions online, therefore this is both consuming and producing the content, and the digital landscape as a whole by extension. This thesis argues that children's interactions and engagements within the digital landscape mean that the concept of prosumerism is applicable to their activities within the digital landscape. As argued within this chapter and the thesis as a whole young people are integral to the shaping of the digital landscape through their interactions and engagements with it. Young people are producing and consuming the digital landscape as they are sharing experiences and self-generated content through it. They are therefore prosumers of the digital landscape. Furthermore argued throughout this thesis is the concept of 'agentic participation', this is explored further within chapter seven, but this is a highly compatible concept with prosumerism, it is theorising that young people exercise agency in their interactions with the digital, and this agentic behaviour moves beyond just agency or participation as they are integral to the shaping of the digital landscape and by extension the experiences of childhood in the digital age. This theorising fits with the idea of children being prosumers, they produce and consume the digital landscape in multi-faceted and transactional ways, and it is a continuous process of production and consumption which cannot be separated from each other. So too, can this be extended to agentic participation; this process of prosumption means that children and young people are incorporated with shaping their own experiences and behaviours which in turns shapes the construct and experiences of childhood itself, thus exercising agentic participation to facilitate this.

2.4. Risk and Resilience: the digital dichotomy?

2.4.1. Children 'at risk' and the age of moral panic.

Thompson (1998:1) argued we are in the “age of the moral panic”, with the news-media continually reporting new issues arising from a breakdown of the moral fabric of society. Childhood in particular is often thought of an area of high concern and moral panic (Buckingham 2008). Cohen (2011) argued that moral panics represent themselves as wholesome fears and concerns. This often is due to public reaction produced by sensationalist reporting of certain issues. Cohen (2011) is credited with the categorisation of moral panics in terms of the sensationalist nature of the media, the public reaction and the reaction by agents of social control. The mass media reporting on the subject perpetuates the issues stereotyping, making generalisations and calling for ‘something to be done’ and often there is a response by the government who are keen to be seen to be taking up the moral crusade (Cohen 2011). Moral panics about children and childhood establish an image of childhood as vulnerable, innocent and in need of protection from the evils of society. This is, dependent on the panic in question, sometimes categorised as middle-class anxiety about the supposed failure of working-class parents to control their children (Livingstone 2002). In news media literature there is a tendency to focus on the risk-based narrative, however academic research takes a different approach to media sensationalism categorised through moral panic (Wilson 2016; Cohen 2011). Leaton Gray and Phippen (2017) argue that risk, uncertainty and moral panic has become a clear and prevailing part of the contemporary constructions of childhood. This is acutely present in the discourses of technologies which amplify public concern over this apparent erosion of traditional childhoods; this public concern does not keep pace with the reality of the cases as

demonstrated through statistical evidence, rather the risk rhetoric catastrophises the perception of the risks involved (Leaton Gray and Phippen 2017). However, Wilson (2016) argues that academic literature, particularly from Sociological research is less exclusively focused on the 'problem' of digital technologies and instead looks towards potential benefits. This approach is adopted through this research, a consideration of both risk and benefit in digital technologies.

Moral panics are not new phenomena; there have frequently been moral panics over youth culture (Thompson 1998). However today's moral panics are more than extensions of the pattern, there are significant differences in how today's moral panics are perpetuated in society as they are more frequent but shorter-lived, rapidly move on to the next issue and concern (Thompson 1998). Currently there is a moral panic on the issues of teenagers access to digital media and the internet with concern of pornography, sexting, and cyberbullying; a new concern or sensational story about these issues appear almost every day. Individual events can be the catalyst (ibid), as we seen with the tragic case of Hannah Smith's suicide (BBC 2013) after being bullied on a social network; this was not the first example of a suicide as a result of cyberbullying in recent times, yet this case sparked such public outrage that there were national calls for social networks to regulate their content (despite the true story in this case). Recent moral panics question the nature of contemporary society and blame institutions such as family structures, as opposed to 'blaming' a select subculture as was the case with past moral panic (Thompson 1998). Prevalence for moral panic is a feature of all contemporary western society, particularly in the Anglophone West; despite this Britain appears particularly prone to moral panic. (Thompson 1998).

Children and childhoods have always been a focus of adult's fears, desires, and nostalgias; however recent technological developments about childhood have given

us a growing sense of anxiety over this generation of children in particular. (Buckingham 2000). Furthermore Buckingham (2008: 13) suggests “the debate about the impact of media and technology on children has always served as a focus for much broader hopes and fears about social change”. Buckingham (2000) also suggests that many of the fears of online media and digital technology actually represent an ‘adult nostalgia for a golden age of childhood innocence’. The so called ‘moral panics’ which currently centre on the internet focus on questions typically being asked about violent, stereotyped, commercially exploitative, or pornographic content (Livingstone 2002). “Young people are seen to be at risk, not only from more obvious dangers such as pornography and online paedophiles, but also from a wide range of negative physical and psychological consequences that derives from their engagement with technology” (Buckingham 2008, p.13).

However, Livingstone (2002) argues that similar questions about the introduction of other mediums, such as video games, television, radio, and cinema generated their own moral panics. Drotner (1992, cited in Livingstone 2002) suggests that with each moral panic there is a ‘historical amnesia’ about previous panics, as we have accepted and incorporated the previous mediums. However, whilst I agree this is historically the case, it seems that there is a difference in the current situation as the level of information and content that young people have access to is unprecedented, as is the levels of interactivity compared to the previous media and moral panics. Furthermore, whilst this general anxiety does have some of the hallmarks of moral panics, it would be simplistic to dismiss it as merely moral panic. These public anxieties are not fully fitting the bill as a traditional moral panic, for example there is no traditional ‘folk devil’ (Cohen 2011), and these concerns do not seem to dissipate over time but rise in the media conscience regularly, particularly if there is a story which acts a catalyst and

reignites the concerns. Nonetheless one of the key prevailing features of moral panic discussed here is sensationalist reports from news media. Phippen (2017, p.19) provides examples of sensationalist news headlines around children and technologies, he argued that whilst it is understandable for journalist sources to adopt these methods to grab attention and sell newspapers; it is problematic when public and policy discourse responds to this rhetoric of extreme rather than take a more balanced view of the issues.

The internet and 'virtual world' in particular are fraught with public anxiety and moral panic about young people for a variety of reasons: inadvertent 'exposure' to adult content, concerns include cyberbullying, internet paedophilia, and the sexual content and the self-sexualising activities such as 'sexting' (Livingstone 2009). This can be packaged within the 'risk society' whereby adult fears and concerns lead to a restriction on young people's ability to participate within society (Beck 1985; 2005, cited in Livingstone 2009). Internet risks have led to the desire of adults to shield children from those risks and potential harm and protect their innocence.

The internet can be a potential source of controversy given the ability for children and young people to access content that they may not have had any real-life experience in, such as sex and relationships. These debates have taken on a new urgency due to the mainstreaming of new media technologies such as the internet and mobile technology (Buckingham and Bragg 2004). Moreover, these issues are clearly of concern to parents, who frequently refer back to their own childhoods and the differences with the childhoods experienced today; however, this can be understood as not simply nostalgia but also as a way of marking, acknowledging and understanding the change in order to recognise the implications of that change (ibid).

The unprecedented access to pornography and sexually explicit content, that the internet and digital technology provides has led to overwhelming concerns, with the perceived risk of such activity is that children and young people are exposed to sexual activity too young and growing up too quickly, resulting in a loss of innocence (Wold et al 2009). Additionally, there is a fear that pornography will influence what children and young people perceive as 'normal' sexual behaviour and may increase incidents of sexual violence (ibid). These fears are not wholly unfounded as research has found evidence that excessive pornography use could be causing a reduction in the size of the brain and a reduction of 'grey matter' (Payne 2014). Furthermore, a case of a twelve-year-old boy raping his seven-year-old sister after watching pornography on his Xbox as 'he wanted to try it out' was reported (BBC 2014) which highlights in particular, fears about the access and abuse of pornography by young people and the potential to 'warp' young minds (Dines 2010).

Despite this risk narrative Sparrman (2015) suggests that concerns over children's sexualities emerged as part of sociological positioning of Childhood a time of dependency and 'becoming'. This status, through what Sparrman (2015) refers to as an immaturity positioning of sociological themes, posits that children are dependent on adults, which are human becomings and this status includes a protected naivety and innocence that must be protected by adult gatekeepers. The discussion of children's sociological positioning is further discussed in the next chapter, but this suggests that children need protection from the adult world and adult themes such as sexual content or other content deemed 'adult'.

Nonetheless there are some arguments against the idea of the viewing pornography having any real harm or consequences for young people, the argument is that to suggest that pornography has an effect it to suggest that the media in general can

control and shape our lives which is a deterministic approach lacking an accounting of agency (Rovolis and Tsaliki 2012). The potential effects of such explicit content are not well empirically researched and there is no establishment of causation, the links and potential harms are not yet established, but it may be that consuming such content is an indication of higher risk levels as opposed to inevitability (ibid). I also feel that access to pornography itself is not the whole issue; it is assumed general acceptance and belief among teenagers that this depicts a true representation of sexual behaviour, something that is also exhibited beyond pornography directly and into the mainstream media through channels such as music videos and advertising to general 'pornification' of culture. Despite this, Mulholland (2015) argues that the discourses of young people accessing pornography are not straightforward as media would lead to believe. Young people do not consume pornography as content and accept it unproblematically; rather young people engage with the consumption of pornography through negotiated ways to make sense of the phenomena with a nuanced understanding of the elements of fabrication and fantasy (ibid).

Young people may not be deliberating seeking to access pornography but can be met with it accidentally for example they may be looking for answers to normal adolescent queries about sex, and by putting sex into google they met with a barrage of pornography, which is free, and very graphic in content (Dines 2010). Previously in the 'soft core' days curiosity would be satisfied by looking at their father's Playboy magazine, however the levels of access to pornography these days is vast and much of the content is degrading or disturbing (Dines 2010). Dines (2010) states that the average age for boys first interaction with online pornography is now eleven years old; the concerns over children accessing pornography through the internet and mobile devices is growing and has now reached the status of moral panic (Livingstone 2002).

This moral panic has been disseminated by the media, who are reporting calls for something to be done, such as banning and controlling young people's access, this is done via sensationalist reporting such the Daily Mail:

Internet porn is leading children on an 'unstoppable march into a moral wasteland' (Martin 2013)

Pornography is now deeply imbedded within our culture and there is a general acceptance of its presence (Dines 2010). Furthermore, pornography is thought of as synonymous with sex, if you take an anti-porn feminist stance you are deemed anti-sex (ibid). These ideas are arguably dangerous for young people who have little or no 'real-world' sexual experiences, as they are basing their ideas of what sex is or should be on pornography which will give a distorted view (ibid). In particular there are concerns that this has a ramification with how young people, in particular boys talk about and treat women leading to an argument that there is a rise in misogyny among young boys and an increase in pressure for young women to conform to the standards of appearance and willingness to perform certain sexual acts as displayed in pornography (ibid). These fears have not escaped the media conscience with a recent BBC Two documentary entitled 'Blurred Lines: The New Battle of the Sexes' which covered, among other things, changes in teenage attitudes and behaviours following a rise in access to pornography, leading to a group of teens to campaign for consent to be taught as part of the Sex and Relationship Education curriculum (Blurred Lines, 2014).

Mobile phone technology has led to concerns over the practice of 'sexting'; which involves self-taken sexually explicit photographs or suggestive text messages sent between peers, this practice appears to be growing amongst teenagers (Livingstone

and Görzig 2012). Hasinoff (2015, cited in Setty 2019) described sexting as a 'digital production and exchange of personal sexual messages and images'. The NSPCC has conducted various research and found that the practice of 'sexting' was becoming more commonplace; it occurred frequently and was widespread (Phippen 2012). It was found to be common for girls to self-generate and send images at the request of boys, whereas boys did so without request; sexting was also found to happen on some occasions in relation to other concerns around digital media such as cyberbullying (ibid). Joint research with ChildLine, the Internet Watch Foundation, and the NSPCC (2013) found that 60% of 13–18-year-olds had been asked for a sexual image or video of themselves, with 25% saying they have sent such an image or video of themselves to another person (NSPCC 2013). What all this research has in common is that young people have the idea of sexting being a normal teenage practice, very mundane, and not at all concerning (NSPCC 2013; Phippen 2012; Ringrose et al 2012). Furthermore, Ringrose et al (2012) found that some young people felt that this was a vital part of having a relationship. Setty (2019) further argues that as sexting has become a normalised practice among teenagers, and this can lead to harmful sexting practices that are taken for granted. Leaton Gray and Phippen (2017a) agree about the normalisation of sexting practices but point towards the apparent failure of education settings and policy to keep pace with the concerns and address them or teach young people to manage these risks. Setty (2019, 2020) argues there are gendered practices associated with sexting, namely that young women often feel coerced or pressured to partake in this practice. Setty (2020) argues that the age of the moral panic has led to a great deal of public and policy discourses of concern around the practice of sexting and the sexualisation that is argued to take place through the use of digital technologies. Setty problematises the categorisation of sexting practice through the

lens of moral panic as 'deviant'; this categorisation fails to recognise how common place the practice is and instead seeks to place blame on those engaging with these risky practices. Leaton Gray and Phippen (2017) point towards the legality of the practice of sexting, and the criminalisation as a method of prevention. Victims of sexting 'gone wrong' have the threat of criminalisation hanging over them leading to less willingness to come forward for fear of judgement or repercussions (Leaton Gray and Phippen 2017). The prevalence of the discussions of this area and moral panic around sexting practices, leads me to categorise this as one of the so called 'social-evils' in the analysis for this research.

Cyberbullying is another common concern surrounding children's internet access which is currently heightened due to wide publication of such cases as the suicide of fourteen-year-old Hannah Smith following cyberbullying through a social network called Ask.FM (BBC 2013). However, what is often failed to be recognised in such tragic cases is that Cyberbullying may tell only a part of such a story, in the case of Hannah Smith the coroner later ruled that cyberbullying was unfounded and Hannah posted the messages herself (Davies 2014). But the rhetoric of cyberbullying causes suicide was persuasive, and this message was taken forward.

Cases such as Cyberbullying is similar to that of 'real life' bullying in that it often includes aggressive behaviour and peer-exclusion; however, it takes place in the 'virtual world' via social networking sites, mobile text message, instant messaging or email (Lampert and Donoso 2012). Cyberbullying can be a reproduction and continuation of the more traditional forms of bullying and is usually no less upsetting for the victim who may experience feelings of vulnerability or powerlessness (ibid). Therefore, it is technologically facilitated bullying. Calls for young people to simply switch off their phones or delete their social media accounts following attacks of

cyberbullying do not appreciate the imbedded nature of these technologies in the everyday practices of youth culture, and do not appreciate the fact that the bullying would not stop but continue in the physical environment as there is often not a distinction between the two but merely a continuation (ibid).

Phippen and Brennan (2020) discuss the many and varied ways young people engage with digital technologies. They point to 'activities and concerns' that are commonly focused upon. Drawing from an extensive dataset they discuss parental concerns with digital technologies, particular high concern for parents is access to pornography (78%), Bullying (76%), Exposure to unpleasant or aggressive people (trolls) (76%), exposure to violence (74%), Grooming (69%), and child sexual exploitation via video or photographs (63%) (Phippen and Brennan 2020, p.25). These findings from survey data reflect my own analysis of the key issues and perceived risks. Throughout this thesis these have been analysed and grouped together as three main 'social-evils' of pornography and other 'inappropriate content', sexting and cyberbullying.

2.4.2. Benefits and opportunities to children

Children and young people rely on digital technology for a variety of functions. Young people now have greater and easier access to information than ever before. This information age allows young people to have the freedom to utilise technologies for educational purposes (Livingstone 2002). Most young people have internet access at home and can use home computers or mobile technology to assist with homework, and educational attainment (ibid). There are debates around the effectiveness of the home computer as an educational or leisure tool, with some saying that the educational benefits are often over played and over justified and that computers and the internet are more widely used as leisure tools rather than educational tools (ibid). Nevertheless, the educational benefits of the internet and computer access are not

limited to formal education or research for school homework; rather the unprecedented access to vast amounts of information, has created a generation of information seekers that may not be limited to formal educational information. For example, there is now a culture whereby questions or debates that may arise in the context of everyday interactions is 'googled' for the instant gratification of finding the information.

Common fears of new technologies include fears of computer games making teenagers isolated and addicted; however, it has been shown that actually, teenagers are incorporating this new media into their peer networks, using both face-to-face and online communication to talk about their games and play them together; thus, it becomes a tool for social interaction (Livingstone 2002). Young people are often said to find a space for themselves online, it is an area whereby young people have the freedom of expression; this could be through social networking activities, generating content such as through the likes of YouTube or Instagram, or participating in discussions (Livingstone 2002; 2009; boyd 2008; 2014). Engagement with the internet is not a passive activity it affords the opportunity for young people to react within these self-created spaces and it can be argued exercise their agency and freedom (Willett 2008). Online communities and digital technologies can be seen as a force of liberation for young people, who can construct their own space and reach beyond the constraining influence of the older generation and create new forms of communication and community (Buckingham 2008). Wilson (2016) argues that access to digital communities can foster a sense of belonging and act as 'self-care' for children and young people, particularly those feeling disadvantaged or isolated by social circumstance. Advocates suggest, that far from corrupting young people, technology is creating a generation of open, democratic, creative and innovative than their

parents' generation. (ibid). However, this view is somewhat utopian in nature and ignores the darker potential of the internet and its possible ramifications.

Access to the internet and mobile phones are a vital part of youth cultures (Bond 2010); it is part of how young people's entertainment and interaction with their peers; denying access to these devices may affect how young people participate with their peers (Davies 2010). Furthermore, young people's relationships are heavily influenced by their usage of mobile phones, whereby 'going out' with each other involves late night text messaging and calls (Ringrose et al 2012); leading Bond (2011) to liken use of mobile technology to 'the bike shed' of previous generations, it is a space beyond the adult gaze and surveillance. This is further echoed by Wilson (2016) who recognised that the privacy afforded by digital spaces could offer a digital dignity, again especially with young people who may feel socially marginalised. Therefore, it is clearly a vital part of youth culture and if access is removed it would deny young people the cultural capital to fully participate with their peers.

Social media has been argued to be a facilitator of peer friendships whether originally constructed offline or online (Peter et al 2009). Furthermore, social networking is said to be of great benefit to young people's identity construction, with five characteristics identified which facilitate this (ibid). Firstly social networks are very accessible making them convenient venues for teen identity exploration; secondly the user-friendliness of such sites allows for the quick creation of a customised profile; thirdly the nature of the sites allows for a greater controllability of a person's self-presentation; fourthly this self-presentation is enhanced by features which allow the publication of content to be restricted to specific groups or networks; and finally the reduced audio and visual cues of these sites that typify this type of communication may encourage young people to present information that they would otherwise may

find embarrassing or inappropriate (ibid). This ease of control over self-presentation and identity construction is said to support young people in building and developing friendships as they are more able to present themselves as friendship-worthy (ibid). Furthermore, existing friendships are enhanced by the ease of communication and ability to learn more about each other and each other's interests through activities such as profile creation and sharing content of interest (ibid). The role that the digital landscape plays in enabling and facilitating communication is well-documented throughout the findings of this thesis, it is discussed as a vital tool for enabling communications and relationships to flourish. This is recognised by Ruckenstein (2013, p.476, cited in Wilson 2016, p.288) who stated, "mobile phones, games consoles, and computers are an essential part of the sociality between children in increasingly diverse ways". Wilson (2016) therefore argues that despite the risks of this form of communication there are many benefits of socialising in this way, which can foster community, friendships, and prevent isolation.

2.5. Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has covered some of the central themes and concerns that are held regarding children and young people's access to digital landscapes. It has demonstrated that the terminologies of Digital Native are not always helpful to the discussion as it leads to a tendency to discuss young people's use of digital media merely in contrast to adult's use. Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted that there is a danger of reducing the debates to technological determinism, which means that the debates are reduced to a media-centric discussion of how young people use elements of technology or an argument that technology has shaped these media practices whereas it is a more fluid and reciprocal process.

This chapter has also begun to discuss some of the risks and benefits of digital landscapes as a vital component in youth culture and as cultural and social capital essential to peer interaction, identity formation and general educational attainment. Some of the risks and anxieties have been discussed with pornography, sexting, and cyberbullying as being highlighted as those which cause the most anxiety and are often seen to be warping young people's minds and robbing them of innocence. Wilson (2016) cites the examples from EU KidsOnline project as the most commonly discussed problems or risks with digital technologies, this includes access to problematic content and pornography, interaction with others in a harmful way such as cyberbullying and grooming, and concerns over privacy (which could incorporate the earlier discussions of sexting). Later in this thesis these areas are framed as the 'social-evils' of the internet this is drawing from the notions discussed within this chapter that these are the most prevalently discussed concerns and issues with children and technologies and so are perceived through the lens of moral panic to be 'social-evils'.

3. Chapter 3: Towards a Sociology of Digital Childhoods: A review of literature

This chapter is the second of two literature reviews of this thesis. It focuses on the body of literature in relation to the Sociology of Childhood. It draws on historical influences to determine the development of childhood as concept and determine how this may impact the experience of childhood today. In particular this chapter examines the theoretical body of sociology that concerns itself with the status of childhood in society. This theoretical body of literature is used within thesis to underpin the arguments and discussions within the subsequent chapters. Suggested here is a move to consideration of the sociology of digital childhoods more specifically, recognises the significance of the digital in children's lives.

3.1. The Social Construction of Childhood

The social construction of childhood is a theoretical principle that recognises that the concept of children and childhood is more than a biological category (James and James 2004, pp.12-14). The concept of childhood is socially constructed, which is to say that it is temporally, geographically and culturally construed. Thus, children are not unproblematically categorised as merely biologically immature human beings, but as a particular cultural phrase of a life stage which is politically and historically contingent and subject to change (ibid). Archard (2015) suggests that childhood is

neither purely a biological nor purely a social category, instead it is best understood as a hybrid of the two. It is both a biological immaturity as well as a particular social period of life, where experiences are context dependent.

There are key notions in the contemporary discipline of childhood studies and the cultural politics of childhood which recognises that childhood is common to all children but also is diversified by the multiplicity of children's everyday lives (James and James 2004). Thus, childhood is a universal developmental stage of the life course, as categorised by biological and psychological developmental patterns; and the ways in which this is understood, interpreted and controlled through social institutionalisation, which varies substantially throughout history, generations, and between cultures (ibid). These notions link to the concepts of children as existing both as human (adult) 'becomings' but also as 'beings' which is discussed later in this chapter. Childhood varies in the ways in which the concepts of child-specific 'needs' and 'competencies' are portrayed and discussed particularly in light of children's rights, law, and social policy (ibid), which will be discussed in more detail, later in this chapter. Thus, the social construction of childhood is represented as a complex interweaving of social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, and cultural norms, laws, policies, and the everyday intergenerational interactions between adults and children (ibid).

3.2. The Historical Construction of Childhood: Ariès, Rousseau, Locke

Phillippe Ariès was a historian of childhood and is credited with being among the first to identify that childhood as a social construct. In 1962 he published his seminal work,

Centuries of Childhood (Brockliss and Montgomery 2013, p.67). Ariès argued that there was not a concept of childhood in the Middle Ages, once an infant was able to walk and talk, they entered the adult world and was treated as a mini adult (ibid). In the Middle Ages there was no room for sentimentality in parent-child relationships and children were thought of more for their economic worth as potential contributors to the economic household, rather than emotionally rewarding (Ariès 1962). Ariès stated:

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why as soon as the child could live without the constant solitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society (Ariès 1962, p.128)

According to Ariès, part of this lack of sentimentality of childhood was due to the uncertainty of infant survival in the Middle Ages, child-rearing was characterised by an indifference to babies. It was only after children's survival was more certain, at around the age of seven that people began to view children through an emotional lens (ibid). Ariès argued that childhood as a distinct category began to arrive in the late fifteenth century when a contemporary model of childhood began to develop, as adults started to value children for their own sake and give children a separate identity (ibid). During this period a larger number of male children were educated, and Ariès argued that our modern, romanticised notions of childhood were born in the classroom (ibid). Ideas about the special nature of childhood emerged and continued to grow during the

seventeenth century, which saw the emergence of specific costume for children under the age of seven, specific toys and games for children, and the belief that children should not be involved in the adult domains of sexuality and work (ibid). This led to what Ariès characterised as the 'sentimentalisation of childhood' and the birth of the 'child-centred family' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (ibid). During this time changes also occurred in the structure of the family, moving toward the modern notions of the family. Prior to this, the family institution was not organised in a manner likely to be conducive to child-rearing, family life was portrayed in the community, with little distinction between public and private spheres. Children were frequently sent away from the family home at age 7-9 to live and work with relatives or neighbours.

The sixteenth century saw an emergence of the family structure that is prevalent in contemporary society, whereby adults and children took enjoyment in each other company and move toward being contained in the private sphere. According to Ariès this was indicative of the shifting ideas of childhood which recognised that children were not 'ready for life' and is to be treated differently and separately from adults and to be kept removed from the adult world. These views of childhood as a distinct and separate began to be popularised among the bourgeoisie and spread to the lower classes to become the prevailing concept of contemporary childhood seen today.

Ariès theory relies heavily on the interpretation and analysis of European Art from the Middle Ages which demonstrate this depiction of children as mini adults (Brockliss and Montgomery 2013). This approach has not been without critique; criticisms include that the overreliance of interpretation of selected medieval artwork has come at the lack of appreciation of other sources of information. Other sources of information indicate that children were thought of as distinct from adults, for example there were medical texts which discussed childhood as a distinct stage with different illnesses

from that of adulthood, the legal system set out the age for criminal responsibility, which demonstrates the belief that children were not as morally responsible as adults, and there were teachings from the Church which drew attention to the specific roles of children distinguishing between this and adults (ibid). Furthermore Ariès' analysis of artwork fails to account for the purpose of the commissioned artwork; the paintings will have been commissioned for a specific purpose and to represent the subjects in a particular way. Additionally, the subjects of commissioned portraiture would typically be from wealthy upper-class families, thus the representation of the concept of children and childhood as portrayed in artwork may not represent the true lived, embodied experiences of childhood during this time era, leading to the argument that perhaps the modern concept of childhood emerged earlier than Ariès argued.

Nonetheless despite the criticisms and potential flaws in the analysis and interpretation of artwork, Ariès' theory remains useful to contemporary childhood scholars as he was the first to highlight childhood as a historical and social construction (Corsaro 1997; Archard 2015). Additionally Oswell (2013) argues that Ariès did not only offer us a history of childhood, but more importantly a way of the contemporary construction of childhood as a consequence of their history. This is a view supported by Postman (1994) whose book 'The Disappearance of Childhood' argued that scholarly obsession with the changing concept of childhood began in 1962 with Philippe Ariès argument of the post-medieval emergence of contemporary views of childhood. Postman argued that this focus is representative of contemporary nostalgia and fears over the loss of this category of childhood in light of the mass-communication and technological age.

The religious or puritanical perspective of childhood is categorised by the notion of 'original sin' the idea that children are born evil and must be baptised and raised in the Faith to counteract this inherent nature (Wright 2015). Puritanism was not universally

popular but was significant in the sixteenth and seventeenth century where many Puritans went to America to build lives and communities. Puritanism gave significant power to the male head of the family to bring children up to be sober, hardworking and deeply religious. Parents were tasked with teaching their children to pray and read the Bible from a young age. The Church urged parents to 'break children's will' and bring them to the word of God by remaining emotionally detached and remove any indulgence in order to correct their 'misdeeds'. Female obedience was paramount, and women and children were expected to succumb to male dominance from husbands and fathers who were seen as God's representatives (ibid).

John Locke (1632 – 1704) was a philosopher who was born into a Puritan family, though he rejected the idea that children were born evil and should be forcefully punished. Locke argued that children should be raised by authoritative parents who managed behaviour with esteem and disgrace as opposed to physical chastisement. Locke argued that children learn from experiences which could be nurtured and were born as a 'white paper void of all characters', a phrase often described as the *tabula rasa* or blank slate (Wright 2015). These ideas and Locke's theories of education were radical for the time period and his influence wide with many educational pioneers taking Locke's original concepts on board, these ideas are still prevalent in contemporary education.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) like Locke, rejected the idea that children are born evil. Through the seminal work *Emile* (1762) he portrayed the child as innately good, a romantic view which directly contrasts the idea of the child as the fruit of 'original sin'. Rousseau argued the child was battling and learning to control selfish impulses for the good of others (Wright 2015). A combination of Locke's ideas of the blank slate and Rousseau's innately good child are seen in contemporary minority world

construction (Punch and Tisdall 2012) of childhood innocence in the idea that the child is born innocent and pure of heart, but societal experience can be a corrupting factor. Archard (2015) argues that a combination of Locke and Rousseau's positions on childhood constitute the earliest manifesto for a child-centred education, and their pioneering radical liberalist thinking (for their time) on what childhood is or should be is prevalent in contemporary minority world society.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) viewed that from a contemporary Minority World perspective childhood innocence is very much part of the public discourse and has been sentimentalised in culture. Children are constructed in contemporary discourse as with a natural goodness and clarity of vision, they represent a condition that has been lost or forgotten as adults recall nostalgically their own childhoods (*ibid*). Thus, childhood is worthy of defence and often this is portrayed in the defence and protection of childhood innocence. Rousseau is attributed by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) as the architect of this sentimentalisation of childhood, although they also discuss the development of these notions in terms of civilisation. This can be linked to Elias' (2000) book 'The Civilizing Process' whereby it was argued that the process of civilisation from the Middle Ages incorporated changes in mannerisms and beliefs. In terms of childhood this was demonstrated in the changing attitudes towards children and move from children occupying the public sphere to being sentimentalised and controlled within private institutions such as the family.

This shift toward the sentimentality of childhood came to the fore when children were no longer seen by their economic worth to the family or workplace (Gillis 2009). This occurred in the Nineteenth Century and was brought about by political shift and introduction of legislation such as the Factory Act (1933) and Education Act (1870) which sought to exclude children from the workforce. Thus, this represented the

contemporary view of childhood as a time of innocence protected from adult responsibility.

3.3. The (not so new) New Sociology of Childhood.

The twentieth century was said to be the century of the child and at no other time have children been so highly profiled, with 'the child' and 'interests of the child' taking a prominent place in societal discourse (James and Prout 1997). Despite an increase in the rhetoric of childhood during this period, childhood has become a problematic concept, with questions and debate on the nature and scope of childhood (ibid). Nevertheless, this time period did see an emergent and shifting paradigm of childhood (Prout and James 1997). This paradigm shift has been branded the 'New Sociology of Childhood' and is capsulated by the new understanding and appreciation of children as social agents and have a role in the construction and reconstruction of childhood as a concept Prout and James 1997: Oswell 2013).

James et al (1998) consider that the New Sociology of Childhood paradigm has four key approaches to the Sociological child. First is the 'socially constructed' child who as previously discussed is thought to originate with Ariès (1962). However, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) take it further to discuss that the socially constructed child does not simply mean that the concept evolves over time and place but that social constructionists suspend assumptions about the existence and casual powers of social structure that makes childhood what it is. Childhood therefore does not exist in a finite or consistently identifiable form, there is no 'universal childhood'; this approach stresses the plurality and diversity of childhood experience (ibid). This approach is therefore hermeneutic in that it is context specific and dependent and in order to

attempt understanding of childhood we must understand the context in which it is existing. Cultural relativism must be employed when looking at childhood either through a historical lens or through an alternative world positioning, practices of Majority world child-rearing that may be frowned upon in the Minority world must be treated with caution and through a lens of cultural relativity (ibid).

The second approach that the New Sociology of Childhood adopts, is that of the 'tribal child' which is often used in anthropological studies and sets out from a commitment to explore children's social worlds as provinces of real meaning in their own right and not fantasises, games, or replication of an adult way of being. Accordingly, children's culture and views are valued, and theorists avoid the premise that children have misguided, superficial or illogical understanding of the rules of social life (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Instead, their voice is valid, and they are deemed the experts in their own lives. Childhood, under this approach is seen anthropologically as a distinct culture, with enough 'strangeness' to be worthy of study in its own right. From this we can see the emergence of a preference for child-centred methodology not only in anthropology but spreading to other disciplines as well.

The third approach put forward by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) is the minority group child, which features a politicisation of childhood along existing power structures and agendas. Oakley (1994, cited in James, Jenks, and Prout 1998) drew similarities between the social status of women and children, describing them both as social minority groups due to their attention in the academic gaze yet with some constraints of power and control. By attributing children, a status of a social minority this approach seeks to challenge existing power relations between adults and children. The term 'minority' is used here to denote a moral as opposed to demographic minority to convey relative powerlessness and victimisation (ibid). The benefit of this approach is

that it seeks to promote the status and interests of children, thus becoming a sociology for childhood, not just of children. Thus there are some similarities with the tribal child approach in that the child status and voice is respected, however the minority group child approach sometimes homogenises children, and forgets to concern itself with the diverse individual childhood experiences.

The fourth approach discussed by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) is the social structural child, which begins from the assertion that children are a present, constant feature of all social worlds. This approach applies the assumption that children are not incomplete beings, but form a group a body of social actors, and thus have rights and needs. Within this approach the constancy and essentiality of childhood is recognised but again children are seen as a universal category and is formed along the parameters of social structures, such as time, space political, and economic factors. Thus the 'social structural' child has certain universal categorising dictated by the societal circumstances in which they occupy, this can therefore provide spheres of comparison between social contexts (ibid). According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998) these four approaches are of vital importance to understanding the sociology of childhood, and demonstrates the inherent dichotomies of structure-agency, universalism-particularism, local-global, and continuity-change.

The 'new' Sociology of childhood is now around thirty years old; we can see that it is an important and prominent theory still today in discourses around the Sociology of Childhood. At the time of the paradigm shifts towards thinking about children as agentic the internet age was its own infancy, the shift towards the digital could not be foreseen or anticipated at this stage. Therefore, the question is should we move these theories forward to more appreciation of the digital?

3.4. Human Beings or Human Becomings?

Another way of viewing children and childhood under the Sociology of Childhood is either as human 'beings' or 'becomings'. According to Oswell (2013) Émile Durkheim, a French Sociologist understood childhood as a problem of growth: 'a period in which the individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist, the period in which he is made, develops and is formed' (Durkheim, 1979: 150, cited in Oswell 2013: 38). Durkheim constructs children as weak, and in the process of development, thus Durkheim understands childhood as a period of 'becoming' as a development in progress. This can be understood not only in terms of physical immaturity and development but most importantly social immaturity, Durkheim viewed children as pre-social, as social becomings (ibid). However, from the 1980s Sociologists began to understand children as social beings not merely becomings (ibid).

The child is conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences –in sum, as a social actor. And the 'being' child can be understood in its own right. It does not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence reason or significance. The 'being' child is not, however static for it is to in time. Like all social actors it populates history. (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998: 207).

Thus, according to James et al (1998) the child possesses agency and is capable of social action in their own right and are therefore more than biological immaturity or

weakness. Uprichard (2008) agrees with the definition of children as 'beings' to mean that children are social actors and are actively involved in constructing childhood, whereas the 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making'. The 'becoming' child is viewed as passive and lacking the competencies of the adult, thus they are incompetent or incomplete (ibid), they are defined by what they are not, defined by deficit. However, Uprichard (2008) suggests that to view the concepts of beings and becomings as a dichotomy is a flawed approach; instead, childhood scholars should recognise the duality of 'being' and 'becoming' and that children are occupying this dual status. There is no escaping the biological immaturity of children however this does not have to mean children are incomplete or incompetent, but that they can possess social agency.

3.5. The UNCRC and Children's Rights

Alongside the emergence of the paradigm shift towards a new Sociology for Childhood, there was development in International Children's Rights legislation reflecting the changing status of childhood (James and James 2004). This was most notably landmarked in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). The legislation attempted to create for the first time, a truly international vision for childhood, and mechanisms for its review (ibid). Nonetheless critics argue against the universalism approach to children's rights which largely stem from the Majority world perspective and are homogenously applied to children despite their diverse experiences and contexts (ibid). Despite this, the UNCRC highlights and affords the same rights to all children under the age of eighteen years as to adults yet

continues to afford them a special and protected status. In particular this can be seen in article 3.1 which requires that the 'best interests of the child are the primary concern'; this allows for the best interests of the individual child to be accounted for when implementing the UNCRC which allows for more consideration of the cultural context (ibid).

The rights outlined by the UNCRC are often categorised by 'Four P's' which are Provision rights, Protection rights, Prevention rights, and Participation Rights (Joslyn, Such, and Bond 2005: 193). Provision rights outlines rights to provision such as housing, food and education. Prevention rights concern themselves with ensuring systems are in place for the prevention of child abuse or infringement of their rights. Protection rights seek to protect children from exploitation or abuse and to allow appropriate intervention wherever necessary. Finally, participation rights outline the importance of listening to children and prescribe that children must be given a voice to be heard and contribute to decision making about issues which affect them (ibid). Participation rights are most notably outlined by Articles 12 which provides rights of freedom of expression and respect for the views of the child (James and James 2004). However there can be tensions with this as the UNCRC details rights protection from harm and by extension innocence, alongside rights to participation, these rights can conflict as often the protection rights are deemed more importance in contemporary debates and this can affect the child's right to participation and thereby their agency (ibid). Phippen (2017) argues that policy directions typically take on more prohibitive measures and this therefore restricts children's access to and participation in digital technologies, in direct infringement of their rights under the UNCRC especially articles 12, 13, 16, and 17). Thus, the protectionist agenda comes at the expense of participatory rights. The desire to protect children from harm is in recognition of

children's vulnerability, passivity and innocence; Jenks (1996: 124, emphasis added) argues 'a dominant discourse of childhood continues to mark out "the child" as innately innocence, confirming its cultural identity as a passive and *unknowing* dependant'. Emphasis has been added to the phrase 'unknowing' to denote that in order for childhood innocence to be preserved by necessity it precludes the exclusion of children from the full participation enjoyed by adults. Taylor (2010: 48) describes 'childhood innocence is a bedrock assumption of contemporary Western thinking which permeates the professional field of early childhood'. Thus, we can see that any threat to that innocence threatens our notions and constructions of childhood itself.

These opposing standards are often portrayed in the media whereby children and young people are portrayed as the victim and villain simultaneously (Jenks 1996). An example of this is the fear of young people as the perpetrators of crime and 'ASBO' culture, alongside the opposing discourse of wanting to protect young people from harm and preserve their innocence. These contradictions can have an effect on the experience of childhood, whereby children are concurrently resented and valued by adults (Faulkner 2011). When a child is deemed beyond 'innocence' such as troublesome teenagers then resentment begins to show, particularly if these 'troublesome groups' are seen to be occupying public space (ibid).

The idea of innocence has become fetishized with the idea of carefree, playful, beautiful, affluent, unblemished childhoods are a thing of great adult longing and nostalgia (Faulkner 2011). Such innocence is an example of the powerful control of adults who seek to keep children in this state of unknowing innocence and naivety as long as possible, under the guise of protectionism. Thus, the dissonance between innocence and knowledge becomes apparent. This dichotomy needs a balanced measured response so that the 'biological frailty' is respected and protected, but

children should still be given the opportunity to be heard and participate in society as social actors, as outlined by the New Sociology of Childhood (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998).

3.6. Conclusion: A discussion of the significance.

This chapter has outlined the historical and social construction of childhood from a contemporary minority world perspective. It has discussed Ariès as a seminal thinker in viewing childhood as a social construction. With the knowledge that childhood is a social construct we can evaluate the context dependent nature of children's lives. The focus of this doctoral research was to analyse children and young people's experiences with digital media; armed with the knowledge that childhood is a social construct enables us to appreciate the differences between childhood experiences, rather than treat children homogenously.

This chapter has outlined the paradigm shift that occurred in the late 20th Century with the New Sociology of Childhood, which showed the nature of childhood as a social construction, that childhood is worthy of study in its own right, children are active agents involved in the construction of their social worlds, childhood is a variable of social analysis and cannot be separated from other spheres of analysis such as class, gender, or ethnicity; and finally childhood studies engages with the double hermeneutic of the social sciences in that it simultaneously constructs and comments on the construction of childhood (Thomas 2009). This research project is aware of these factors alongside the four common approaches outlined by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) and discussed here in order to understand the discipline of study and where the research will fit.

A key theme of this literature review was the construction of and appreciation of children as being considered innately innocent. This paper has discussed the origins of this view as attributed to Rousseau but remains a significant part of the minority view of childhood, to the extent that if a child has been removed of their innocence due to abuse, or exploitation society views that they have not been robbed just of their innocence but their very childhood itself. Innocence is an underpinning theme of this doctoral research project, specifically in relation to the nostalgic perceived risk to childhood innocence that access to digital media and technology provides, through such mediated practices as accessing pornography or engaging in 'sexting' practices. As argued later the fear of the removal of innocence from childhood is used as a reason to aim to protect children from harm, but this can impinge on their rights to participation. These competing discourses of participation and protection; and agency and innocence play out in children's everyday lived experiences through the digital landscape. Therefore, these competing constructs underpin the arguments and analysis of this thesis throughout. From the literature explored across these two chapters and the findings that are discussed in latter chapters this thesis calls for a reshaping of the sociology of childhood, to move towards a sociology for *digital* childhoods, this would place the digital landscape firmly at the forefront of the debates and discourses around childhood as a social construct. It would recognise the salience of the digital for children and young people. It would recognise children's and young people's capacity for agentic participation, and this would therefore be a springboard of change towards the appreciation and integration of the digital as an accepted part of childhood in public and political dialogue.

4. Chapter 4: Methodology and Ethical Considerations

This chapter sets out the methodology and ethical considerations for this doctoral research project. This chapter firstly sets out the methodology employed throughout this research. This research has adopted a qualitative approach which has drawn from feminist epistemologies and grounded in children's rights. Children's voices are salient to this research and therefore the underpinning philosophies seek to promote and empower these voices as expert in these topics. Below, this chapter sets out the underpinning philosophies, strategies, and design this research adopted. Then this chapter evaluates key ethical considerations, a particularly pertinent topic when researching with children and young people.

This research has investigated the following research questions/aims:

- How are children and young people engaging with digital and technological landscapes?
- What does this digital landscape consist of and look like through children and young people's perspectives?
- What are children's and young people's experiences and perception of risks associated with digital technologies?
- How are young people mitigating and managing these risks?
- How and why do digital technologies shape the experiences of adolescence and growing up in the digital age?
- Why are young people engaging with the digital landscape, and how does this foster participation and belonging to youth culture?

This project has engaged with primary research data collection, defined as the gathering and analysis of new data (Sarantakos 2013). The principal methods of data collection were qualitative with focus groups, and individual interviews as the predominant research tools.

4.1. Research Philosophies: Strategies, Paradigms and Approaches

This thesis takes an approach to research categorised as an Abductive Research strategy, which involves using social actors' language, meanings, and accounts in the context of everyday activities to construct theories (Blaikie 2010). This is deemed appropriate to the questions this research addresses, as part of that is to understand and appreciate the social actor's views, who in this case is the sample of young people who participated. Descriptions of the young people's accounts lead to an understanding of the key categories and concepts which can therefore form a basis to understanding the problems at large (ibid). Abductive research strategy also seeks to move beyond the limiting inductive and deductive strategies; inductive strategy is concerned with 'what' questions, and can provide exploration and descriptions of social phenomena, whereas deductive strategy concerns itself with 'why' questions and can offer explanations to social phenomena. However, this research calls for a grasp of the whole picture of this topic; therefore, abductive approaches are the most suitable in order to successfully combine and ask questions of what and why simultaneously. Furthermore, abductive strategy can incorporate what inductive and deductive ignores, that is the meanings, interpretations, motives and intentions that people use in their everyday lives which direct behaviour (ibid). Thus, abductive strategy is participant focussed as the key goal is to understand and perceive the social world from an 'insider' perspective rather than pose outsider views upon it (ibid). This makes abductive strategy the natural choice for this thesis which sought children

and young people's views and sought to gain understanding of their everyday behaviours and experiences in relation to digital technologies.

An abductive strategy lends itself to an ontological basis in Idealism or Subtle Realism (Blaikie 2010). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and asks if reality is objective, subjective or constructed; in research the question is what does the research focus on? (Sarantakos 2013). This research takes an ontological positioning of idealism which suggests that reality is made up of representations created by the human mind; social reality consists of shared representations that are produced by people in the social world, i.e., social actors (Blaikie 2010). Thus, the questions that this research asks in an idealist perspective consist of examining shared social realities of young people, whilst recognising that it will not be universally applicable due to the differing social realities that may be inherent in different contexts. Consequently, the findings are not deemed universally generalisable but are able to be applied to specific similar contexts and will show an understanding of a group of young people and their realities.

Where ontology is the nature of reality, epistemology is considered as the nature of knowledge, and asks what kind of knowledge research is looking for (Sarantakos 2013). The epistemological approach this research takes is that of constructionist which suggests that knowledge is the product of social actors making sense of their experiences in the physical world (Blaikie 2010). The role of social scientists is to reinterpret this knowledge in terms of technical language and social theory; it also views that it is impossible to perceive an external world separate from the existing theories, concepts and background knowledge that an individual may hold (ibid). Therefore, there can be no fully independent social truth or reality that can be measured and wholly generalised (ibid), it is the social researcher's role to interpret

the knowledge that is presented by an individual or group in the context for which it is intended.

The ontological and epistemological approaches of this research can be loosely packaged into the classical paradigm of interpretivism; social reality is regarded as the product of social beings, and it is interpreted through the meanings research participants produce and reproduce as part of normal social life (Blaikie 2010). The interpretivist perspective is often critical of and rejects the more empirical positivist paradigm which often seeks to find an objective, measurable reality (ibid). This research rejects the positivist approach as it does not view there is one objective reality for such social topics of concern in this project; furthermore the nature of the aims and questions is such that an in-depth research is desirable, as well the ability to ask 'what' and 'why' questions to evaluate the rationale of the research participants, as opposed to the quantifiable questions characterised by the positivist paradigm that tends to seek measurable variables.

4.2. Feminist Research: one does not simply do feminist research

This project identifies with a feminist methodological approach, in that it can see the potential to produce knowledge that can make recommendations and perhaps be a catalyst for change (Letherby 2003). For this reason, Feminist research is often described as 'praxis'; both 'theory' and 'practice' (Madriz 2003). This research borrows from a praxis approach in that it sought to establish the current situation, the theory behind such situations and seeks to make recommendations which will benefit the lives of a marginalised group, which in this case is children and young people, as opposed to feminist research typical group: women (Letherby 2003). Whilst there is

not a feminist methodology per se there is recognition that feminist approaches are distinguishable from other forms of research in the questions asked, the positionality of the researcher in the process and the theorising and purpose of the information produced (ibid).

Within feminism, 'feminist methodology' is often seen as an ideal approach to doing research, which is respectful of the participants and acknowledging of the subjectivity of the researcher, leading to reflexivity being of vital importance (Letherby 2003). However, this leads to the question put forward by Cook and Farrow (1990: 71 cited in Letherby 2003: 5) 'Is feminist methodology that which feminist researchers *do* or that which we *aim for*?'. Principles of feminist research include the researcher engaging with the participants through carefully selected methods and procedures with a goal of promotion of the participant's voices to be heard, particularly if they are considered marginalised (Sarantakos 2013). These principles are inherently value-led, and it is for that reason that throughout this project the view is that feminist-research is something to aspire to and attempt to achieve as such lofty ideals are not as easily achieved as simply selecting a 'feminist method'. The principle of engaging with the participants and attempting to promote their views and voices beyond that of academics is highly compatible with the idea of child-centred research which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A key feminist principle is that of the subjectivity of the researcher is recognised (Letherby 2003). As such this suggests that there is an essential role for reflexivity throughout the research process to monitor how the researcher is impacting on the research and to critically analyse the researcher's role and relationship with the participants (Berg 2001). Reflexivity is the appreciation that the researcher is part of the social world they are studying and are embedded within it, with their own beliefs

and values; it therefore recognises that the researcher cannot stand outside their own subjectivity and positionality to carry out objective analysis and observation of the social world (ibid). Therefore, the researcher's own views are embedded in the process. I address my own subjectivity and positionality later in this chapter.

4.3. Qualitative Research

As stated earlier this research project identifies with a constructionist epistemology, routing itself within the interpretivist paradigm. This lends itself primarily to a qualitative approach to research (Sarantakos 2013). Nonetheless it is wrong to start with a preferred choice of methodology when discussing the qualitative versus quantitative dualism (Silverman 2010; Blaikie 2010). Instead, methodological decisions should be led by the aims and objectives of the research (Silverman 2010). The research questions of this project lead clearly toward qualitative inquiry as the most appropriate method of investigation of these topics. This research asked how and why questions as opposed to quantifiable questions such as 'how much' or 'what happens' (Blaikie 2010). Furthermore Flick (2014) argues that qualitative research can be thought of to consider more 'micro' level questions of individual experiences as opposed to 'macro' level research questions typically associated with quantitative approaches. This is reflected in this research as it sought to discover the perspectives of the participants in relation to their experiences in the digital landscape, which is an individualist, subjective micro level experiences of everyday life and interaction. Qualitative research favours wordy approaches and in-depth analysis of participant's explanations as it is felt that words offer an insight into the participant's subjective meanings rather than statistical trend analysis (Lazar 2004). Qualitative research utilises in-depth methods in order to gain an understanding of the complexity and

depth of the human experience and the social world (Gilbert 2001). Therefore, qualitative research offers rich data that is submerged in the complexities of subjective human experience and interactions (Flick 2014; Silverman 2020). It offers a way of studying social phenomena in the context of its occurrence, and without losing or depreciating the contextual nature of knowledge and knowledge creation (Silverman 2020). Furthermore, it draws from the social context to interpret and understand meaning in social interaction and in the social world more broadly (ibid). Consequently, I decided that a qualitative approach is the best fit for my area of interest to address the research questions I explored as they sought to gain understanding and meaning of children's contexts, interactions, experiences, and perspectives in the social phenomena of growing up in the digital age.

The key principles of qualitative research includes a preference for data gathering to be naturalistic; undertaken in natural settings (Sarantakos 2013). This is opposed to empiricist methodology which often conducts research in controlled, laboratory or artificial based settings. This project aimed to be naturalistic in that it took place in the school environment, which is considered a 'natural' environment for children and young people: an environment they are familiar and comfortable in, it is therefore not an artificial environment constructed for the purpose of research.

Qualitative research is often considered 'subject-centred', as it describes the world from the point of view of the research participants (Sarantakos 2013); this is compatible with the ideals of the feminist epistemology that this research embodies. As already mentioned, a key component of this research is that of reflexivity, valuing the self-awareness of the researcher (Parker 1994). Therefore, there is a role for self-awareness and reflection in order to recognise the researcher's subjective, value-based beliefs and how this may impact the data gathering and analysis of the project.

Qualitative design is flexible (ibid), this research was flexible and adaptable throughout the process, being led by the participants. One way this was achieved was in the utilisation of semi-structured focus groups and interviews which allowed for adaptability and alterations throughout the process, allowing the flow of conversation to be led more by the participants than the researcher.

Holistic research is a key part of qualitative design in that it looks at the whole subject of study in its entirety (Parker 1994; Silverman 2020); it is for this reason that the research questions are broadly discussing concepts such as 'digital technology' and 'landscapes' rather than narrowing the subject to specific types of media or compartmentalising the issues. Part of the rationale for this was to ensure that the research is not leading to any specific types of media, keeping the research open-ended, and with the ability to be participant-led adapting to the issues and topics the participants may wish to discuss.

A common feature of qualitative research is that it is often small scale (Sarantakos 2013), and this is the case with this research, with only eighteen participants; this allowed for in-depth study with the participants in order to understand the complexity of their social worlds. However, this often leads to criticisms of qualitative research as lacking efficacy, validity and reliability (ibid). Furthermore, such criticisms often lead to questions of generalisability (Silverman 2010); however, it is often the case that qualitative research does not tend to aim to be universally generalisable, at least not beyond a specific context or group (ibid). Validity and Reliability are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

4.4. Child-Centred Methodology

Hardman (1973 cited in Christensen and Prout 2005) identified two problems about children's representation in social and cultural studies: their muteness and their lack of visibility. This situation is similar in some respects to how women in society and social science were perceived previously (Christensen and Prout 2005). However feminist critiques of women's social positions brought women's perspectives to the attention of social science and led to changes in their representation that are still ongoing today (ibid). The need to make children 'visible' may seem redundant given their apparent centrality in western culture; however what needs challenging is the traditional views that neglects children's influence and agency over their social representation and therefore child-centred methodology appreciates the valuable contributions children make to research findings and processes (ibid).

Therefore, argued here is the links between Child-Centred methodologies and the feminist methodologies or approaches, as discussed earlier. In particular, it is linked in that child-centred methodology seeks the opinions of children and young people and attempts to gain understanding of their worlds from their own perspective viewing them as the expert in their own lives (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2013). Further similarities are drawn in that feminist methodology focuses on those who are marginalised and seeks to promote and elevate their views and voices; children and young people can be seen as marginalised due to their status as operating in adult-driven and adult-controlled environments which means that adults are often in a position of power and authority over them (ibid). Consequently, research with children and young people involves added considerations and care in order to appreciate the special nature of childhood as distinct and different phase of life to adulthood, and with its own complexities and challenges (ibid).

As a major aim for this research project is valuing the young people's views, and opinions and promoting them, child-centred approaches are the most compatible in order to achieve this (ibid). Greig, Taylor, and MacKay (2013) discuss that previously the idea that research with children in general has been neglected; however, in the last two decades that has begun to change and the single most important development which brings about such change is the rise of children's rights perspectives (ibid). This change can be identified as a major paradigm shift, characterised through the New Sociology of Childhood which values children as active agents in constructing and co-constructing their social worlds (see James et al 1998; James and James 2004). This was discussed in more detail in chapter three. Furthermore, this is seen in the children's rights perspective which is demonstrated through the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC). The UNCRC details rights for children and childhood; it gives a legal definition of childhood as those under the age of eighteen years and article 12 details the right for children to participate and have their views heard (Taylor 2000). Participatory rights are reflected in the New Sociology of Childhood and in child-centred research methodology as it values children as social agents able to construct and reflect on their social worlds (Smith 2011). By ensuring that we include children and young people in research and respect their views as salient to issues that affect them, then we are helping to promote and respect their participatory rights (Smith 2011; Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2013). This was a key aim for this thesis, to take an approach grounded in children's own views and promote those as expert in discussing and shaping these theories, and the ideas discussed.

Part of child-centred approaches is the careful selection of research design and tools; this involves great consideration to the aims of the study, the age and abilities of the children and most significantly the ethical implications (Gallagher 2009a).

4.5. Research Design

Focus groups are often thought of as an appropriate tool to engaging children and young people in research for a variety of reasons (Gallagher 2009a). Focus groups consist of a group interview or group discussion and are dependent on group interactions (Cronin 2001). Typically focus groups have around five participants but can be up to ten, they offer the opportunity to evaluate group meanings and to help participants feel at ease (Bloor et al 2001). Barbour (2018) argues that focus groups as a method also offer something different in that not only can the responses of individuals be analysed but that the interaction of the group itself can also offer a researcher much information. Furthermore, advantages of focus groups with children and young people are that the participants tend to enjoy the experience more as they are able to participate in the research alongside their friends and peers (Gallagher 2009a). They can also feel more relaxed and less pressured; in these situations, they outnumber the adult researcher which can be considered as important for ethical considerations of balancing power relationships between adult researchers and child participants (Hennessy and Heary 2005). By not having a one-to-one situation the balance of power is tipped in favour of the participants as they outnumber the researcher. This is very important to making the participants feel at ease and building rapport with the group and is therefore a central consideration of this research and why focus groups were chosen as the initial and main method of data collection. Barbour (2018) further argues that focus groups offer a way of discussing sensitive topics with vulnerable populations, that there is a 'safety in numbers' approach to sharing common ideas and experiences in a focus group setting. This was something I saw in the focus groups conducted; the children and young people seemingly enjoyed the opportunity to be able to share experiences, in a 'safe space'.

The main method of data collection is the focus groups, and each participant participated in a focus group with same-sex peers in the same school year, before moving onto follow up individual interviews, where more follow up questions were asked and a debrief took place. There was a total of five focus groups that took place, each lasting approximately an hour and a half which fitted into a normal school lesson. Barbour (2018) points out that there are some disadvantages to Focus Group research, firstly that there is a fear that participants may not want to share all experiences in a group setting, perhaps they may have a fear of judgment in their responses. Secondly, that there may be too much 'noise' or discussion leading to challenges in attributing who is talking later when transcribing and challenges in facilitating the discussion, so everyone gets a say. These limitations were considered in the design for this research. I feel that the advantages of Focus Groups as a method discussed earlier outweigh the potential pitfalls. However, steps were taken to mitigate the limitations. Firstly, the focus groups were video as well as audio recorded, this gave me the opportunity to watch it back if I found it difficult to attribute responses to individual participants (Gallagher 2009a). I also took the step of having two audio recording devices one at either end of the table, again with the idea of capturing voices if there were participants speaking over one another. As discussed below I also took steps to group the focus groups to put young people together who were friends or at the very least peers and familiar with one another, with the hope of the young people feeling comfortable with their fellow participants. Another limitation of focus groups as a method discussed by Barbour (2018) is the challenge of facilitating focus groups in ensuring everyone has a chance to speak and that it is not dominated by any one person; and indeed, encouraging people to speak. My approach to this was to treat my role less like an 'interviewer' and more like a facilitator. I took an approach that I

was facilitating a conversation between the participants asking questions to prompt discussion and then largely sitting back to allow the participants to direct the flow of the conversation, only interjecting to ask follow up questions, ensure everyone had a chance to speak and to move on to another topic as it became relevant to do so. The focus group schedule (see appendix one) was used as a rough guideline to facilitate the focus groups and was not used in a rigid or structured way.

An additional way of overcoming some of the limitations was the way the individual interviews were used. Follow up interviews were chosen in order to give the young people a chance to gain confidence, feel more comfortable and reflect on the topics in-between the two meetings (Gallagher 2009a). The follow-up individual interviews also gave a chance for the young people to express any views or experiences they may not have wanted to share with the whole group. At the time of the individual interviews the young people had built some rapport with myself as the researcher and so part of this rationale was to ensure they felt more familiar and comfortable with me. The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured with a loose topic guide for guidance (see appendix one and three); therefore, the conversation was flexible and adaptable with the topic guide being used as a prompt for reference if needed (Silverman 2010). The focus groups were video, and audio recorded using a recording device and transcribed at a later stage. The interviews were just audio recorded.

Some benefits and limitations of focus groups have already been discussed; however, it is important to note that one issue with focus groups is that group dynamics can be problematic, and it is advised that friendship groups are chosen (Gallagher 2009a). One way this principle was incorporated was to match up the focus groups with participants from the same school year groups, this meant they were grouped with similar age children and hopefully peers they were familiar with; this choice was to put

them at ease and feel more comfortable to participate and share their ideas (Alderson and Morrow 2011). Furthermore, the focus groups were held as same-sex groups, with separate groups for girls and boys, in order that the participants feel at ease and able to discuss any gender specific differences. Moreover, as the focus group discussions were led by the participants it meant that differences and similarities across the genders were able to be explored in the data analysis. Another potential issue with the focus groups identified by Gallagher (2009a) is that with focus groups there is a lack of privacy which means that discussion of potentially sensitive data can be problematic. I took an approach of being very aware of this principle and the wider ethical concerns and therefore did not ask direct personal questions on sensitive topics. Instead, the questions were general and used as prompts to facilitate conversation, I also used fictional case studies to prompt discussion on topics that might be deemed more sensitive (see appendix two). This is also a key argument and rationale in favour of my approach which included, the individual follow-up interviews as it may give the participant the opportunity to share information, they felt uncomfortable about in the focus group scenario.

4.6. Sampling and Access

The participants were across school years seven to nine, though mostly years seven and eight, thus the participants were aged 11-14 years. The participants were accessed through a mainstream secondary school in the local area. The school environment provides a naturalistic setting to conduct research with young people and provides an 'easy' way of accessing groups of young people (Heath et al 2009). The age group was chosen as a largely under-represented age group in past literature which frequently focuses on older young people. I also viewed this group as a particularly

interesting stage, as it incorporates the in-between stage of being 'pre-teen'. The majority of participants were under thirteen years which is the age limit for most social media participation; given this, it was further interesting to see social media engagement with this particular age group. Permission letters were sent to parents and children of all of years seven, eight and nine, in chosen school and those who participated were those who returned the letters by the deadline. They were then group into boy/girl groups from the same year group to attempt to establish friendship groups for the focus group (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay2013). Issues of access are often portrayed as one of the most problematic aspects of research with children and young people (Denith et al 2009); this research was no exception to this with the process of negotiating access to the school and sending letters being a time-consuming and lengthy process. Initially it was hoped to gain more participants, however eighteen were successfully recruited and produced a wealth of rich data. Please see appendix five for further discussion and breakdown of participant demographics.

4.7. Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy employed in this study borrows from grounded theory in that it adopts a process of coding with thematic analysis seeking to produce theory or arguments (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). A computer-assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS), NVivo was utilised to better organise the data and begin the process of coding the transcripts into themes which form the basis of the discussion chapters (chapters five to seven). Using this system facilitating the coding and retrieval process for the data analysis, which was a way of facilitated the coding, recoding and revisiting of the data in different forms (Silverman 2020). The analysis also combines some elements of hermeneutical cannons of interpretation, in that it was a circular

process of visiting and revisiting the texts (ibid). I revisited and recoded the data numerous times, using both the NVivo software and the more traditional 'highlighter pen' approach. The goal here was not complete saturation of the data, as is the goal in full grounded theory, but was to be fully immersed in the data and to ensure that it was fully analysed to make sure that the young people's voices had been fully represented and explored in the final discussions.

4.8. Reliability and Validity

Validity can be defined as whether the research measures what it aims to (Sarantakos 2013). Searle (2004) distinguishes between external validity and internal validity; external validity is commonly desired by quantitative approaches to research and is achieved by representative sampling in order to generate results that can be generalisable to the whole population. Reliability in quantitative research refers to whether the same results would be achieved if the study was repeated (ibid). However qualitative research in the interpretative paradigm seeks a different kind of validity; internal validity recognises that whilst qualitative research often lacks the breadth of quantitative studies, it gains in-depth of the understanding of the research topics (ibid). Internal validity is consequently seen as more important in qualitative inquiry than external validity. It is characterised by theoretical generalisation which means that it can be counted as valid when it can be applied to a specific smaller group as opposed to empirical generalisation in statistical studies which view the research to be valid when it can be generalised to the whole population (ibid).

Triangulation is one way in which the internal validity of qualitative research can be improved. Denzin (1978 cited in Searle 2004) identify four types of triangulation,

firstly data triangulation which involves using differing sources of data; secondly investigator triangulation involving more than one researcher in the field to establish if all observe the same phenomena in the same way; thirdly theory triangulation whereby researchers approach data with several hypothesis in mind and see which the data fits. Finally methodological triangulation which is the most common and involves using more than one method of data collection in order to see if the data is similar across different methods (ibid). This research used a multi-method approach incorporating focus groups, and interviews. The intention was that by using a multi-method approach as well as using a process of theoretical triangulation, this would promote internal validity for this research. Similar questions were asked within the interviews as focus groups (see appendix three), and these took place around a week later, this meant the participants may have had a chance to reflect on the topics further and it also gave me opportunity to ask follow up questions and further explore topics that were discussed. Furthermore, the data was triangulated through the literature by comparing and producing themes that may have been previously explored alongside recognising new data and new interpretations of the findings.

4.8.1. Reflexivity

Another important part of enhancing the validity of qualitative research is through reflexivity. Ormston et al (2014) recognise reflexivity as one of the foundations of qualitative research. They argue that within a qualitative paradigm there can be no complete neutrality or objectivity for the researcher. This is further argued by Flick (2014) who argues that the role of reflexivity is central to qualitative research; unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research recognises how both the researcher and participant's subjectivity is embedded and shapes the process of data collection and subsequent analysis. Therefore, the researcher needs to acknowledge their own

positionality and their own subjectivity as influential and shaping of the research findings and arguments. This understanding is also discussed earlier in relation to the underpinning epistemological and ontological positioning I have taken with this research. It is further recognised that when adopting an approach grounded in feminist epistemology and taking an abductive, interpretivist stance it is impossible to completely separate the researcher from the process. Indeed Emond (2005) argues that following the emergence of feminist methodologies there was greater recognition that the researcher cannot be divorced from the research process or findings and in particular the data is always presented through the 'lens' of the researcher. As such the role of reflexivity is to invite the reader into this lens and share potential influences.

I therefore argue that as a researcher I was embodied heavily in every stage of the research from the selection of the research questions, the methods, and then the data analysis. I remained during the process reflexive in order to promote an awareness of my own positionality and subjectivity, and remained open-minded throughout, in order to maintain this reflexive position. With this in mind it is important to note my positionality throughout this research as a woman born in the mid-1980s. My age puts me in a position somewhere between that of a digital native and a digital immigrant (see chapter two). I have not completely grown up in a digital age as my participants have, so therefore I am not 'native'. Nor have I adopted technology later in life as an adult as I came of age into the emergence of the digital revolution, so therefore I am not fully 'immigrant'. I can remember and reminisce through a nostalgic gaze my family getting a home computer, located in the dining room for the first time at the age of twelve and the sound the dial-up modem would make when it connected to the internet. I find myself engaged in something of a double hermeneutic in that I am both positive and fond of technology, having had access to it all of my adult life, I am 'tech

savvy' and value all the benefits and opportunities it can offer. However, I am still concerned about the risks to young people something that also took new meaning when becoming a parent, myself in the final year or so of this PhD. My status, or positionality as a technology and social media user is important to recognise, because the above-mentioned personal experiences and views will be the lens by which I have investigated and explored this research topic. Yet, I am neither a complete insider nor outsider to the social phenomenon the research participants are experiencing, being a technology user but not having grown up in a digital smart enabled world that includes social media, and mobile technologies such as tablets and phones that mean you are constantly connected. Thus, I continued to be reflexive and appreciative of my mostly outsider status embracing the methodological positioning of the participants as experts in their own lives and taking their views as salient in the data collection and analysis. Please see appendix four for a reflexive statement that further reflects upon and discusses my positionality during this research.

4.9. Ethical Considerations

The need for ethical guidelines and principles became apparent following Nazi atrocities and research during the second world war, which led to the first piece of international guidance for research and consent in research, The Nuremberg Code (1947) (Alderson and Morrow 2011). The code is said to represent integrity in research and gives rights to consent to take part in research; however, children were excluded from this as they were deemed too vulnerable and pre-competent to be research participants (ibid).

This changed overtime and a key landmark was in 1989 when the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC) was introduced; this enshrined in international law children's rights to protection from harm, but also participatory rights including articles 13 and 17 which detail rights to information (Alderson and Morrow 2011). This right to information and freedom of choice on matters that affect them (article 14), allows children to express their own opinions and to give informed consent to participant in research activity (ibid). Moreover, the UNCRC further highlighted the need for protection from harm for children and young people and enshrined the right to such protection in international law.

4.9.1. Harm

Sarantakos (2013) identifies various types of harm that can potentially affect participants of research; it is the researcher's role to protect participants from these various harms and uphold institutional ethical guidelines. Researchers need to protect participants from physical harm by ensuring that there is no risk to bodily injury, there is not normally risk of this in social research (ibid); in this project there was no risk of bodily harm to the participants arising from the research. Sarantakos (2013) also discusses the idea of mental harm which occurs where participants are subjected to (directly or indirectly) mental discomfort, stress or embarrassment. This is a possibility in all research as you do not know the triggers of stress or discomfort for individual participants prior to the research and therefore this research was mindful to actively avoid overly sensitive questions and be aware of and responsive to any verbal or non-verbal cues that indicate any form of distress. One way this was done was use of the case studies (appendix two) as described earlier, to avoid asking directly sensitive and personal information during the focus groups; instead discussing the issues in a more

abstract way by advising the fictional characters in the case studies. I was also very mindful for looking for any signs of discomfort or dissent with the research, any indications the participants were not happy and might not want to continue.

Legal Harm or reputational harm occurs if details that could be considered reputation damaging are 'leaked' from the research (Sarantakos 2013; Blaikie 2010). These details can have personal, emotional, social, and economic consequences for the participant and are often caused by not upholding rights to privacy, anonymity, or confidentiality (Sarantakos 2013). Therefore, anonymity for the participants and the participating school was upheld by using pseudonyms and storing data securely. All electronic data (recordings and transcripts) were stored in password protected devices and computer folders. Any paper-based information or data was stored in locked file cabinets and shredded when no longer needed.

Furthermore, in order to help protect the participants, researcher, and university from potential harms there is an obligation to uphold institutional ethics (Sarantakos 2013). This means that the research went through a process of gaining ethical approval from the University of Essex prior to fieldwork commencing, along with following the ethical principles and guidelines the university sets out. Richards, Clark and Boggis (2015) discuss the process of institutional ethical approval as a process of negotiation. This can be particularly fraught when considering topics that are deemed 'sensitive' and adding research with children into this mix, who are arguably seen as a vulnerable group. Nonetheless the process of institutional ethics was on this occasion relatively straight forward; I had considered and reflected clearly on the ethical practices I would follow which no doubt provided some reassurance to decision makers at the institutional level.

There is also an obligation to uphold the principles of the British Sociological Association (BSA) statement of ethical practice (BSA 2017). The BSA (2017) rules outline key ethical principles including professional integrity, making sure the participants give informed consent, have a right to withdraw from the research and the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is respected and upheld.

4.9.2. Informed consent

A key principle followed in this research was that informed consent must be obtained from the children and young people themselves, the information provided must be developmentally appropriate to the child to ensure that they understand what is being asked of them and are therefore aware of what they are consenting to (Gallagher 2009b). In adopting an approach to research which is cognisant of children's rights and the centrality of children's voices in research process I took the view that the first and foremost ethical principle to be followed is that of informed consent. Under article 12 of the UNCRC children have a right to express views freely and have these given due weight and consideration. This application of children's rights is also underpinned by child-centred research in general (Tisdall, David and Gallagher 2009). I therefore viewed that children's rights to consent or not and opt in to participate was crucial to adopting a reflexive, ethical, and child-centred approach to research.

In this study letters were sent to the pupils and parents in years seven, eight and nine. These letters detailed exactly what is involved, including the opportunity to ask questions, a consent slip for them to fill in and hand back to express interest in participating in the research. However, I took the approach that this formal consent letter process was only the beginning stage of informed consent. Ongoing consent is

an important aspect to consider when researching with children and young people (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). Ongoing consent in my research meant that consent was not something obtained just at the beginning of the research process, there was an ongoing recognition that participants could withdraw from the research at any stage during data collection; something they were reminded of at each interaction and key intervals, such as the beginning of each focus group or interview. Furthermore, ongoing consent also needs assent, it needs children's active and ongoing agreement (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). It involved me looking for and being mindful of dissent, any signs (verbal or non-verbal) of distress, discomfort, or disengagement with the research process. Part of consenting to research is the right to withdraw that consent at any stage (Alderson and Morrow 2011). In this project the participants were made aware of this from the start, and this was reiterated at the beginning of each focus group and interview to ensure that the participants were happy to continue. Being watchful for any signs of discomfort either verbally or non-verbally such as through body language and asking the participant if they would like to continue, reminding them of their right to withdraw formed part of these strategies for ensuring ethical practice and ongoing consent.

Despite the positioning of children as expert in their lives and able to consent to research participation, there is still an ethical and social requirement to also gain consent from adult gatekeepers, in the form of parents/guardians and issues of access go via adult gatekeepers situated in the school context, as discussed below.

4.9.3. Gatekeepers

In order to gain access to children and young people there is a need to seek consent from adult gatekeepers such as the school as a site of access and where the research is carried out. Furthermore, there is an expectation that access to children as participants also requires parents/guardians to give permission for their child to participate (Hill 2005). In this research informed consent was also sought from the parents of the participants and the head teacher at the school in order to gain this essential access. The need for consent from relevant adults' stems from children's and young people's statuses as legal dependants (Hill 2005). This is partly in contradiction with The Gillick principle which stated that children and young people should be able to make a decision about medical treatment separately from the wishes of the parents (Alderson and Morrow 2011). However, in the case of research consent is required from both parents and child in order for research with that child to take place. It is not enough for just the child to consent (ibid). Richards, Clark and Boggis (2015) argue that this approach therefore positions children assent to research participation as lesser than adults. Children are unable to consent without also the consent of their adult gatekeepers. Furthermore, it can be argued that this positions children, as interdependent rather than agentic in their own right (ibid).

Nonetheless it is a key ethical principle outlined by the BSA and others, that consent and assent of children must always be negotiated through and in conjunction with adult gatekeepers. This perpetuates the societal construction of childhood as vulnerable and in need of adult protections. This principle goes against the ideal of children as agents and able to consent on their own merits; it is an example of the polarisation in children's rights whereby there is a disconnect from children's rights to participation

and children's rights to protection. Consequently, protectionist rights take a higher role and so children's consent must be sought in collaboration with adult gatekeepers.

This was done through a formal process of consent letter sending, both the children and their parents/guardians were sent letters at the same time. There was an encouragement in the letters for the adults and children to discuss the research and decide together to consent (or not) to be research participants. Letters were returned via the school and the focus groups and interviews were scheduled following this with those whereby both parties (children and parents/carers) had consented to the research.

4.9.4. Confidentiality and Anonymity

To protect the participants and the school from potential harms confidentiality must be upheld and anonymity respected (Hill 2005). This was upheld through the use of pseudonyms; no actual children's names are used in this thesis. The pseudonyms were chosen randomly from online lists of most popular baby names, in order to keep the naming of participants as neutral as possible. Furthermore, the school's name is not used anywhere in this research, this further protects the participants from identification and upholds the principles of confidentiality and anonymity.

However, there was a 'safeguarding clause' explained to the participants both in consent letters and at the beginning of each research interaction (focus groups and interviews). This safeguarding clause was that if any participants disclosed, they or another were being harmed, or at risk of being harmed I would have to break confidentiality and tell another adult (such as a teacher if appropriate), in order to protect them. Twice during the research process, I felt the need to enact this clause, I

took an overly cautious approach and informed the teacher who was my main contact and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for the school of things said during the research. On one occasion participants mentioned a 'dick pic' (sexting image) which was spreading around their year group; the participants didn't mention a specific person involved however, when mentioning this to the teacher they were already aware and dealing with the issue. A further response was also shared with this teacher, this involved an issue of bullying where a participant described another individual (without naming them) who was nice to them on an online game but verbally bullying in person in front of "their mates" in the park (so not within the school environment). Again, this information was shared with the DSL who was aware of similar issues with the individual. From an ethical considerations' standpoint on reflection, I feel I took a duly cautious approach to upholding ethical guidelines and principles, putting the need to protect the participants from potential harm first, and ensuring that the participants had ongoing support beyond and outside of the research process.

4.9.5. Sensitive issues in research

Research that can be deemed to be of a sensitive nature has higher risks of harm, particularly mental or emotional harm (Walsh 2005). I took an approach as mentioned earlier than all research has the potential to be sensitive due to unknowable triggers or stress of individual's experiences. This is also argued by Dickson-Swift, James and Liamputtong (2008) who define sensitive research, as potentially encompassing all research but that which could be socially sensitive; that is to say, studies that might have wider social ramifications; or research that is individual or personally sensitive. I deemed this research to be more potentially personally sensitive to the individual participants with the potential to cause embarrassment or discomfort if not handled

carefully. Sensitivity in research is also reflected by Richards, Clark and Boggis (2015) who argue that certain topics with children are taboo and considered extra problematic or ethically sensitive by virtue of the 'vulnerability and unknowing' status placed on childhood in society. One example they discuss relates to sexuality, which is covered in this research particularly in relation to 'sexting' and accessing sexual content online as part of cultural phenomena. But other topics that societally are taboo for children and childhood can make a research topic seem 'sensitive' and require extra ethical consideration and caution. I therefore took an ongoing and reflective approach in mitigating and handling such sensitivity.

As researcher I deemed that discussions with young people associated with digital media, could be ethical sensitive or problematic due to the potential for causing embarrassment or harm. Moreover, as a researcher researching such subjects involves overcoming institutional objections (for example the university) and individual objections (such as through the gatekeepers) (Walsh 2005). Therefore, no direct questions on these topics were asked instead the focus groups and interview were kept quite general and thematic allowing the participants to direct the conversation around key themes and using the fictional case studies described earlier (see appendix two) as a way of discussing these issues abstractly. The research was guided by the participants as to what around these topics they find most important and wish to discuss in-depth without the need for probing personal questions. Furthermore, as the research was with the same participants for a focus group and a follow-up individual interview there was an opportunity for rapport building which may mean the participants were potentially more willing and comfortable to talk about more sensitive issues. The interviews also served to debrief the participants offering a chance to discuss any ongoing concerns and signpost sources of further support.

4.9.6. Legal Checks

Finally, it is important to acknowledge 'legal ethics' and to recognise that the processes here were following accordingly. Legally working with children under the age of eighteen requires a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to be carried out to ensure that the researcher has not had any bans from working with children or criminal convictions that would prohibit working with children. A relevant DBS check was undertaken through the University of Essex and was provided to the school to keep a copy on record to reassure them and protect them, that as a researcher the necessary legal checks and safeguarding procedures were followed in order for me to be able to work with children.

5. Chapter 5: Digital Landscapes: A Risky Business?

This chapter is the first of three data analysis chapters; this chapter provides an overview of the concept of risk as drawn through thematic analysis of the focus group and interviews discussions with children and young people aged 11-14 years. Discussions included what the children found risky or problematic about digital landscapes and how they deal with and mitigate those risks. This chapter represents those discussions and evaluates the findings in this area.

This chapter organised into is two subsections representing subthemes. The first is 'Doom and danger: the internet as a risky landscape' which will discuss perceptions of the internet as a risky space. Also included here is 'children's own perceptions of risk'. The second subsection is digital wellbeing, which explores topics related to digital wellbeing and mental health. This section will discuss that there is growing recognition of this area. This section discusses the children's responses in relation to this area.

5.1. Doom and Danger: - 'Social Evils' and the internet as a risky landscape

It is a given that today the internet has a large role to play in everyday life, digital technologies are integrated into everyday life and children are not separate from this. For children and young people digital technology is part of everyday existence. For my sample of eighteen 11-14-year-olds this was especially the case, the internet and digital technologies afforded the integration between the online and the offline worlds, there was no real separation between these realms with them being co-dependent and integrated in everyday experiences. Chapter seven explores in depth the digital landscape as a site of agentic participation and integral to everyday lived experiences of adolescence.

However, with the rise of the digital age there has been a growing concern over children's experiences and interactions with the online environment. Through the adult gaze these technologies are seen as inherently risky and there is a great deal of concern over children's digital access. This concern is often constructed as the 'robbing of childhood innocence', many adults speak of technology as taking away from childhood in a way that was not experienced 'in the good old days. Buckingham (2000, 2005 cited in Taylor 2010, p.49) argues that these fears are perpetuated by "adult nostalgia for a lost 'golden age' of childhood innocence". For the children in this study, they have not experienced a life before the internet, they have grown up in the digital age. Mark Prensky would refer to them as digital natives (Prensky 2001). However, even though Prensky would categorise these children as digital natives and adults are immigrants to this field, adults still hold great concerns about children's uses of technology and the risks that may be present in how children interact with new technologies.

Chapter two (section 2.4) explored the notion of risk that is associated with digital technologies and defined that this fear of risks has given rise to something of a moral panic on the issue, whereby media outlets report the digital world as something tricky and problematic to be navigated and fundamentally not suitable for children. It is therefore constructed as an adult landscape whereby children are conspicuous with their presence in this realm. Just as Jenks (2005a, p.74) has likened children to 'weeds', the issue being that they are not problematic in and of themselves, but they are conspicuous by their presence in public spaces, seen as "growing in the wrong place" which are defined as 'adult' by default. So, too we can apply the same analogy to the digital space, children are conspicuous by their presence on the internet, they are weeds, growing in the wrong place, in an 'adult-orientated space'. This belonging

to the 'wrong place' is what gives rise to a great deal of public and policy discourse of concern.

As discussed in chapter two sensationalist reporting in the media has fuelled this moral panic around children's presence online. The news media will report on high profile cases such as suicide following online bullying, one such example is the case of Hannah Smith, aged 14 who committed suicide following cyberbullying via the social network Ask.fm (BBC 2013), whereby this site has the functionality of posing and answering questions anonymously. Hannah Smith experienced a sustained campaign of bullying via this site, including with such comments as 'kill yourself'. Such cases have led to the claim that "Cyberbullying makes young people more than twice as likely to self-harm or attempt suicide" (Knapp 2018, *The Telegraph*). However, as discussed in chapter two the report by Davies (2014) demonstrates that the rhetoric of the tragic case of Hannah did not match the reality when the coroner ruled there was no evidence of cyberbullying. Another example is highlighted is the tragic story of Breck Bednar, aged 14; he was murdered in 2014 by Lewis Daynes a 19-year-old he was met and groomed by through online gaming (Halliday 2015, *The Guardian*). Despite such cases being fortunately statistically rare, these cases provide a moral panic flashpoint for reporting on the topic, whereby it is deemed a failure in the very fabric of society that this could occur and serve as a warning for adults about the real possibilities of children engaging in risk taking behaviour online.

However, risk taking is a part of everyday life, we as humans take risks constantly in the 'real world' whether that be crossing the road or driving in a car, risk surrounds society. Part of the socialisation process is growing up to be able to mitigate and manage our own risks. So why should this be any different when managing and mitigating risks online? One thing that can be agreed upon is that participation in these

digital landscapes is not going away, they are going to continue be part of everyday existence in contemporary landscapes. We cannot put the genie back into the bottle.

5.1.1. So, what is it that we are worried about?

Discussed in chapter two were some of the common concerns perpetuating the risk narrative around digital technologies. Literature in chapter two (see Phippen and Brennan 2020) discussed some of the main common concerns reported by parents and reflected in the news media. I have analysed and thematically grouped these issues as the three main 'social evils'. The three 'social evils' when it comes to reporting on risk in relation to children's behaviours online are pornography (and other content deemed inappropriate), sexting, and cyberbullying. As demonstrated in chapter two these three areas have been discussed for a number of years and demonstrate that what we fear when media discusses risk in relation to children online a loss of childhood innocence when children accessing information that is hitherto reserved for adults, such as content relating to sex, violence, and anything else that challenges the construct of childhood as a time of freedom and carefree innocence which has been well documented in literature (Phippen and Brennan 2020). Jenks (1996, 2005a) likens this construction of the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, whereby the innocent child is the apollonian child, and the corrupted child is the Dionysian child. It is the fear of a shifting towards dionysiac childhood in the postmodern age that leads to moral panic surrounding children's access to digital technologies, and potentially adult spaces consequently.

Furthermore, these constructs of risk and innocence portrays the notion that children are needing adult protection. In constructing this innocence and subsequent requirement for adult protection in the digital world, discourses also construction children as passive. As argued in the new sociology of childhood, it does not

appreciate children's own agency and resilience in managing and mitigating risk (James *et al* 1998; Corsaro 1997; Mayall 2002; James and James 2004). This is further discussed in the next chapter whereby it is argued that the children in my research displayed some sophisticated levels of resilience and agency in how they dealt with and navigated online risk.

Despite these discourses, I argue that the children in my study are very aware of some of the risks they encounter in the online landscape, and in showing this knowledge and understanding of this risk they are therefore demonstrating more knowledge and agency than adults typically afford them. What is most telling from the research that when asked what is good or bad about the internet the children's first response is not usually in relation to pornography, sexting or cyberbullying, the three 'social evils'. Some of the young people's initial concerns related to a concern that might be more 'adult' in nature, such as online fraud:

Such as Liam (age 12) who said:

The internet can be bad because some people could like hack your bank accounts and empty them.

For Liam the first thing he thought of when thinking about how risky the internet could be in that it is financially risky, with online banking and fraud be a potential consequence of the digital landscape. Indeed, the financial implications of the digital landscape were echoed in other discussions, this time another year 7 boy felt that you need to be careful when playing certain games online. In particular, he discussed that that in-app purchases were problematic:

I think games like Candy Crush are a bad thing because, it has like overpriced lives and you are basically wasting your money on lives (William, age 12).

This demonstrates that for these boys, and from other similar responses the first thing they might consider risky is not the same thing adults might be concerned about in relation to *children* accessing the digital landscape. Adults are typically more concerned with children accessing violent or sexual content, and do not necessarily assume that these issues around finances and fraud would be something that would concern young people. Throughout the research there was a theme around the access to 'inappropriate content'; this was not always defined as what is immediately considered as inappropriate by adults, who might typically think about content that is sexual or violent in nature. For these young people they defined 'inappropriate' content as swearing or racist language which was present.

Someone like called someone the 'N word', and then they might feel like...they are like another species like an alien, but some people could like stand up, and say, that is racist, and they could like report them. (William, age 12).

For William it was a great concern seeing racist and abusive language used within chat dialogues in online gaming, and he problematised that as something that he didn't want to see or engage with. Furthermore, as noted here by William, upon seeing such language he would take steps, such as reporting the comment so that the person making it would be flagged and possibly removed from the game chat. This demonstrates a level of maturity inconsistent with the moral panic surround digital technologies that instead construct children and unknowing, naïve and innocent in

need of adult intervention. Here William demonstrates resilience and resistance by being able to recognise this as problematic and what steps he would take to mitigate this; these resilience factors are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Some of the young people in my study also felt that digital technologies were problematic in relation to internet gaming. They expressed frustration over getting banned on the game, for seemingly minor infractions:

[On gaming] - It can be a good thing because like, some people can socialise in the game chat? But it can be like a bad thing because like, you can get banned for no reason, from like console banned. (William, age 12)

Here it is somewhat ironic that the very mechanisms of reporting and banning rule-breakers that are designed to protect players, and young players particularly are in fact causing discontent in the gameplay when this is directed towards the young people themselves. Another area in relation to gaming that was deemed challenging was the use of in-game purchases. Here there is the option to use real world currency to purchase virtual items. This could be expansions to the game itself, or this could be virtual items, such as 'skins', armour or weaponry that enhances playability in some way in the game. But this comes with its own set of issues also as discussed by William:

I got a refund from Microsoft because I went on a massive shopping spree, and I got 145 quid back (William, age 12).

William is discussing that he went on a massive spending spree via his Xbox and spent £145 which fortunately his parents managed to get refunded from Microsoft. William

then goes on to discuss that how he got banned from his Xbox as a punishment. So, this demonstrates that there are very real risks of accidental spending and the temptation that online spending can cause for young people.

These discussions represent some examples of very real and common risk with engagement with the digital landscapes, yet they are not talked about as often as the 'social evils' of the internet: inappropriate content, including pornography; cyberbullying, and sexting.

5.1.2. Discourses of Screentime and addiction:

There has been a recent shift in policy focus and public discourse towards 'screentime', the government and other bodies have recommended that parents limit children's use of screentime. This has been seen in the Online Harms white paper whereby it suggested there needed to be 'tools' such as apps for parents to manage screentime (Phippen and Brennan 2020). Screentime is defined as children using screen-based technologies including, television, computers, tablets and mobile phones. Phippen and Brennan (2020) argue that concerns around screentime have become increasingly part of the public and political discourse, with parents expressing concerns over screentime. Furthermore, policy responses to this 'problem' became part of the government agenda such as Matt Hancock in 2018 announcing plans to regulate or restrict children's screentime for fear of it causing harm (ibid) and the Online Harms white paper as mentioned above.

Problematically what the discourses (and subsequently the policies) of screentime fail to do, is differentiate screentime based on *how* screens are being used. For example, it would not differentiate between children using screens to complete homework, play educational games, video chat with family or children using screens to watch cartoons.

Moreover, Phippen and Brennan (2020) argue that there is a lack of research proving the link between the impact of screentime on children's wellbeing. There is contradictory advice in how to regulate children's screentime. There was much discussion of imposing a two-hour limit which originated from the American Association of Paediatrics (AAP) who suggested a 2+2 model: children under the age of two should have no screentime, and those 2-16 years should have no more than two hours per day (AAP 2016 cited in Phippen and Brennan 2020). Phippen and Brennan (2020, p.58) go onto criticise the approach adopted by the AAP as "arbitrary blanket measures fail to acknowledge the different types of screentime than can occur with young people". Essentially it is not just about the length of time spent with screens, but that the activities that the children take part in need to be part of this context.

In January 2019 the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) went against the normative discourse of recommended time limits to screentime. Instead, it recommended families together to consider a range of questions:

- Is your family's screentime 'under control'?
- Does screentime use interfere with what your family wants to do?
- Does screentime interfere with sleep?
- Are you able to control snacking during screentime?

(RCPCH 2019)

There is no consensus on the regulating screentime, but the RCPCH recognises that a time limit alone is not sufficient and does not effectively recognise the variety of activities that young people might engage with through screens in the digital landscape. What is often lost in these debates is how screentime can be a highly valuable activity and should be considered in balance with other activities including

access to outdoor environments and experiences, the RCPCH guidelines, therefore take a pragmatic approach to this, perhaps appreciating that not all screentime is created equal! Whilst the screentime agenda was not specifically an aim of this research, what did emerge from the children's responses is that they themselves problematised how long they spent online often referring to themselves as 'addicted' to their tablet or to social media. As demonstrated by this discussion with Sophia (age 12):

Sophia: I have got an Xbox which I do not really use much, a Wii again which do not really much use, a TV... but I am addicted to going on my iPad.

Researcher: What makes you say you are addicted?

Sophia: Because I cannot stop myself getting, off it... and a few times, someone has to come and get me off it.

From this response it can be seen that Sophia herself has problematised her 'addiction' to her iPad and recognises that it can be really difficult for her to control her use of her tablet. She explains this as a lack of control and self-regulation in her time on her iPad. However, in demonstrating awareness of this she recognises it as an issue for her, and something that needs to be addressed.

Other participants discussed various aspects of the internet as a black hole that you cannot get out of, in particular this was in relation to YouTube and the endless videos:

But it is just like, people sort of get sucked into a black hole of like, just the internet.... this generation has just got too sucked in, I think,

like if I had the choice of living, growing up with technology or growing up without I would probably choose without (Charlotte, age 12)

Here Charlotte is demonstrating almost remorsefully how central the internet is to her life, and this black hole analogy and feeling like her whole generation has been 'sucked in'. Nonetheless, she herself recognises this as something challenging to be dealt with and does not acknowledge it as being 'ok'. This would therefore contradict the notions of childhood naivety and passivity when it comes to knowledge of risk and technologies. Views around digital technologies as a 'black hole' were also shared by Ava (age 12):

I really really really really, really really really have an addiction to any kind of video games, yeah.... And I do it online, so I usually meet up with friends on Skype and we play, a black hole of video games.

However, it is clear from this discussion that the children themselves recognise this as challenging in terms of their internet engagement and so they are recognising this behaviour as requiring regulation. By recognising this they can question it and possibly make modifications to this behaviour. They are also recognising this behaviour as somewhat deviant. But perhaps the deviance here is in this apparent lack of control resulting in addictive behaviours that are only so defined as deviance in comparison to adult online behaviours and societal expectations.

5.1.3. A Judgement of Quality

One subtheme that emerged was that of 'quality', the young people were often fearful of judgment if they produced content in the digital landscape that was not high enough quality. This could be for example, a social media post, whereby the imagery would

have to be just right or a video to be shared. In relation to YouTube specifically this was in relation to the quality of the videos they might produce if they started their own YouTube channel. Here there was a real fear of judgment from their peers; the young people discussed an issue relating to others putting judgemental comments on their videos. In addition, they discussed that it would be 'really embarrassing' if they had put something on YouTube when younger that they may regret when older. They also showed awareness that if you put something on YouTube it could be re-blogged or shared and they may no longer be in control of that video or where it would be used. Such as this discussion among year 7 (age 12) girls...

Olivia: they are usually not the best quality because they do not know how to use it

Ava: Yeah, that happened to me with my friends because they are like oh did you see my video and I am like.... yeah [grimaces]

Emma: Some people have like iPhones and then like some people use it and then like, like when you get the apps on your iPad and you use it, but some people just do it if they have an app for photo taking camera which is not so good, but, like, usually they do not like edit them so it is just like awful

From this discussion and other similar discussions, the children and young people are problematising the quality of YouTube videos feeling it opens them up to scrutiny and that this may be difficult for them to deal with. This may lead to hurtful or nasty comments on YouTube videos posted. Such as Charlotte, age 12:

I have never liked to play the ukulele on YouTube because I would be worried that someone would be like, oh you are so rubbish at this and I will be like, oh well, I will just take it down.

Here Charlotte is demonstrating her reticence to put herself in a position of judgment and scrutiny, going to the length of avoiding sharing those aspects all together. Instead, she is showing that she would prefer to avoid such interactions all together. One of the fears for her here is that she will get hurtful comments, telling her she is rubbish, so she opts to avoid this engagement all together. This relates to the topic of cyberbullying and 'haters' this chapter now discusses.

5.1.4. Cyberbullying, Trolls and Haters

One of the areas introduced earlier in this chapter was Cyberbullying, the act of bullying or saying harmful comments online to another person. Sometimes this may occur as anonymous comments such as via an avatar on a YouTube video. And other times might be hurtful things friends say to one another, perhaps part of a disagreement or if friends fall out. The girls had more to say on this topic overall than the boys, but the girls were also more likely to be engaging with social media which is a main locale whereby cyberbullying occurs online. Nearly all the girls I spoke to as part of my study had an Instagram account. In discussion of 'nasty comments' online, the girls often termed this as 'trolls' or 'haters'. They rarely used the term cyberbullying themselves, I would therefore suggest 'cyberbullying' is more of an adult terminology for this phenomenon. Indeed, adults are much more likely to problematise this phenomenon, whereas the young people were more matter of fact about the existence of cyberbullying; it was an accepted risk and part of the digital landscape generally.

In discussion they particularly felt it would be easier for people to say hurtful comments

via the internet than in person, recognised that the medium of online communication may facilitate hurtful comments or interactions, as demonstrated from this discussion from 12-year-old girls:

Emma: Some people say oh it is easier to be mean when you are online but I have not, I have not been mean to anyone online before because it is like, you may as well if you are going to be mean just say it to their face, because then people just get more upset...if you do not know the person, then it might be easier to like say something to them.

Olivia: Yeah, say in real life someone you know and care about has said something to you it is easier just to offload on someone you do not know online

Emma: It is also I think that if someone, that you know, if someone that you know said something like mean to you like, to your face I think they would find it easier to apologise because they could see your reaction, then they could not see your reaction online

From this it is clear that these young people believe it is easier to say negative things online, there is a sense from them that this is due to lack of personal interaction online afforded by online communication, there is a lack of immediate feedback, which is present in face-to-face communication. The discussion here indicates that not seeing the reaction of the person is what makes it easier to say hurtful things online. There is also the question of anonymity as discussed by Olivia, it is therefore 'easier to be mean' if you cannot see the reaction or indeed do not know the person in real life. Discussion also occurred with what they would do if they experienced these hurtful comments. Mia aged 12 stated she would not block someone straight away or she would feel she was giving into the bullying (see chapter for full quote). She discusses

how difficult it could be to just block potential bullies online, believing that this constitutes reacting which may escalate the situation. This demonstrates that for young people the online safety advice does not reflect their realities, here in particular I refer to the online safety advice relating to cyberbullying which suggests that young people should block the perpetrator or 'just switch it off' or block the person. Mia expresses a reluctance to block a person who is being a bully preferring to deal with it herself, and the fear that the reaction could make the situation worse. Further discussions of cyberbullying related to its prevalence:

I have never witnessed anything serious in real life, but like whenever you are online you sort of see if you go on comments on YouTube there is always someone that is like oh your hair is a bit fluffy in this video and then someone is like just shut up, you do not even know them (Charlotte, age 12)

Generally, there was a lot of focus on YouTube comments, as being a site of 'haters or cyberbullies' and the anonymous aspect of such comments, hidden by an avatar was a factor here as discussed earlier. There was some further discussion by various participants on how much easier it was to put such commentary online:

Because they do not, when you in front of them you are seeing them, and you are seeing what their face is looking like, but on the phone, you do not see what they look like, and you cannot see what emotion they have in the moment (Evelyn, age 12)

Emma and Olivia (age 12) also point towards the asynchronous aspects of most online communication, here they discuss that there is more time to reply online than in face-to-face communication but that could be positive or negative:

Emma: I see it when someone says something mean online then I find that they have more time to think about what to put, instead like in real life... you have to think what to say

Olivia: Yeah, you do have more time to think about it, so you can be more responsible, but also people do have more time to think about it, to be more mean.

The participant's belief here overall is that people have the capacity for being meaner online than they do in person. From this the children and young people think it is twofold, on the one hand speaking online should mean you have a longer period in which to respond and therefore can be more measured and careful in responses, as Olivia's says to not be 'mean'. Whereas others described the immediate feedback you would get if you were speaking with someone offline and see their reactions, in addition if experiencing hurtful comments, you have the right of immediate response in person, whereas online the response is asynchronous and may feel more damaging.

This demonstrates a risk that is therefore unique to the digital landscape that there are those that may negatively use this space to say hurtful comments. However, what is not clear from these responses is where does hurtful comments transcend into cyberbullying? I would argue it becomes cyberbullying when the abuse is sustained and detrimental to wellbeing. However, the young people mostly did not use the terminology of 'cyberbullying', instead focusing on hurtful or 'mean girl' comments. Whilst these girls recognise that cyberbullying exists, and some say they have seen evidence of it. They do not identify that they themselves have experienced it:

[In relation to what is good or bad about being online] It is good because you can connect with people like your friends, you can do fun things on there you can get opportunities, but there is bad because cyberbullies and there is people that are like not nice but there is also, that I feel like it stops people from like going outside and

sort of more living their life? Like usually like if we, if we did not have technology we would be like outside more and stuff. My mum is always like oh when I was younger, we would be outside playing in the woods, but the thing is, is nowadays it is not really to do with technology, but you could not do that anyway (Emma, age 12).

From this Emma is demonstrating awareness of the issues of online but showing that these need to be balanced against the benefits. She is further discussing that the rise of digital technologies has been detrimental to access outdoor opportunities, citing the adult rhetoric of her mum here. However, Emma is somewhat critical of this nostalgic approach, citing that she would not be able to do that anyway. While she does not say why this would not be possible it could be due to the general risk rhetoric which has also impacts children's general freedoms such as the ability to play outside. There is often public discourse and rhetoric which creates a dichotomy of experiences suggesting that children should be playing outside instead of inside engaging in screentime. However, the reality is that there are public discourses of fear around children playing outside independently, such public discourses focus on stranger danger, traffic danger and the concern over unsupervised children in public spaces; this is the contention that Emma alludes to in her response above.

During the research, the young people did not directly identify they are experiencing or have experienced cyberbullying, or indeed been cyberbullies themselves. Yet the comments suggest that cyberbullying is an integrated part of their everyday lived experiences of adolescence, they also discussed how they had witnessed it or had friends who had experienced it. They are very matter of fact about how they describe incidents and so they take it as part and parcel of life online. Further, for these children there is no separation between cyberbullying that may take place online and bullying

that may take place in person, such as at school. This evidences that for adults, those who are digital immigrants we think of online and offline as two separate entities, for children and young people there is no great divide it is integrated experiences in the online and offline worlds. So, when a falling out with a friend occurs at school it spills into the online and outside school environments:

I have seen quite a few people that like experience them [hurtful comments] and then get quite upset about it all, and they definitely, know the person, from school. It is just the case that they are not being very nice to them (Emily, age 13).

This is deemed challenging as in the digital age, this spilling over into the online spaces, becomes ever more problematic when you consider that the children feel constantly connected to the digital landscape. This constant connection is difficult to comprehend and to escape from, meaning that traditionally private spaces like the home are no longer fully private nor a haven from bullies who cannot be left at the school gates.

This demonstrates how challenging it is for children and young people to be fully 'offline', this constant connectivity can be challenging for children as they navigate these realms. Hitherto, prior to the digital age children would return home from school and have limited contact with their school friends. Due to the constant connectivity that the digital landscape affords children are now much more likely to be talking to their friends outside of school environments. But this can also be deemed detrimental:

I feel like since phones have been out everyone has just gone to a phone instead of like, actually talking face-to-face. I feel like it has kind of spoiled the modern day and like, actually speaking to someone being close to them basically it is just, the screen has taken over (Abigail, age 13).

Here the constant connectivity of the digital landscape is problematised by Abigail, she feels that it has been detrimental to the experiences of communication, whereby it is all done through technological facilitated means. However, overwhelmingly the young people were positive about online communication and discussed it as a good way of keeping in touch with friends and family far away, as well as friends outside of school. This is discussed more in chapter seven. This connectivity has meant that children can continue conversations started at school, which can further the development of their friendships. This can be a great feeling of connectedness and sense of belonging for children and can potentially reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, this connectivity can become problematic when fallings out with friends occur. When they are physically isolated but digitally connected if they are being bombarded with negative and hurtful messages, this can feel invasive. Cyberbullying in its extreme and sustained form can lead to children feeling very lonely and isolated, this lack of escape from cyberbullies can mean that children and young people may begin to believe the things that bullies say. This can lead to serious mental health illness such as depression or can even lead to suicide as discussed earlier.

My friend like she got bullied online and stuff and she gets like depressed and stuff, and she does not like talking to people, but she is like sort of alright now because she has told the teacher...but she just she got like really sad about it and like it leads to depression when you get bullied online. (Charlotte, age 12).

From this the young people I spoke to have a real understanding of cyberbullying, and why it would be really detrimental to a person's mental health having had friends who has experienced similar. Again, this would suggest an acute awareness of the risks

involved in such activities. Sophia (age 11) sums it up neatly:

Yeah, I would not want to get cyberbullied

Sophia here expresses the desire to avoid being Cyberbullied herself, from my discussions with the children and young people it was clear, particular amongst the girls in both year 7 and year 8, that they had a good understanding of what it is to be cyberbullied. They portrayed the issues as challenging and something to be navigated online. They mostly talked about hurtful and harmful comments, 'trolling' or 'haters'. They discussed that when you put yourself out there such as on social media or YouTube you essentially open yourself up to this level of scrutiny. Whilst they problematised this they were also very much accepting it this risk as integral to belonging to the digital age.

It is clear from discussions that what young people class as cyberbullying is a sustained period of abuse (or hurtful comments), this can be anonymous or known. However, they also recognised the damage that can be done to self-esteem from less sustained periods of abuse such as with one off occurrence or getting into arguments with friends. From these discussions, arguments with friends may 'spill' over to social media. Whilst as discussed earlier means that due to the constant connectivity they are not able to escape from this. It is also to the children and young people no different than falling out at school and resolving differences and making up to be friends again. In this case it is merely that the bullying or argument is technologically facilitated. For the young people in the study the online world is an extension of the offline world. So, for us as adults to problematise the fact that these friendships play out over social media, rather than the more traditionally constructed 'playground' is not to fully

understand the digital landscapes in which children in the digital age operates. It is, therefore, difficult for a child to simply 'switch it off', 'block the person' or indeed report to an adult. When it is 'low-level' comments or one-off occurrences, children did not feel they would report it to an adult or block the person, preferring to deal with it themselves. In discussion of the case study involving 'Louise' (see appendix two), some of young people raise this as an issue. Noah age 12, thought that the person may confront the other one blocking, and Mia, age 12 felt that the 'bully' thinks it is because they can get away with in online (see chapter six for full quotes).

Furthermore, Noah and William indicate the idea of only taking serious actions like reporting or blocking if it is sustained and more than once, then they might report to an adult. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter with full quotes about what the young people felt they would do in response to hurtful comments, and the resilience and self-regulatory factors they engage with in order to support this. Cyberbullying has been shown here to be something which greatly concerns children and young people, they have a good sense of the risks surrounding this issue, and ultimately that it can result in mental health concerns. However, they also accept these risks as integral to belonging to the digital age, and for them the benefits outweigh the risks. Therefore, we as adults need to continue to support young people as both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of online facilitated bullying.

5.1.5. Pornography and Nudity

As discussed earlier within this chapter, one of the 'social evils', portrayed by the media is the exposure of children and young people to sex and sexuality through digital technologies. The extent to which this is problematised in modern society is made acute by the constructions of childhood as a time of innocence which is the commonly

held view. With that childhood innocence comes little recognition of children's sexual agency (Buckingham and Bragg 2004). The desire to protect childhood as a time of innocence is salient within society and this is a competing construct with children's agency which requires them to be possessors of knowledge and the ability to access knowledge that may hitherto be reserved for adult realms.

This has caused a moral panic within society, whereby the very fabric of childhood is threatened by children's access to sexual content online, deemed 'adult' in nature.

Egan (2013) argues that young people, and particularly young women are perceived to be heavily sexualised through the media such as through advertising and the concern is that this is taking away from innocence of adolescence. This is particularly the case when considering that the internet affords opportunities to access content such as Pornography in far more accessible ways than ever before and access to practices such as Sexting (Setty 2020). Whilst pornography in some form has been accessible through many generations. Arguments such as those by Dines (2010) suggest that the level of pornography, including violence, themes that are not always respectful to women, and that depict seemingly young (or teen) performers is unprecedented. This has led to Dines (2010) suggesting that children are growing up in an increasingly 'pornified' environment. Dines (2010) sees pornography as insidious creeping into the collective unconscious of young people and providing them a warped view of human sexuality. Furthermore, this warped view of sexuality extends to consent, with the suggestion that young people lack understanding of sexual consent due to imagery in pornography. There is also a fear that this gives young people unrealistic and extreme expectations of sexual relationships, consent and body types (Internet Matters 2019b).

Additionally, it is considered that pornography may be damaging to children's self-

esteem and self-confidence particular in the formative teenage years when ideas and explorations around sexuality are most likely forming. Pornography actors typically display certain common body types, such as slim as muscular physiques, male porn actors typically have large penises and female actors shaved pubic hair and large breasts. For teenagers just starting to explore their sexuality they are potentially feeling pressured to conform to these idealised body types displayed in pornographic content. This could lead to feelings of inadequacy with their own bodies which could negatively impact self-esteem (Dines 2010).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that whilst the internet may facilitate access to pornography, young people have always accessed some pornographic content such as sneaking a peak at a playboy magazine. Furthermore, sexual curiosity during teenage years is a very normal part of adolescence (Egan 2013). Moreover Egan (2013) categorises this as a 'social problem' with sexual discourses rather than being grounded in historical or empirical fact. Nonetheless, the young people have unprecedented access to pornography afforded by online technologies, with a vast array of types of content freely available within a few clicks. Society problematises this access as a corrupting force of children and young people fearing that this access affords them access to an adult realm, once again there is a blurring of the adult and child space, blurred through internet access to content deemed inappropriate.

Within this study focusing on 11-14-year-olds, I did not ask direct questions about pornography, the reason for this is due to ethical considerations I did not want to risk pressuring the participants to discuss something they may find embarrassing, or not wish to discuss. Another reason is that through semi-structured approach to focus groups and interview I wanted them to input what they felt was most important to them. Instead, I asked general questions and we did have general discussions about things

they found challenging or 'bad' about online technologies and the internet. Some of the young people volunteered information that related to the access to pornography online:

Emily: There are a few websites I have heard of that I definitely do not want to have anything to do with um...Porn Hub is one (Emily, age 13)

Yeah. I've heard of that too (Abigail age 13).

From this discussion these Year 8 girls are familiar with the site Porn Hub, this site has free access to hundreds of online pornographic contents. In particular, Porn Hub has been under scrutiny in the past due to some of its more graphic and violent video categories. So, this is on the surface of it alarming that this site is so well-known amongst those so young. However, the girls problematised the accessibility of such sites, recognising the risks:

Emily: I do not want to have anything to do with at all, quite a few of my friends say that they have watched.... And I do not want to get involved in any of that type of stuff...I do not know why they would

Abigail: No, it is just...a few people have said it but...I think they, they have heard of it, but they have not looked at it, they just want to, they kind of say they have looked at it just to sound cool but like it is not cool to watch that kind of thing.

Emily: I would not really say it is cool

Abigail: No.

Emily: Nothing to be proud of really.

From this for these too girls they do not see the appeal of accessing such websites. Further they believe that their friends are saying they have looked at it when they have

not really. There is a social credit of being 'cool' which from this exchange is attributed to the accessing of this website. However, this may pressure those to participate in this social norm of accessing pornography. But despite this apparent peer pressure to look 'cool' or to fit in with others, for these girls they expressed resistance to this. However, on further discussion it became apparent that the girls were referring to their friends who were male who thought it was 'cool' and gave them social kudos to be accessing pornography. This is reflected in arguments by Egan (2013) who discusses the perceived issues with boys in particular accessing pornography, however Egan also reflects similar statements to the participants that they access pornography not necessarily as a kind of sexual awakening but out of desire for 'coolness' or 'acting like the bigger boys. So, there is an argument to be had here about the role of accessing pornography as a form of masculinity performativity, there is a sense of them performing gendered norms in gaining the kudos associated with pornography to where it becomes a 'rite of passage'. The idea of masculine performativity could be linked to the work of Judith Butler (1990) who argued that the representation of gender roles in society involve a performing of the expected norms of that gender. This can be applied to pornography access as becoming a new norm for masculine performativity to ensure a sense of belonging to that gender. In 2019 age verification checks on pornography become mandatory within the UK (Internet Matters 2019a). It will be a requirement for pornography sites to have robust age verification processes to prevent under 18s from accessing pornography. What remains to be seen is if this has made a real difference, or like other technological barriers, savvy internet users will circumvent this, much as the social media age limits have been breached (Phippen and Brennan 2020).

Further, to such discussions around the access of pornography some of the young

people had things to say generally about seeing images or items which they deemed inappropriate:

And there was also this thing on Instagram, there was this like certain hashtag that you put in... or accidentally click one and it comes up, and there was this really like disgusting things like naked pictures of people and stuff. I went straight back off it and then, I like reported it and stuff but um, the thing is that, like, it just keeps happening you cannot control it on Instagram because there is so many people on it. (Mia age 13).

From this response Mia regularly comes across content she finds upsetting or challenging and describes seeing images of nudity. It is therefore part of the digital landscape for her, but this is something she does not want to see, and therefore problematises its existence in the online realm. Amelia also shared this:

Like nude pictures or something really inappropriate something you do not want to see or upsetting (Amelia, age 11).

However, the difference here is that this is unintentional finding or seeing of information that may be considered harmful. This means that even when the children and young people are not intending to see such content, they are exposed to it:

Yeah like that awkward moment when years ago when I was flicking through like a normal day...then all of a sudden there is just like pictures that you really really do not want to see you accidentally come across and you think to yourself why would you just do that because it is, something wrong (Amelia age 11)

Amelia here is referring to some images of nudity that she stumbled across that clearly

still troubles her. From a societal point of view, this is problematised and deemed 'risky'. This exposure, intentional or otherwise to sexual content does not fit with our expectations of a 'good' childhood. A good childhood is freedom from adult anxieties and freedom from adult content. It is argued that the ongoing exposure of children and young people to this adult realm is damaging to childhood innocence, and forces children to grow up much quicker than they used to (Buckingham and Bragg 2004). However, considered here is a more balanced view, because the young people themselves are problematising this access to pornography or nudity. This is therefore demonstrating that they have agency in deciding what is best for them themselves. This contradicts those constructions of childhood innocence because what comes is connected with innocence, is an unknowing passivity. By demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the prevalence of pornography they are refuting the idea of being unknowing and passive. They are active in their awareness and despite the inherent peer pressure to conform and access such content, they are actively striving and saying this content is not for them.

Furthermore, what is to say that young people accessing pornography is going to harm them? Where is the evidence for this? Arguments that suggest that pornography is damaging young people's sexuality are reductive. This is a complex issue that cannot be narrowed to purely accessing online pornography, there is not clear cause and effect that can be established. There are other factors such as individuality and agency in the interaction of such materials. Additionally, such arguments do not consider that modern society is existing within a hypersexualised culture, as demonstrated through mass media, such as advertising, films, and television. This may also play a role in the apparent 'sexualising of youth'. Moreover, whilst this was a concern for some of the young people in my study, there was not a substantial concern shared by all around

this. The young people who discuss pornography felt that it was problematic and that they didn't wish to engage with it. Additionally, the prevalence of accidental viewing of pornography such as through pop-ups or as Mia says above via social media like Instagram appears to cause no major harm to young people, they see it as 'awkward' or 'annoying' rather than risky.

Once again there is a dissonance between adult perception of risk, and children's perception of risk. What is argued throughout this thesis is the children's perspectives as salient, they are the ones who experience and live this on a day-to-day basis, and they are expert in their own lives.

5.1.6. Sexting

Sexting is another area whereby we see a clash of young people's sexualities and sexual exploration creating dissention between the lived experiences of children and young people and the adult expectations of what those experiences should be. Once again sexting confronts the view of children as innocent and passive unsexual beings. 'Sexting' as a terminology is sex and text combined, it may refer to the sending of pictures of yourself nude, or with various body parts on show. It is also used when referring to textual messages that are explicit in nature. However, the terminology 'sexting' is often more of an adult-used terminology. Young people tend to use terminology such as 'Dick pic' or 'nudes' (Setty 2020).

Sexting is considered risky and problematic for a variety of reasons, firstly as stated in related to pornography it is about exposure of young people to content deemed adult in nature. However, here this is going beyond this and is considering content that is self-generated by the young people themselves and can have negative consequences. Potential consequences can include the spreading of the image

beyond its original recipient. This means that one of the parties to the image may have shared it with friends, friends may have shared with other friends and so it escalates beyond the original purpose (ibid). This can be reputationally damaging to the person depicted in the image as friends and other young people have access to the image. It can be a source of ridicule, embarrassment and deep shame. It can have negative consequences for self-esteem or mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (Setty 2020). Additionally, there are potential legal ramifications, when the young people are under the age of 18 years and such images are shared beyond the intended party. Under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 they are liable to be prosecuted for making, distributing any indecent images of anyone under 18 even if it was with consent of the young people involved (Child Law Advice 2019). This is highly contentious as these police cautions create a legal and criminal record which can follow them into adulthood. So that if that person later wanted to get a career working with children and required a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, then this incident would be flagged up on the system and could prevent their future career choices. Despite these legal ramifications recent developments in the UNCRC with the adoption of general comment 25 (UN 2021), specifically states that the practice of sexting, consensual self-generated images should not be criminalised. Furthermore, in the UK the age of sexual consent is 16, but rarely are their prosecutions for underage consensual sexual activity between two underage partners. However, the legal framework here would currently until seek prosecution or caution for those underage persons sending sexual images. This amounts to a criminalisation of this activity, whereby young people can be criminally punished for sending each other images but not for engaging in physical sex acts. Prior to the digital age similar practices occurred in the sharing of nudity, but there was no physical record of the

image that could be shared beyond its intended recipient. So, this panic and moral concern is due to the permanence of such imagery in that there is a record beyond its original intended purpose (Setty 2020). So, there is an argument that this social practice has shifted and has now become technologically facilitated, as opposed to these practices being *caused* by the digital age.

When discussing this with the children and young people, I used a fictional case study which involved a boy pressuring a girl to send a nude picture (see appendix two). This case study facilitated the discussion and avoided making it too personal for the young people. This was beneficial to avoid them feeling that they need to disclose any personal information they may not have felt comfortable with exposing or discussing. This was they could discuss the topic in a more abstract manner. However, some of the young people discussed this topic freely and volunteered information and opinions on the subject. They were discussing and finding problematic the concept of sexting:

Mia (age 13): I mean I do not think you should ever do it because, I mean like, there is no point, doing it because what are they even going to do with the photo they are just going to look at it and be like, ok, cool and then like, just, like...yeah it is not really much point in sending the photo in the first place.

However, there was also discussions around that maybe it wasn't something for them at the age they were at, but maybe if older it would be ok:

Ava (age12): The thing is, it is ok if you really care about them, you are older, and it is fine and all that when you are older and stuff, but it is like, if you take a photo, it is there, it is an actual, thing...it is being kept,

Researcher: So, what age do you think it might be ok?

Ava: 16, 17

From this Ava felt that at their age they should not engage in such practices, but that it would be ok when older. What this demonstrated is a cognisance of her own limited levels of experience and her age as a young person engaging with and navigating these worlds. She recognises her own levels of comparative immaturity in dealing with such issues.

Such sentiments were also expressed by Harriet:

Harriet (age 12): I have mixed feelings because if you have been in a relationship for years and you like live together and things chances are you sleep in the same bed and if you are sleeping in the same bed you do not need photos because it is all there [laughter] so...if you want you know, if you want to see each other naked just do it in private.

Here she is taking it one step further and suggesting if you are an adult living with someone it would be OK. From this Harriet has associated the practice of the sexting as an adult activity, part of a 'serious' relationship and therefore not a practice that teenagers or young people should engage with. However, despite there was discussion of examples of their friends or other people in their year group who have experienced or participated in this practice:

Emily: Nothing that really happened to me, that I can think of, obviously there was quite a while back, was not there, people started sending pictures of themselves to, other people?

Abigail: And then lots of people found out and Mr Smith had to get involved and things.

Researcher: Ok, what, what sorts of pictures of themselves?

Emily: Um, I would not really say proper naked but...images that show things that do not need to be seen.

This discussion from these year 8 girls (aged 12 and 13) shows that while this is prevalent it is considered problematic by the young people. Similar was discussed in a focus group with the year 7 girls who are 11 and 12 and discussed a 'Dick pic' that was spread around their year group:

Mia: because there is this thing going round with dick pic something like that

Emma: There are people who are in year seven doing that and it is like [pulls face] there was like, a big thing, going round because there was like each group chat that people were in this guy sent it to...I did not see it, thank god for that...yeah but like, lots of people saw it or knew about it.

Again here, this group are problematising the spreading of such imagery, furthermore they are feeling that they did not want to participate in such actions and see the image themselves, they are reticent and reluctant to engage with such activities.

Amelia (age 11) goes further and links this to social media where images may be shared.

Amelia: I always think there is that downside to Instagram, about stuff that you just...do not see and, just...I do not know, it is just why people do that it is because, it is just not cool at all it just makes you look like an idiot for doing something like so wrong and showing it to other people.

Here she problematising the whole practice and thinks it's wrong to do such a thing.

When discussing with the young people what they found problematic or difficult in particular about this social practice the young people provided this example:

Emily: I think one of the people that, they had I think they sent them to each other, and people told their friends, their friends told their friends, the image got around.

So, the main issue for these young people is the fear of such images being shared. The fear of the image “getting around” is enough to currently turn these young people away altogether from the practice of sexting. In response to the case study (in appendix two) the young people discussed what they would do or what advice they would give to ‘Susan’ the fictional recipient of pressure regarding sexting. Emma quoted online safety advice she had seen that could be used in such a circumstance:

Emma: Well actually I saw this really good ad, on YouTube, it was like nine texts to send to send to people, they said like certain messages, one of them was like “oh I think you are mistaking me for my future self that has been on a lot more dates with you and knows you better”, but I would still say do not do it; because also, if Tom loves Susan then he would not force her to do it...

What is particularly interesting in her response here, is that this advice stood out for Emma. This represents a way to playfully push away such requests until the recipient is ready for such intimate relations. Furthermore, there is an element of trust there, expressed in the idea of knowing the other person better. If a young person choosing to engage in the practice of sexting, there is a huge element of trust and intimacy required. The trust involved indicated that that person will not share those very private images beyond the intended recipient. Despite this notion, Emma’s response to the

case study is to advise 'Susan' not to engage in this practice and to indicate that a loving relationship would not include one person pressuring the other to perform intimate acts with which they are not comfortable. Ava also shared some advice for the characters from the case study saying she should "back away" and not do anything she wasn't comfortable with; the full quote is located in chapter six. Ava, she feels the people in the case study are too young to engage in such practices. Furthermore, she echoes Emma's advice that in a loving relationship Susan should not feel pressured to engage in the intimate act of sending a nude picture to Tom if she did not feel comfortable with this. Among these girls there is some resistance to this area. The girls expressed strong opinions about the case study such as Harriet saying "to just ditch him" if he was pressuring her, or it not being worth it if 'Susan' is comfortable. However, this was not always shared with the boys in the research who largely felt it was "up to her" (James, age 13 – see chapter 6 for full quote).

The area of sexting is problematic in the public discourse as discussed, society represents that sharing of this explicit and intimate content, inherently puts young people at risk of exposure. Risk that children and young people are exposing themselves to harm, whether that be psychological or physical. Young people's self-sexualisation by engaging with such acts produces the same fears we have when considering young people's access to pornography. That is that young people are becoming sexualised at younger ages, and this fundamentally changes the nature of childhood, and in particular childhood as a time of innocence. However, where the debate of the sexualisation of childhood differs is in its response to sexting and pornography is through the reactions to both phenomena. Both can be considered a moral panic but there are subtle differences in how this may play out in the media. When discussing children's accessing pornography this is portrayed as damaging to

Childhood innocence. Children are portrayed as passively and naively innocent, devoid of sexuality. Children's access to pornography challenges this public discourse as children are deemed to have been 'exposed' and 'corrupted' by these challenging adult images they are accessing (Faulkner 2011). They are portrayed as mostly victims in this process. Conversely public discourses surrounding sexting portray the young people as active in their engagements with this practice and therefore they are problematically defined as active and self-sexualising. Nonetheless this could be challenged to reflect that they are perhaps still victims of a peer and media saturated culture which has normalised sexting practices. As discussed, Sexting is a risky venture, but at least for these young people at this age, they recognise the risks involved and show some agency in consideration of how to overcome them. Resilience, self-regulation, and agency in this regard is all discussed further in the next chapter.

5.1.7. Inappropriate content and other 'awkward stuff':

Aside from sexualised inappropriate content, the young people referred more broadly to other content they may discover online that they found difficult. This went beyond the sexualised content such as pornography and sexting and looked at wider content they discovered or have come across and feel it is challenging to them. For example, Charlotte here discussing video including violence such as murder:

Charlotte: Yeah, I know like nudity is gross and stuff like, but people who like kill people on videos, and like...cut and stuff they are like scared of like the most natural thing in the world, like I know it is gross.

As she states here that while she feels images of nudity online is problematic, she

feels that more challenging is images of murder and cutting (self-harm) online demonstrating other forms of content that they deem problematic. Furthermore, Mia problematises racism she has seen online:

Mia: you get like really racist comments, because like there is memes and stuff and sometimes, they can be funny and sometimes they can be like really racist and like take it too far

Mia is showing a depth of media literacy in explanation of racism and memes. Memes are culturally accepted jokes when a common and shared understanding of the joke, as discussed further in chapter seven. However, Mia discusses her view that these cultural jokes and shared understandings can be taken too far into terms she deems racist and offensive. This demonstrates some critical appreciation of media and an ability to question content agentially as opposed to passively accept or receive the information. This is linked to Digital media literacy as discussed further in the next chapter. However, for Harriet, she reflects on her use of the social media and states she does not “venture into the darker depths of the internet” to avoid seeing offensive content (this is discussed further in chapter six).

So, whilst she has not actively come across the similar content to Mia, which was deemed by her to be offensive, she is aware of its existence and is active in her avoidance of such content she is believing problematic in this way. Furthermore, other concerns that the young people expressed was the types of language that was used:

Sophia: I think I might have seen something on Instagram, like somebody...that I followed said...the, typed down the b word,

Here Sophia (age 12) is finding issue with some language she has witnessed online, the 'B – word' she did not want to say the word aloud, she found it problematic that she had seen such language used online, finding it inappropriate. This demonstrates that children and young people have diverse ideas of what would be considered inappropriate online, they each have their own thresholds, and this can be variable in different contexts and for each individual.

Some further content that troubled the young people in the study was the other video content they had come across on the internet:

Charlotte: There was videos of animal cruelty and it's just not nice. And like, if someone is being rude, they are doing stuff like they should not show online, it is like, or there is also people threatening people online saying oh I am going to kill you or something.

These videos of animal cruelty had troubled and upset her deeply. Such content is unpleasant for anyone to view, it can be upsetting to see such imagery. Images of animal cruelty are emotive, and this was clearly something that troubled Charlotte who recognised this alongside other violent or threatening content. This is further echoed by Amelia:

Amelia: Sometimes it is just, it is just really awkward stuff that you never want to see...children being abused like, from that, and like animal testing and just something like really really horrible that you do not, you do not want to happen in the world.

From this is its clear that these girls are very aware of the potentially inappropriate content they could come across online, and express great concern over this potential content, fearing seeing it citing how horrible it is. This demonstrates an awareness of these risks and how this may be disturbing for them.

5.1.8. Video Gaming, a risky enterprise?

Gaming was a topic that was discussed amongst the different groups. The young people engaged in different types of gaming. Minecraft and Call of Duty were the most talked about games amongst the young people of both sexes. Public discourses of gaming are surrounding the risk-based practices that are inherent within gaming. So many games allow players to play online with friends or strangers. Online gaming platforms mean that they can communicate with each other via and through these gaming platforms. Grooming can occur through such game channels such as the case of Breck Bednar as mentioned earlier.

Another of the key areas of risk that is associated with gaming is that children and young people are accessing games above their age ratings. Games are rated by the Pan European Game Information (or PEGI) ratings system. They are ranked based on their violent and sexual content and given an age classification in much the same way that films are given age classifications. However, the young people in my study said they were playing games like Call of Duty. Call of Duty as a game is rated eighteen, this is mostly due to violent content within the game play.

There has been debate in academic and public discourse as to whether there are harmful effects following the consumption of violent media. For example, following the murder of 2-year-old Jamie Bulger by two ten-year old boys in 1993, the resulting moral panic perpetuated by the news media looked at potential reasons why the two ten-year-old boys committed such an act. One of the reasons pointed out in the news media was that the ten-year old boys had been consuming horror and violent films prior to committing the murder, particularly the film *Child's Play 3* was cited as a 'video nasty' the perpetrators consumed prior to the murder (Petley 1994). However, despite sensationalist reporting of this moral panic (ibid), this has been much debated in

academic discourse and the evidence remains thin, to claim that violent media impacts violent behaviour directly (Phippen 2017).

Similar principles could be applied to the discussions around young people accessing violent video games, there is little to, no evidence that playing violent games means that a person will be more likely to commit violent acts themselves (Phippen 2017). However, there is a great deal of concern about children accessing this content and fears around corruption of childhood innocence of children accessing very violent content aimed at adults (ibid). Despite this, the young people didn't see this as problematic at all. They access these 18 rated games without expressing concern:

Emma: Well, I play like, Call of Duty...I play like with my brother and my sister.

William: I like playing with my friends on a couple of games and I also like playing Call of Duty

These young people aged 12, are accessing the Call of Duty game but do not see it as an issue. There is no acknowledgement that the game itself being an age 18 rated game is problematic. None of the young people perceived it as risky them accessing these types of games. There were discussions about accessing games that did not relate to risky content such as:

Olivia: I hate it when it glitches...and someone is like...like if you are in the middle of a game, and someone is trying to kill you and you are lagging

Here Olivia is not problematising the fact that she plays an 18 rated game but is problematising system failures such as internet glitches which cause her character to

be killed. It can be explained that it was normal for them to be involved in and access these games, whatever the age rating may be. Conversely, the issue of violent video games has not really expressed in moral panic in the same way that the access to other violent media or sexualised content has been. But why is that? As discussed throughout this thesis so far, childhood is constructed as a time of innocence, yet access to sexual content and sexuality causes moral panic and fears about innocence. However, the same is not true of violent content. Violent content while it is often deemed problematic, it is not to the same extent as sexualised content. In 2013 the game *Grand Theft Auto V*. There was a public outcry about the game as it involved scenes whereby the character could pick up a prostitute for sexual activity which would be viewed as part of the game, then attack and kill the prostitute to avoid paying her (Hoggins 2013, *The Telegraph*). Whilst it was evaluated at the time that the violence inherent in those actions was problematic, the sexualised and misogynistic nature of the actions and subsequent attack is what drove the public discourse of concern over this at the time, yet no similar outcry has occurred for other PEGI rated 18 games, like *Call of Duty*. So, the public perception is that is less problematic for children and young people to access violent content than sexualised content. Even though sexuality is a natural human condition that most will experience. However, most do not commit violent acts depicted in such gameplay. It is the very adult nature of the sexualisation of such content which makes it problematic, that it is adult in its nature further asserts the claim that the digital landscape is adult by default.

Further discussions by the young people included generally inappropriate behaviours that occur via gaming platforms:

Olivia: I was playing on my Minecraft one evening, and someone said they liked my skin, and they just kept following me...but it was really

easy to get out of that situation, but on Minecraft you cannot really like block people.

This situation clearly made Olivia uncomfortable, she felt threatened by this situation and felt like she no recourse to take steps to protect herself. Minecraft has a PEGI rating of age 7, but it is a game that could be used to target children for grooming purposes. I asked her what she did:

Olivia: I left, the server, and start playing a different game and forgot it [Olivia laughs] I was fine...but that happened, and it does happen, and I see it happen

So, in this case she has found that as she felt uncomfortable her only option was to leave the game server she was on and go and play something else. It is surprising that for this game aimed at children, with a PEGI rating of 7 years, there is a lack of controls over the game chats and other content. There were also other content that the young people deemed inappropriate, such as commentary on videos:

Emma: once I did see on my friends' videos there is two people, and someone was like, oh can I come round your house and rub your feet

From this, for young people there are different concerns in relation to comments online that they may deem inappropriate and may make them feel uncomfortable. Whilst what adult perceive as inappropriate is not always the same as what children perceive as inappropriate, they do have some clear ideas expressed agentically about things which they do not believe is right online, things which make them feel uncomfortable and which they feel is not suitable for their overall wellbeing. Nonetheless there are some contradictions in what they say, for example on the one hand they are stated

that they play games such as Call of Duty that are PEGI rated 18 with no qualms about the levels of violence in the game. On the other hand, discussing horror films and how they do not watch them:

Abigail: I do not really like things like um...horrors or anything like

Emily: Nor do I...I will tend to avoid films that are not for my age group

From this exchange these year 8 girls do not like horror films, but what is particularly interesting is Emily's comments about avoiding films that are not for her age group, this is interesting as it demonstrates a commitment and understanding of the film rating system which Emily chooses to respect. This contradicts the discussion around gaming because on the one hand she is mindful and respectful of age guidelines for the films but not the PEGI game rating system not viewing it in the same way. Perhaps because there is a peer pressure in engaging with a game that all her friends are playing that is not present when discussing films. Or there is not the same understanding of what PEGI rating does amongst both adults and children, as there is for film classifications.

The role of parents in permitting such games also needs to be considered here, when there is peer pressure to the extent where all your peers are playing a certain game, it also puts pressure on the parents to allow their own children to play the same game, if all of their children's friends are playing the same game, it may place parents in a very difficult position whereby it becomes hard to say to no to their children when they are asking for access to the game. Even when parents do say no it then becomes difficult to completely stop the child accessing the game, as they may then play it around a friend's house.

After the focus groups and interviews the game 'Fortnite' became popular, it is PEGI

rated 12 years. This game has hit global acclaim with 250 million players worldwide (Gilbert 2019). It attracts many young people; it is a player versus player post-apocalyptic Battle Royale survival game whereby players must build forts and survive through battles. The game allows the creation and modification of a character that the player will then use throughout the game, this allows for personal customisation and creativity in adopting characters or avatars, further customisable with in-game purchases. As with many games there is interactivity within the game itself, such as game chat where users can communicate via text or where they can speak over microphones to one another. However, we are seeing something of a moral panic and great concern about this game, firstly the game itself is deemed to be 'addictive', many parents report having difficulties getting young people off the game and that they want to continuously play. Whilst the gameplay is cartoonish in nature there are also some concerns around the violent nature of the battle-style game. There are also the same concerns, as with other games, that the open chat formats leave young people vulnerable to inappropriate content such as sexual, racial, or violent language. Furthermore, these social capabilities potentially leave young people vulnerable to potential grooming from predators online, who would seek to make a friendship with a young person and then move the chat away from the game into another platform.

Whilst this is problematic and risky for children and young people the concerns around Fortnite are not new, they have seen with various open world games which have a social component, including the likes of Minecraft which many of my respondents were engaging with. Fortnite shares some of the previous concerns about the addictive nature of gaming, and the potential for the social aspect to be abused.

In chapter eight I explore this social aspect of gaming further with the young people, what it means for them and what it affords them in terms of social experiences and

engagement.

5.1.9. Digital Stranger danger

‘Stranger danger’ has become one of the great concerns of contemporary society in relation to children and young people. As outlined in the literature review, childhood has a protected status in society as a period of innocence and carefree freedom that is often romanticised. This is challenged by the stranger danger discourse, the thoughts that there are strangers out there who wish to do harm to children fills every parent’s nightmare. Such stranger danger discourse arose and was intensified in the early 2000s following ‘flashpoint’ cases such as the Sarah Payne murder in 2000 and the murders of Holly and Jessica in Soham in 2002. These flashpoint cases become a central tragedy with news reporting focusing on morally corrupt strangers or paedophiles who may be abducting children. This stranger danger fear is passed onto children who are schooled to not speak to strangers, building in mistrust of the general unknown public. This destabilised the public space as being a space that is suitable for children and young people and it has now become a space whereby it is adult by default, and unsafe for children. However, such discourse is disputed when we consider that statistically speaking children who experience abuse is usually at the hand of a family member or someone they know. This demonstrates that the rhetoric of stranger danger does not reflect the reality of when abuse occurs.

The same has now become true of the digital landscape. The rise of the digital age has mirrored these concerns in the digital sphere. As has been argued the digital landscape is considered adult by default and adults have great concerns over children’s access. As has been established through the literature (chapter two and

three specifically) through the lens of moral panic, children's access online, long for, and to what extent they should engage with certain online practices is questioned. So, to the same can be said of public spaces, it is adult by default (Clark and Gallacher 2013). Therefore, there is a similar trend to the stranger danger phenomena impact the digital spaces. Here we have seen that stranger danger rhetoric is problematic when applied with the context of online grooming and online paedophile gangs. There is a great fear that children will fall victim to grooming online. Grooming is defined as the befriending and building of a relationship with a child in order to gain their trust for the purpose of sexual abuse or exploitation (NSPCC 2021). There have been reports of online groomers targeting young people via social media, gaming platforms, and anywhere whereby children may be frequenting the internet. High profile cases of this online exploitation are again creating something of a moral panic around these issues, cases such as Breck Bednar who was groomed via online gaming and murdered by his abuser. However, statistically speaking such cases are rare, with only a very small risk of such things happening. So, we see that like the stranger danger phenomena, the online grooming phenomena has also reached a crescendo in it striking fear in adults; yet, despite perceptions the actual risks are relatively low.

Online safety education works with children and young people such as through ThinkuKnow campaign and other organisations have tackled and sort to address this by providing advice to children engaging with the digital landscape. This is designed to help them safely navigate and help protect themselves. This is discussed further in chapter six. However, the fears around strangers online were something that the young people themselves felt they were concerned about it:

Emily: I think that, if people do not know who they are talking to... if you go to meet up with them they could do stuff, they could take you

away they could, you could never see your family again...I have seen that so, many times, on TV... it is not necessarily to do with social media and stuff but, loads of years ago Madeline McCann she went missing...she was left in this villa in Portugal and, this man took her, and she has never been seen, it is just proof what can happen if you are not watching your child properly...

From this Emily's responses here indicate that speaking to someone she does not know online is a real concern for her, this is something she feels is a risky endeavour. From this she fears being taking away from her family, embodying the fears around online grooming, demonstrating in particular the fears around meeting up with strangers. She is vague on what might happen she states, "they could do stuff". There is some reticence in spelling out what that "stuff" may be, however I expect that she knows very well what this may be. Interestingly she herself makes the links here between the debates of online grooming and stranger danger discourse as she discusses the Madeline McCann case, by linking these ideas together she has demonstrated an understanding of the issues, that strangers are 'lurking' in the public space as well as the digital space. What is also interesting is that she discusses this as something that can happen "when you are not watching your child properly". This idea has been reported in the media when the media were seeking to blame the McCann's for Madeline's disappearance. However, it is seemingly impossible to fully 'watch your child' when they are engaging with the unregulated digital landscape. Digital landscapes are vast and whilst parents can take steps to protect their children there is immense unregulated areas of the internet. Due to this it is important that children and young people are equipped with the tools to support themselves and

protect themselves online, alongside adult support. The role of parental regulation is discussed further in chapter six.

Further discussions of the role of strangers online were discussed by Amelia:

Amelia (age 11): When we were at primary school we had this ChildLine person come in telling us, dangers in real life, if you show your badge, your road somewhere where you live then it is always like...it could do harm to yourself, and then... it kind of puts me off there are so many bad stories about: someone gaming sharing online with a complete stranger, that stranger coming over to their house and then like something really really bad happened where he got killed by that person, it puts me off

Here discusses her knowledge from online safety awareness education, she shows good awareness of the issues, and about showing her (uniform) badge or other personal information online she could be tracked. She shows here an understanding of the potential dangers of this and speaks of it potentially causing her harm. She then references 'bad stories' such as through gaming and online sharing. What is interesting is that she says this puts her off social media altogether, suggesting a perception that this is a high risk. Whilst there is a risk of these things happened the reality is that these risks are relatively low. Particularly this is low, when you have a young person such as Amelia who is has the knowledge and agency to protect herself online. She has some good perspectives on how to protect herself and she is taking the steps to do so. These protective factors further mitigate the risks and demonstrate awareness of the issues. Online safety education clearly has a significant role to play in helping children to understand the risks and provide tools and support to enable them to protect themselves.

Other young people such as James (age 13) also echoed similar sentiments:

James: A person can ask you to meet up somewhere. They could ask for your name and personal information.

From this like Amelia, James also has a good understanding of the risks involving meeting with strangers and divulging personal information. Again, messages from online safety education are getting through to these young people and they have a clear understanding of risk

Amelia: if you do not know them...they could turn out to be someone dodgy as well

From this from Amelia she is further discussing that it can be difficult to trust people online, are they who they say they are? Or are they 'dodgy'? Noah further reflects that it is easier to lie about personal information such as age via the internet:

Noah: Or there is like an adult that is pretending to be like, their age...and wants to meet up one day

Realistically there is no absolute way of telling if someone is lying online as discussed by Ava:

Ava: It can also be really really misleading...what people put out there, like if you do not see a picture of them, and you just have this information it might not be real, but then if just had a picture of them and you have no information it is not right, so you kind of need both

Olivia: But even if you had both it could still be a lie

Ava and Olivia had further discussions of this and demonstrated some awareness here that anything on the internet from a stranger could indeed be a lie. Ava describes it as misleading, and Olivia further adds that both pictures and information provided by an

individual could be a lie. Here there is an understanding of these issues that people online are not necessarily trustworthy. This demonstrates a good understanding of the inherent risks of engaging with strangers online. Emma (full quote in chapter six) discusses that she feels it is easy to lie online, and whilst she does not directly discuss grooming or the risks of talking to strangers online, she is demonstrated a clear understanding of just how easy it would be to lie about key characteristics of yourself and there would be no way of providing it. One group discussed the website Omegle, this website is a webcam-based website which gives you a random stranger to talk to:

Olivia: It is where you chat with random strangers, that is their motto

Emma: Yeah you type in like what you are interested in then people come up

Researcher: Ok do you find things coming up there that you do not feel comfortable with?

Emma: We usually just play pranks

From this discussion the young people do not see an issue with using the Omegle site, they enjoy it, playing pranks on other people, and they do not construct it as negative or risky. However, this site has been linked with some incidents whereby children have been exposed to risky adult behaviour or inappropriate content. Such as webcam footage of nudity or sexual acts. This site has been linked with such content as the motto is 'talk to strangers'. So, this has been raised as an issue with children's access to this site as it is deemed potentially risky to children. Such exposure and practices are more common and much more likely to occur than grooming online. Once again, this stems from the innocence discourse and a desire to protect young people from harm.

From the discussions with the children and young people they mostly have a good sense of the risks involved with potentially engaging with strangers online, they feel that it is inherently risky and have begun discussing various protective factors in order to reduce and mitigate these risks. They have discussed that there is a present risk in engaging with strangers online, they have shown awareness of grooming. Further discussion of protective factors will be discussed in chapter six.

There is, some inherent contradictions in what the young people say in relation to digital stranger danger, on the one hand they are able to reflect on potential dangers such as providing personal details online or meeting up with a stranger met on the internet, recognising how easy it is to lie online about key characteristics. However, on the other hand they also do not problematise practices such as interacting on a site like Omegle where the very premise is to talk to strangers via webcam, which reflects a much more common 'risk' than online grooming. This represents cognitive dissonance whereby the young people can hold two competing views simultaneously, that speaking to strangers is risky, yet it is OK when playing around with the Omegle site to 'prank' people. This represents division from adult perspectives on risk as adults would overall view this behaviour as risk-taking behaviours that children need to be protected from.

However, what is recognised from this discussion is that whilst children have a need to be protected from risky situations such as speaking with strangers that could potentially have disastrous consequences, and indeed be protected from online grooming. Is that children themselves are aware of some of the issues surrounding online grooming and digital stranger danger and this awareness is agentic in its nature as it allows children then to take reasonable steps to protect themselves when navigating the digital landscape, which is further evaluated in chapter six. Nonetheless

children need support and guidance in navigating these troubled waters. This should be given in a measured, reasonable way, to not take a scaremongering approach putting children at further distance of accepting help with these issues.

5.1.10. Footprints in the Concrete

This section relates to the ideas discussed by the young people that relate to digital footprints. 'Digital footprint' is a relatively new terminology that has arisen with the digital age. Things that are posted online have the potential to become a permanent record, hence my theme here of footprints in the 'concrete'. There have been reports of years later posted content coming to be regretted by their posters as it causes reputational damage or loss of employment (Garone 2014: BBC 2017).

This was something that the young people I spoke to were concerned about:

Charlotte: It is like, if you put something on the internet, someone is going to find it on Google or something and it is going to be up there forever, and you might regret it when you are older because if you get a job or something, your boss might look your name up and like see really bad pictures of you, so you might not get a job.

Here Charlotte demonstrates an awareness of the potential risk and implications of creating a digital footprint, although she does not use that terminology. This shows an understanding of the risks that can be involved when creating a footprint. A footprint is something automatically created every time a person interacts or engages online and is particularly associated with posting on social media. There are increasing reports that during job application and interview processes managers will look a person up on social media to see what sort of person they are (Smith 2015). If there are lots of images of the person on a night out intoxicated for example, this may make

the candidate seem less attractive and can injure job prospects. Charlotte demonstrated her understanding and concern about such things in the future, recognising that things she posts now can have implications for her future. Similar discussions took place in terms of regretting something posted online and fearing it may cause embarrassment in the future with Mia:

Someone could have a picture of yourself on Instagram when you were younger then, when you are older you have got a new account and someone has found your old account or, if they screenshot it when you were younger they can have that picture which could be really embarrassing and stuff and they could share it and you, would not be very happy

Here Mia is discussing the potential for embarrassment following someone using her Instagram posts from when she is younger against her and how that can cause shame. She discusses the mechanisms by which this could happen quite readily, such as images being screenshot and saved and then shared. This idea of images shared without consent is something that also troubled Emma:

Emma: That has happened to me I have got an old account, I got hacked on it because I forgot the password and it has got a really weird picture of me blowing bubbles, when I was like 10...and it is not private, and I do not know how to delete it...

Emma discusses here how the existence of such an old account embarrasses her, as it has a picture of her on when she was younger that she does not like and does not have access to, to delete. This recognises that for children there is a different kind of reputational risk. For Emma, this risk is that someone will see this image of her younger self, and this will be 'embarrassing'. This also speaks back to earlier

discussions of what is 'cool' online, young people feel a certain pressure to perform a lifestyle to fit in with their peer groups. It is the sense of belonging they crave, to feel they fit in with their peers and have something they are interested in. This striving for perfection is potentially damaging to children's self-esteem and this will be evaluated within the section on Digital Wellbeing.

The theme of regret is demonstrated further by Evelyn in discussing sexting:

Evelyn: people sometimes do rude pictures to get a boy and the boys...they are not worth it... and then, then it becomes awkward for them when they are older, they will realise what they have done, and they will regret it

Here she is discussing the potential for future regret when it comes to sexting, which is congruent with the discussion here around digital footprints and online behaviours having future ramifications and regretting earlier actions. Sexting is further discussed in the next chapter. The theme of regret is further demonstrated by Emma when discussing Snapchat:

Emma: If you send someone a picture of yourself, that is awkward like when you just woke up or something, and it, if someone replays it...it can say if someone has replayed it or screenshotted it...Because if someone has screenshotted it and sent it to someone they have a crush on or something it could be like really awkward for them?

Emma expands on the discussions and further suggest that pictures of you not looking your best also depict a view of perfection or idealised ways of being that need to be portrayed online. Furthermore, Emma describes it as 'awkward' if an unflattering picture is shared with your 'crush', here she is discussing how you must be careful

when sharing imagery as it can be spread and shared by more than you intended audience. This demonstrates that for Emma this is a real concern and is something she would perceive as risky.

There were discussions which turned towards privacy settings online. Privacy settings or having a private Instagram account were discussed as a way of controlling who sees what images, however, as per Emma's comments above there was a recognition that this is not always the case because it still could be shared.

Mia: I do not have my account on private because I do not really put many pictures of me on it? I usually put pictures of what I am doing or a photograph that I have taken.

Here Mia has discussed her accounts, and states that as she enjoys photography she keeps her Instagram profile public, but there is a recognition here of the risk of having a public profile as she then justifies it by saying she doesn't post pictures of herself on there but uses to promote what she is doing and her photography. This demonstrates an awareness of the risk and a conscious calculated act in not having a private profile, she is has done a risk assessment and decided as she is not posting pictures of herself, she is limiting her risk-taking behaviour. This is echoed by Harriet:

Harriet: Anything with my face on I keep it private, or anything personal on

Harriet confirms here knowledge and awareness of the risks of posting personal information online, she states if anything is personal or has her face on then she posts it to a private account as opposed to one that is openly accessible, in order to protect

her footprint.

This section has discussed digital footprints as a concern and risk when relating this to children's engagement with digital landscapes. The creation of a digital footprint is typically an adult concern, but this has demonstrated that children and young people share similar concerns. The discussion here has been two-fold, there is firstly the discussion of 'traditional' digital footprint thinking; that is thinking around social media and what is posted can later hurt your reputation and future carer by extension. The young people here have demonstrated an excellent understanding of this, and it was interesting that they raised this as an issue. This would typically be considered an adult concern, by raising it as an issue they are demonstrating sophisticated understanding of risk involving this.

However, this section has also discussed another concern that can be more broadly linked to digital footprints. For the children and young people, they were quite concerned about 'embarrassing' images becoming part of the public domain. For them they were defining embarrassing images as those taken of them when they were younger, or not looking their best such as having just woken up. This demonstrates a different type of digital footprint, but nonetheless has reputational implications. The young people discussed this as being awkward if older pictures of them surfaced or if their 'crush' saw it. So, whilst this is something that is unique to children and young people's engagement online, it does demonstrate an engagement with the same kind of thinking as adults in relation to the role of the internet. It also represents a reticence when it comes to what they post online, and an understanding of the risks involved when posting online and how posting on these platforms it to put themselves into the public domain and there are inherent risks potentially associated with doing this.

Therefore, they are demonstrating a cognitive understanding of risk, and this understanding is the first step to being able to manage that risk.

5.2. Digital Wellbeing

This section explores and examines the theme of digital wellbeing and mental health. One of the findings from the focus groups and interviews with children and young people indicate that the digital landscape can provide some challenging fields to navigate in relation to children's and young people's sense of wellbeing. Throughout discussions with these young people, they presented a picture of a digital landscape which is integrated into their perspectives of mental health. The digital landscape can be considered as both a risky environment in terms of children's wellbeing and a protective environment in terms of wellbeing.

5.2.1. Perfectionism

As discussed earlier the digital landscape can promote a sense of idealism or perfectionism in relation to young people. This is particularly related to social media. The persona that is adopted with social media is always the best version of yourself, the perfect version. Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue that this is a form of self-presentation akin to presenting a 'brand'. This presentation of self has risks and opportunities, for instance risks in how the self will be perceived is balanced with opportunities for self-protection, thus people online present a 'managed self' in how they present themselves online for this 'self-exposure' (ibid). For example, this may be in relation to the pictures or 'status' they post. How people present themselves on social media is therefore a performance, the performative actions of choosing a perfect

image to encapsulate themselves is part of the image of themselves they are trying to portray online. Couldry and Hepp (2017) liken these performances to 'The Presentations of Self', Goffman's theories of performance (1956). The notion of 'face-work' is discussed in light of a temporal and spatial shifting of the 'performance of self' from every day in person social interactions into digitally mediated presentations of self. These new forms of presentation can occur in several ways. Instagram as a social media application has made a particular success of these aspects. For example, people will frequently use Instagram to post selfies using an Instagram filter. These filters make the appearance of the photo better, for example they may 'smooth' out any imperfections. This technology affords the functionality to only present the best self and strive towards perfectionism. Furthermore, other trends on Instagram include the practice of social sharing aspects of their lives for public consumption, one common theme among this is food sharing, images of food to portray something exciting occurring within their lives. This has led to a phenomenon about something being 'Instagrammable' (Urban Dictionary 2016). Something Instagrammable is usually a clear aesthetically pleasing picture which shows some commendable aspects of their lifestyle that they wish to promote.

Where this may become problematic for children and young people's wellbeing is in the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality in the representation and presentation of everyday life. Baudrillard (1981) would link this to the ecstasy of communication and Hyper reality; this theoretical approach links the ideas of the representation of reality as constructing reality itself to the extent in which there can no longer be a separation between reality and our representations of reality. Whilst Baudrillard is writing prior to the advent of the digital age, his words fit well here in relation to social media, that the faux reality it portrays has a way of shaping actual

reality in a circular process, where reality can no longer be separated from the representations of reality. However, this may set unrealistic expectations for children and young people, who are striving for this perfect imagery displayed in social media, it can lead to depression and anxiety. As the young people strive for unobtainable goals this may impact their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing as they feel others are better than themselves. This was something that was reflected throughout the focus groups and interviews, but particularly with the girls.

Emma: Because like you do not want your crush to see like an awkward picture of you going like...weird faces at your friends.

It can be seen from this that Emma is worried about her photos online, and the quality of those photos fearing they may be embarrassing. The performative aspect of social media is present here, where they have to present themselves in a particular way in order to conform to the expectations of their peers and society at large. Here the term 'awkward' is used as a catch all term for photos that do not conform to these idealised expectations. Celebrity culture on social media, particularly on Instagram is of relevance here. In the digital age celebrities maintain a social media presence to raise their profiles by connecting with fans. Celebrities maintain a certain persona via their social media interactions that portrays their lifestyle in glamorous ways and with pictures of themselves demonstrative of 'perfection'. This pressure to conform to idealised and perfect representations can be damaging to young people's self-esteem when this is not countered with the idea that this is a representation that does not always represent a whole story or reflect the true realities.

In contemporary society we have seen a rising number of children and young people present with diagnosable mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression. The

NHS/Independent (2020 cited in Young Minds 2022) reported the number of young people presented at A&E with recorded diagnosis of psychiatric conditions more than tripled between 2010 and 2018-19. Furthermore in 2017 one in nine children were identified with diagnosable mental health conditions, and this rose to one in six children in July 2021 (NHS Digital 2021 cited in Young Minds 2022). Whilst the factors that could be contributing to this rise in mental health illness are multifaceted and complex (and the statistics from Young Minds show sharp increases during the pandemic) it could be suggested that this perfection pressure is heightening these concerns and making it so that children are struggling to find a place where they can be comfortable with who they are 'in real life'. However, is this different to seeing airbrushed images of celebrities in magazines which has been around long before the rise of digital media? What is lacking in public discourse around this issue is that children may be able to use critical thinking skills around this issue and appreciate that this imagery is only reflective of 'real life' but is not always a true and full picture.

Interestingly, the young people themselves did not discuss this as potentially damaging. They spoke in matter-of-fact ways about their striving to avoid 'dodgy' pictures online: Furthermore, the opposite could be argued, that actually these acts of performance with social media are an act of self-expression, something which can be challenging for young people to find the space for in the adult dominated public spheres of contemporary society. Additionally, young people's engagement in the realms of social media is inherently a social and socialising activity which can be a protective factor which is discussed further below and in chapter seven.

5.2.2. Mental health imagery

The unregulated digital landscape offers promotion of all views and opinions some of which can be problematic if left unchallenged. Bond's (2012) research into pro-ana

websites; that promote anorexia as a lifestyle and offer tips and a community striving for anorexia and anorexic physique, demonstrates the prevalence of some of this harmful content. These sites promote anorexia, they offer tips about extreme exercise, and limiting calorific intake, they also offer advice on hiding these behaviours from adults or other concerned parties. It can offer images of very thin people as 'Thinspiration' something to strive towards. Furthermore, research by Westerland (2011) discusses the prevalence of pro-suicide websites which discuss methods and ways of committing suicide and an online community in which to exchange advice with. Some individuals have gone onto commit suicide or have serious suicide attempts following the access of such information. However, Westerland (2011) also points out the accessibility of these sites affords opportunities to reach suicidal individuals to offer support.

Such websites and content exist readily online and is freely able to be accessed via search engines. Accessing imagery and advice around mental health issues was something that concerned the young people in my study who discussed seeing images of cutting online:

Charlotte: There was this thing on Instagram, I was looking through the hashtags and I accidentally pressed one and it was called like cutting and... I did not mean to like go on it...I like...saw it and I was just like really scarred for life and I just did not like it, because I did not realise, it was just like these people who had cut like, their like arms and stuff and it is not nice

From this Charlotte had come across these troubling images through following a hashtag on Instagram. Seeing images of self-harm on the internet, and on Instagram by following the cutting hashtag has impacted the children and young people, they

found it worrying that they saw such content and raised it as an issue. Furthermore, a trend such as 'cutting for Zayn' when Zayn left one-direction was discussed by Amelia:

Amelia: There was like this one thing on the news at the time when, Zayn left One Direction people cutting themselves and like harming themselves...and posting about it

This may give children a view of mental health and wellbeing that is less healthy. Furthermore, exposure to such troubling behaviours may make them become normative in the eyes of the young people and therefore they are more likely to also commit such acts. However, they also express here that they felt uncomfortable with witnessing this through these online images thereby showing some demonstration of the risks. It is therefore acknowledged that the young people themselves are seeing this as problematic they are seeing it as a negative thing that they are seeing such content online; they are aware of this as a negative consequence and recognise that seeing such imagery is uncomfortable for them.

However, despite the negative implications of the digital landscape on children's mental health and wellbeing it also provides protective factors in terms of children using digital technologies. Firstly, how children are using digital technology is an inherently social exercise, they collaborate with peers through a social sphere and space. But what they do with technologies offers many social practices. Such as social media, playing with friends, online gaming, sharing memes and shared cultural understandings. This builds a sense of community and shared experience amongst peers; this can promote a sense of belonging for individuals. This sense of belonging and friendship that can be enhanced through digital technologies is a protective factor in that there is a shared understanding of the issues. They can support one another with navigating this field and there can be a peer support network to foster this support.

All of this can mean that while the digital landscape whilst it may be challenging to children's wellbeing it can also be a source of positive influence on children's wellbeing. We need to move towards an understanding and appreciation of digital wellbeing as a concept that is promoted to children and young people. We need to move towards children feeling as though the positives outweigh the negatives and they feel they are in a place whereby they can manage their online experiences or feel able to seek support when it feels unmanageable. Part of this children feeling as though their online activities are in balance with other aspects of their lives and that they feel empowered to manage and mitigate their own risks. Chapter two looks at resilience factors in more detail and how children in the study showed demonstrated agency in how they managed their interactions online and the sense of belonging to a community is also discussed further in chapter three.

5.3. Conclusion: Risky Business: A summary.

This chapter has discussed the digital landscape as a potentially 'risky business'. It has discussed a wide range of risks that are typically associated with children's engagement with digital worlds. This chapter has discussed the 'social evils' of digital risk: pornography, sexting, and cyberbullying. These three main risks have invaded the public discourse through mechanisms of moral panic and serious concern for children's welfare. This concern for children's welfare has been born from a desire to protect children from harm, and particularly to protect children's innocence. As has been discussed the construction of childhood as a time of innocence has a large role to play in the shaping of this public discourse. This has dominated thinking, but along with innocence comes a construction of passivity and ignorance. This is acutely reflected in the discourses around children's sexual expression such as through the

accessing of pornography or engagement in the practices of sexting. The new sociology of childhood argues that children are agentic. This is reflected in these findings from discussions of children and young people around their ideas of risk online. Overall, the children and young people had a clear understanding of potential risks online, and an awareness of how to protect themselves. How the children show resilience and self-regulation in protecting themselves is further discussed in the next chapter.

Children's perceptions of digital risks are, however, sometimes in conflict with adult-led perceptions. And this where protection of children and young people becomes the overriding rhetoric when confronted with this disparity. This does not mean to say that children have less understanding of risk than their adult counterparts but that this perception of their risk is different. There are some inconsistencies in children's discourses of risk; for example, some of the children discussed their views that Facebook was riskier than Instagram. Facebook as a social media platform is generally more 'locked down' than Instagram, on Facebook people will only see (aside adverts) posts from friends they have added, pages they have liked, and groups they belong to. On Instagram however, while they may see posts from friends they have added, but they can also engage with a hashtag, and this can be it is much more open free, no matter what their privacy settings. Hashtag technology affords a way of coding or seeing group responses from a range of sources. So, a person can click a hashtag and pull up all responses that have included this hashtag. That means that the person can see a multitude of posts from diverse sources. One of the groups found that by following a hashtag they found content they deemed was 'inappropriate' the content related to self-harm. But what this demonstrates is that children's perceptions of risks may not always reflect the reality around this. Furthermore, we can question where

these ideas are coming from, on reflection one potential cause of this disconnect between the idea of Facebook being risky but Instagram is not, could be from adult's perceptions. Adults are the ones who seek to protect children and provide guidance in the navigation of digital realms, this can be through parental regulation or discussion, or in educational contexts through online safety education. Perhaps children have been warned about Facebook by adults, as adults typically have a deeper understanding of the functionality of Facebook as they are more likely to use it and therefore the risks that it may present. Further, as UK Safer Internet Centre (2019) demonstrates that children are more likely to have an Instagram account, rather than a Facebook account; it is the fastest growing social network among children and young people.

The risks online are many and varied, and whilst public discourse has focused on the big 'social evils' due to the moral outrage and condemnation this causes, what this chapter has shown is that in discussion with children and young people they do not necessarily see it that way. What is perceived to be risky is variable and reflects the complexities of human experience and engagement in the vast digital landscape. Children expressed concerns over, bank accounts being hacked, being kicked off game servers, harmful comments, definitions of which were disparate, ranging from friends falling out, to what would amount to severe cyberbullying. They expressed concern over online stranger danger, people who lie online, accessing inappropriate content, and digital footprints. This diversity of understanding regarding the multifaceted nature of risk comes into the fore and demonstrates children's agency over their online worlds, they demonstrate that they have capacity for understanding and maturity in how they perceive risk. From this it can be inferred that children and young people have deeper understanding of risk-taking behaviours online than they

are typically credited for, they have a deeper engagement with the risk narrative than is considered by discourses around innocence, passivity, and protectionism. This knowledge is agentic for children and indicates a power that they have in managing their own risk and acts as a resilience factor. The perceptions of risk evaluated here demonstrate an evolving capacity and understanding of online risk for children which can provide a firm foundation from which to build into resilience and protective factors which are discussed within the next chapter.

6. Chapter 6: “It’s not all bad”: Resilience and Regulation

6.1. Introduction to chapter:

This chapter further explores children and young people’s responses from the focus groups and interviews in relation to their experiences of risk in the digital landscape. Chapter six discussed the risks inherent to the digital landscape, and this chapter builds upon this further by discussing how children and young mitigate these risks through resilience and regulatory factors.

These resilience factors include young people’s own self-regulation and agency. Further resilience factors that are discussed includes parental regulation; how parents may be taking a role in help children to manage their online behaviours, and the young people’s perceptions of their parent’s involvement in their digital landscapes. Finally, this chapter evaluates findings relating to children’s digital media literacy, particularly their knowledge and understanding of mechanisms to protect themselves online and consider how they use this knowledge to protect themselves when navigating the tricky waters of the digital landscape.

What is argued throughout this chapter is that children and young people are inherently agentic in their dealings online. These ‘digital natives’ do possess the knowledge they need to protect themselves online. Alongside continuous support from online safety awareness campaigns, young people still need adult support in navigating these fields. Whilst they possess the required knowledge, they do not always act on it. By having non-judgemental adult support from parents and teachers, young people can feel supported, empowered, and understood when engaging with digital technologies.

There is sometimes a missing link between young people's knowledge and behaviours. Further peer support can be a protective and resilience factor, this may be due to the young people feeling that they can rely on their peers having more understanding about the issues that they face online and have solutions to fix it. Again, this speaks to young people's agency in dealing with issues. Therefore, this chapter establishes that children and young people are capable and resilient in dealing with the risky digital landscape. Online safety campaigns, and adult interactions should therefore focus on ways of positively empowering children and young people to make informed choices about their interactions in the digital landscape. There needs to be opportunity for non-judgmental support from adults, so that children have somewhere to turn to when things get risky or tricky with their online interactions.

6.2. Agency and self-regulation

This subsection explores the sub themes related to agency and self-regulation. How children self-reported that they watched their time online, and how they dealt with content or activity they viewed as problematic. From the data, children were more likely to 'self-regulate' or manage their own issues amongst themselves, with support from friendship networks, rather than report to adults.

Within this sub theme it is discussed how children regulate their own time online, and what they do when they come across issues online. Demonstrated here is that children are agentic in how they approach any issues they come across online and they use their agency to protect themselves online. This includes when they come across something they find troubling they recognise it as disconcerting and takes steps to avoid it in the future. This is therefore, building on the last chapter which recognised

that children and young people have a good understanding of the risks and can take time to protect themselves wherever necessary. When they come across something they perceive as risky or problematic they would often confide in their friends in the first instance. This demonstrates self-regulation amongst peer groups, whereby they will rely on one another for support.

As discussed within the literature review children's agency is something that is often underestimated, children are agentic beings but perhaps their agency is portrayed differently than adults. The young people took ownership of their experiences within digital landscapes and demonstrated an ability to critically reflect on their behaviours and interactions online. This demonstrates the inherent ability to be agentic. In their ability to reflect critically on their behaviours they can then take actions to protect themselves. This is a powerful ability to be able to do this and protect themselves. Here we can see the dichotomy between innocence and agency in action. On the one hand if children are innocent, they are perceived by society as unknowing and passive. This means that they have a naiveté compared to adults. They do not yet possess knowledge of the world, and this lack of knowledge makes them vulnerable to the risks of digital technology. However, in the new sociology of childhood (as discussed within the literature review), it is recognised that children *do* have agency in making decisions and participating in wider society. To use this agency young people, need to have required knowledge in order to fully participate. They cannot be both passive and innocent, and active and agentic at the same time. This contradiction in terms plays out in the media, and in society in general in how children are discussed. Furthermore, this inherently contradicts with Mark Prensky's notion of digital natives. Digital natives are children of this generation who have grown up with digital technologies as a part of their lives. Prensky argues this makes them 'expert' in digital technologies

compared to their adult counterparts, who are deemed 'digital immigrants'. In recognising children's expertise in digital technologies, we must consider that their expertise leads to agentic behaviour. The more children understand digital landscapes, the more they can take ownership for their self-protection and regulation online. This also speaks to the generational digital divide that Prensky argues, that there is a gulf between young people's understanding and expertise and adults' immigrants' status as 'newbies' or 'noobs' in internet speak to the world of digital technologies. If we accept that this gulf is there, then no wonder that children and young people rely on self-regulation and peer support when navigating the online world.

One such example of this self-regulation was provided in this exchange with these year seven boys. Here they were discussing online games and who they play with online, they discussed that they play online with friends, but online gaming affords the opportunity for socialisation with people they know as well as people they do not:

William: [A good thing is...] you can socialise? And talk to other people that you do not know? And the bad thing is, some people will like to ask you for personal information.

Researcher: So if anyone was asking for your personal information what would you...do?

William: I would like, block them and then like kick them from the party.

From this discussion these boys particularly enjoy playing online games. They discussed that they enjoyed the ability to play with other people remotely via the internet and use the social functions within the game to interact with their peers. When asked who they play with online they mostly discussed playing with their friends,

people they know in the 'real world.' For these boys online gaming is mostly just a mechanism and extension of their offline lives. This functionality allows that they can play with their friends remotely and be playing the same game at the same time. For these boys this was a vital part of their experiences and interactions as friends. In the past computer games lacked this social functionality and so young people would visit each other's homes to play a game together. This is now no longer necessary as the internet has heralded a new generation of games such as Fortnite and Minecraft (as these boys discuss), this new generation of games affords the functionality of allowing children to interact remotely. This is the same social practice as playing together by technology facilitates that this can be done via the internet. This is discussed further in chapter seven. For these boys they would not view this as at all problematic. However as discussed within the last chapter there is a risk with online playing that the chat functionality can be abused by those who wish to do harm to young people such as online groomers, or that this social aspect will expose children and young people to 'adult' behaviours and/or content that may not be deemed appropriate to them. As discussed in the last chapter this 'exposure' is troubling to society's conceptions and perceptions of childhood innocence.

However, what the above discussions demonstrate is that these young people have the required knowledge to protect themselves from 'digital stranger danger'. They have taken the precaution of only interacting with people they know through online gaming. They do not interact with strangers. However, as William posits online gaming platforms offers the opportunity to make new friends and interact with others, but when doing so some precautions are required. He draws a line in if they wish to draw out any personal information from him, he says he would take the steps of blocking and removing the player that crosses his personal boundary of requesting personal

information. This form of self-regulation and setting of personal boundaries by William demonstrates some abilities and agency in protecting himself online, therefore drawing from his knowledge and experiences to protect himself. Note that he did not say he would report to an adult, such as parent or teacher. He is taking the steps required for self-regulation and not relying on adults in this circumstance.

In discussion regarding YouTube William also expressed resilience in discussing so called hate comments:

William: when I like, get like hate comments I like delete them.

Researcher: why do you think people put things like that on there?

William: Because I sometimes use like this editing, app called Viva Video, and then the person that commented say really Viva Video, it is bad, and then, and I just deleted it.

Researcher: Ok, so was it hurtful or...?

William: No just shrugged it off and delete it.

This comment demonstrates William's resilience in dealing with 'hate comments' on his YouTube videos. He is showing that whilst he puts himself out there by publishing YouTube videos, he does not let it bother him if he received negative responses to this. He simply deletes and 'shrugs it off'. This is in contradiction to the perceptions that children are damaged by hurtful comments and content online, however, does not account for differing levels of 'hurtful'. This shows that William does not take such comments to heart and cannot take it personally. Simply deletes it and moves on.

James (age 13) expresses YouTube as a community changing because of haters, and his active approach which is to avoid the comments to avoid the 'drama':

It went from being a nice place where we could share things and be happy, to a place where it is just hate and ranting, and people just getting grumpy, that is all it has becomes now... depression.

William (age 12) goes on to discuss this in relation to social media as follows:

William: If I ever get like a bad message I delete them? And then block them. Because like I only use Instagram for like my friends and WhatsApp too.

Here he discusses how he would act if confronted with bad messages or hate messages via social media. And James is discussing how hate or 'grumpy' comments has ruined a community on YouTube. One protective factor William is discussing here is that he only uses these social media for his friends. People he knows in 'real life'. So, he states that if he gets a negative message, he would delete them and block the person sending the message as he would view that this would be in contrast to the notion that he uses these applications with friends only. So here he is demonstrating that he is able to be resilient in how he deals with these issues. He is able to use his knowledge of the affordances of these applications in terms of media literacy and takes steps to block those who he would deem are doing him harm online. By taking an active approach to protecting himself by restricting his interactions to just those he knows in person, he is showing self-regulation and resilience in managing his interactions.

Evelyn, (age 12):

Have you read about Miranda Sings, and she went on and did a song about the haters? So, she is like haters back off and stuff like that in the, in the video and made it really funny...

Here Evelyn discussed the response to 'haters' and making it a funny reaction to online haters. This was discussed as a resilience factor in resisting the online hate comments that are part of the digital landscape.

The focus groups also explored the case study of Louise, this fictional case study depicts a Facebook post by 'Louise' in which she posts a photo of her and her cat, and has some hurtful comments placed on it. The focus group participants were presented the case study of Louise when the discussions became focused on hurtful comments and/or cyberbullying. They were asked to response to the case study and state what they would recommend she do (see appendix two).

The below exchange demonstrates how the boys in this focus group responded.

Noah: Tell a responsible adult.

William: Yeah, tell an adult or tell a trusted adult, and like not someone who you do like, not know.

Researcher: Ok, so tell an adult, yeah...anything else you should do?

Noah: Do not reply because then they are actually getting your details.

Researcher: Ok, so these are people that she knew, these were her friends that she knew at school, and then said these hurtful things do you think she should just not reply ignore it or...?

Noah: Ignore them and then...report them

William: Report them for like...hateful comments and then...delete the comments

Researcher: What would you say it was the first time they had done it...would you report them straight away or would you try and talk to them?

William: I would like ask them why they had done it

Noah: I would want to see if they do it

William: Yeah and just like wait for another, mean comment from them...and then if it gets like even worse you could like report them.

Noah: They might say like, 'why did you block us we are friends?'

From this it can be seen that these young people show some resilience factors in how they would approach and deal with such a scenario as expressed in the fictional case study. Firstly, they start off with saying that 'Louise' should tell an adult. They use the phrase 'responsible adult'. This suggests that they are repeating the advice they have encountered through online safety education, perhaps at school or maybe from their parents. This is a long excerpt from the transcripts, but I felt it was important to include it, so the full context of the conversation is clear. During this initial exchange I got the impression that they were trying to give me what they thought may have been the 'correct answer'. So, I probed a little more with follow up questions and scenarios, I wanted to get a sense of whether they would actually go straight to telling an adult, or whether they would find a different way of dealing with it. In this exchange I was aware of my own positionality as an adult asking them these questions and felt that the young people felt they needed to 'perform' and adhere to the guidelines they had been taught to give the 'correct answer'. So, with a bit more probing by asking well what they would do if it was a friend with these hurtful comments, I felt I got a bit more of a sense of the

reality of the situation. Charlotte (age 12) provides a further example of giving an answer about blocking or reporting cyberbullies.

Charlotte: I think she should like...tell someone at her school? Like someone she is close to or a teacher, and her parents and like, maybe like block them because like, they are just, being mean about her

As also echoed by James (age 13):

She could always report people, and block them

Cyberbullying is something that would usually occur in friendship groups, and so this line of questioning got to the young people's responses in this area.

Mia: I had something similar because my friend she, started having a go at me for some reason because I, she did not like someone that I liked, but I was not going to take sides because I like, like both of them, so I just friended both of them and she just started saying, why cannot you just be friends with me...when we were having the argument it was on Snapchat but, I was, just being really calm about it and not saying anything like nasty back just trying to, like, keep it cool and not, like, saying anything bad back because then it makes it worse and then it would be harder for her and me to say sorry.

Mia (age 12) her provides an example of a falling out with a friend and the argument taking place over social media which could escalate into a cyberbullying issue. However, she is here explaining how she took protective and steps by not saying anything 'nasty' back as she wanted to be able to make up with her friend again afterwards. Friendships are particularly important to young people, it is through friendship they can develop a sense of belonging to peer culture, as discussed in chapter seven, in today's society identity and friendship formation is taking place through the digital landscape, and this is true of when friends have arguments as well. However, if it escalates beyond a falling out this can turn into a Cyberbullying situation.

Oliver (age 13) argues that you should not delete conversations but keep them in case you ever need evidence. This shows another protective mechanism the young people are using to protect themselves from difficulties online. Whilst they may not report issues straight away, they may save conversation in case it escalates. Keeping evidence for when needed, when reporting or telling an adult becomes necessary:

People say you do not ever delete conversations you have with people, because if something happens in that conversation you can save it. And you have evidence (Oliver, age 13)

From the below exchange there was a threshold of where young people felt that the bullying or comments should be reported. This discussion was from a year 8 focus group on the cyberbullying case study:

Researcher: Ok...because these are people Louise knows, do you think she should comment back and say something?

Emily: No because she could then be drawn into it, she could be part, she could be part of it, they could have her to blame

Researcher: So, if you were, friends with Louise would you tell her to report it straight away or would you tell her to ignore it, and see if it goes away.

Abigail: ...I would probably say report it, but it might just be one small thing then it can get bigger

Emily: Yeah...I would probably have to wait till there is something, really valid, that you should really really report I mean this like...they are not very nice comments, but I would...you cannot really get told off for just saying that...something else really has to go on before, I think.

From this discussion it is evident that there is a threshold whereby they young people would report the actions of cyberbullying. Exactly what this threshold is, was not clearly expressed. But there was a sense that the bullying would have to get 'worse' before it was reported to adults. Thus, young people are dealing with these lower levels of instances without adult support and help. They therefore need to be empowered and their agency respected in their abilities to be able to report instances of bullying. But as stated by Evelyn (age 12):

I think the funny thing is that, on phones people can block them but in real life they cannot [laughs] they cannot suddenly press a button and say I am going to block you, you cannot talk to me

She makes a distinction between the ability to block a person online but not in 'real life'. This demonstrates a view that cyberbullying is different as you are able to block the person, however, as has been explored and argued by the young people that could escalate the situation or 'give-in' to the bullies.

As can be seen by the responses to these discussions above and below generally the young people showed they would take their own actions; beyond just telling an adult, they would delete and block the harmful comment. But if it was a friend and it was the first time, they did this they would confront the friend as to why they were saying such things. This shows a form of social regulation in young people managing their friendships and social interactions. This is a key part of socialisation as managing social relationships and interactions is key part of growing up. This demonstrates that whilst these interactions are occurring online, they are not that different from everyday lived experiences of adolescence in negotiating and responding to friendships. One

final aspect noted by Noah is that if you were to block your friends, they would wonder why you had blocked them. This demonstrates the conundrum of advice that young people often get about online safety. When confronting online bullies or hurtful comments, the adult response from both schools and parents is often to either switch off the device, block the perpetrator or walk away from the interaction. What is often not appreciated is that this online interaction is salient to young people's lives, friendships, and social interactions. It is not as simple as switch it off and walk away or block that person. This may in fact cause more problems as Noah notes they would wonder why you blocked them; this indeed may cause further confrontation. So, if young people do not see this adult response as a viable solution to the issue, it is no wonder that they would then seek alternative solutions and regulate these issues themselves.

These responses to the fictional case study were also echoed in more depth in a Year 7 girl's focus group:

Olivia: I am probably going to say you should talk to someone and report it, but that is what they always say to do but that is not what you do in real life.

Researcher: What do you do in real life?

Emma: In real life you comment saying can you not...that is mean...deal with it if you are going to be mean do it somewhere else.

Olivia: I do not understand why these people are being so mean it is just her and her cat it is quite cute...I like that

Emma: I would probably even though it was really cute, I would probably have to delete the photo, or I do not know if you can on Facebook...make it so the comments are disabled but I do not know whether you can do that...

Researcher: But if you could, you would tell her to take it down

Emma: Yeah.

Olivia: Probably tell someone.

Researcher: So, who should she tell do you think?

Sophia: She should probably tell ChildLine.

Olivia: Yeah maybe...But say you knew these people...in life...people who are commenting mean comments, I would probably go up and confront them if I knew them and say why did you do this

Researcher: In the case study these are her friends on Facebook commenting on this...

Emma: Or you could kill them with kindness and say to Francesca you could say oh my god what a loser cat probably only friend she has and be like yeah, the cat is my friend unlike you...

This demonstrates some further resilience factors in that the girls discuss how they would support 'Louise' in this scenario, of particular interest is Olivia's response here, she says you should report to the adult, but immediately recognises this is not what happens in 'real life'. In reality they would deal with this themselves to regulate their own behaviours or that of their peer group. This echoes the boys' initial responses, I felt that here Olivia is perceiving that 'tell an adult' is the 'right' answer but is also recognises that this is not actually what she would do. Interestingly from Emma, she says that she would take the photo down. This shows self-regulation in considering what she would put out to the world via social media and would self-adjust based on the perceptions and negative reception that is potentially received. Whilst this acts as a protective factor for an individual perspective, it does not address the underlying

bullying behaviour. This is something they later go on to make suggestions about in regard to confronting the person or as Emma posits as 'killing them with kindnesses.

Further evidence of children's resilience factors comes in the form of their response to finding things online they deem inappropriate. Such as the following example:

Noah: Once I searched Bangkok in Thailand it is the capital, and then it came up with um like this website saying how to find... [Trails off]

Researcher: Ok [laughs] so it came up with something very rude, yeah oh dear, what did you do.

Noah: [Shrugs] I just, ignored it [laughs] and carried on finding what I needed.

Here Noah shows awareness of the inappropriateness of the search results and just carried on looking for what he intended. Whilst public discourses would suggest that it is problematic that Noah was 'exposed' to such content online and that this could be damaging to childhood as a time of innocence as was discussed within the previous chapter. However, Noah recognises that this was inappropriate and takes steps himself to 'shrug it off'. Therefore, this demonstrates some resilience in dealing with such issues and that this would not have a detrimental effect on Noah's experiences online. Furthermore, this demonstrates agency in Noah being in control of the situation online, in control of what he chooses to engage with and chooses not to engage with. This contrasts with the perception of childhood passivity which is brought about due to the notion of children being innocent and 'corrupted' by the danger adult world. These same aspects are demonstrated by William but in relation to witnessing offensive comments online:

William: I've seen..., some like offensive videos and comments... someone called someone the N word...and then they might feel like they are another species like an alien, some people could like stand up, and say that is racist and they could like report them.

Researcher: So, you might see racist things...ok so if you came across something like that what you would do?

William: Basically like, not respond I just like tell someone I know? And like let them deal with it.

As demonstrates from this conversation William is discussing the aspects of the digital landscape whereby hurtful and hate comments are seen. Here William defines those comments as offensive and give the example of racism as an example of an offensive comment. Here is also shown some resilience in saying that he would stand up and say, 'that's racist' and report them. This resilience means that firstly he recognises this as an offensive action online, and secondly would take steps to avoid this and protect the person this was aimed at by reporting them. This peer protection is a protective factor for the young people as they look out for one another and seek to create the digital landscape as a safe space for teenage interactions.

These responses and 'standing up' to cyberbullying as a resilience factor were also demonstrated when discussing the 'Cyberbullying' case study (see appendix two) with this group of year seven girls:

Researcher: Ok, so in relation to Louise, most of you are saying that she should, tell an adult or, or block the person, if it was actually happening to you is that what you immediately do, or would you do something else?

Charlotte: I would probably reply to them and say something mean...just being honest

Mia: Yeah, I think, I would, I would not, straight away block them because sometimes people can have moody spells and just say something and, not mean it. I said something to my mum the other day because, obviously we are becoming teenagers now and we get like, teenagery...but I would not block them straight away because I feel like then you are giving in to the bullying letting them have a reaction because, because if, someone is being mean to you and then you react to it they are just going to do it more. So, you can block them and stuff, but I would not, I think I would just say something back saying something like I am not going to listen to what you are saying because, I do not care what you say and just, not talk to them again.

From this Charlotte and Mia argue that you would not immediately block the person, particularly Mia is recognising that it could be the person does not mean the hurtful comments. But both are suggesting that they would reply and say something back. Charlotte is more direct about this; this may be a protective factor to respond and retaliate. Mia implies it would be a form of weakness to block someone, a way of reacting that maybe the bully is hoping for but responding is a show of strength. This is demonstrative of agentic behaviour they young people are taking action and control over their own lives and issues. They are showing resilience in dealing with such issues by trying to solve them for themselves. However, if they are arguing back, it is clear to see how an online argument like this could escalate and if the young people have given some comments back, as 'tit for tat', then perhaps they will be more reticent to seek parental or adult support if it did escalate to a level that was felt unacceptable to them.

Further examples of experiences come from another year 7 girl's focus group:

Olivia: I have like a really weird situation where I was...playing a game online...And I had been hacked but they the hackers were just like..."this is not worth hacking"...because I had just started playing the game, and I found an abusive comment, and I just reported it blocked it and I left and I was like ok, I was not particularly put out by that because the site had kind of been going downhill for a couple of years now...but I was just confused, for a week

Ava: One of my friends...on Instagram this, person, kept on pressing to follow her, and she had, rejected it like, five times, and it, she kept on doing it? So, like after about a month she blocked it and then reported it to the police.

Here Olivia and Ava discuss two different issues, offensive comments via an online gaming platform, and social media. Both have demonstrated agency in their capacities or knowledge in dealing with such issues. Olivia discusses her experience with an online game whereby her account was hacked, and she had an abusive comment. As stated, she reported the comments and hacking and left the game. This is a good example of her using the affordances and functions designed to protect users in order to take steps to protect herself and her online interactions. She says she was not put out by it as the quality of the game had deteriorated anyway, so on this occasion she was able to walk away from the activity. However, she has demonstrated knowledge and self-protection in her ability to respond to the issue and resilience in it not bothering her. Ava gives a different example from a friend on social media. This time an unwanted follower was rejected from her friend's account. But as this was not effective

was eventually blocked and reported to police. This shows good awareness of the issues and demonstrates steps to take to avoid this becoming a worse issue. These two examples demonstrate that these young people have the required knowledge to protect themselves online. Knowledge helps foster children's agency, with the required knowledge of how to protect themselves by using block functions they can take agentic steps of self-protection. Therefore, they are empowered through this knowledge for resilience against online risk.

6.2.1. Inappropriate content

One of the 'social evils' of the digital landscape that was discussed in chapter five was young people accessing content that is deemed inappropriate. This is content that is thought of to be adult in nature and examples include content that is sexual or violent. Discourses of childhood innocence seek to protect children from exposure to adult content deeming it being a corrupting influence on the child, and by extension the status of childhood itself. This is something that was echoed by the young people who came across content they deemed inappropriate, Emily and Abigail discussed in the year 8 focus group young people accessing pornography, their full quotes are in chapter five and demonstrated they disapproved of the practice of accessing pornography. It is worth reiterating here also in the context of agency and self-regulation. Here Emily and Abigail are stating that there is a 'kudos' that some express in accessing online pornography. But crucially they problematise this access to pornography and the kudos or 'cool' that might be associated with it. In problematising it they are demonstrating knowledge and by extension agency in actively seeking to

avoid such content. Therefore, they are empowered to protect themselves from this type of content.

Further discussions with the young people including discussion around other things they found inappropriate online and what they would do:

Amelia (age 11): If you accidentally come across it and you are like, oh my god once you see it you can never unsee it and it is just like always there

Mia (age 12): I like report it and I just go off and do not, ever like go near that sort of stuff again

Charlotte (age 12): I just ignore it and go onto like a different picture because like... a hashtag it comes up with all these pictures that are like linked to that? And like what they have put in called hashtag like, someone naked or something it is like ugh!

From this conversation as part of a year 7 focus group, these girls were finding issue when coming across such imagery they viewed as inappropriate online; here they refer to imagery that shows nudity specifically. They viewed this as an issue because they viewed that once you saw it you could not 'unsee it'. Suggesting an awareness of the permanency of exposure to such content. However, in recognising this as a potential pitfall of the digital landscape they are demonstrating an awareness, and this promotes their agency in making an active choice of what to engage with or not as part of the digital age. This was illustrated by Emily (age 13) who came across inappropriate content but sought to ignore and avoid it:

Ads will come up saying date this sexy Asians and stuff like that and like, and say yeah, I do not click on it at all I just leave it as it is but it, not really something I want to be looking at, at my age.

Here she is showing awareness of it not being suitable or appropriate for her age, and actively avoiding clicking on the adverts. She is making a conscious decision to avoid this content, thus protecting herself from it.

Furthermore, another example of content that participants would come across they did not want to see, comes from Charlotte (age 12):

Yeah it is like when people remove earwax from their ears, and it is like why are you recommending this to me... I was just watching a video on how to do a French braid and now you are saying I want to watch someone getting earwax pulled out of their ears and then you press on that little button...I am not interested in this and then it is like ok we will tune your recommendations, and I am like I hope you better, I do not want to watch that [laughs]

Charlotte's example here is slightly different in that it is not content that is considered problematic as part of the moral panic around children's access to inappropriate content online. However, what this example does demonstrate is that young people class a wide range of content as unwanted for viewing, in this case earwax videos. This example shows that Charlotte has the knowledge and skills necessary to exercise agency and take steps to avoid seeing unwanted content. She can click to say this is not wanted to be viewed and this can prevent her from seeing similar things in the future.

In chapter five examples provided from the young people around content they did not want to see included content around animal cruelty, and racist abuse. They therefore took active steps to avoid such content online and/or report such instances where they came across it. Again, this is indicative of an agentic resilience promoting behaviours in how young people are taking actions to protect themselves online, demonstrating self-regulation and self-protection.

6.2.2. Sexting case study

During the focus groups I discussed with the young people the issue of sexting. Sexting was discussed earlier as being one of the 'social evils' of the digital age that is often reported and made problematic in its reporting in mainstream media. It is the practice of sharing explicit messages, usually self-produced images. I discussed this using a fictional case study (see appendix two) this showed two characters (Susan and Tom) one is asking the other for a topless selfie. I asked the young people what advice they would give to the characters in the case study. I kept this to the case study discussion rather than asking them to report their own sexting experiences (or not) as this kept the discussion more abstract, less personal, but gave the young people a safe space to express their views of this topic.

From their responses that discussed below and previously discussed in chapter five the young people were overwhelming against Susan sending Tom a topless selfie. The various girls' groups were very quick to dismiss the request, and often suggesting Susan ditch Tom in the process. Some of the boys were less quick to dismiss the request, which was an interesting gender difference to observe. More is discussed below:

Just say no and it does not really matter if he dumps you, because you do not want to take your top off and send a picture to him and... he might share it with everyone... (Amelia, age 12)

Personally, if someone asked me to do that, I would not go out with them anymore, because they are expecting for you to do something that you really should not be expecting them to do... You do not know where it will go really, like anyone could get hold of that photo like if someone hacks into his account and he did not even do anything someone could still get it (Olivia, age 12)

He could send it to his mates...and be like oh look...it is Susan's boobs! (Mia, age 12)

He is going to send it to in a group chat to his mates like look I am well hard I got this girl to send me a topless photo...then everyone is going to see her topless and she does not need to be seen by all these boys topless! (Harriet, age 12)

My advice to Susan would be...do not do it, Tom is kind of an idiot...he is not worth it, he kind of wants her but...for the wrong reasons yeah. (Evelyn, age 12)

I... would probably say to her that just, you just need to back away and I would just explain to him that if you really loved this girl, and you would not actually then force her to do anything she was uncomfortable with? And you would just love her for what you know of her? And I think someone who is 13 and 14 is barely going to have a relationship...four months is not a long time (Ava, 12)

Why would you do that! (Sophia, 11)

If he loved her, he probably should not have said it in the first place, if she wanted to do it she would do it herself (Ava, 12)

From the above examples the young people were very clear that they felt that it would not be good for Susan to share this image with Tom, and she would be better off without him. They discuss saying no or dumping him as a defence mechanism against this request and are strongly clear that they should not send such images. Some of the main reasons cited were around the image being shared beyond the original recipient. This shows clear awareness of the issues and the steps taken to protect themselves. It is particularly useful to consider here also, as a way that young people might exercise agency or self-regulation in protecting themselves when issues such as sexting arise. There were also responses regarding the future reputation damage and regretting it. This shows a sense of self-regulation in order to protect themselves from this in the future:

I think people do that not being rude it is just to get a boy...people sometimes do rude pictures to get a boy and the boys...they are not worth it, yeah, and then, then it becomes awkward for them when they are older, they will realise what they have done and they will regret it
(Evelyn, age 12)

Despite that as discussed for the boys they were generally less definitive on being against sexting such as the year 8 boys (age 13) who discussed:

James [shrugs] it's up to her really, she can if she wants...

Oliver: This feels a bit uncomfortable...

Benjamin: I think you need to be at least about...

Oliver: 15, 16, 17, 18...

Benjamin: 17 and over.

James: I think its fine, maybe not if you're younger.

From this exchange James was less against the idea of it, showing that there was a difference here in how the groups responded. Most of the boys here felt it was not appropriate for their current age, but a bit older would be ok. So saw that they should self-regulate based on age. Whereas the girls mostly said it was completely unacceptable and Susan should not do it at all. During the conversation with these year 8 boys, James revealed that he has a girlfriend and the other boys started asking him questions about this, he got embarrassed so I redirected the conversation to ask what advice they would have for 'Tom', Oliver said....

Why they hell are you asking for this! Wash your brain with some soap man, that is not on... you have serious problems.

This shows a stronger view that it is not something he felt they should be doing. So, whilst there was a variety of responses, what was clear from the young people that they had an awareness of the issues and showed agency in making informed choices as to how to respond if in that scenario. Age also factored into Amelia's (age 12) response:

I feel if you are like in your teens, you like want to like have a boyfriend and stuff but...if you go out with an older boy I kind of feel like you are putting yourself in a slightly more, kind of wary relationship?...when you are young and you have got an older boyfriend I think it is a bit, iffy and stuff.

She took umbrage to the age difference and the age of the characters in the case study in general, but there is a sense here, like the boys group described above that it would be OK at an older age. So, for now at their current ages, it is a protective factor to avoid such actions and make that agentic decision.

Thus, showing that whilst young people will be making decisions for themselves, and when it can sometimes go 'wrong' with images being shared beyond the original recipient, what young people may need is support and not judgement in order to be empowered to protect themselves in their interactions.

6.2.3. Self-regulation of usage

In chapter five it was established that some of the young people identified themselves as being 'addicted' to forms of technology. Some said they were addicted to going on their tablets or addicted to online gaming. However, despite saying they were addicted, many of the young people showed resilience and resistance to this effectively regulating their own usage and screentime or finding other activities:

William (12): I can basically live without it...technically, I would just like go on with my normal routine like, like talk with my friends and, have a bounce on the trampoline

Emma (12): I would not say I was addicted, like I can stop myself, but I would say I am a bit like, let us just see what is on here then,

There is therefore some balance in how the young people are interacting online. They can balance their time. This also speaks to screentime narratives explored in chapter five. The young people were able to regulate their time and balance with other activities:

Olivia (12) on a school day probably an hour, on a weekend probably more [Olivia laughs]

Emma (12): Yeah, on a school day, it depends if I have got homework...if it is on a day that I do not have homework I will probably get home and use it for an hour, but if it is a really nice day might go outside instead.

Here they are prioritising other activities, showing self-regulation including outside activity:

Sophia (11): But when the weather is nice, I would rather go outside more

This demonstrates that young people are capable and resilient in regulating their time effectively and making priorities for this. That being said they may still need some guidance and support in managing this.

Another area whereby the young people regulated themselves was in what content they opted to put 'out there' in the digital landscape.

Olivia (12): No...I do not even have a YouTube account, I know that someone at my old primary school they used to do like a ton of videos but they used to always like delete them because they were not happy with them but they have, one channel and they did not know like the password to it so they could not get into...that is quite embarrassing because they are quite young in it

Olivia and others as discussed in chapter five regulated their own behaviours because of fear of judgement. The above shows how once content is in the digital landscape it

can become unmanageable, as seen by digital footprints discussed in chapter five.

Ava (12) reflects on this, when thinking about whether to start a YouTube channel:

Yeah, I do not want to do... I kind of want to do it because it sounds fun, but I do not want to then regret what I have then put online, later.

Here Olivia and Ava show resilience in resisting publishing content in the digital landscape they are using their knowledge of the issue of creating a footprint to consider whether they would want to put themselves out there in that way. This shows that they are able to critically reflect and consider the consequences, making an informed decision and thus, demonstrating agency.

For all the young people they expressed that the digital landscape was of vital importance to them, reasons cited were entertainment, communication, and peer culture. This is discussed more in chapter seven. However, there were examples where the importance of their devices or online access was put into perspective. One example comes from Noah (12), who describes when his sister broke his Nintendo DS games console:

Researcher: What did you do Noah when, your sister broke it?

Noah: My sister was four when she, um when she fell over and I went, oh are you alright, and as she landed, I heard a crack, and then suddenly she started crying because she landed on her face. But my DS screen was cracked.

Researcher: Oh dear, so did you feel more sympathetic to her after

Noah: Yes - You cannot replace a sister.

Another area of regulation is of age limits, the young people largely showed awareness of age limitations such as for social media applications or films. But as discussed in chapter five less awareness of or mention of age limits for games. The young people had an awareness of the age limit for Facebook, for example being 13 years. However, across different focus groups they thought the age limit for Instagram was 12 years old, when it is actually 13. In conversation this appeared to be because of the AppStore, listing it as 12 years plus regardless. Nearly all the young people had access to Instagram despite most being under the age of 13; they did not see this as problematic as they didn't have a sense of the age limit for Instagram. But as discussed earlier they saw Facebook as more dangerous as they had an awareness of Facebook being 13. In discussion about social media age limits Emily (age 13) said:

I never actually thought I was ready for it until, obviously, they put the ages out for a reason they know, what could happen to people, so I think that is, that is definitely why they put the ages up.

She is showing understanding of the age limits and is self-regulating to avoid breaching these age limits.

Further areas of self-regulation come in the example of William (12)

Yeah, I do not really like, buy, like in app purchases, um I have this like app which makes like all in app purchases free? Um, but um, I do not use it so much because I do not really buy stuff

Here he recognises the pitfalls of online purchasing through in-app purchases and recognises the importance of avoiding such functions. This demonstrates knowledge and agency in making these informed choices, as part of self-regulations and resilience.

Another way that young people self-regulate their online risks is by considering what is posted about them or on their behalf. This refers back to chapter five whereby digital footprints were discussed as a lasting digital record of young people's activities which can have consequences for future. But also, this could be applied generally to content that is posted for, or about children and young people. There may be content posted about them that they find 'embarrassing' that they would not post and shared. This could be from parents, such as the common concept of 'sharenting' whereby parents post images of their children to share experiences online. This was described by William (12) in relation to his mum asking if she can post on social media:

They often like ask me if they can like post on Facebook and, I do not really mind, because she is my mum.

Here he is showing that he does not mind his mum posting on his behalf or posting about him on social media as his mum asks permission first. He therefore is in the position to exercise his agency in giving permission, or not. Therefore, he can demonstrate regulation of his own digital footprint. There were further discussions related to what friends or other parties might post. One issue that was discussed was how they might regulate their friends and what they would do if they posted something they did not like:

William (12): I would like um force them to delete it? And...I would just say to them I am not your friend anymore for like posting images um, without my permission.

Noah (12): I would just ask them to delete it and if they did not, I would go, tell someone...they did it without my permission, and the proof is all over the internet,

Here William and Noah describe if something was posted by a friend, they didn't like they would ask it to be taken down, and that they would expect friends to ask permission. This shows self-regulation of enforcing boundaries with friends and what they would do in order to prevent this being an issue.

Another example comes from Emily (13):

Well...this happened to me, I had done it to one of my friends, it was a joke...I took it off as soon as I found out that she was upset about it I took it off, apologised to her for it, and, it was, I found it alright, but if that actually happened to me...I did not really want, I would private message them and say that, I was not happy about what they had posted

Here Emily explains she has done that to another person but recognised this as an issue and apologised and took it down. She expects the same would happen if the reverse was true. Here she is therefore showing self-regulation and a learning experience. By these young people looking out for one another and trying to be considerate of what they post with expectations of asking permission, they are showing resilience and protecting one another from harm.

There was generally lots of discussion about posting too much information online. The young people problematised the sharing of personal information online. They saw this as a risky practice as it could lead to such information being exploited. This was discussed in chapter five but this example from Amelia (12) sums this up quite well:

I think if you reveal so much about yourself, on social media, it is kind of like, you cannot go back it is sent...if you just destroy your phone, it has already been sent it has already gone to everyone so...there is no going back.

She speaks to the permanence of online content and that it cannot be taken back, therefore she looks to take steps to avoid issues online by being careful what is posted.

One of the ways young people are protecting themselves is empowering themselves through knowledge of security and privacy setting such as:

Emma (12): I have a private account because I just let people follow me that I know... my friend she has like, 2000 followers, but she does not know them all and she is like her account is just like everyone can see it, so I have my own private Instagram.

Emma's Instagram is set to private to protect who can see her content and here she problematises her friend's public account, viewing it as risky that information could be shared with this wider audience. This demonstrates knowledge and self-protection. There is knowledge expressed by the young people in how applications work and could be exploited. Such as Amelia (12) who recognises that Snapchat might be able to be shared if it was manipulated:

Amelia: they say it is private on Snapchat and it is going, I think, well it is not private because anyone can like take a picture of it, and send it to someone you are not actually following,

Harriet (12) takes this point also, by having different accounts for different purposes:

Well, I have two accounts but I have like two main ones, I have what I call a personal account which is like obviously more personal and I keep that private and I know all of my followers and all of the people are either people that I know or celebrities and then I have a fan account which is public

Here she is showing self-regulation in protecting herself from harm and being careful what she shares on each account. Furthermore, the young people demonstrated self-regulation and awareness of showing personal information to avoid sharing information that would make them vulnerable to grooming or exploitation from strangers online:

Amelia (12): I made my Instagram private because, if there is something in like, the background like a house or a road or like your school jumper that you could be found...so everyone that I follow is like, trusted so I know that they will not send hate comments, spread something that I do not want to be spread.

Amelia here shows awareness of the danger of inadvertently sharing personal information such as school uniform or location. Therefore, she has taken the necessary steps to protect herself, by ensuring her account is set to private and she is careful who she lets see her information.

Another aspect that discussed in the focus groups was meeting up with people met in the digital landscape. Here young people mostly discussed that you should not meet up with people online. However, some young people also discussed ways of protecting themselves if they did choose to meet up:

Emma (12): If you did not know someone and they said oh you do want to meet up with me, I would definitely bring someone else, like someone that was an adult

Ava (12): Bring a posse!

Emma: If you were actually going if you really wanted to go with someone else...if they were genuine, bringing someone else, like my mum. But...if they were not what you thought they would be people can get their profile photo from anywhere they can just type on the internet 16-year-old boy and then that is them when they are really like a 60-year-old man.

Ava: It can also be really really misleading...what people put out there, like if you do not see a picture of them, and you just have this information it might not be real, but then if just had a picture of them and you have no information it is not right, so you kind of need both

Olivia (12): But if you had both it could still be a lie

Emma: Yeah, I could like, it is quite easy to say like, oh yeah, I am 16 year old, and I am on the Olympic swimming team, anyone could believe...well they probably would not believe that if they could see me but online anyone could believe that...

Here the young people are showing awareness of the ease of which people can pretend to be other people online. That pictures and information are not to be trusted online. They are further showing resilience and self-regulation by discussing how they would protect themselves if they did choose to meet up with someone, such as by taking an adult with them.

This knowledge was further echoed by:

Evelyn (12): When I was younger, I watched this thing and it was a girl who plays with a certain game, and then there is a guy and he sends a picture off of the internet who is not him...and then they metted up in a place, and he was like 50 years and she was like 12 or something...

Evelyn reflects on this story she had heard therefore showing awareness of potential issues of meeting up with strangers from the internet. This awareness is a protective factor, in young people being able to take steps to protect themselves from online dangers. Emily (13) shares an experience she has had:

I also experienced someone, I did not know, and they also went to our school because it had our school in their description, but they started saying hey and started sending me kisses and I kept asking them who it was, and I found out who it was and I blocked them straight away cos this boy was like, older than me he was like, in Year 11 now.

From this experience Emily shows awareness of being sceptical of people online she does not know, she took steps to protect herself by asking who it was and when finding it was someone older, she blocked them. Thus, she is using her knowledge of the functions of the social media application (in this case Instagram), to block unwanted attention. Whilst she found that this person went to her school, she was uncomfortable it was someone older and uncomfortable with the types of messages she was receiving from this person. She, therefore, took steps to prevent this content continuing and showed agency in regulating and protecting herself.

This section has reviewed the subtheme of agency and self-regulation; what has been established through this discussion is that children and young people possess knowledge needed to protect themselves, they know how to keep social media private, how to block and report messages and individuals, and they have knowledge needed about the risks and dangers inherent within the digital landscape. This knowledge facilitates children's agency; through knowledge they can make informed active

decisions on how to interact and engage with the digital landscape. This knowledge is therefore empowering and facilitatory of agency; this goes against the discourse of childhood as a time of passivity and innocence. Innocence implies an unknowingness, not being aware of the potential 'social evils'. This ignorance would make young people vulnerable to exploitation and corruption if engaging with digital technologies. However, through education and sharing experiences with each other they can demonstrate resilience factors which empowers them to keep themselves safe. Throughout this subsection aspects related to digital media literacy have also been explored. The young people were able to demonstrate and display knowledge and competence in digital media, include the regulatory aspects such as setting privacy controls, reporting functions, and filters. Therefore, knowledge of the issues, and how to regulate their own experiences means they can help to keep themselves and each other safe or at least mitigate risk-taking behaviours. Consequently, there is a vital role for online safety education in promoting this knowledge to empower young people; furthermore, children and young people need non-judgmental access to adults, parents, or teachers, in order to have a safe space to turn to if experiencing difficulties with online technologies and experiences.

6.3. Parental Regulation

This subsection will explore the sub themes related to how parents regulate children's online activity. From the discussions some of the young people had 'strict' parents who heavily regulated and controlled their online presence. Others had parents with less rules or boundaries in this area. This is analysed based on children's perceptions of this, they most said they saw parental regulation positively, however, also indicated they knew strategies to bypass the regulatory controls. Parental regulation is generally viewed here a protective factor, a factor that can help build and support children's

resilience in dealing with and mitigating risks of the young people's engagement with digital technologies.

The young people were generally positive about their interactions with their parents regarding their uses of online technologies. They did not complain about their parents' involvement and mostly saw this a protective factor when parents were checking up on them. Some parents would set rules and boundaries for example about screentime use, and some would take it further by actually checking up on what young people were looking at. For example, by reading private messages on social media. This raises questions regarding privacy online, and whether young people are entitled to keep aspects of their lives private. Here we can see the dichotomy between protectionary and participation rights play out in children's and parents' interactions. On the one hand it can be argued that parents need to protect their young people and so bypassing their rights to privacy in order to do this is acceptable. Or on the other hand, it could be argued that young people are agentic, able to participate and if empowered through knowledge and non-judgmental support they are capable and resilient of protecting themselves, and their rights to privacy should be maintained. This dilemma is indicative of the status of childhood in wider society generally, and how the competing constructs of childhood as a time of innocence (and the subsequent need for protection), are in conflict often with the ideas around children being agentic, capable, and resilient and should be enjoying similar rights to privacy as adults. Nonetheless, despite these issues that play out, the young people themselves remained positive about parental regulation of digital technologies. For example, this from Olivia (12):

Olivia: My dad will take my phone and checks my [social media] inbox messages from time to time...

Researcher: Ok, what do you think about that?

Olivia: Well... it's OK it's to protect me, so I guess I feel good he wants me to be safe...and besides I am careful what I put...I delete it if I don't want him to see.

From this discussion during the interview with Olivia she spoke positively about her dad checking her phone on a regular basis she viewed this as a protective factor and was pleased her dad wanted to protect her. However, she goes on to say that she would be careful of what she keeps on her phone as she is aware he is checking. Therefore, this shows that Olivia is taking steps to protect her own privacy by ensuring her dad does not have access to all her content, including private inbox messages. So, in the knowledge that her dad will randomly check her phone she actively takes steps to keep parts of her life private. Arguably the act of her dad checking her phone is therefore acting against protecting her. It does not show trust which would perhaps be a more protective factor. Her dad will only see what Olivia wants him to see or is happy for him to see. This might make it more challenging for Olivia to come forward if she was experiencing issues as she would need to 'confess' she had been deleting some content in order to hide it from her dad first. She may fear judgement or punishment in coming forward with issues. So, although Olivia spoke positively about her dad's protective actions, the reality is she is not completely comfortable with it by sharing all aspects of her engagements and interactions. I would therefore argue that in order for young people to be protected and empowered they need to be trusted and supported by adults who are non-judgemental and understand and appreciate the importance of the digital landscape.

A further area that was discussed amongst the young people in relation to parental regulation of children's digital landscapes, includes discussion of how adults may regulate children's screentime to limit their uses of digital technologies. Or may punish young people by removing technology when it becomes an issue or if the young person breaks the rules as stated by Noah (12) in relation to his games console:

I have had it taken away for a month once.

This was in relation to Noah once breaking his parent's rules about how long he spends on his games console and demonstrates that his parents are considering his screentime and regulating this in order to protect him. Furthermore, as considered further in chapter seven William (12) discussed that he had a 'shopping spree' on Xbox live, spending £145, and having to refer to his parents for support to deal with the situation and the big bill he had accumulated. As a consequence of this happening, William's parents had to contact Microsoft to deal with the situation, but this then led to William's access to the Xbox being removed for the rest of the day. He thought it would be taken away from him for longer and discusses how pleased he was he got access to his Xbox back the following day. His parents managed to get a refund of the purchases from Microsoft and William further reflects on what happened:

William: Well, I did realise but mum and dad should really be watching me but yeah, I, I learnt not to go on a shopping spree

This is in response to me asking whether he realised at the time he was spending 'real money', and as can be seen from the response William knew he was spending money. So interestingly he feels he has learnt from the situation not to spend lots of money

online with in-application purchases, but also somewhat 'blames' his parents for this, stating he feels his mum and dad should be watching him. This is interesting and suggests that while he discussed earlier his own self-regulation, here he is more inclined to believe that his parents *should* regulate his online activities. This may suggest that while he is believing that he is grown up and capable of managing himself, deep down he would prefer some adult guidance or interventions where necessary. William also noted that his parents were more vigilant after this incident, he has noticed a difference in how his parents monitor his online behaviours and interactions, and he saw this a positive change, in him being monitored more.

In discussion with Noah (12) about his parent's regulation of his digital landscape and he stated:

No, I do not do stuff that I am not allowed...

From this it could be inferred that Noah abides by his parents' rules and regulations and is respectful of those rules. However, what is difficult to determine from this interaction is exactly how he follows the rules, or what those rules are. It is also difficult to determine if there was any incompatibility between his desires online and the parents' rules how it would resolve this. Overall, Noah discussed parental regulation positively and as a protective factor. Many of the young people discussed the boundaries that were set by their parents on their screentime use, they discussed how parents would limit how long they spent on tablets or phones and would seek to balance these with other activities such as completing homework.

Mia (12): I am allowed on my Xbox on Wednesdays and Fridays and like weekends, but I am not allowed on my phone...when I am doing

my homework, I get my phone taken away when I am doing homework or, revision or something like that.

From this Mia describes the limits of her Xbox and phone use as set by her parents, she spoke positively about this, she discussed that she would get too distracted otherwise with her homework. Sometimes the regulation of the digital space was due to practical constraints such as the family all sharing the same devices:

Amelia (12): I use my phone my iPad and just a family laptop.

Researcher: ...Is that easy sharing that?

Researcher: Well, we all use it for different things and use it at different times, I usually use the iPad instead.

Amelia's responses here demonstrate a shared device in action and how this is done through careful negotiation of sharing the laptop at different times or for different purposes. She states she has an iPad for use instead if others are using it. But having a shared device would require regulation from the parent. But Amelia is positive about this, and not saying she would want one of her own and is happy to share the device. Furthermore, many of the participants discussed that they are limited to engaging with digital technology for a set period of time, such as Evelyn (12):

Evelyn: My mum usually says to me I can go on my iPad for half an hour, so it does not hurt my eyes or something like that.

Here she is showing how her mum restricts her to half an hour at a time. She speaks positively though, and it is matter of fact, it does not act as though this is problematic to her. Her mum gives the reason of it not 'hurting her eyes'. This is in line with the public discourses around screentime which portray screentime as damaging to children and young people. Despite this, as discussed in chapter five the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2019) set guidelines which did not set specific restrictions on the amount of time, screens, and whether there is a balance of other activities. Furthermore, setting set time limit on screentime does not engage with the questions as what they are doing with the screens, as this can still be a worthwhile, engaging activity, so a time limit alone does not appreciate the full extent of the issues and consider the types of activities young people may be engaging with online.

The balance of activity is something echoed by others as well, Amelia (12) discusses that she uses her dad's iPad at set times, but will put away this device when having family time:

I play on my dad's iPad, but he lets me borrow it when he gets back from work...and then when there is like a programme on TV when we are all sitting in the living room. I usually just like turn it off and stay off technology until like the next day.

Here Amelia discusses that watching television together is perceived as a family activity whereby being on the iPad is considered a solitary activity and not compatible with spending time with the rest of the family. Interestingly Amelia here expressing the turning off of the iPad as 'staying off technology until the next day'. But this does not appreciate the television of another form screen-based technology. It could be inferred that Amelia perceives 'technology' and in particular 'screen-based technology' referring more to the solitary activities such as being on a device like a tablet, phone,

or PC. But gathering around the television is thought of as more of a social activity. This does not appreciate that what she may be doing on such devices as an iPad may be inherently social. She could be engaging in social media, commenting, and sharing YouTube videos, or playing games with friends. But Amelia here does not necessarily perceive these virtual interactions as sociable as sitting with her family in person enjoying a television programme. This reflects the public discourse in relation to screentime, where it is reflected as a solitary exercise whereby a person is solely interacting with a device and being 'unsociable'. This includes rhetoric that young people are losing the ability to converse due to overusing mobile devices. Despite this I would argue that not all screentime is created equal. It really does depend on what the young person is engaging with. For example, if they are interacting sociably via the device with their peers then this would seek to refute such perspectives as they would be able to demonstrate sociality of these functions, it is an extension of their peer interactions in person. Furthermore, if they were on video chat with a family member who lives far away that would not normally be perceived with negativity, yet that is still technically screentime.

Charlotte (12) describes that her parents regulate access to Wi-Fi with parental controls:

We have this thing where the WIFI cuts out in our house at a certain time...but like on the weekend it is alright because... we do not have to go to bed really early or wake up really early

The above example from Charlotte, demonstrates that her parents have regulated her screentime and access to technology by having the Wi-Fi at home cut out at bedtime. This is to prevent her using a device like a mobile phone until late, instead of getting

a good night's sleep, and she goes on to specifically mention this is to prevent her being 'sucked into' YouTube. She does explain that it is just for her devices, and it does not cut out for her parent's devices. However, this does not appreciate that she could still have access such as via the data network. Nonetheless Charlotte discusses this positively, she is not resistance to the boundary set in place. Harriet (12) further reflects on her access to devices:

I cannot stop myself, I have to leave my iPod in the front room, if it is next to me I cannot stay off it...[laughs]...I have an addiction...I do not actually,...that is like what about this is so relatable because last night I spent like three hours on YouTube when I was just downstairs...my mum was like oh you have to do your homework and I was like ok can I just watch this one video it is five minutes and then my mum is like five minutes is up and then I pressed on four more videos I was like just ten seconds and I was watching this and this and this, it is like a bottomless pit, and you cannot sort of get out of it

Here she is describing YouTube as a bottomless pit due to automatic queuing of additional videos and content. From Harriet's response it is clear that her mum tries to regulate this to ensure she does her homework, but this becomes a negotiation of 'just five more minutes'. This example that Harriet discusses shows parental regulation in action. Harriet is recognising and aware of and by extension problematising her 'addiction' as she phrases it to YouTube and her difficulty in regulated her own time. Here her parent tries to guide and support her in time regulation. However, this can be challenged by the young person. Here Harriet is agentic in her negotiation with her mother in allowing a bit more time to be online

Other participants also discussed how their parents managed their usage online, including limited the physical spaces in which they are allowed to connect to the internet and use devices. Such as Emily (13):

I am allowed on it up till I go to bed but then I have to leave my phone...I am allowed my laptop in my room, but I never go on it, but I have to leave my phone on charge downstairs.

Here Emily is discussing that she is not allowed her phone in her room to avoid it being a distraction and prevent her from getting a good night's sleep. That suggest that her parents feel that having constant access to her phone would be detrimental to her wellbeing. Again, this reflects the public discourses around screentime and in particular that screentime before bed is detrimental to children's sleep habits. By ensuring that Emily has to leave her phone on charge downstairs, her parents have regulated this usage and prevented her from using it excessively and it is impacting her sleep.

Earlier I included a quote from Mia who discusses how use of her games console is regulated to certain days and times. She also described that the use of her mobile phone is restricted when she is needing to do homework. The motivation here for the parental regulation is about limiting screentime to ensure that there is enough time and concentration for homework. So here it is less about the use of a screen itself and more about the phone as being a source of distraction. Similar to Emily's parents who do not allow the phone in her bedroom overnight in case this distracts from sleep.

However, this level of parental regulation was not apparent for all participants, Harriet discussed her parents as being more relaxed in regulation:

Mine is quite flexible because, I am an only child so when my mum is busy, I do not really have a lot to do, so, especially in the winter. So, I just play on my Xbox, but I do not really do that a lot on weekdays, but I play on my Xbox more on weekends but it just sort of depends, how, it depends whether I have got dance that night or, whether I have got anything going on that night to be honest, on how much time I spend and whether I have got homework,

Here she is saying that her time is not as strictly regulated as some of the others, this demonstrates that there are inconsistencies among the participants as to how much parental regulation they experience. It is also interesting that here Harriet is also saying that it is due to when her mother is busy, she feels she has less to entertain herself so will turn to her Xbox as her default mode of entertaining herself when she hasn't got anything going on. For Harriet it depends on other activities that are happening or how busy her Mum is. It is a more flexible process which fits with the earlier example whereby Harriet will negotiate for more time on YouTube. Therefore, with some parents there is clear set ground rules for technology usage, and some have fairly relaxed guidelines or rules. There is variation among the young people

Similar points are echoed by Amelia (12):

It kind of depends how busy other people are because if my mum and dad are busy it is just like I have got nothing else to do because now my sister is like in her teen years she will not like ever be off her phone or drawing, so it is kind of just like I am left by myself although my parents are off there, it is more like, a family time, so I think it just, depends about everyone else, and I will kind of try to limit myself as much as I can.

Like Harriet, Amelia is discussing using technology as entertainment when her other family members are otherwise engaged. Interestingly, she mentions her older sister in her teen years as having less time for her now, with one of the reasons she cites is that she is engaging in using her mobile phone, which she constructs as problematic because she has less time for her. She also mentions that she goes on her games console when her parents are also busy, and describes it as being 'left by herself'. This indicates that although she is happy to entertain herself with technology this is a 'fall back' and she would prefer family time when everyone is available. Furthermore, she goes onto say that she tries to limit herself as much as possible, this suggests that in the absence of overt parental regulation she defaults to self-regulation. But the fact that she recognises that self-regulation would be desirable suggests an agentic take on her usage of technology.

Regulation of usage was echoed during the year eight focus groups:

Abigail (12): Yeah um, normally I get in and I have to do all my things and then, as soon as I have done all my things then I can go on it and then, I think it is like half nine I have to actually go up like stairs and leave my phone downstairs.

Emily (13): Yeah I have to do the same thing it is like when I get home I have dinner and then I have to do my homework that is due in, and I will just do things around the house maybe like do the hoovering or something, and then I will go on my phone and do what I want up until I go to bed, and I go to bed.

From these responses it is clear that for these two participants they experience similar regulation from their parents. Here again it is about limiting screentime, particularly mobile phone usage to ensure that other tasks are completed, particularly homework.

Further these girls discussed whether their parents had access to social media and followed their accounts online:

Emily (13): My parents do not have it, at all, but my mum has a friend that has it, and she will go to my mum if anything happens that she sees, like a couple of days, like I say a couple of days ago I liked a picture, and that, I was allowed up to, for a certain amount of time, so I liked a picture and she told my mum like should, be allowed up that late, because it was probably like half nine, and she was just checking that I was allowed and that time, but I was, so,.

Many of the participants discussed that their parents didn't have access to their social media accounts, but as described here by Emily, despite the fact that her mother doesn't have access to her Instagram, she finds she is monitored by her mum's friend instead, who reports back to her mum if she is concerned. This is parental regulation by proxy. Her social media accounts were further discussed:

Emily: I only have just started using Facebook properly... I got Snapchat when I turned 13 as well, I kind of started using them more than I have been using Instagram, whereas before I was like on Instagram all the time, but...I like Facebook but, I have, had to go through, I had to change my password because someone had hacked into account, and my mum saw that I was apparently liking quite inappropriate things, and I like was not and I also had to get all my account changed

Researcher: What sort of things was it?

Emily: It was stuff like, teachers, going to, like, other, students house and doing stuff that they should not really be doing and stuff so

Here she discusses that her mum is on her Facebook and noticed she was doing things her mum deemed inappropriate, but as this was monitored by her mother it then became apparent her account had been 'hacked' and so with her mother's support the issues was resolved. She displayed awkwardness in the fact that her mother had seen that she had apparently 'liked' content online that would be deemed inappropriate. But she felt supported to resolve the issue, as she has her mother's support and her that she knew her mum would not believe that it was her 'liking' this kind of content. This demonstrates that in this circumstance having parental support was really important to her as it meant she had the relevant support she needed to empower and protect herself. Emily also discussed that she had an Instagram account from the age of 12, but Facebook and Snapchat were not allowed until she was 13. This was due to a perception of Emily and her parents that Facebook was riskier than Instagram, and that the age limit for Instagram was only twelve, further discussions of age limits and parental restriction is below. Nonetheless, the age limit is actually thirteen, this misconception seems to have come from the app store which lists the age limit as twelve. However, what the above example demonstrates is the importance of parental oversight, so that if issues do occur, they can be resolved appropriately, and the young person can feel supported by this. Without this kind of support and oversight a young people may feel they have no choice but to rely on friends for support and guidance when experiencing such issues.

Screentime is an area that was discussed as having lots of regulation from parents. Examples of screentime becoming regulated comes from the year eight girls' group:

Abigail: I am not normally on it for that long because, when I am actually inside, my mum would normally like, have my phone with her,

so I do not get distracted... because, otherwise I get really distracted really easily because my friends are like messaging me [laughs]

Emily: My mum often says to me right you have got to stop, you have got to do your homework now, but after she has maybe seen me on my phone for a little while she would be like come on, have you got any homework due in soon, and I will be like yeah and she will be like now you have got to, sit down and do it, and I do it anyway so...

These examples further demonstrate that mostly the parental regulation is focused on regulating their time to prevent it being a distraction from other activities, particularly homework. This reflects the public and political discourses of screentime. Whilst it is important that young people are managing their time to be not too dependent on mobile phones or other technology at the detriment to their education and schoolwork, what it does demonstrate is that the discourses of screentime are meaning that parents and in general wider society has become very focused on the amount of time young people spend with screens and arguable less focused on what they are actually doing with their screens. This means that for these young people they could clearly articulate if their parents regulated their usage of technology in terms of how long they spend online or where they are allowed to access their mobile phones. This theme came across very strongly in all the focus groups. Despite this there were inconsistencies with some young people stating their rigid rules for technology usage, and others having more flexibility. However, what was even more inconsistent was that the young people did not always experience parental regulation of their activities in terms of *what* they were actually participating in while engaging with digital technologies. This shows that the focus has become the length of time spent on technology or technology as a source of distraction rather than considering what young

people actually do with technology. This is why the screentime agenda could be considered damaging to young people's experiences. Whilst it is important that young people do not use technology at the detriment of other important activities; what is far more valuable to consider is what they are doing online. As the previous chapter has discussed there are many issues when it comes to young people's usage online, and many potential risk-taking behaviours that can occur. Societal discourse is concerned that the use of technology is damaging perceptions of childhood as a time of innocence. That young people are at danger of being 'corrupted' by the wild and unregulated digital landscape. Whilst the previous section has demonstrated that young people are adept at self-regulation and are resilient and agentic in how they do this; this is not sufficient replacement for all adult support. Adults in young people's lives need to provide non-judgmental understanding support of young people. They do not need to be experts in the technology young people are using, but they do need to take an active interest in what young people are doing and offer support and guidance wherever possible. Adults need to empower and equip young people with the skills and critical appreciation of digital media to be able to be resilient in the face of the unprecedented and largely unregulated digital landscape, in order for young people to be able to protect themselves and keep themselves safe online.

Another aspect that was discussed by William (12) is that his parent takes an active role in providing advice in navigating the online realm in relation to digital stranger danger:

That is what my mum always tells me, do not like talk to someone you do not know...unless it is an emergency

Here he discusses that his mother gives advice about his online usage, in particular, talking to strangers online. This demonstrates that he is getting specific advice from

his parent about keeping himself safe online. His mum is taking an active role in addressing some of the risk he may experience and need to navigate whilst engaging with digital technologies. However, some young people may fear their access is removed: Such as this example from Emma (12):

I know this YouTuber and her mother went, crazy...for a while and she has completely deleted her channel and that is her only source of income, and she has been living off the money she has been making from YouTube for years

This is what young people fear that their access to this landscape could be cut off but over regulation from their parents. Whilst this is an unusual example provided by Emma, it would be the ultimate form of regulation for parents to remove access entirely. However, this would not be a desirable outcome for the young person. Access to their digital landscapes is a vital part of peer friendships and interactions, as discussed further in the next chapter. This fear of parents removing access to these important spaces, may make young people hesitant to come forward if they experience issues online, for fear it will be withdrawn. A better approach is to not deny access. That way young people are more likely to come forward if they experience an issue in the future.

This is demonstrated by Emily (13) when discussing accessing television media:

I will watch like EastEnders and stuff, with my parents, I will not, I will not go watching anything that is not for my age at all, because my mum will find out and... She will ban me from things, so I know it is not right to be watching stuff that is not appropriate for my age.

Here she is showing that her parents regulate her media use, so she does not watch things that are not age appropriate. This demonstrates parental regulation in order to protect her from harm. One thing discussed by the young people was who (if anyone)

they would report any negative experiences to, when they experience things with digital landscapes. These negative experiences could be very variable, from finding inappropriate content to experiencing cyberbullying behaviour. Some of the responses here reflect the participant's views in relation to the two case studies used with the participants to facilitate discussion. One case study was the bullying case study involving 'Louise' (see appendix two). This involved a fictional Facebook post by Louise, which had hurtful comments on, the participants were asked what they'd advise Louise to do. This was a prompt for the discussions which meant the young people could discuss the issue of cyberbullying without asking them directly to disclose information they could either embarrass them or make them feel uncomfortable. Some of the participants discussed this and one of the first recommendations was that Louise report to parents:

Mia (12): Yeah, I think, like when something happens like that you should like ignore them and then tell your mum or your dad or something and um...like...like block them and try and like you know just block them out and not, speak to them again.

Mia discusses that Louise when encountering these hurtful comments should ignore these comments, but report to a parent for support. She also mentions that she should block them uses the reporting and blocking features that social media affords. Such sentiments were echoed by Harriet (12):

I think what she should do, take a screenshot of it so she has proof, and, um, then she should...tell a parent or a trusted adult and obviously, and then they will be probably sorted out and if it gets really bad just delete all your social media accounts, all of them

Harriet goes a bit further and mentions telling a parent or 'trusted adult' and providing a screenshot of the exchange so there is evidence. She mentions that by telling an adult they will sort it out. Here she is seeing the adult as the fixer of such issues. She goes further though and says if the bullying gets 'really bad' then she should delete all her social media accounts. However, this suggests she is repeating advice she may have heard from online safety education, perhaps from school. This demonstrates that she is knowledgeable about some good steps to take and good advice to give, but whether these would be the steps she would actually take is less clear. From the previous discussions in the last subsection, it is evident that whilst the young people say immediately they would tell an adult what might actually happen is that they would first of all try and deal with the situation themselves or would seek peer support, rather than going to a parent or teacher. This would suggest that there is a certain threshold of how 'bad' the situation would need to be before the young people would report it to an adult. This might suggest that lower-level negative experiences would largely go unreported to adults. This might mean that a young person could be confronted with some negative experiences constantly and be fairly isolated in dealing with them as they are lacking adult support.

Such action as reflected by Amelia's (12) responses:

I would probably try to see if I could recognise the actual account, and see if I could like search it or Google it and if it is like someone I know or, I trust, they are probably just doing it as a dare or joke is what I would like to think, but then if it developed further I would then go and tell an adult even if they were my friend.

Amelia here, rather than report the issues to an adult would also take matters into her own hands. She mentions here some actions she would take, trying to see who was saying hurtful things, and if it was a friend and a one off would not take further actions. But if it developed 'further' would go and tell an adult. This again demonstrates a certain threshold of reporting to adults. That until that threshold is reached the young people would deal with it themselves. In the case study example Louise has comments on her Facebook saying things such as "What a loser", "She Stinks" and "Let's ignore her at school". These sorts of comments, whilst part of this fictional case study example are very possible sorts of comments that may be experienced online and would constitute cyberbullying. But for the focus group participants, initially they would say tell an adult, but later concluded this was not really considered severe enough to warrant adult intervention and instead could be dealt with themselves in the first instance. However, it could be argued that whilst these comments are not severe enough for reporting, they are still hurtful mean comments, this could potentially damage young people's self-esteem and overall wellbeing, as discussed within chapter five. This would suggest that the young people are used to this kind of behaviours and interactions online and so whilst they recognise it as problematic it is par for the course when interacting online. This is further echoed by Harriet:

Yeah, but if it...sort of progressed into, worse and I would take a screenshot tell my mum that stuff, report them

Earlier Harriet had said she would tell an adult, which was her first response, but what the above demonstrates that she later reflects that she may only report to a parent if it progressed and became 'worse'. What is unclear is when this situation would be classed as 'worse'. At this unknowable threshold she would then screenshot (to

provide evidence) and report to an adult. However, it could be argued that the situation could quickly get out of control and become much worse more quickly.

Cyberbullying can often lead to young people feeling isolated and that the world is against them, when it escalates to this degree it can be difficult to reach out for help. Similar views about screenshotting the post and telling an adult were discussed by the year 8 girls such as Abigail (12):

Maybe... maybe tell someone, like if your mum does not understand how to use it like tell someone at school or a teacher.

Abigail agreed about telling an adult but suggested that maybe the parent would not be so understanding about how to use the technology or social media, and if that was the case then to report to a schoolteacher as well. Here Abigail is demonstrating the discourses around the digital natives and digital immigrants' dichotomy, viewing that some parents may have digital immigrant status and therefore may lack understanding about how the digital landscape works, and this may impact how they can then support young people when dealing with issues. This is one of the arguments against distinguishing between digital natives and immigrants, it creates a false dichotomy that can often be used as an 'excuse' or reason for adults not engaging with digital technologies in order to protect young people. Young people are negotiating a range of risk in dealing with online issues, navigating that risk they need adult support, and there is lots of help available for adults who are not as tech savvy as young people, such as Internet Matters (2021) which provides step by step guidance on setting privacy controls, and using reporting functions.

In relation to the Cyberbullying case study Mia (12) points out that it is easier to 'get away with' more online.

I think people think that they can get away with it online as well because, they feel like there is, not a teacher there, or adults there to stop them? But actually, it is, no different to doing it at school or something because, Louise can still like, screenshot it and give it to a teacher or something and show them.

This shows that she recognises the digital landscape as the great 'Wild West' of unregulated spaces, and that may cause some people to feel they can 'get away with' negative behaviours online. However, as Mia posits that just because an adult is not present at the time of posting the negative comments or information, does not mean that they may not become aware of it, such as through the reporting it to an adult with evidence in the form of a screenshot.

The notion that this space is absent of the adult gaze, is an interesting one. This lack of adult intervention, at least synchronously, means that these digital spaces such as through social media become mostly children's spaces in their construction and interactions. These adult free spaces are very rare experiences for children and young people. No wonder these spaces are so highly valued by the young people. The notions of the importance of the digital landscape to children and that this is a freer space for children is explored in chapter seven.

6.3.1. Age limits and restrictions

One theme that came up in relation to children's uses of the digital landscape and in relation to parental regulation is around the age limits of certain applications such as

Instagram. The age limit for social media application is generally thirteen years old. But as discussed earlier many of the young people thought it was twelve years due to what it states on the app store. Nonetheless some of the participants discussed that their parents regulated their access to social media, sometimes due to the age restrictions, or sometimes due to other reasons, such as Evelyn (12) discussing what she is allowed to access:

Evelyn: I have WhatsApp, but I am not allowed Instagram...because it has got an age limit, so I am not, my parents say I am not allowed it yet.

Researcher: Ok, but would you like to, have it?

Evelyn: Yeah, because most people have it, but I do not, but at the moment I am really used to not having it and I do not get bothered about it as much.

From this discussion it is clear that the Evelyn's parents are restricting her access to Instagram due to the age limit of thirteen. However, allowing her access to WhatsApp. WhatsApp is a free messaging application that allows single chats, or group chats and is free to use. At the time of the focus group the age limit for WhatsApp was thirteen, the same as all other social media applications such as Instagram or Snapchat. However, in May 2018 WhatsApp increased the age limit to sixteen in order to comply with data protection rules (BBC 2018). So, despite citing the age limit as the reason her parents do not want her accessing Instagram, they are allowing that she is able to access WhatsApp. Evelyn would clearly like to be able to participate in Instagram in order to participate in these social interactions that are shared with her peer group.

However, states she is 'used to it' as not bothered so much. Similar discussions were shared by Emily (13) in relation to age restrictions and social media:

In primary school...we were asked questions, in this massive assembly with the whole school in it, and like I must have been in Year 5 and loads and loads of people put their hands up for having Facebook but they obviously were not 13 because they were still in primary school, which is quite young actually, like people in Year 4 had it, like people younger than me had it, but...would you really let your child, like do things on social media that, they do not know what they are doing, I would not, if I was, if I was a parent I definitely would not.

Emily here shares her experience with children younger than herself having access to social media. She clearly problematises that these younger children who clearly did not meet the age restriction of thirteen for social media had access to Facebook. She cites this as an issue that parents should be aware of, and states that these parents should not allow access due to them being too young to understand. This shows a level of critical appreciation of these age restrictions and a consideration of this from a parental perspective. From this Emily is clearly constructing that is the parental responsibility to regulate and control young people's social media usage and protect them from accessing information that they cannot cope with or have responsibility for. Despite this Emily discusses that she has access to Instagram because the age limit was only twelve, but thirteen for Facebook:

I was restricted to like, I asked my mum whether I could have Instagram when I was like 11, and she was like what is the age on it, and I would tell her it was, what the age was and she would say, oh well then you have got to wait till that age to have it, yeah I had to

wait, quite a long time for Facebook, because Facebook you definitely have to be thirteen.

Here she discusses that she has now got access to both Instagram and Facebook now that she is thirteen but was allowed Instagram at twelve as she believed that was the age limit for Instagram. When I probed about this it became clear this is due to the age limit on the app store saying Twelve years. What is particularly interesting is that the other girl's focus groups also had the misconception that the age limit for Instagram was twelve. However, the app store guidelines of 12+ for the app store are more in relation to the content whereas the age limit of thirteen comes from the COPPA law, (Nguyen 2017). This law stems from the United States where the majority of Social Media companies have their headquarters. This regulation states that only children over the age of thirteen can consent to having their data shared. This regulation is largely to protect children's data in relation to advertising rather than to restrict access due to the nature of the content on these social media platforms. Therefore, all social media platforms have this rule of at least thirteen years. The implementation of GDPR strengthens this protection of data in the European Union and tries to provide some more universality by stating that the age of consent should be 'no younger than thirteen'.

What is further interesting in Emily's discussion above is that she mentions her mum asked her what the age limits are. This suggest that her mum did not know the age limits of the social media applications and relied on her daughter to be honest in what those age limits were. This reinforces the supposed dichotomy between digital natives and digital immigrants. However, if parents rely on their children to tell them the rules and regulations to participation in the digital landscape this leave them open to misinterpretation or misinformation, so the young person could say the age limit was

lower than it was so they would be permitted access to the social media platform. In Emily's example if her parent instead checked the age limit for herself, she would have seen that it was thirteen for Instagram and not twelve as Emily believed. Emily further goes on to discuss her experiences with other social media platforms. The below shows that her usage of other social media platforms such as Snapchat was also restricted until she was thirteen, so it seems that it was just Instagram there was a misunderstanding over the age limits. Despite this it is interesting that the age limits on films are not so readily enforced:

Emily (13): So, like 18s, I'm not [allowed] but I have been allowed by my parents to watch a couple of 15s

This shows that she is allowed to access some films rated as a 15, but her parents will not allow her to access social media apps before she has reached the required age. What is particularly interesting about this, is that as mentioned above the age restriction on social media apps is due to data protection laws and sharing data through advertising. Whereas film age classifications are related to content. So, a film rated as a fifteen, would have content in the film, that the BBFC (2021) deem only appropriate for those over the age of fifteen. They list on their website that a film classified as a 15 could show 'danger behaviour' such as suicide or self-harm, discrimination, drugs taking, strong language, sex and nudity, sexual violence, threat and horror, and violence. There are clear and rigid guidelines for a film to be classed as unsuitable for a person under the age of fifteen. Yet, the rules on social media use are much less clear, the regulation is an age restriction of thirteen years, but this is purely due to data protection and does not appreciate the content that may be on social media. Such potentially harmful or risky content was discussed in the previous chapter. One example that was discussed within one focus group was the trending

hashtag on Instagram of self-harm images, as explained by the participants this hashtag was trending when Zayn left the band One Direction as discussed earlier. By clicking on the Hashtag, the young people were taken to images of self-harm. This wouldn't be allowed in a film unless it was rated age fifteen plus. So, this demonstrates that the age limits and ratings for social media do not take into account the content on the application yet are arguably more adhered to and followed by parents, but without appreciation of the content. Perhaps this is due to social media still being a relatively new form of media, and maybe less understood to these digital immigrants than films are.

Harriet (12) had an interesting take on what should be restricted by parents:

Harriet: Because I have Vine, I like obviously there is a lot of memes and stuff on Vine but...I would not really say that any of the ones that I see are, offensive? Because...you know I do not really venture into the darker depths of the internet I am not really, um, I sort of stay on the surface of it, unless I fall into that dark hole of YouTube [laughs]

Researcher: Ok so what do you mean by the darker depths of the internet, what does that mean?

Harriet: Like, like the things that you know when you first when you like get your first phone or something and your parents say or do not do this, and do not do this and do not search this

From this she self-regulates her usage by 'staying on the surface' to avoid the darker depths of the internet and in particular tries to avoid the content she deems offensive. What is interesting here is how she defines these 'darker depths' as things her parents would not approve of. This demonstrates that she has some clear ideas and regulation from her parents who have provided guidance about what she should or should not do

online, and she uses this guidance as information to form her own self-regulation as discussed with section 6.2.

6.3.2. Facilities, affordances, and tech support:

One area that young people discussed in light of the support they got from parents was technical support, and guidance. Here the young people showed they really valued the support and guidance from parents which taught them how to use certain functions or to fix issues:

William (12) Well, without the internet it is quite hard because I have tried it once because my internet broke, and my dad was away then, when he got home it took him about two days to actually fix it, so, I had like, a whole week of homework to do...and the homework sheet actually need to search it up.

So, from this William is valuing his dad's help to fix the internet connection, he found it challenging as was unable to do his homework, showing how important the digital landscape is to him. But with parental help was able to get back connected. Similar was express by Noah (12):

I was going to upgrade and then my dad as a technician he said, whoa sod that Noah it is a rubbish um, Windows 10 is rubbish, and it is so slow compared to Windows 7

Here Noah's dad is using his expertise to assist Noah in using the technology effectively. Noah also went on to discuss how his dad supports him in finding music online:

I do not know my dad is, um...he just searches on the computer and copies a load onto my phone

This is showing that with his dad's support he is able to access the technology affordances of having music on his phone. Furthermore Emily (13) describes her getting a new laptop for her birthday and parents setting up her passwords and sharing them, so they have access if they want to. This was another protective mechanism:

Yeah, I have like as well, but on my laptop, it is, like it was my requested present and the only thing my mum and dad wanted me to do is like share my passwords so if for any reason they wanted to get on it.

Furthermore, Emily describes how her parents keep a close watch on her activities:

That is the only thing, to my mum and dad, but they will ask, what I am watching they ask what I am doing but yeah, they are quite, protective over it because they know that, things can happen...they know that maybe I can get bullied online or something but, I have not so I am ok at the moment.

From this she is describing how her parents' pay attention to what she is doing online in terms of activity, and she shares that with them, she shares they part of her social worlds. In addition, she describes learning the skills needed when she first got social media accounts:

Well, I kind of already knew how to, Snapchat, because I have seen quite a few of my friends use it, but with Facebook my mum has Facebook, so I asked her how to use it properly, and she told me how to use it, and, I became friends with, a couple of her friends that I was really close to, and yeah and then I saw people that you may know, I knew who they are, and their little profile picture is them, so like I asked to friend them, and that is own, I kind of started mine up

From this it can be seen that Emily's mum taught her and shared knowledge with the affordance and functions on Facebook, so shared her experiences and knowledge of her social media with Emily in order that she can use this effectively and safely. This can act as a protect factor in helping to keep them safe as we know that however, we know that as discussed earlier that her Mum does not use Instagram and therefore her mum was not able to join in and participate with her with this particular social media application. What this does show is that even 'digital immigrants' are capable of being an active role in regulation and support of young people's digital activities.

6.3.3. Parents own usage

Another area explored was parents own usage of digital technologies. Here Emily (13) describes that she does not use Facebook as much:

Yeah, my mum and dad uses Facebook, but um I do have Facebook but um I do not use it as much um, but I often like look at my timeline, a lot, I hardly post anything on there

Although not explicitly said the implication here was that as her parents were on Facebook, she was less interested in being on it. Facebook is arguably seen by young people as more of an adult space. As the young people who do have a Facebook account have their parents as friends on there it is a space under the adult gaze and so lacking the freedoms of other social media platforms such as Instagram.

Harriet (12) had this to say regarding her mum's use of Candy Crush the mobile game:

Although my mum has deleted it because she gets into a vortex of Candy Crush she is like I need to give up playing...but she does not spend any money on it, it is like, she just does it and she gets a level which she cannot get off and then she deletes it

From this example Harriet was problematizing her mother's gaming, calling it a vortex, and her mum having to delete it in order to regulate herself. It is an important observation that young people will notice and emulate parent's behaviours and so perhaps it is important to be a good role model when using digital technologies. A further example of parents own social media use comes from Ava (12):

My mum posted a real weird message on there and she regretted it the next day and I was like why did you post that, and I just took it down.

From this Ava questioned her mother's actions in posting a so-called weird message to social media. She took steps here to protect her mum by taking the post down, here we can see Ava is taking on the protectionary role in protecting her mum from harm. This is demonstrative of Ava's agency and ability to regulate not only herself but her mother too.

Another area explored by the young people was the thought that they may not always want to tell their parents everything for fear of an over-reaction. Charlotte (12) discusses this in relation to the Cyberbullying case study:

If she had no one else to go to, yeah I probably if I was Louise I would probably tell my parents or my sister because the thing with siblings it is easier to tell your siblings because you know they are not going to be like, oh my god we have got to sort this out they are more like ok, that is fine, let us get rid of this then.

She is here therefore saying it is easier to tell a sibling about issues expressed online because they are closer to the digital landscape and can help them sort issues out but without overreacting or making a bigger issue which Charlotte is clearly keen to avoid.

Overall, this section has explored parental regulation of children and young people's uses and experiences of digital technologies. It is clear from the responses from focus groups and interviews that the young people were mostly positive about their parent's engagement, regulation, and interest in their digital lives. They mostly saw this protective factor as positive and welcomed. They said it made them feel safe and secure in the knowledge that parents had set boundaries and limits and would be a source of support. Parental regulation demonstrates to the young people that they have parents who are interested and engaged with their digital activities, and this was largely received positively. Throughout this section various aspects have been discussed parental regulation of screentime was discussed, along with parents setting guidelines using technologies and adhered to age limits. Whilst the young people spoke positively about parental regulation it was clear that they still kept some aspects private such as the examples provided by Olivia earlier; her dad checked her messages from social media, and she discussed deleting some to keep her information private.

Overall parental regulation is an important aspect of mitigating online risks and helping to keep young people safe. Young people are agentic in their dealings online by they need practical help and guidance and support from adults around them. They need to be empowered to protect themselves from harm through thoughtful and understanding advice, and they need support from adults to help them achieve this. Young people are active in this role, they are resilient and capable; the dichotomy of protectionist and participatory rights must not overrule young people's access and opportunities.

6.4. Chapter conclusions

Chapter five established that the digital landscape was a 'risky business', it argued that there were giant 'social evils' which constituted much of the risk discourse and narrative when considering children and young people's engagement of the digital landscape. Discussed in chapter five mainstream media report on digital risk in sensationalist ways, leading to moral panic and further perpetuates the dichotomy between young people's agency and their innocence. The 'social evils' as discussed included, young people sexting, accessing pornography or other 'inappropriate content', and cyberbullying. During the focus groups sexting and cyberbullying concepts were explored using two fictional case studies (see appendix two).

This chapter has built on the discussions began in chapter five about risk, and young people's assessment of risk. This chapter has sought to destabilise the risk narrative by considering what resilient and regulatory factors help keep children and young people safe, thus mitigating the risks. What has been argued throughout this chapter is that young people are resilient and agentic. They are able to exercise their agency in order to help protect themselves from harm and regulate their online behaviours. It was established that for the most part, young people who be seeking to resolve issues independently, without the need of adult intervention. They demonstrate digital media literacy through their knowledge of online safety advice and device or application functions such as privacy settings, reporting, blocking and filters. Argued here is that this knowledge is demonstrative of young people's digital media literacy in understanding how the landscape works thus promoting agency and self-regulation.

Nonetheless, the young people still need clear guidance and regulation from adults, and parental regulation as a topic was also discussed in this chapter. Young people largely viewed parent regulation positively as a protective factor. Parents were

regulating children's screentime and providing support for using the technologies generally. What is clear is that young people need help and guidance navigating the troubled waters of the digital landscape. This help and guidance should empower and promote children's own resilience and regulation, but not control, to ensure that their participation in the opportunities the digital landscape has to offer.

This chapter has discussed resilience factors, and how young people are able to navigate the digital landscape and mitigate risk through self-regulation and also through parental regulation. Overall Children and young people are capable, resilient, engaged and the experts in their own digital lives.

7. Chapter 7: “Tumblr is a Lifestyle”: Children’s Agentic Participation in Digital Landscapes

As has already been established in chapter five, the internet affords children and young people a landscape which is deemed risky. This construction of risk is particularly concerning to adults who are looking in on this landscape from an outsider perspective.

As established by chapter six the young people themselves are acutely aware of the inherent risks and show resilience in resisting and mitigating risk. This is suggestive that the messages from online safety education are helpful to an extent in helping raise young people’s awareness of potential issues. Nonetheless as argued in that chapter, young people themselves are the experts when it comes to their online worlds and interactions. Therefore, they are also expert in managing those risks and mitigating the risks where possible. As argued in that chapter young people show agency and resilience in regulating their own experiences and protecting themselves. However, as further argued they do still need practical help and guidance to support and empower these agentic and self-regulatory efforts.

This third and final data analysis chapter continues to draw from the Focus Groups and Interviews carried out and seeks to discuss young people’s interactions and engagement in a digital landscape. This chapter establishes the argument that the young people are engaging with a digital landscape of participation, meaning that they are not only engaging with a landscape, but creating and co-creating the landscape through this interaction. Young people’s participation in these realms is also interwoven with the very experience of adolescence. Their interactions are integrated with peer culture and participation with their peers. Through this interaction they create

shared meanings and understandings constructing their own landscape and peer culture. This, therefore, becomes a salient aspect in growing up in an increasingly digital world. The participation in these realms becomes a vital part of belonging to the digital society and is crucial in facilitating peer interaction, culture, and friendships. These peer relationships foster a shared culture, which in turn promotes a sense of belonging. Therefore when things 'go wrong' or there is something negative within this environment, as is argued in chapter six, it is not simply a case of being able to 'turn it off' or disengage with the device, social media account or whatever has caused the hurt; as this landscape despite its potential for risky interaction, or hurtful engagement is still a primary support system for young people to build and develop important friendships, interaction, and develop that sense of belonging to a peer culture.

The title of this chapter reflects the significant role that the digital landscape plays in children and young people's lives; "Tumblr is a Lifestyle" is a direct quote from an Interview with Harriet, (age 12). This quote sums up and is indicative of the role the digital landscape plays in constructing the identity of children and young people, and how it is part of their 'lifestyle'. The full quote is as follows:

Tumblr is a lifestyle...it is like a thing. It is an activity, a lifestyle...I guess you would say it is an adjective, so if you bought a really nice eye shadow palette... say it was like high end and it had really nice shades, you would say oh a picture of this with a filter is so Tumblr

This shows that engagement with these landscapes is integrated with young people's identity, sense of belonging and importantly sense of shared understandings constructed and co-constructed through peer engagements.

This chapter is split into three sections, firstly 'Digital Landscapes of Participation'; in this section, how young people are interacting and what they deemed the most

important aspects of the online world were to them, will be discussed. It is here that it will be established and argued how integrated the online world is to the everyday experience of childhood. This lays the foundation for the latter arguments around 'agentic participation'. The second sub-theme and sub-section is 'Children as savvy digital consumers'; this section ascertains that children and young people have high levels of knowledge of the digital realm and they apply this successfully to their experiences and interactions to consume digital technologies and use them wisely to their advantage. This also draws on the concept discussed within the literature review of 'pro-sumers' recognising that children and young people are not just consumers of technology but producing it also. The third section is titled 'fandom and subculture', this section recognises the role the digital landscape plays in identity formation and exploration. It discusses how children and young people come to identify with a subculture and how being a part of that subculture can promote a sense of belonging and shared understanding. The concept of fandom is explored with the notion that the digital landscape afford access to different fandoms where young people can express themselves, and their interests and find commonality which may not always be accessible in the offline world.

Overall, this chapter will establish the argument and discussion that children are not 'just' consumers of digital technology, they are firstly pro-sumers. They are producing and consuming digital landscapes. Furthermore, it even goes beyond the concept of production, and consumption. Children and young people are consuming and shaping the digital environment. This shaping of the landscape is something that produces shared understandings and community meanings. It creates a sense of belonging to the peer culture and is intertwined with individual and shared identities of growing up in the digital society. The literature review discussed the Sociology of Childhood and

how children can be considered as agentic. This chapter argues that in the contemporary digital society we can see that agency plays a role in the interactions in the digital landscape. Children are shown here to be agentic in this creation of the digital environment and therefore it goes beyond just consumption or participation. Their participation is interwoven with their agentic behaviour and thus the concept of 'agentic participation' is argued as being above and beyond either concept combined to something more and something extra. This beyondness is seen in the ways in which children are engaging with technology, with each other and this shared experiences that stem from this. It is more than agency and more than participation. It is towards a concept of 'agentic participation'.

7.1. Digital Landscapes of Participation

This section evaluates and discusses the landscapes of participation the young people are engaging in. It considers what it is they are doing online and how they are interacting and engaging. This section argues that the digital landscape affords many opportunities for interaction and engagement with peers and primarily the young people favoured the digital environment as being one of interaction and engagement with peers.

One of the first questions I asked during the focus groups was asking what sorts of technology the young people were using. All the participants had a mobile phone they used, mostly they had smart phones, and some had an Apple iPod touch, and a non-smart phone. Nearly all the participants had access to a tablet and a computer or laptop. It was interesting to see that the Ofcom statistics (see chapter two) were

mirrored by the participants who generally favoured mobile technologies (phones and tablets) over computers and laptops, as seen from Ava, age 12 in relation to her tablet:

I like it because it is not quite as big as a laptop and you do not need to boot it up, you can just go online and look something up... like for gaming, or recipes on YouTube

In discussion of tablets several the young people said they were using their tablets for homework, so there was a shared commonality in how these were used. In addition, there was discussion of how 'addictive' the tablets were:

I am addicted to going on my iPad... I cannot stop myself and get off it (Sophia, aged 11).

The idea of being 'addicted' to these forms of technology was a theme that came up several times and was touched upon earlier, often the children discussed how parents try and regulate this time online. This was also explored in chapter five. Nevertheless, when asked why they like their tablets or the internet in general the common responses related to entertainment and it being something 'to do':

I think I just like it because it is sort of entertainment like when I have nothing to do and say, 'Mum I'm bored!' she will say just go on your tablet, so I do and I get sucked into it (Emma, age 12).

I think the internet is good because it is like fast entertainment so if you are bored and it is a rainy day, because in England it is most of the time [laughs]... chances are there is nothing on TV so you can go online. (Harriet, age 12).

From these responses from Emma and Harriet, the digital landscape offers great sources of entertainment, with many things to do, entertainment was a central motivation for young people spending time online.

You can use it [tablets] for entertainment... like you can watch films, like Showbox. You can watch any films like Avengers Age of Ultron, and you can watch in high quality or medium quality or low quality. But it does sometimes freeze and locks halfway through (William, age 12.)

From this quote William is discussing using Showbox to illegally stream films and other copyright protected entertainment content. This is demonstrative of the digital landscape being a core source of entertainment for young people, however there was no acknowledgement of the legality or otherwise of using such websites or applications.

I know this is bad but there is a website, and you can watch films even if they are on in the cinema (Emily, age 13).

As can be seen from the above, Emily is awareness of the illegality of accessing this sort of entertainment from illegal streaming sites. However, for the young people who mentioned this, this was not deemed too worrying it was discussed in a matter-of-fact way. Illegal streaming is therefore just part of the culture of entertainment young people access through the digital landscape.

In addition, most of the other participants across different focus groups discussed using their devices, laptops, and tablets, to access legal streaming sites or applications such as BBC iPlayer or Netflix. There was a shared community formed by using these websites and applications to access content, largely television programmes or films. There was also discussion from this about the content specifically, whereby the young people would then discuss either in person or via social media the content they were engaging with and discuss their views and opinions of it, and speculate what might happen next:

We watch stuff on Netflix or something and we will either discuss it at school next day, or sometimes we will watch at same time and message each other at the same time.... Like we are guessing who 'A' is all the time in Pretty Little Liars (Amelia, age 11).

In a different focus group with year 8 girls Pretty Little Liars was also discussed as being watched online:

I watch stuff online, that either I have missed on TV, and I cannot go back to record it, or I watch stuff that on maybe in America as they don't always put it on TV in England. My friend got me into Pretty Little Liars, I am addicted to it now, but I try and limit myself to one episode or something a week. (Emily, age 13).

This shows that the digital landscape facilitates this interaction and conversations about entertainment in new ways. This particularly captures the popularity of a particular programme at that moment in time, it crossed different year groups and was popular among the peer group. Young people can, therefore, share common interests and explore and engage with entertainment content together in active ways. They can share this common interest in entertainment products and discuss this and share this via the digital landscape such as through social media. Whilst the interactive and shared experiences of entertainment have been the case since the advent of television, the digital landscape affords new opportunity for instantly sharing opinions, views, and experiences of entertainment products. Furthermore, it affords the ability to be able to instantly access vast quantities of entertainment within a few clicks at any time, without having to adhere to scheduled programming. This instantaneity is what sets apart the digital landscape opportunities from 'traditional' media like television. Young people can access their entertainment of choice instantly, engage in 'binge' watching of whole series of programmes at once, and then discussing it with peers over social media. Additionally, the digital landscape offers the opportunity to connect

with larger audiences, so young people can put out their views and experiences via social media platforms to much larger audiences of people than the handful of friends they may engage with to discuss it in person.

Me and my brother we either watch YouTube while playing games, or Netflix, like the Big Bang Theory comedy. We also watch streamers play things live and I am like hey in the chat, and they are always open to chat and say hey back and my name... It makes you feel more included in the videos because if they comments are not live you can't do that. I find Twitch better than YouTube to do that (Oliver, age 13).

From the above quote from Oliver, it can be seen that the ways they are engaging with the digital landscape for entertainment are highly integrated, Oliver here discusses using multiple entertainment platforms simultaneously, playing games whilst engaging with other forms of entertainment also. Demonstrated here is the importance of engaging with 'live' entertainment for Oliver, he particularly mentions engaging with live streamers and interacting through chat with them as developing a sense of belonging. This level of interactivity is afforded by the digital landscape and is unique to the digital age, through digital technologies people are more accessible than ever before, and the range of activities available for collaboration are vast, such as the example here of watching someone stream online gaming and being able to interact with them in real time meaning Oliver felt included in the activity; this is a much more active and interactive way of consuming entertainment as opposed to traditional media such as television which is a more passive consumption as it is one way interaction. Here Oliver can interact in real time, and in doing so he is also constructing and co-constructing the experience not only for himself but for others to engage with also.

Key to entertainment in the digital landscape is shared engagement in media products. The below exchange between Harriet and Charlotte highlights this:

There is this really funny thing called Elders React... I was watching one last night, it was elders react to Musical.ly, it was so funny! They were trying to do it, and it was so cringey. (Harriet, age 12).

I was watching that last night as well! (Charlotte, age 12).

Here Harriet and Charlotte discuss funny videos on YouTube, and they share that they both viewed the same content; this is an example of shared meanings, and commonality which can be produced through the digital landscape whereby young people can share their experiences and views of things they have seen, whether that be videos, pictures, memes, music, or any other content. In sharing their experiences and content they are engaging with they are producing cultural understandings among their peer group and shared experiences; these shared experiences are central to developing a sense of belonging and commonality amongst peers.

Generally, YouTube was discussed extensively as offering opportunities to engage with a wide range of hobbies and interests. When discussing with a focus group what it is they do on their tablets and why they find this 'addictive' (as described by Sophia above), the most common things they used it for (aside from homework) was YouTube. YouTube was discussed as being addictive, it was discussed as a good source of information, such as for information related to online gaming and recipes. Additionally, YouTube was discussed as a way of viewing music videos and overseas television programmes.

What this discussion around tablets and YouTube demonstrates is commonality; there was commonality in how they used and engaged with this form of technology. This is further discussed below. They had shared experiences through the technology that was being discussed, being able to have these shared experiences was important to the young people, it is a part of their culture and peer interactions in both the online

and offline environment. Being able to discuss and share ideas and interactions through this technology meant that they had a shared interest, a commonality which brought them together in friendship and understanding.

In addition, there was lots of discussion about practical use of the internet such as for homework or certain application for information as illustrated:

I use my apps for good information, like I have a weather one, so I know whether I need to bring a coat to school [laughs]...I also like Football, so I have one for all the Premier League matches and scores (Emily, age 13).

This shows that young people are engaging with the digital landscape for practical reasons, the vastness of the information that is readily available at the click of a button is utilised by the young people to facilitate their lives and make it easier, this easiness of accessing information is what sets apart the digital age as the information era.

7.1.1. Landscapes of Social Media

Social media was a topic of much discussion throughout the focus groups and interviews. It was an aspect of the digital landscape that emerged in discussion repeatedly. It was a salient aspect of communication in the focus groups for several the young people. They discussed applications such as Instagram and Snapchat, what they do with these and what this demonstrates about the experience of growing up in the digital landscape:

I like using Instagram because you can see what people get up to, like when they go on holidays and things because they post pictures... you can also use a group chat when organising a meet up with friends (Abigail, age 12).

I got Instagram because a lot of my friends had it, and my friend taught me how to use it properly. I have now gone on to show other people how to use it properly (Emily, age 13).

From the above two quotes from Abigail and Emily on Instagram from separate focus groups, it is clear that Instagram affords functionality of communication and keeping in touch with friends, organising meet ups. However, it is also a vital part of youth culture in that they are constantly connected to their friends and can therefore share and feel part of their everyday activities. This is demonstrative of the centrality of constant connection to foster a sense of community engagement among the peer group, and as discussed later this is one the key aspect young people fear would be missed if it was not available. Instagram was by far the most used and discussed form of social media, almost all the participants said they had an Instagram account, despite the majority of them being under the age limit for Instagram of thirteen years old. However, as discussed in chapter five there was a misconception across various participants that the age limit was only twelve years old, coming from confusion in how it is presented in the app store. Despite the popularity of Instagram, not every participant was as fully engaged with it:

I have Instagram, but I do not really do much on it, I do not really post any images of me, I post images of like things in my garden because... there is an odd pheasant that comes through.... I don't really talk to friends much on there, it's not very direct, it is sort of passive in a way? You sort of just put something up and they will like it or not like, there will be the odd comment, but you do not really go further than that. (James, age 13).

From this from James, it can be argued that for him he was not as bothered by Instagram, he was on it and posted pictures, but it was not a central form of

communication like it was for some of the other participants. Furthermore Evelyn, (age 12 said):

The only social media I have is Pinterest and that is because I like looking at cooking stuff...I'm not being rude but I am not interested in looking at pictures of people, I could see them in real life if I wanted to see them

She was one of the very few girls who did not have an Instagram account. Everyone else did have an account and were enthusiastic in discussing their use of Instagram. There was also a sense of having to do it 'right' among the girls in particular.

My sister taught me how to use it because she and her friends had it. She is 16 so obviously had these things before me so she could show me (Abigail, age 12).

From this and other discussions there was a sense of making the most of the social media functions and ensuring that it is done 'right' this is suggestive of the performative aspects of belonging to the peer group that are elaborated on below.

There was a sense from the passion of their discussions which occurred across different age groups and in different focus groups, that Instagram was the primary social media application of this time, and it was central to interactions of young people to maintain their status and belonging as part of the culture. This was also shared with discussions of what it would be like with no internet, as discussed later in this chapter. With social media there was a clear gender divide, the focus groups with girls were much more likely to spend a great deal of time discussing their use of various social media and how important this form of communication was to them. Whereas the boys focus groups were more mixed, they were less likely to all have a social media account, and as the above example from James illustrates, they were less likely to be

as passionate and enthusiastic in their discussions and use of social media. The significance of this apparent gendered difference is suggestive that with social media applications it is dependent on which applications the young person's peer group were interacting with, for most of the girls it was of vital importance to them to be able to keep in contact with what their friends were doing. However, for the boys it was not as important an aspect for their peer group generally. There is therefore an argument here about the performative aspects of belonging to the peer group and joining in with peers by interacting through social media. If the majority of the boy's peers are not really engaging with social media, there is less pressure to conform and be part of that social group. Other social media applications were also discussed for example:

One I have been using a lot is Musical.ly... I like to make lip sync videos for my friends and other people to see. It's like Instagram but for videos (Emily, age 13).

Musical.ly no longer exists but was merged with TikTok which is currently the fastest growing social media platform, overtaking records for reaching one billion monthly active users that was set by Facebook (Dellatto 2021). While social media trends come and go one of the key aspects of longevity remains in the ways that young people interact through these applications and the centrality of these applications to youth culture and experience. They generally vary in the different approaches to communication, there are different methods and functions in the different applications; however, the common aspect is that it facilitates communication and cultural belonging. It is mediated communication, and the social practices are similar throughout different applications. As discussed in the literature review.

Some social media activities were seen as a commitment:

You have to keep up with certain things otherwise you do not know what is going on. (Emma, age 12).

As per the above Tumblr was seen as a big commitment and it was more unusual for the young people to be engaging with it. Some of the participants were huge fans of Tumblr, such as Harriet as discussed earlier. But as per the quote from Harriet as part of the title for this chapter, it was a huge part of her digital life, and was central to her experiences of peer interaction and culture in the digital landscape and understanding of what it meant for Tumblr for a person's lifestyle and sense of community. Whilst this level of enthusiasm of Tumblr was not shared with *all* the other participants, what is common across multiple platforms is that they had a passion for their preferred and favourite ways of online communication, whichever application that may be, for example whether that be Instagram, Snapchat or indeed Tumblr.

On Snapchat:

I use Snapchat like I send my friends pictures of me doing weird faces...and I put a funny caption and I send it to my friends, and they send something back (Charlotte, age 12).

I don't use it much now, because it is, I know this is kind of like a first world problem [laughs], but it is quite a lot of effort to record it and then do the caption and then send it and draw funny things on it... using all the effects, if I am going to do it I have to use every single thing and it is too time consuming when I could just text someone...basically our generation is just concerned about the less effort we use [laughs] (Harriet, age 12).

I did get Snapchat but then I thought what was I really going to do with it? But then when your friends send you something, you have to send something back (Evelyn, age 12).

From the above discussions around Snapchat, it could be argued that Snapchat was falling out of favour with this age group, or peer groups. Similar discussion took place across various focus groups, from Harriet's response it was too much effort to keep up with Snapchat and there was a sense from Evelyn's response that it was an obligation to have to send a Snap back to friends as opposed to something that was highly desirable to do. Nonetheless Snapchat was shared across the focus groups and interviews as one such example of an application that was engaged with and offered different opportunities to share experiences and engage with peers through the sharing of funny images and the ability to produce humorous content using the functions of the filters, stickers and adding captions. This is further evidence of the ways young people interact through the digital landscape and how they are creating and co-creating the landscape itself through peer interactions, shared and community understandings.

7.1.2. Landscapes of Communication:

A key theme that emerged through discussing the digital landscape was that of communication. Communication was discussed as a vital aspect that was facilitated through the digital landscape in various forms. The importance of communication was discussed along with the methods of communication. Overall, it was clear that digital technology affords hitherto unprecedented levels of communication. There is a variety of methods of communication produced through and in conjunction with peers. This communication takes many forms such as through text, video, photos, and shared understandings such as memes, which is discussed later in this chapter. Whatever the method or style of communication the young people referred to, what was common across all the focus groups and interviews was the importance of communication to

the very experience of adolescence, it was a vital part of youth culture to be in constant contact with peers and to be able to share multiple aspects of their lives. While the internet era is often referred to as the 'information age' I would however put forth that it is also the 'communication age'. As this was a something that was discussed by all participants as the primary advantage of the digital landscape. The research activities were carried out prior to the Covid-19 pandemic; however, I think it is reasonable to argue that post pandemic digitally facilitated communication has become and even more pertinent aspect of all our lives and so it would be interesting to see what young people would now say about this.

There was various forms and methods of communication discussed as well as reasons for the importance of this digitally facilitated communication:

Well at lot of time I don't get to see friends that are not at school, like friends from holiday or from my old Primary School. So, I will talk to them online, as it is the only way I get to talk to them (Abigail, age 12).

I like being able to talk to my friends, see how they are getting on because I don't see much of them anymore, they went to a different high school (Liam age 12)

There was a boy in my primary school called Quinn, but since he moved school, I kept in touch with him (William, age 12)

For these participants here the digital landscape, and in this case social media specifically afforded access to friends from primary school or made whilst on holiday, these are friends that she would not see in her everyday life, but the digital landscape affords opportunity and accessibility to interact with these friends and stay connected.

This was further discussed by Harriet, (aged 12):

I play online with my friends from Primary School

Here, Harriet is referring to online gaming as a method of communication and keeping up with friends she is not seeing every day. Like the others, she is discussing the importance to her of being able to stay connected with friends from her previous school she no longer sees daily. This was a common point of discussion for the Year 7 participants, who had transitioned to High School approximately six months prior to the research taking place. This transition process would have been a period of adjustment for young people, and the affordances of being able to keep in contact with friends who went to different schools was extremely important to the young people as it meant they did not have to say goodbye to those relationships altogether. The difference here is that Harriet is doing this through gaming online with her previous friends which is an especially interactive online activity. Whereas the others were discussing using social media for this function. Nonetheless what is clear from these responses is that various aspects of the digital landscape offer different opportunities for engagement with other people, in this case friends from Primary School, but what is common is that the digital technologies afford those opportunities and again this can be related to participation in these realms as constructing the landscape itself.

There was a practical element to online communication, with the follow discussion as one such example:

I like OoVoo because you can do a group video call with up to four people. You can have a group conversation and it saves you from having to go somewhere to meet them. You can do it at the touch of a button, which is cool (Emily, age 13).

Here Emily is showing how the OoVoo platform allowed for group video calls which enabled a practical solution to being able to have a group chat without having to see people in person. This affords a kind of online communication and socialisation which

is unique to the digital generation. There are now multiple applications and programmes which offer similar functionality, and these were used extensively during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. This technology affords the functions of being able to simultaneously connect with several people at once and offers opportunities for socialisation outside of face-to-face meetings. Indeed, socialisation was one aspect particularly valued by William (age 12):

One of the best things about going online is being able to socialise with friends and talk to people you don't know

Here William shows that not only does he interact with his friendship group he knows in 'real life' but also being able to talk to people no known. This was said particularly in the context of online gaming whereby William discussed playing online with friends and strangers, but regardless the ability to communicate and interact through online gaming was of importance to him as it supported a sense of belonging and community. Mia (age 12) offers another practical example:

Some of my friends are going into Town on Saturday, and we did a mass group chat to add as many people as possible, and it doesn't cost anything to send.

Here Mia is demonstrating that the practicality of some digital functions such as the ability to send group messages means that mass communication can occur to send messages to everyone at once with ease, freedom and without occurring costs. These functions facilitate the ability to organise a meet up with ease, by instantly connecting to multiple friends at the same time. This is particular to the digital age whereby this level of communication and instant access is unprecedented.

Another key theme of communication that came up from various participants was the ability to keep in touch with friends or family far away:

I keep in touch with my Portuguese family, because it is cheaper than calling them... Skype is just universal. (Olivia, age 12).

I use WhatsApp to keep up with my friend in South Africa...I like WhatsApp because it's free...I love it because I can keep in contact... they are an hour ahead at the moment, so we talk until 8pm then she needs to go to sleep so I read for an hour.... It's really important to me because I can reach the other side of the world, she only moved there in November, and it has been quite lonely (Noah age 12)

I like using it [Social Media] because it's good to talk to friends, that maybe I meet on holiday and don't get to see very often (Emily, age 13).

My sister has two children, she is 26, and she sends me photos of what they are doing, like yesterday sent me pictures of their first hairstyles...and it is really cute because I can look back at them. (Evelyn, age 12).

From the above examples it can be seen how important it was to the young people to be able to communicate with friends and family far away. Olivia (age 12) further demonstrated this:

I have moved house 12 times because my dad is in the military, so I use it to keep in contact with friends that live far away.

The digital landscape therefore offers an opportunity to be able to engage with people no matter the location. There is an understanding here, for example as highlighted by Noah, that the instantaneous aspects of the communication, such as via What's App, are particularly valuable to him to be able to talk to his friend in real time and still have that engagement as he clearly misses his friend.

The instant access of online communication, and the constant ability to reach their peers, as shared by Charlotte (age 12):

It is effort if you have to go round someone's house and you have to walk, but online can get them instantly

This shows how easy it was to access peers through online communication, additionally several participants shared the belief that online communication was easier.

I do not like starting to talk to people in person because I get really awkward when I meet new people and I like get nervous...Talking online is easier because you do not have to look at them and then you can break the ice. (Charlotte, age 12).

You have to have guts to literally go say hi and introduce yourself, but you can start talking on social media it is easier. (Amelia, age 11).

Some people are more confident in online chat than in person, but sometimes it is the other way round (Abigail, age 12).

I have seen quite a few people that are really shy... but like talk so much online (Emily age 13).

For Charlotte and Amelia, they found online communication facilitating making new friends, and was a way they could overcome shyness in making new friends when they started at High School, as also shared by Amelia and Emily who discuss here the ability to be more confident online. As mentioned earlier for the year 7 groups they had only recently transitioned to High School, and part of this process was fitting in and finding new friendship groups. This process was facilitated initially by social media enabling the young people to continue to build relationships outside of the school environment and this could create a peer culture through interactions in both the offline and online worlds as demonstrated by Harriet (age 12):

When we were in primary school I got my mum to arrange it with other mums when I was meeting friends and at High School it doesn't work

like that because the parents do not stand in the playground so do not know each other, they do not have each other's numbers...so we are more independent and have to do it ourselves, so without it [the internet] we wouldn't be able to do that, so it would be bad.

Here Harriet is reflecting that to arrange meet ups outside of school this needs to be organised through social media, and this is a transition from how it was in Primary School. Therefore, digital technologies provide opportunity for young people to build independence and manage their own peer relationships with increasing autonomy. Thus, they can exercise agency in their peer interactions, and this in turn helps to create a sense of belonging and ability to be a participant in peer culture.

Overall, the digital landscape was extremely important to participation in peer culture. One of the questions I asked in each focus group was "if the internet was taken away tomorrow, what would you miss the most?" and universally the response was along the lines of "Talking to my friends" (Abigail, aged 12).

The below is some further examples of responses:

I would miss long term friends that you would never see because you could not arrange to meet them... and it is kind of upsetting (Amelia, age 11).

If you cannot have a connection with someone outside of your school, you wouldn't be able to talk to someone for six weeks during the holidays... and also, I have got another quite important reason, my parents have split up and I was able to talk to my best friend... if I had not been able to communicate with someone, I probably would have just collapsed. (Ava, age 12).

From the above example it is clear how important being able to communicate through online technologies is to these young people. The quote from Amelia here is particularly indicative of the centrality of the digital landscape for peer interactions and

friendships, it is a key aspect of her friendship formation and being able to interact in both online and offline worlds. For Ava there was a similar sentiment in the ability to keep in touch with friends outside of the school environment, but she is also offering a particularly poignant observation of how online communication with her friend when she was going through the challenging time of her parents splitting up was exceptionally important to her and her wellbeing. It is examples like this that must be kept in perspective when the rhetoric of risk is applied to digital landscape. As acknowledged in chapter five and the literature review, the digital landscape is a place of risk but examples such as this highlight how supportive it is also for young people's experiences.

The centrality of the digital landscape to peer participation and youth culture was summarised by Emily, (aged 13):

My whole life is like dedicated to going online, if it was taken away it be like, my life is over, no internet.

There was some 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) expressed by the participants at the thought of not having access to digital technologies as the below examples highlight:

If I was off for a day, the next day I might have missed lots of messages which might have been really important or missed out on a lot of dramas and stuff going on.

If my iPad or phone was taken away, I would feel really agitated, because I would be thinking, what is that person saying at the moment (Evelyn, age 12).

I would miss out on the gossip and what people are up to. (Amelia, age 11).

This shows the importance of the ability to access the digital landscape for the young people, this is interwoven with their very experience of peer culture. This 'fear of missing out', may stem from fear of disconnection from their peers. They may fear that in a constantly connected landscape not having this connection may be damaging to their relationships and friendships as they are not able to join in with the discussions or 'gossip' if they are not part of this. It could therefore be damaging to their sense of belonging not being able to interact and engage with their peers in this way.

7.1.3. Landscapes of Shared Meanings: memes and more!

One cultural understanding that has arisen is that of 'Memes' which is a shared cultural understanding, and in the internet age this takes the form of an 'in-joke'. This is indicative of the integrated nature of the digital landscape to young people's experiences of belonging to their peer culture. That shared understandings are formed and exchanged through the digital landscape, and this is part of developing a sense of belonging to the peer group as a whole, by being able to create and share memes or other community understandings. Memes are explained by Ava (age 12):

They are like pictures with captions... when communicating with someone and you can't be bothered to type, just get a meme, it explains everything [laughs] (Ava, age 12).

Typically, when thinking of internet memes this takes the form of pictures with text on them, there is a shared understanding of the joke of the meme and these funny images are shared amongst peer groups on social media. Memes are often slightly changed and developed through each sharing, such as through changing the text, and there are online 'meme generators' where you can take an image and insert your own text

to advance or apply the meme to a new context. The key aspect of a 'meme' is the shared community understanding which makes it humorous.

Grumpy cat is my favourite meme, (William, age 12).

Here is an example of the 'Grumpy Cat' meme:

Figure 1: Example of 'Grumpy Cat' (Menendez 2019):



As per the above example Grumpy Cat memes feature the image of the above cat, or similar of this breed that has a 'grumpy' face, and the overlaid text has various joking statements about being grumpy or annoyed. The shared understanding is that the cat is grumpy and complaining about something and the joke subtly changes with each new version that is produced. The meme therefore produces and reproduces shared meanings and cultural understandings each time it is circulated and changed. Young people are central to this process as they produce or change the text on the meme and share it amongst their peers. Grumpy cat is just one such example of this phenomena there are many other examples which feature different imagery and

convey different meanings and jokes, not all of it appropriate for young people. What memes do demonstrate, however, is the shared cultural understanding that is shared amongst young people, and this is indicative of the digital landscape in general. Children and young people's interaction in the digital landscape demonstrates their agentic participation in shaping this landscape through their interactions in sharing and producing memes, in this example. This participation is salient to the experience of youth culture in the digital age, it helps young people to fit in and experience friendship and peer interaction. Non-participation would mean young people are missing a shared experience with their peers which might be challenging to their friendship formation and sense of belonging.

Other examples of shared meanings and understandings come in the below:

My family laptop used to have Windows 7, but when I was playing a game on it, it froze and got blue screen of death!... It means a hardware failure... and once you get blue screen of death it cannot be fixed so my dad bought the family a Windows 8 laptop. (William, age 12)

From this there is a shared understanding of the phrase 'blue screen of death' the other participants (and me!) instantly knew what was meant by this phrase. The other participants audibly groaned when William said the laptop suffered from 'blue screen of death', in a shared sympathy for this. There was a shared meaning of what this means in technological terms and what the significance of this hardware failure is and there would be no choice but to replace the device. This is demonstrative of the new shared understandings of the technological age, and how this has produced new understandings, challenges, and ideas. The fact that this exact phrase is well recognised is indicative of the shared language and culture of contemporary society

whereby such discourse is instantly recognisable, and this is also shared by the community of young people.

7.1.1. Landscapes of Gaming

In general, the young people spent a lot of time discussing gaming and sharing their experiences with gaming. These experiences showed community understanding and shared experiences with gaming as a source of entertainment, such as Ava was particularly vocal (see chapter five for full quotation) about her 'addiction' to video games, she identified herself as a gamer, seeing this as a key component of her identity. In general, there was lots of discussion about different games and different devices across all the focus groups. As the focus groups were semi-structured there was opportunity for the young people to shape the flow of conversation and take it in directions of their choosing. The group of Year 7 Boys had a lot to say about gaming:

I am often playing on my X-Box to get rid of all my stress, and then I will like having a bounce on my trampoline (William, age 12).

From this William finds gaming not only a source of entertainment but also a source of stress relief and enjoyment. Furthermore, William and Noah discussed shared experiences of gaming. They discussed an online community where they got information about games and where they get gaming information from:

I basically have all the Minecraft handbooks... they help me to play and give me an idea what the crafting looks like.... I also often look at like reaction videos for new games and then think hey that game look great, I should get it (William, age 12).

From this William is engaging with an online community to access his games and gaming information. This is a shared community of experiences which he discusses is shared with friends both online and in person. There is a therefore a shared experience across the peer group of young people which has been fostered and afforded by the digital landscape. These shared experiences promote a sense of belonging and community as the young people can share common interests and hobbies through gaming. Whilst William and Noah from the year 7 Focus Group were particularly vocal about this and spent a long time in the focus group discussing and sharing what games and gaming devices they played, this was also shared in other focus groups. In all the focus groups gaming was mentioned to an extent and seemed to cross gender divides whereby both girls and boys focus groups discussed gaming as a source of entertainment, a hobby, and a way of interacting with others through the digital landscape. Whilst there was no clear gender divide, as girls and boys were likely to discuss gaming. There was an apparent divide on how much they had to say about gaming, for example typically the boys spent longer discussing games and, in more depth, than the girls. This demonstrates that both girls and boys are engaging with gaming, but the boys were more likely to speak for longer about the intricacies of gaming and that theme would dominate the discussion of the focus group whereas the girls typically spoke about gaming in conjunction with other activities such as social media.

The types of games discussed were varied for example there was discussion of warfare games such as Call of Duty alongside 'Sandbox' games like Minecraft. Call of Duty and Minecraft were the two most popular games mentioned repeatedly by different participants across the focus groups and there was no apparent difference in gender; the girls' and boys' groups were equally as likely to say they played Call of

Duty or Minecraft or vice versa. Furthermore, the discussion around gaming demonstrated that games were a good source of a creative outlet:

The good thing about Minecraft is that you do not really have a limit of what you can do? You are free to do what you want, and it is easy to use (Evelyn, age 12)

I like the whole Sandbox kind of gaming thing because you can do whatever you want and build for hours. (Ava, age 12).

This shows that the open world sandbox format of games such as Minecraft allowed for a creative outlet of exploring and creating a world. This creativity is a good skill to develop in fostering and promoting imagination. This is done collaboratively with peers, so in the creation of the game content young people are shaping their experiences through and in conjunction with one another. In young people sharing experiences of a particular game, they are showing how the digital landscape is facilitating their hobbies and interests and how sharing these with one another means that there is a common interest which can facilitate community and friendship:

I like playing games online because you can do loads of different stuff, there is competitive element, you play with friends and get an adrenalin rush (Harriet, age 12).

Here Harriet discusses why she enjoys playing game online, but her argument here about playing with friends in a competitive way or getting an adrenalin rush is indicative of the above point; that shared experiences online gaming can foster and develop peer relationships:

I play with friends as they are not going to get angry... We often play games that are relaxing like crafting based and sandbox ones because they are fun, and you get to create things and build things... I find them fun because you if you make something it does not matter

because it is your creation, and nobody can judge it. If you want to make a house, a giant disco party room, something like that, you can. The only limit is your imagination, so I just find that fun. (Oliver, age 13).

In the above example from Oliver, he is agreeing with the others about the enjoyment of crafting and sandbox games, again showing that creative outlet as discussed above, Oliver is arguing that the creative outlet is providing a sense of ownership and there is fun in developing such an ownership over their own creations. Furthermore, Oliver discusses here (above and below), playing online with friends. There is an understanding from these responses that Oliver is preferring to play with friends as there is less judgement as from other people he might play with online. The role of friends in gaming was also explored by Harriet (age 12):

I like playing Plants vs Zombies.... You have to plant these weird plants and then deal with the threat of Zombies. I don't know really, I just liked it because all my friends were playing it

Here is she is showing that playing with friends was a main motivator for playing this game, and that the community aspect of playing together was the main motivator for her to be playing and engaging with this game. This demonstrates the important role peers play in engagement with digital landscapes and that sharing experiences through digital media, in this gaming is salient to enjoyment and engagement in media products. These shared interactions shape the experience of belonging to a peer group and to the youth culture.

In addition, what the following shows from a discussion between Oliver and James is that whilst gaming young people are engaging with multiple media simultaneously to facilitate online game playing with friends:

I use Skype. I play games with my friends, and we talk on Skype at the same time, so we can strategize and chat about stuff (Oliver, age 13).

This shows that engagement with multiple media is common to facilitate an integrated experience and feel fully immersed with friendship groups to enable an interactive experience with friends. Oliver further discussed how he talks to various parties online via social media to share information and gain understanding about games and how to do things and achieve his goals:

I talk to my friends and my neighbour, and my brothers' friends... I ask them for opinions on games and how they do things because they are really good at reskinning games, interfaces, and modding them to look cool

The digital landscape is therefore complex and diverse in the ways multimedia is used by the young people to participate and shape their experiences. As argued throughout this chapter the sharing of experiences in participation through the digital landscape constructs and co-constructs the landscape itself and shapes the very experience of growing up in the digital age. Furthermore like 'memes' shared understandings and experiences are formed through the interactions of the landscape, with common experiences such as 'glitches' and 'modding' being shared among the young people as a cultural capital and understanding of how to interact online which shapes peer relationships and experiences.

You can exploit funny glitches with characters... they were just going about the place like glitching, I was like what the hell...I screenshot it and sent to my friends and they were just laughing. (Oliver, age 13).

This example of a glitch becomes an item of cultural capital that can be traded and shared with friends to share the experience as something enjoyable and create new

shared meanings. Another example of this comes from the discussion of 'mods' or modifications whereby people will make changes to the coding of games to produce funny effects or reactions:

Some people do funny mods...there was one with Thomas the Tank engine... (James, age 13).

Yeah, they did that in Skyrim...it was like the Thomas Tank engine Music [sings]... it was hilarious because you were about to battle a dragon, but it was the big face like coming close, I brought my brother in and he was just laughing it was hilarious (Oliver, age 13).

This demonstrates that shared meanings and experiences are created through such interactions and participation with games in the digital landscape. As argued, this creates the landscape itself, however, Oliver took this even further as he was particularly enthusiastic about creating his own games and gaming experiences:

I use my Raspberry Pi to make games using coding in Scratch and Python... It is more fun because if you make the game, you know how to fix it (Oliver, age 13).

He is engaging with key digital literacy skills in creating his own games and taking a great deal of satisfaction and pride from these experiences. William had some further examples of young people can share their experiences with gaming online, here he discusses his YouTube channel:

On YouTube I like to share game uploads... I have a series for the game robots and basically vlog about the game... on one video I have over 1000 views (William, age 12)

In creating and posting gaming videos for others to see and engage with, he is demonstrating participation in the digital landscape; but this is going beyond

participation towards the concept of 'agentic participation'. He is agentic in how he can put himself out there to express his views and opinions and engage with other people in the digital landscape. Whilst 1000 views may not sound a lot compared to big YouTubers, the number does not matter, he was proud he had that many views, and this showed the immense satisfaction he gained from engaging with the digital landscape in this way. Moreover, this is an example of how young people shape the digital landscape itself; creating and co-creating it in collaboration with peers. Their very interaction with the digital landscape creates it, therefore the digital landscape of participation is ever shifting and changing as the young people interact, engage, and shape their own experiences.

7.2. Children as savvy digital consumers

Within this subsection I discuss the participants as 'savvy digital consumers'. Here I am theorising that the children and young people further exhibit and exercise agency in relation to their interactions with the digital world in how they make choices and decisions about which technologies to engage in. Here I propose that the children are savvy consumers of digital technology as they can make clear and rational choices. These choices are informed by research, and in collaboration with peers. They reach shared understandings and experiences through being able to interact through the same technologies. Whether this be uses similar devices, for example, phones or tablets or through the same applications. Here I am defining 'savvy' in the context of children and young people's *informed* decision making when it comes to consumption of digital technologies, they are 'savvy' in the decisions they make and their rationale for such decisions.

One example of this is that the children and young people particularly valued Apple products, having an iPhone was deemed highly desirable. When asked why an iPhone, they discussed the range of apps available, and the ability to send iMessage, which meant that they did not need to spend their credit on sending text messages to friends. They further discussed using WhatsApp for this reason too, to save money and not spend credit allowances.

I like my iPhone because of iMessaging does not cost you anything, but that can only work if you both have it (Emily, age 13).

Another key area in relation to money and expenses was discussed in relation to in-app purchases or in game purchases. The young people were aware of in-app or in-game purchases and were aware of the cost these might induce. They expressed a keenness to avoid such purchases and how to use free apps but to avoid purchasing the extras. This demonstrates an awareness of the marketing aspect of free apps and how they can be marketed in such a way as to promote extra payments.

Another way in which the young people demonstrated digital consumerism was through the devices they chose to use, as mentioned they mostly wanted an iPhone for the free messaging using iMessage. There was also a sense of community in using the same devices, they wanted to fit in with their friends.

Most of my friends have iPhones, so I guess it is good because you can iMessage for free (Noah, age 12.)

This demonstrates that they were looking to fit in with their peers and use the same devices, but there is also a practical reason for this, if they are all using an iPhone,

they can all benefit from the iMessage system and the availability of apps in the app store. Nonetheless some did not have an iPhone, instead they may have been using other smart phones. However, instead some had an iPod touch, this is a music player primarily and only connects through Wi-Fi (not the data network), it also does not have phone functions. However, it has some similar functions to iPhone in that you can access the app store including iMessage. So, some of the young people had an iPod touch to still have the same experiences as their peers, in their ability to be part of conversations on iMessage and share lots of app experiences, such as games.

I use an iPod touch it has lots of the same things as iPhone like I can message and audio call for free (Harriet, age 12).

Furthermore, another iPhone feature discussed by the young people was the ability to track location. It was discussed about the importance of remaining in communication with parents such as arranging pick up times and locations. This demonstrates the protective factors that having a phone had for children and young people. In addition, another safety feature that was discussed was the ability to track location, a number of participants said that their parents tracked their location using the 'Find my Friends' app and this added a layer of protection to make sure they were where they should be. Parental regulation was a key theme discussed in the previous chapter.

During the focus groups, one boy expressed his excitement about getting an iPhone:

Today I am getting an iPhone 5S! I cannot wait, I am using £80 quid of my own money I have saved... I am really looking forward to it, it is thinner, less heavy and will have a better camera... One reason I wanted it was because of the fingerprint thing, you can lock it and

unlock easier. The iPhones get better and better each year, except for a 6s because it bends in your pocket (William age 12).

From this it can be seen he was looking forward to acquiring this device. It also demonstrates savvy consumerism as he is showing knowledge in making an informed decision about which device to get, and the features it offers, along with which one to avoid. He was particularly proud that he had saved up the money to buy it for himself, seeing it as a real achievement to do this. He also saw that the price he was paying for it was a 'bargain' so was thinking about how to spend his money wisely to get what he wants and needs from his phone.

I really like I can use Facetime to video chat and um to message them, you can see that they are typing... and it doesn't cost anything to message other people with iPhones (William, age 12)

One subtheme that emerged through the focus groups is that of cost, or cost-saving. The young people were very conscious of the cost of activities such as calls or texts; instead, they were keen to use technology to reduce the costs, such as above the discussions of using iMessage as it does not cost to send messages. Thus, the young people demonstrated their abilities as 'savvy digital consumers' to use a variety of technology, which avoids cost incurring activities.

One example of the concern about the cost of some forms technology came from William who as quoted in chapter five recognised the cost of 'lives' in Candy Crush demonstrating the danger of the cost of in-application purchases and that this would occur 'real-world' costs. This shows awareness of these issues and therefore this is something he tried to avoid. The discussion earlier also showed how young people used apps like WhatsApp or iMessaging to be able to message for free. Emily offers another example:

You can do Facetime audio so it's like a normal telephone call, but it will not cost you anything (Emily, age 13).

Facetime audio calls were mentioned on various occasions by the participants as a way of making phone calls using Wi-Fi so there are no costs incurred. Another reoccurring issue discussed was the young people did not want to pay to access music:

I like using YouTube for music, I cannot obviously get all the up-to-date music on my phone because it costs money, so I get music there, I don't actually watch the videos though...I won't do any of the subscription apps, but I will do the free stream ones online and sometimes for Christmas I get an iTunes voucher (Emily, age 13).

From Emily's discussion of music, she was able to use various apps to access the music she was interested in, and this was able to do this without paying to access it. This demonstrates being a savvy consumer to be able to use a variety of apps to engage with the entertainment products that are desirable to young people. This is a common and expected part of the digital landscape, being able to participate in sharing and experiencing media products but using what the landscape offers to its full advantage by accessing this content without cost.

Building on the digital media literacy aspects discussed in chapter six, the young people I spoke to also show a great understanding of technical aspects of the technology they are using. They were able to use this technical know-how as savvy consumers to use technology effectively. They expressed how they upgraded their computers:

My laptop is a notebook laptop and it originally had Windows 8, and at first I didn't know how, but I played with settings and worked out how to upgrade to Windows 10, for free! (William, age 12.)

Here William is showing a sense of achievement in having the technological knowledge necessary to upgrade his laptop to a newer version of Windows. He also said that his parents “were amazed” he got a free upgrade on his laptop. This shows that he had the technical knowledge necessary to be a ‘savvy’ consumer’ of technology this technological knowledge facilitated his ability to utilise the technology to its full advantage. It also demonstrates that on this occasion William’s knowledge surpassed that of his parents, but he was able to exercise agency in using this knowledge effectively.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the concept of prosumerism that is that the children and young people are not ‘just’ consuming digital technologies, but they are also producing it. Here I can apply this concept of prosumerism to children and young people as savvy ‘prosumers’. So far, throughout this chapter there is discussion of how children were keen to use certain devices, particularly discussing the role an iPhone has as opposed to other smart phones. Again, I argue that the children are making informed choices about which devices, apps, and technologies to engage with. This informed choice is demonstrative of agentic behaviour. They are expressing and exercising agency in the ways they are deciding to engage or not with certain technologies they are empowered through the digital landscape to be making decisions for themselves. However, one of the most salient aspects of this is that they are not just expressing individualistic agency, but collective and shared agentic behaviour. It is agency that is expressed as a collective group which is making informed choices about which technologies to engage with and share experiences

through. It is through this savvy prosumerism that young people are making shared meaning and experiences. They are shaping the digital landscape itself in the choices they are making regarding the ways they are interacting and what they are doing within the digital sphere. They are therefore, not just consuming but producing the digital landscape. Therefore, we can think of children and young people as not only being savvy digital consumers, but also prosumers.

7.3. Fandom and Subculture

This subsection is looking at the topic of fandom and subculture which emerged during the research. Duffet (2013) defines fandom as an individual identifying themselves as a 'fan' of a particular genre or media product. This self-identification as a fan could be to a sporting team, a media product such as television show or book series. Duffet argues that identifying as a fan is also identifying yourself as part of a fandom community of like-minded individuals who share a common interest in the target of the fandom. Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007) define fandom in similar ways but also discuss the particularity that being a fan and identifying as a fan is to also identify as a community of individuals who come together with shared collective understandings and meanings all constructed around the identity of being a fan of that particular entity or media product. They argue that to belong to a fandom is to belong to a community and through this community there is shared representations and a sense of belonging and friendship can often develop on the back of the fandom.

Haenfler (2014) discusses subculture and the long history of the theory of subculture. He argues that subculture is a subset group of individuals with common and shared interests. To outsiders of the subcultural group, it can seem strange behaviours and

interests of the cultural group, however the subcultural group has a sense of belonging and friendship developed from shared interests. For example, Haenfler (2014) reflects on his experiences in the 1980s, growing his hair long like the members of Metallica and playing the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons leading to awkward conversations with his parents who feared he was into the occult, and how this was an expression of his belonging to a particular subculture. Jenks (2005b) argues there is a long history of academic studies in the theory of subculture, this is prevalent within Sociology and within Cultural studies particularly, the Chicago school is often cited as the foundation of subculture studies. But this was previously around cultural understandings of deviance and belonging to deviant subgroups or subcultures, which are diverse from mainstream culture.

However, I would now argue that today society has a broader view of subculture, and a typically more accepting view that there is diversity of culture and culturally shaped meanings and belongings. I also argue in this section that there is great overlap between the definitions of fandom and the definitions of subculture as experienced in the digital age. The digital landscape affords people new opportunities to experience and express fandom and subculture, it offers access and opportunity to find and connect with like-minded individuals in ways that are often more accessible than in person. I argue that fandom and subculture are often inextricably linked; to belong to a fandom is to express and identify yourself as a fan of a particular thing, whether that be a media product, sports team, or genre (for example genre of music). In expressing and identifying as part of the fandom, you identify with a particular community that has shared meanings and cultural understandings and fosters a sense of belonging. Therefore, I argue this leads to a subcultural group, where there are likeminded individuals sharing experiences and importantly expressing those experiences. This

may be through cultural products and tools such as clothing, language or engaging with certain media, like certain music or genres of other entertainment.

So how does this relate to children's digital landscapes? I would argue that in the digital age there is more access to an ever-diverse range of random and subculture communities. The digital landscape affords access to diverse and niche community groups, there are online communities for fandoms and subcultures. This was clear and evident as something that the young people who participated in this research experienced.

Throughout they discussed shared experiences with different media products such as apps or games. YouTube and being fans of certain YouTubers was common as discussed by Abigail (aged 12) Emily (Aged 13):

Abigail: I watch YouTubers, I like Zoella, she does like tutorials like baking and makeup and things...

Emily: Yeah she will do make-up tutorials of her favourites.... And her morning routine and stuff

Researcher: So what do you enjoy about watching her videos?

Abigail: She is really uplifting...like there is nothing bad in them, they are fine to watch

Emily: Yeah there is nothing bad there all. Towards Christmas she does daily videos so there is the build up to Christmas.

Abigail: Yeah, and it gets you excited towards Christmas

This was shared by other young people, who also discussed seeing her videos. They also discussed subscribing to their favourite YouTubers to get updates when new

content is posted so they can keep up to date. Therefore, by being fans of the same media 'product' in this case YouTube celebrity they were able to have shared experiences and common interests something they shared in their offline lives but experienced as facilitated by digital media.

I watch a few gaming YouTubers, and few prank ones which are funny. I also listen to music channel ones, and they give away albums in competitions, for free which I find cool. (James, age 13)

Emily also discussed how long she spent on YouTube:

I watch for about an hour to hour and half day really, I have it on when I am doing homework, it gives me a little break from homework because it can be quite boring.

So, YouTube is a form of entertainment, boredom relief for the young people, but also a way of connecting with YouTubers and in turn connecting with peers in sharing the common interest and being part of a fandom for certain YouTubers such as Zoella. This can promote a sense of belonging to a community with shared experiences and interests in common to discuss.

I have been thinking about starting a YouTube channel for ages...I would probably do it on gaming or cooking or something...My mum has actually been encouraging me to do one (Ava, age 12).

Furthermore, the status of being a 'fan' being part of a 'fandom' is also part of young people's identity. For example, Harriet (age 12) discusses her Instagram accounts:

Harriet: I have two, I have a fan account and a personal account set to private...My fan account is not private there is not pictures of me it is just for the fan base...

Researcher: What fan base is that?

Harriet I am a fan of Selena Gomez, so I am in the fan base, so yeah it [the Instagram account] is honouring her...fans of her are called 'Selenators' so my account has that in the name.

From Harriet's example here she is identifying herself as a 'Selenator', a member of the Selena Gomez fandom. She goes onto explain how she follows different Selena Gomez related accounts across different platforms: Instagram, YouTube, and Tumblr, she is demonstrating how the digital landscape is facilitating her fandom status and through the landscape she can explore this interest and share these experiences with others in the fandom. This creates a community of Selena Gomez fans, whereby the participants are sharing interest and common understandings and meanings are formed through this, such as the term 'Selenator'. Additionally, Harriet is not just participating in a community, but she is part of its construction through her use of a fan account to put her own Selena-based content out into the digital landscape. She was fiercely defending of Selena, saying that she "gets a lot of hate", but that she couldn't understand why, but "haters are going to hate".

What Harriet's example demonstrates is that the digital landscape offers community to fandom and young people can experience a sense of belonging to a community through engaging with fandom activities, such as watching videos, reading blogs, and making posts. Engagement in the fandom community is part of experiencing the digital

landscape and demonstrates agentic participation in that young people are constructing their social realities through this engagement.

In addition, the digital landscape generally offered opportunities to share common interests and hobbies, for example several the participants discussed YouTube as a way of access recipes to make:

I like YouTube for music, and like to watch people do things like, how someone does their hair or just talk about their day. I do not know why I just find it really enjoyable. (Emma, age 12).

I watch YouTube for cooking and recipes.... Cooking for life... I want to open a Bakery. (Ava, age 12).

While this is not a specific fandom, it does further illustrate that the internet can foster and afford opportunity to explore interests and hobbies, and that this interest and hobbies are done in collaboration with peers. This was discussed earlier, in light of the various things young people were doing online. As mentioned earlier, one of the most discussed activities was gaming, the young people were having shared experiences through online gaming, they discussed the open world game of Minecraft and the creativity and fun they experienced through that, they also discussed games such as Call of Duty, warfare games. They discussed the community aspects of playing these games and that they were able to share experiences through playing these games. Thus, it can be argued that being a player or gamer of particular games is also related to being a 'fan' of these games and therefore being part of a fandom community sharing these experiences with those that have common interests.

The digital age offers new opportunities, but I argue that for adolescents the sense of belonging that can be found from online communities and shared online experiences is salient to the experience of adolescence in the digital age. Young people have access to an unprecedented amount of information in the digital landscape, as established earlier this unprecedented level of information has caused anxiety and moral panic about inappropriate content for children and young people and great fear over the potentially corrupting nature of this. However, this fear can be destabilised when considering the opportunities that can be considered and whether this may outweigh the risks. In relation to fandom and subculture there is great opportunity for children and young people to find a community of likeminded people to engage and interact with, no matter what their interest they can find a community of fellows through the digital landscape. The vastness of the digital landscape means that there is opportunity to find commonality with other people in a range of niche and diverse interests. There were a few examples of this from the young people but the most poignant of these came from Ava:

I am a pastel goth... Pastel goth is pastels on black...Emos and goths are completely different things: emos self-hate, goths hate everything, and pastel goth is someone who wears pastels and black and that's me, very cute, but like a teddy bear with an ear ripped off... My friends don't know... I don't share it with them, they wouldn't get it. My mum doesn't fully get it, but she likes the idea of me being different, my own person (Ava, age 12).

Here she explains what a Pastel Goth is and how she uses the digital landscape to connect with other people with similar views:

Online is good to meet people similar because you can find the right kind of clothing, the right kind of people there, because in the real world you are not going to find the things that you would find online,

that are like you... no one knows about the things I like because it is out there and different... but online I can find people who like the same. (Ava, age 12).

The above is a particular pertinent point, that the digital landscape is affording the opportunity to engage with people with diverse interests and seeking this can mean that young people find a community of like-minded people online to relate to. This community producing a sense of belonging and community engagement. Ava's engagement with this community is also indicative of how she is exercising her agentic participation in creating the community itself, thereby shaping the digital landscape. Ava offers another example:

I watch Anime on YouTube; I watch a lot of that stuff. I was not brought up on Disney like a lot of my friends were... I was brought up with Studio Ghibli, so I have been growing up with a lot of that stuff and I watch reviews and reactions to Anime. (Ava, age 12).

What was particularly poignant about these examples was that she expressed her interests in the Anime fandom, or Pastel Goth subculture as being divergent from the interests of her 'real life' friends, but that through the digital landscape she was able to connect to likeminded groups of people and build a community of digital friends. I also found it interesting that she discussed this only during her individual interview and not during the focus group of her peers even though there would have been opportunity to discuss it with the topics that were being discussed. It would therefore be reasonable to suggest that she was reticent to discuss her affiliation with the pastel goth subculture, perhaps she was embarrassed or fearful of judgment from her friends who had differing interests to her. As per the above she discussed her 'real life' friends as 'not getting it'. However, the digital landscapes offer a safe place of exploring this identity and subculture and a place where she can be herself and express her views

and opinions readily without fear of judgment. This would produce a sense of belonging that can only be beneficial to a young person's self-esteem and self-concept, that the internet can afford access to a specific subcultural group to develop interests and shared understandings. Being an adolescent is a particular time in a person's life whereby trying on identities is part of growing up and learning who you are and what you identify with as per interests and communities. The digital landscape has therefore become interwoven with these experiences of adolescence and affords the opportunity to foster a sense of belonging to niche and/or specific subcultures and genres of fandom. This could be done through social groups through social media, or through accessing the same content, being on a forum. I have experience of this myself as being part of the Harry Potter fandom, I can reflect on my own experiences here as I have fostered a group of 'online only' friends, who all share the common interest of being Harry Potter fans. We have a Facebook group and messenger group chat where we interact with to discuss and share information of Harry Potter, however this has expanded beyond just the Harry Potter fandom, we support one another daily and share other aspects of our lives and have even met in person!

This could be revolutionary for adolescence, as it is for Ava because they can access and develop a sense of belonging outside of their immediate friendship groups, one of the common feelings as a teenager is struggling with 'fitting in', through the online communities a sense of 'fitting in' could be more achievable than ever before.

Overall, established within this subsection is that fandom and subculture in the digital age is expressed through developing a sense of belonging to a specific group with shared experiences or interests. The online landscape affords unprecedented opportunities for access to information and communities of diverse and niche interests and subcultures can be explored and expressed. This can foster and promote a sense

of belonging hitherto inaccessible for some in their offline lives. This should be considered a real opportunity and benefit of the digital landscape to young people in that this community and shared understanding can be made and developed and this could have a positive impact on a young person's self-esteem.

Once again this can be theorised considering the concept of 'agentic participation'; with young people finding sense of belonging to particular groups, fandom, and/or subcultures in the digital landscape they are continually shaping the experiences of belonging to this group for themselves and for others. Therefore, they are shaping the very landscape itself, they are demonstrating their agency in using their experiences to shape and inform the landscape of digital interactionism, and this is an active process of developing a sense of belonging and community understanding. It is also an ongoing process of negotiation, a process of continual change and shifting, it is not static to belong to an online community but the everyday interactions that occur between young people mean that the community group grows and develops together continually producing shared meanings, and understandings of the subculture or group.

7.4. Conclusions: Agentic Participation in the Digital Landscape.

This chapter has sought to bring together key theorising and arguments throughout the thesis. It has established and focused on the activities of children and young people and the shared experiences that children have through the digital landscape. These shared experiences could be sharing a particular online gaming experience, social media application, or sharing content such as videos. As has been argued children and young people are not passive in these interactions with the digital

landscape, it is an active process of engagement. I have drawn from the concept of 'pro-sumers' – those children and young people are not just consumers of the digital landscape but also producers, they produce the landscape whilst consuming it. Their very interactions, engagements and experience shape the landscape itself as an ever-shifting realm of interactions. To consider *how* specifically this happens I have theorised this as a concept of agentic participation; this is to imply a beyondness. It is beyond 'just' agency and beyond 'just' participation. Participation suggests joining into an existing activity or in this case it would suggest joining in with activities through the digital landscape. Children's agency as established through the Sociology of Childhood is how children and young people have power and control over their own lives, and how they go about exercising that power and control. The status of childhood in contemporary society is often thought of as quite a powerless status to have. The experience of childhood is shaped through adult authority, and in offline realms children practically have limited power in their own lives and even when they do have opportunity for agentic expression this is often afforded to them through adult permissions, and with adult limitations. However, the digital landscape is different it offers a previously unexperienced realm of apparent freedom for children and young people. They can make choices for themselves, and in doing so create shared meanings and understandings in how they interact and engage with one another online. Therefore, as has been argued their very interactions and engagements are demonstrative of this concept of agentic participation, because here in the digital landscape they are able to express themselves, their interests, and share this to create a community where a sense of belonging can be afforded and developed. Shared meanings can be seen in the cultural tools that are exchanged through the digital landscape, this can be the certain language or expressions that might be used or the

'memes' that might be shared and understood. In sharing this content along with sharing things of interest such as pictures, gifs, or videos the young people create a community of shared meaning and understandings, of 'inside jokes' and shorthand speech. This shapes the very digital community itself, therefore shaping the experiences of belonging to that community and in turn the experiences of adolescence in the digital age. Consequently, the concept of agentic participation can be seen as explanation as to how the digital landscape is and has become so interwoven in the experiences of growing up in contemporary society.

This chapter has further explored the concept of agentic participation through some subthemes or ideas. Firstly, it looked at the area of digital landscapes of participation, here some examples have been discussed of how children and young people are engaging within the digital landscape. It has been established that there is some shared activity and experiences, such as through interaction in online gaming, and sharing video content and so on. Discussed within this section is how online gaming offers opportunity for creativity, and exploration of games with collaboration and teamwork from peers. It has also discussed how certain social media applications afford the opportunities for social interaction in different ways, such as by sharing images, videos, or general communication. This section also discussed communication in general as this was one of the primary reasons cited by the young people when discussing whether the digital landscape was important to them. A common theme here was that the digital landscape afforded opportunity to stay connected with friends and family whether that be keeping in touch with school friends, afterschool or in the holidays or keeping in contact with family who lived far away. The digital landscape has therefore affordances of communication that have previously not been as easily or readily available. Images and videos can be shared with ease, and

this can be done in real-time such as through video calling, something we all became even more familiar with during the Covid-19 pandemic. These interactions and engagement in the digital landscape is indicative of the concept of agentic participation because it demonstrates that how young people are using digital technologies is creating shared and community experiences and understandings, therefore shaping the very landscape itself.

A further sub-section was on children as savvy digital consumers. Here it was discussed that children and young people are 'savvy' in their consumption and interaction with the digital landscape. They make informed choices about how to consume digital media and which technologies and devices to engage with. This is done in collaboration with peers so there are shared experiences drawn from this consumption, therefore this is also shaping the digital landscape itself in terms of which devices are used, and which media applications (such as games or social media) are engaged with. Once again this can be linked back to agentic participation, firstly through the concept of 'prosumerism'; young people are not just digital technologies or the digital landscape, and they are producing it too. This is an active process of interaction, exploration and creation of shared experiences and community. This is fundamental to what the digital landscape is and what it looks like and how it is experienced by individuals and groups alike.

The final subsection of this chapter looked at fandom and subculture, definitions were explored to establish what is meant by these concepts in this context. It was established the fandom is a community of likeminded individuals that share a common interest by being 'fans' of something. This is commonly fans of media products like a particular television show, genre or as explored in this chapter a YouTube sensation like Zoella. Subculture in the digital age was explored as a way of identifying as

belonging to a particular group with common interests and expressing those shared interests as facilitated by digital technologies. It was argued in this section that in this context there is overlap between the concepts of fandom and subculture: to belong to a fandom is to belong to a cultural group with a common interest. Subculture is similar there are shared experiences and interests through subcultures. However, subcultures maybe slightly broader than being a fan of one particular media product. What is salient to these arguments is how interaction with a fandom or subculture is central to many young people's experiences of adolescence and in exploring their interests and identities. By engaging online with subcultures this affords children and young people opportunities for developing a sense of belonging to this subcultural group that may not be able to be experienced otherwise. Such as the example of Ava who identified with being a pastel goth, but this was not something she could share with her 'real life' friends, so instead she engaged with a community of online pastel goths to share this interest and have a sense of belonging to a community through this online access. Thus, the digital landscape affords new opportunities for exploring and interacting with shared meanings and community engagement.

Overall, this chapter has taken a view of the more positive aspects of the digital landscape, it is important to acknowledge that the digital landscape is a vast, ever-changing environment. The digital world affords access to an infinite amount of information and opportunity for engagement. This vast unknowingness is fundamental to risk narratives and fear when it comes to young people's engagement with digital technologies (see chapter five). However, this chapter has sought to look at the other side and see what these landscapes offers in terms of interactions and experiences and how this helps young people develop a sense of belonging to a community, as well as offer opportunities for self-expression and creativity. In exploring these issues,

I have argued that the way that young people engage with digital technologies is shaping the very nature of the landscape itself, that young people take an active role in the creation of the digital landscape and that they are displaying agentic participation in how this is done. Agentic participation has been theorised and explored as a concept which is underpinning this thesis and theorising why engagements with digital landscapes may be quite so appealing to young people. This is therefore demonstrative of the centrality of the digital landscape to contemporary childhood experiences.

8. Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis has investigated children's experiences of digital landscapes through focus groups and interviews with children and young people aged 11-14 years; this research has explored this through adopting an interpretivist feminist epistemology. This meant that this research aimed to promote children's voices as expert in their own lives, thus, implementing a child-centred underpinning methodology. The rationale for this was explored in chapter four, the methodology chapter; it was here argued that taking an approach which appreciates that children have agency and participate in research is of vital importance for understanding social phenomena that impacts children and childhoods. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that children are not only able to or capable of participation in research, but moreover it is of vital importance that they are given the opportunity to contribute to research. By having children's voices heard, respected and put forward as expert in social matters, research with children and young people has the opportunity to promote the children's own perspectives and in turn promote the children's rights agenda which recognises children's voices and participation as a key right of childhood. The new sociology of childhood has been discussed in chapter three as a paradigm shift within the discipline of childhood studies. It was during this time that children were considered to be agentic able to exercise power and control over their own lives, this was concurrent with the children's rights agenda which notably outlined rights to participation explicitly alongside protection. The sociology of childhood, and the children's rights agenda has underpinned the themes and theories that this thesis has engaged with throughout. The role of children's rights to participation was explored within chapter three in exploring the literature around the children's rights discourse. Here this thesis argued that there is a tension between children's rights to participation and children's rights to

protection. This tension is demonstrated through the discourses of children's digital landscapes, which presents a dichotomy of 'risk' versus 'resilience' and participation. On one side of the dichotomy the digital landscape is considered inherently risky as explored within chapter five, yet on the other hand as explored within chapter six young people are capable of resilience and regulation, both self and facilitated by parents in order to mitigate these risks.

The 'risk' side of the dichotomy is indicative of the wider discourses around the children's rights agenda which promotes children's right to protection from harm above that of their participation. It views through the lens of moral panic that children's access to digital landscapes needs to be heavily regulated, controlled and monitored under the guise of protecting children from harm online. Chapter five explored the digital landscape as a 'risky business' and evaluated this in light of three giant 'social evils' of the internet: Cyberbullying, Sexting, and access to inappropriate content (including pornography). As argued and discussed, the digital landscape affords unprecedented opportunities of access to these social evils. This unprecedented level of access in the digital age has led to moral panic, as argued within chapter two's review of literature. Moral panic is categorised by sensationalist news reporting and in this case concerns over children's engagement with digital landscapes leads to concerns about the internet being a corrupting force on children's innocence. Therefore, by extension the risk agenda extends not just to individual children's exploration of the digital landscape and the risks inherent within this, but to panic over the very status of childhood itself. It is seen as threatening to the discourses of childhood innocence and therefore the construction of childhood as a time of carefree innocence.

Despite this, the other side of the dichotomy recognises that the digital landscape affords children and young people access to opportunities. The opportunities that are

presented within the digital landscape are vast and shape the experience of growing up in the digital age. Adopting a rights-based discourse to consider the opportunities the digital landscape affords is to appreciate the rights of participation that children and young people enjoy through their access to digital technologies. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was discussed within chapter three; in particular this refers back to the ideas here of participation and protection rights. Under article 17, children have a right of access to information from the media and this access to information from digital media extends to participation in the digital landscape as outlined in General Comment 25, (section VI. Point a) which was adopted in 2021 (UN 2021). Furthermore, section XI details the importance of the digital landscape for promoting rights to education, play and leisure. These ideas are reflected by the findings of this thesis in particular in chapter seven, whereby discussions of children's digital landscapes demonstrated the importance of these spaces for children's participation in cultural and peer interactions. However, whilst this general comment makes explicit how children's rights apply in digital societies it further outlines some of the limitations of this. As discussed in this thesis participatory rights are often revoked when there are concerns about children at risk, so in need to protect children and young people, decisions may be made *for* them instead of *with* them. This is reinforced in General Comment 25 under section XII which outlines the risk-based narratives of the need to protect children from exploitation and sexualisation online (UN 2021). However, under section XII, subsection A. 118 it is stated "Self-generated sexual material by children that they possess and/or share with their consent and solely for their own private use should not be criminalized" (UN 2021, p.19). This guidance therefore enshrines into international legislation a recommendation that the practice of 'sexting' should not be criminalised as argued in

this thesis, that criminalisation of these practice does not act as a deterrent and seeks to punish the behaviours as opposed to prevent it.

However, while there are welcome additions to the rights-based discourse from general comment 25, there are still inherent tensions with children's rights particularly around the divisions between protection and participation. Therefore, this plays out in the digital landscape where adults, including parents, teachers and policy makers may seek to control and regulate children's access to the digital landscape in order to protect them from it. Thus, access may be withdrawn due to the concerns over risks. Therefore, this thesis is arguing that in terms of children's landscapes, rights are hierarchical; protection rights are placed at higher importance and concern than participatory rights.

Despite the discourses around risk, this thesis argues that young people themselves are capable, resilient and agentic in managing their risks. This was argued and demonstrated throughout chapter six whereby young people's responses to risk and how they sought to protect themselves was explored. As argued in chapter five there was several risky endeavours explored by children in their engagements with the digital landscape, for example this research used fictional case studies on the areas of cyberbullying and sexting in order to prompt discussions around these elements of digital engagements. What is argued throughout chapter five and six is that children have a very good awareness of potential risks online, they shared a number of experiences they had or hypothetical scenarios in which they explored how they would respond. This demonstrated excellent awareness of online risks, furthermore they demonstrated high levels of resilience in resisting risky encounters. For example, the young people discussed using technologically facilitated means of protection such as privacy settings, reporting and blocking features, and how to avoid risk to begin with.

Furthermore, children discussed telling a 'trusted adult' when encountering issues; however, as analysed within this chapter there was a sense that they were maybe trying to give the 'right' answer from their online safety education lessons. What I teased out from their focus group responses is that whilst they would seek adult support, this would be something of a last resort or only if it got 'too bad'. Instead, young people would deal with issues of risk online themselves and only seek support if it reached an unmanageable threshold, instead mostly reliant on peer support. What is argued is that young people are capable and resilient in protecting themselves from harm, but that they do still need support from others in order to manage and mitigate the risks. Throughout chapter six the concept of self-regulation was explored, and it was demonstrated that children were able to an extent self-regulate their experiences online and as discussed above mitigate the risks through their knowledge and application of technologically facilitated defence mechanisms. Children and young people's experiences of self-regulation are demonstrative of their agency; they utilised their agency in making informed decisions about their online engagement, and make decisions that protect themselves from harm, or mitigate the risks. This is another example which demonstrates that children are resilient, capable and agentic in their dealings online.

Further explored in chapter six was the role of parents in regulating children's digital landscapes, here it was demonstrated that young people felt mostly positive about their parents' regulation of their online spaces and liked that they took an interest in their online activities, feeling this was a protective factor. Argued here is that children are capable and resilient, but this does not mean they are not requiring adult support. Conversely adult support is important to young people, but they fear that adults do not

necessarily 'get it' and therefore this thesis argues that non-judgemental and open-minded support is critical to support young people navigate the digital realm.

Chapter seven looked at children's agentic participation in the digital landscape, here the thesis drew from the experiences and ideas expressed by children in terms of what they enjoy doing online and what this offers to the experiences of growing up in the digital age. Here it was argued and demonstrated that the range of activities that young people engage with online was vast, but that they are largely enjoying these activities as a form of entertainment. The trends of young people's usage of technologies discussed within this chapter are echoed by the findings of the Ofcom (2021) Media use and attitudes report discussed within chapter two. The findings show how central digital technologies are to the experience of adolescence and how they foster and develop a sense of belonging among young people. To participate in the digital landscape is to participate in youth culture more broadly, without this vital access young people are not able to engage with their peers. Also argued within this chapter is that children are savvy digital consumers, what was meant by this is that they possess the required knowledge in order to make informed choices about how and why which technologies they engage with. This is another form of agency whereby young people are demonstrating their competence and knowledge to make decisions that shape their own experiences of technology.

A further section of this chapter explored the topics of fandom and subculture, here it was argued that young people are afforded lots of opportunities in the digital landscape that hitherto would have been inaccessible. Through the digital landscape young people are able to find a sense of belonging through engagement with community groups and subcultures, here they can find a group of like-minded individuals with similar hobbies, tastes, or interests and build a digital community. This is argued to

foster a deep community engagement and a sense of belonging that is crucial for teenagers to explore. Fandom was defined as part of this, as the belonging to a community of 'fans' or group of people who share common interests. Here a notable example explored was that of Harriet (age 12), who identified as a 'Selenator', which is a fan of Selena Gomez. Here she expressed that she is able to connect to a community of 'selenators' through social media and creating a fan account. This demonstrates the importance of the online community for Harriet, in forming and shaping her identity and community engagement developing a sense of belonging. A further concept explored in this chapter was that of 'subculture', and an example of a digital subculture was put forward by Ava (age 12), she identified herself as a 'pastel goth' which involves a sense of style of clothing, music, and identity. Ava discussed that the online community of pastel goths, meant she had somewhere to share and express her interests with, as she did not share these interests with her 'real life' friends. This demonstrates the digital landscape as a land of opportunity, it is a place whereby young people can find a place they belong and find like-minded individuals to interact and engage with.

This chapter and the thesis as a whole has been underpinned by and argued the concept of 'agentic participation'. Agentic participation, as argued in chapter seven particularly, is an original contribution to the field of the Sociology of Childhood. It is defined by its 'beyondness'. Agency is a well-known construct of childhood in society, the new sociology of childhood recognised that children have agency. Likewise, participation is a well-known concept and children's rights to participation are well discussed and debated within literature. However, what is argued here is that the engagement of children in the digital landscape is beyond our traditional theorising, it is not 'just' agency or participation, it is both and beyond. What I argue is that children

shape the digital landscape by and through every engagement with it; they are agentic in this shaping process demonstrating power and control. Children's engagement with digital technologies is argued as beyond participation, as participation implies a 'joining in' rather than a creationary process, as it is for the digital landscape. Therefore, this thesis has offered a contribution to the field of children and digital technologies, by considering and evaluating children's engagements in the landscapes as agentic participation, combining and moving beyond either concept singularly. Childhood as a status of being is a relatively powerless one, agency is often granted through and in conjunction with an adult lens or agenda. However, what has been argued in this thesis is that the digital landscape affords new opportunities for children and young people to shape their own experiences and demonstrate agentic participation. They are not only joining in with digital technologies, their interactions and engagements are producing the landscape itself. This production is through the shared meanings, cultural capital, and cultural tools that are exchanged through the landscape. These interactions are shaping the very digital community itself, this process by extension shapes the experiences of belonging to that community. It is a circular process, and transactional as young people are integrated in digital landscape. Therefore, agentic participation offers a theorising of this construct. It recognises that young people construct the digital landscape through their engagements and interactions. But crucially in turn it recognises that the digital landscape plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of growing up in the contemporary digital age, thus by extension young people themselves are exercising this concept of agentic participation to not only shape the digital landscape and their interactions within it, but also the very experience and construct of childhood itself.

8.1. Going Forwards: Policy recommendations and Future Research

This thesis has recognised the importance of the digital landscape for children and young people. It has recognised that for young people engagements within the digital landscape are salient to the experiences of growing up in the digital age. Agentic participation as discussed above has been argued as a concept to explain the forces which shape children's experiences and engagements within the digital landscape. Key themes have been extracted from the discussions with young people, themes around risk, resilience, regulation, participation, subculture, and consumerism have been explored with an underpinning theoretical stance grounded in the sociology of childhood and children's rights. What is clear from this research is that the digital landscape is central to and a vital part of adolescence. It is a critical part of growing up in contemporary society. Therefore, one recommendation going forward is that this importance is placed at the centre of discourse around children's access to technologies. Public and policy discourses of concern destabilise the notion of digital landscapes and seeks to exert control over children's uses of digital technologies through overt surveillance, and technologically facilitated control functions. This public and policy discourse of concern comes in the backdrop of a risk adverse society, however what remains clear is that digital technologies are part of everyday society for all, including but especially children and young people.

Education policy offers an opportunity whereby such risks can be balanced, and young people could be empowered to make informed choices and equipped with tools to protect themselves. For example, the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) (DfE 2022) document outlines statutory responsibilities for schools and other providers for Safeguarding children and young people. There is a section within this policy guidance that relates to protecting young people from sexual harassment and it is here

that under one bullet point there is mention of online sexual harassment, this refers to a supplementary document called 'UKCIS Sharing Nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education setting working with children and young people.' UK Council for Internet Safety 2020). The Sharing Nudes document refers specifically to the practice discussed in this thesis as 'sexting', it outlines how the curriculum through Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) should cover such topics to understand and prevent online sexual harassment, it specifically mentions children should be taught that "sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children is a criminal offence" (UKCIS 2020). This conflicts with the principles outlined in UNCRC general comment 25 discussed earlier which states children should not be criminalised in this way. Therefore, we have competing policy discourses on keeping children safe online. Policy discourses need to provide clear direction for how to address the risks of the digital landscape whilst also maintaining balance, i.e., to ensure that fear of the risks does not prevent or outweigh children's access to digital technologies. There needs to be practical strategies outlined in protecting young people, this could be built into the curriculum with specific programmes of study which recognise and respect children and young people's digital landscapes as important to them and empowers them through practical and respectful understanding of the roles the digital technology plays in their lives. This could sit within Sex and Relationship Education (RSE) and also Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), but these subjects need more prominence, time and emphasis in the curriculum in order to be effective.

The importance of the digital landscape was especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns which meant the digital landscape facilitated the access to outside world, whether this was in order to engage with remote schoolwork,

or to engage with friends and family who could not be seen in person. Recognising that digital technologies are an integrated part of children's lived experiences, means that the policy agenda needs to be respectful of this and what it offers in terms of opportunities. Nonetheless it has been argued and recognised that the digital landscape comes with inherent risks alongside opportunities. As has been established in this thesis young people are adept at managing and mitigating risks for themselves if they are equipped with the tools to do so. Thus, young people need online safety education that is respectful of the importance of the digital landscape, furthermore the goal of online safety education should be empowerment, it should aim to empower and equip young people with the tools and knowledge necessary so that they can protect themselves and each other with their online interactions. Parental regulation is another key area that has been explored, and parents need practical support and guidance in order to support young people with the digital landscape. Furthermore, parents need to offer a supportive, understanding, non-judgmental response to children's digital landscapes. They need to take a response that understands the importance of the landscape to young people, and so young people may be more likely to come forward when and if they experience issues.

Overall, this thesis reflects a successfully executed doctoral research project. I have successfully gathered data from young people on a challenging topic, eliciting frank, honest, and engaging observations from the young people. As previously discussed despite the shift in recognition of children as agentic, this level of child-centred research remains relatively rare, particularly with this topic area. This research has successfully engaged this group of young people through the adoption of this participant-centred methodological approach to enhance society's understanding of the phenomenon of children's engagement in digital landscapes. One of the core goals

of this research from the outset was the promotion of children's voices in the research findings. This thesis has successfully achieved this aim and contributes to the field a rich dataset that takes a balanced view of the digital landscape and its role in children's lives. This thesis also contributes to the field through the age group of the participants, they were 11-14 years old; typically, where empirical research with children has been conducted this is with older children and young people. The age range for this research was chosen specifically as there was not much research with this group, and certainly not much research which adopted a child-centred approach. This age group has offered an interesting insight into a particular stage of childhood, which is the 'pre-teen' into early teenage years stages. This stage is particularly interesting and relevant to digital technologies as discussed in this thesis the age limit for most social media platforms is thirteen, but this demonstrated young people's uses of these technologies prior to reaching this age. Overall, this thesis contributes an argument for the importance of digital landscapes in young people's lives; it argues that it is vital and salient to the experiences of adolescence. It argues that the young people have knowledge and resilience when it comes to mediating their risks, but that maybe practical help is required to empower them to protect themselves. Empowerment is key here as it recognises the concept introduced in this thesis, that of agentic participation. Of being beyond discussions 'agency' and 'participation' as separate concepts in the sociology of childhood, to recognising the duplicity of these concepts, their interwoven nature that plays out through digital landscapes. Therefore, this thesis contributes that the digital landscape itself is an ever-evolving concept, which is shaped through and by young people's interactions with it, thereby they are shaping their own experiences and understanding of adolescence in a digital age.

As has been argued the digital landscape is constantly evolving and being shaped with children and young people's interactions within it, this can be applied to the post-pandemic society we find ourselves in today. The data collection for this research took place pre- Covid-19 pandemic and prior to the development of TikTok as a video sharing platform. TikTok has been linked with problems, and like all new trending technologies with risk. Whilst new platform for social media trends may come and go, mediated practices of the social sharing may remain static. Nonetheless future research areas could look specifically at TikTok as a platform and its contributions to the experience of childhood. Furthermore, another key area that could be further explored is the importance of the digital landscape during and post Covid-19 pandemic. It would be reasonable to hypothesise that with the need for online learning, and the digital becoming our main source of interaction with friends and family outside the household during times of lockdown, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and developed even more so the importance of the digital landscape to children and young people as a salient aspect of belonging to contemporary society. Thus, these areas would be worthy of future and further investigations.

However, what has been demonstrated through this doctoral research is that the digital landscape is integrated with the experiences of, and construction of childhood. This integration is particular to the digital age we live in, and young people are instrumental, as argued through the concept of agentic participation, in shaping and developing the experiences within, across and for the digital landscape for themselves and their peers. Therefore, I argue for a new sociology of *digital* childhoods; one that recognises the interwoven ideas of childhood to and with the digital, and the importance of the digital in children's everyday lived experiences. This would take account of agentic

participation in the digital landscape as discussed, and this positioning would be the lens through which policy and public discourse can emerge and develop.

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10. Appendices

10.1. Appendix One: Focus Group Topic Guide

This topic guide was used to guide the focus group conversations, in a semi-structured way. I remained led by the young people, but having a guide or schedule allowed me to ask some questions to prompt a conversation. This was not used rigidly; most topics came up naturally and so I was able to ask the questions in ways logical to the young people.

- Introduction – introduce self.
- Recording

You will see we have a camera (point) and Dictaphone (point) recording; this is just for me to record what was said and these recordings will not be public, OK?

- Reminder of aims of project:

I want to talk about how you use digital technology such as the internet and your phones, I want to talk about whether you think this technology is good or bad and if you think it is good for your friendships.

- Consent and Safeguarding

You have already provided consent via the letters, but I wanted to check you are happy with everything? If at any time you want change your mind and do not want to continue just say and it will be absolutely fine.

I also want to remind you that I will keep everything you say private, in my project I will not use your name.

The only exception to this is if you tell me something that means you are getting hurt by someone or at risk of being harmed, I might have to tell another adult so that they can help you.

- Check understanding

Is all of that, OK? Does everyone understand any questions? Do you want to continue? Shall we start?

1.) Introduce yourself, say your name your age and an interesting fact about you! Such as a hobby, or pets or interest?

2.) Which types of technology do you like to use? Open question, prompts if necessary:

1) Smartphones

2) Internet

3) Tablets

4) PCs

3.) WHY???

4.) How do you use technologies?

- Which apps?
- Which websites?
- Which social media?

5.) Why those ones what do you like about them?

6.) How much time do you spend online?

7.) How do you spend your time online?

- Games
- Music videos
- YouTube
- Social Media
- Forums/Blogs
- Communicating with people
- Sharing information
- Finding information – homework?

8.) WHY....

9.) Who do you communicate with?

- Friends
- Strangers
- Family
- boyfriend/girlfriend
- Online only friends

10.) How do you like to communicate with your friends?

- Video
- Text
- Voice/sound
- Pictures

11.) WHY.....

12.) Is online communication important?

- WHY/WHY NOT?

13.) Do you think people communicate differently online than in person?

- WHY/WHY NOT?

14.) What are the benefits to the internet and online communication?

15.) Have you ever had any trouble or difficulties online?

- Inappropriate content
- Cyberbullying

16.) Cyberbullying

- What is it?
- Have you ever seen it happen online?
- Cyberbullying case study

17.) What are some of the risks or dangers to the internet and online communication?

18.) Do you think your parents look at what you do online?

Why...How do you feel about this?

19.) Have you ever tried to look at something online, and found it blocked?

What did you do?

Is that a good thing?

20.) I now want to talk to you about sexting....

- Do you know what sexting is?
- Do you think it's OK or not really a good idea?
- Sexting case study.

21.) If your mobile phone and the internet was taken away tomorrow, what would you miss the most and why?

- Would you rather never be able to go online again or use a mobile phone
OR never go outside again

22.) Follow up any other points that are missed....

- CLOSE FOCUS GROUP

- Thanks
- Individual interviews next step, explain process.

10.2. Appendix Two: Case Studies

These fictional case studies were created by me to facilitate the discussions in the focus groups. When the topic of cyberbullying and sexing or similar came up naturally in the focus group I introduced these for discussion. I asked what they would advise the person to do.

10.2.1. Case study 1: 'Cyberbullying'

Louise after school Louise posted a photo of her and her cat to Facebook, She got some hurtful comments on it... what should she do?



10.2.2. Case Study 2: 'Sexting'

Susan is 13 and her boyfriend Tom is 14. They have been going out for four months. Tom has asked Susan to send him a revealing photo – a topless Selfie. Susan doesn't know what to do and she is not sure she feels comfortable with it. Susan really likes Tom and doesn't want to upset him. Tom says everyone does it, and he promises that he will keep the photo secret. Susan is worried Tom will dump her if she says no.

If Susan was your friend, what advice would you give to Susan?

10.3. Appendix Three: Interview Schedule

Following the focus groups I met with the young people for an individual interview, these took place a week later and lasted up to half an hour each. There was a dual purpose of these interviews, firstly to offer a 'debrief' to the focus group, to offer them a chance to discuss anything that concerned them or anything they wished to ask about. I pointed them to their teacher who was the safeguarding lead for online safety so they knew they could approach the teacher with any follow up concerns after the interviews and focus groups. Secondly was an opportunity, now that some initial rapport was built, was to ask some follow up questions on an individual basis. The rationale here was that they would then have the opportunity to discuss anything further they wished to, particularly if there was something they wished to discuss away from their peers.

To this end, the interviews were very loosely structured, and I very much went from what the young people themselves wished to discuss, and I drew from some key topics that were discussed the previous week. A basic schedule I followed was as follows:

1. Welcome and thank them for joining me again.
2. State for the Dictaphone recording, the date and participant name
3. Remind them of consent, and right to withdraw. Confidentiality and Safeguarding clause. Ask if they are happy to continue with some further questions.
4. Ask if anything was concerning or worrying them following the focus group.
5. Ask if there is anything in particular, they would like to discuss or add following the focus group. Highlight anything that might be
6. Ask about mobile phones as a key topic that came up:
 - What phone do you have?

- What do you like about it?
- What do you mostly use it for?
- Camera, internet, texting, others?

7. Discuss social media as a key topic:

- Is it a good thing & why?
- Is it important to you & why?
- Do you ever regret what you post on social media?
- Do your friends/parent post anything about you on social media you would prefer they didn't? How do you deal with that?
- YOUTUBE

8. Is online communication important to you?

- WHY/WHY NOT

9. Do you enjoy Gaming?

- What types?
- Play online or in person?
- WHY/WHY NOT?

10. We discussed people saying hurtful things online. (Cyberbullying)

- Have you any further thoughts or comments about this?

- Is it easier online? – why?
- What is your experience of it? (Only ask if feel student will be OK with question)
- How does it make you feel? only ask if feel student will be OK with question)

11. We also discussed what might happen if you come across Inappropriate content online....

- Have you any further thoughts or comments about this?
- What sort of content is 'inappropriate'?
- What is your experience of it? (Only ask if feel student will be OK with question)
- How does it make you feel? (Only ask if feel student will be OK with question)

12. Discuss parental regulation as a key topic:

- Do parents monitor their usage of digital media?
- Yes/no, to what extent?
- How do they feel about that?
- Do parents know all you do?
- Would you want them to know what you do online? WHY/WHY NOT?

13. Who do you talk to if you are concerned or worried about something online?

- Do you feel like you could tell your parents if there was something online that was worrying you?

- What else do you do if you feel concerned or worried?
- Tell sibling
- Tell friend
- Tell no one – ignore it.
- Tell teacher.
- Report the person/content and block them?

14. Are digital technologies important to you? Why?

15. Is the internet overall a good thing or bad thing? Why?

16. Anything to add at all, or anything else to discuss?

17. Final thoughts – Do you think the internet is a good thing or a bad thing? And why?

18. Close interview with thanks.

19. Remind student that if there is anything they are concerned with following the interviews or while being online that they can talk to a teacher (name teacher) or another adult who will be happy to help/support them.

10.4. Appendix Four: Reflexive Statement

Further to the Methodology chapter, and in particular section 4.8.1 it is important to further acknowledge my own positionality and address the importance of this for the maintenance of reflexive researcher approach to qualitative research. As argued within section 4.8.1 the epistemological stance my research adopted is grounded and influenced by feminist approaches to methodology. In particular that there is a recognition that I as researcher are embodied in the process from start to finish. This recognises that the researcher's positionality is therefore intrinsically interwoven with the outcomes of the research, as the researcher has heavy influence on the scope, aim, designs and analysis of the research. Whilst steps can be taken to minimise the impact, through active awareness, reflection and recognition of one's own stances; ultimately there is a recognition in this type of research that some subjectivity is inevitable and should therefore be acknowledged.

With this in mind, this reflexive statement aims to enhance the discussions in section 4.8.1 and provide more detailed discussion of my background and experiences which may have influenced the research process. Here I am reflective of these experiences and how the embodiment of me as researcher is interwoven through these processes. Firstly, I will discuss my background and experiences growing up as a technology user and then my professional and personal experiences. The purpose is to share and demonstrate how these personal experiences has shaped my view of how children and young people engage with technology today, and by extension how this provides a window into my analysis of these subjects.

To begin with it is important to acknowledge generational positionality, I was born in 1986. If we were to accept Prensky (2001) Digital natives and digital immigrants this would place me as somewhat 'native' yet, I feel it is more of an in-between status. I

did not grow up with the saturation of technology and the constant connectivity that children of today experience. In fact, in Primary school, we had one computer for the whole school, and we did not have access to a computer at home until 1998, when I was twelve years old. That PC was a family device, sat in the corner of the dining room, I can still recall with some nostalgia the screeching sound of the dial-up modem as it connected. I can also recall the levels of parental mediation I experienced as a teenager, which for me was very minimal, I do not recall any conversation about my activities online or worries I might have had. The only parental conversation I remember was complaint about the length of time I was spending online as it 'tied up the phone line'. I remember feeling typical teenage resentment of this intrusion so that my parents could make telephone calls. On reflection these experiences would have been influential to the analysis of how young people discussed their own experiences of parental intervention. Prior to carrying out this research, I operated on the assumption that young people would also be resentful of parental interference. However, as seen through the analysis sections they were actually more positive about this than I expected, they saw their parents taking an interest in online activities to be a protective factor. This is where it was of vital importance that I ask open-ended and non-leading questions, as this allowed the participants the space to discuss their views and experiences without the introduction of sub-conscious biases and influences.

In terms of my activities online compared to that of teenagers today, one thing that is very clear is that I grew up in a very different era of technology to that young people today. This predated social media, smart devices, even mobile phones were not as widely available, and when they were they were for calls or texts only. Today, there is a constant connectivity with online activities of young people and as discussed

throughout this thesis this has given rise to moral panic of the issues and the perceived risks. However, reflected on my own internet use as a teenager, I engaged in 'risky' behaviours, I chatted with strangers in chat rooms and MSN messenger, conversations often turned inappropriate and sexualised, even in teen-based chatrooms. These activities were often done in conjunction with a friend, where we would encourage one another to be provocative lying about our ages or locations, to see what kind of responses we would get. If we encountered something we felt pushed the boundaries we were comfortable we shut it down. We did not once tell our parents about this, and this happened on the family computer, publicly located within the house. On reflection looking back with an adult agenda, I am alarmed at these behaviours and the risk taking, we were fortunate nothing serious occurred. Yet despite no online safety education we managed our own boundaries with these activities, for instance never providing detailed personal information or providing false information.

Reflecting on my own experiences here galvanises my own understanding of and arguments around young people and risk today. To me this provides a window of analysis which shows that even in the infancy of the internet, pre social media as we know it today; these risks were already prevalent. It destabilises the rhetoric of the "golden age of childhood innocence" that David Buckingham discusses (see literature review), as it demonstrates that even in the very early internet risks already were there, they were perhaps less discussed or known than today. As demonstrated through the contemporary focus on online-safety education, there is a big focus on risk-management. It is now worth revisiting the notion of Digital Natives, coined by Prensky (2001). He argued that those born in my generation are native to technology and those born earlier are immigrant, i.e., there are generational differences in the understanding

of, use of, and engagement in technologies. However, such argument can be undermined when we consider that in contemporary society there is not such a clear division, see literature review arguments. Furthermore, taking a reflective stance here about my own positionality and experiences demonstrates the potential influences myself as researcher may have had on the direction and analysis of this research. One of the greatest methodology dilemmas touched upon in section 4.8.1 is whether to consider yourself as researcher as having insider or outsider status to the subject of research. If we took Prensky's view about the distinction between natives and immigrants, I would be considered native, and so too where the participants; this is indicative of me having an 'insider' status. However, what is clear having completed the research and adopting the stance that I did, that I do not have insider status. The technology of my childhood is very different to that of childhoods today. Therefore, through reflection it becomes clear that there can be no 'native' status for an adult. Any adult is already 'outsider' in status as we are not engaging or embedded in the same worlds as the young people. From a research perspective this also further supports the methodological choices made, namely the adoption of a child-centred approach; this recognises children's agency, and autonomy; it recognises that the child's own view is salient to the research, valuing the unique perspectives they hold as an insider in the sub-cultural groups they inhabit. The reflective stance I took in this research enabled me to reach this conclusion, and therefore was highly influential on the analysis of data, as I viewed that young people are expert in their lives and sought to elevate and emphasise their voices and interpretations of the issues.

Another area of consideration is my contact with young people, I am a leader within the organisation Girlguiding working with girls aged 10-14 years in a voluntary capacity. None of the participants were known to me prior to the research, the research was conducted in a different area; however, this contact with young people in this position meant that I am very used to building rapport and relationships with young people in this age range. The role of leader is still one of 'authority' but is 'closer' than say the role of teacher. It is about creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, bonding, and trust. Thus, on reflection as a Girlguiding leader I have acquired important skills in working with young people and building rapport. I feel that this enabled me to build rapport with the participants quickly during the research, I feel I was able to put them at ease and this greatly enhanced the data collection they felt able and comfortable to share their views and experiences. This was also an aspect that enhanced ethical considerations, the ability to put participants at ease and feel comfortable when discussing issues that are challenging meant that I could ask the questions once rapport was built without fearing to cause the participants emotional harm and respond if I felt the participants were uncomfortable or embarrassed. An additional point to be reflexive of is the experiences of working with these young people and seeing first-hand how they use and talk about technology in everyday life; our Girlguiding meetings had a mostly 'no mobile phones' rule that was sometimes challenged by the young people, but mostly respected. Despite this the Guides would still be clearly influenced by their mobile phones, and social media as part of their conversations and everyday interactions. On several occasions Guides would ask for help with something going on via social media, for example would ask me for help with privacy settings or what to do when they found things problematic online. I think they came to me as a younger leader (compared to the others) and perhaps because they knew I would not 'tell them

off' they felt comfortable to be able to share and ask for advice. These experiences are the frame by which I analyse and see this research, I cannot be divorced from these experiences, in fact I feel it makes me a more sensitive understanding researcher to have some real-life experiences with the age group I research.

Another vital aspect of my identity that I feel has shaped my understanding of this research, is that in the latter part of this PhD research I fell pregnant and had a baby boy. This was March 2020 at the very beginning of the pandemic crisis. At the time of writing, I am parent to a two-year old. Becoming a parent in 2020 fundamentally changed a core aspect of my identity, this changed the lens through which I see the world at large. In terms of this research, the data collection was already complete at this stage, but I was still in 'write-up' mode. The pregnancy, looking after a new-born and the pandemic combined delayed my progress with the PhD meaning that the completion was later than anticipated. However, aside from the practical, there was emotional changes, I could not help but reflect on the technologically driven future that my own child would be growing up into, and how I would like to manage to support him with navigating the risk. By the time he is a teenager it may be a different world yet again in terms of the technologies available and young people's uses of that technology; a realisation that further refutes the idea of being a digital native, and my 'outsider' status when it comes to young people's technology uses. This realisation further enforces the idea of children and young people's voices being salient to research in this area.

However, one further aspect that has emerged is that my attitudes towards technology may have changed in light of technology, I consider myself 'pro-technology' and believe that for children and young people technology is important in balance with other activities and learning opportunities. However, since becoming a parent I find

myself worrying or feeling generally more risk averse regarding technology than before, in particular, I find myself concerned over the rhetoric of 'screentime', despite my criticism with the messaging of this agenda, I remind myself of the importance of balance and that screentime is not all bad, it is another activity. Parenting may have impacted the analysis of this research, as it is a new lens through which I see the world. It may be that I am more risk averse and can anticipate a future whereby I will have to make difficult choices over parental regulation of the digital landscape, this offers a different perspective to the analysis and understanding of the topic.

However, despite these positions and views which alter over time and experiences, I held onto the guiding and underpinning methodological approach which viewed the young people as expert in their lives, coming back to this approach constantly enabled me to take a view that was putting them central to the research, therefore working towards minimising biases and subjectivity as much as possible.

10.5. Appendix Five: Participant and Demographic Information

The below table demonstrates demographic and other participant information. For confidentiality reasons the names here are pseudonyms. The data collection, focus groups and interviews took place in May 2016. In the consent letters the participants were asked how they identified in terms of gender. The sample was drawn from ALL those who consented, it was thus a self-selecting sample. All participants joined a focus group of same-sex peers, and then an individual interview. As listed in the table one participant opted to not join a focus group as they preferred to discuss one-to-one; this participant disclosed that they had Asperger's Syndrome and would prefer not to be a group interview. No other participants actively disclosed other Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).

All the participants were accessed through a large comprehensive Secondary School in Suffolk. The school is located on the outskirts of a major county town, and near to a smaller town. The location could be considered 'semi-rural' as the catchment area of the school would include some of the rural villages from the surrounding area. The towns and suburbs of the towns in the catchment areas are considered 'middle-class', so it is assumed that most of the participants came from this economic background. However, these sorts of demographic details were not captured. All participants that volunteered for the study were white, and Suffolk broadly has a higher than the national average proportion of people identifying as White British; at the 2011 census this is quoted as 95.2% living in Suffolk (Suffolk Observatory 2011).

10.5.1. Table 1: Participant Information

Pseudonym	Year Group	Age	Male/ Female?	Focus Group	Interview
Emma	7	12	F	A	5
Olivia	7	12	F	A	12
Ava	7	12	F	A	8
Sophia	7	11	F	A	11
Charlotte	7	12	F	B	9
Mia	7	12	F	B	10
Amelia	7	11	F	B	4
Harriet	7	12	F	B	2
Evelyn	7	12	F	B	7
Liam	7	11	M	C	3
Noah	7	12	M	C	6
William	7	12	M	C	1
Abigail	8	12	F	D	16
Emily	8	13	F	D	15
James	8	13	M	E	17
Oliver	8	13	M	E	13
Benjamin	8	13	M	E	14
Elijah	9	14	M	N/A	18