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The internet and its associated electronic technologies have provoked a considerable wave of worry and anxiety among parents and policy makers worldwide in recent years. But in this discussion a very crucial distinction has not been sufficiently made. It is one thing to say that there are risks online. The research has clearly established the point that such perils exist, from online molesters and bullies, to exposure to problematic content. But where it is easy for people to jump beyond the evidence base is when they assert, not just that there are risks, but that the Internet is a **risk-promoting** environment or a **specially risky** environment. They imply that there are features of the Internet that increase risk for young people above what they already encounter or what they encounter in other environments, or what they used to encounter. It is hard to cite any research that as yet supports that notion. Yet, this is the narrative implicit in much of what is being written.

Of course, writers generally preface their discussion of risks by talking about the benefits of the Internet, making the point that it has both risks and benefits. But then they go on to describe Internet dynamics that increase risks and that increase the potential for deviance or corruption.(Pellow, 2009) In a phrase, they assert that the Internet is a risk- and social problem "amplifier."

So, for example, the contention is, not just that they can encounter sexual exploiters online, but that the Internet makes it more likely that children will be sexually abused because it has made it so easy for molesters to find them.(U.S. House of Representatives - 109th Congress, 2007)

The contention is, not just that children can be bullied online, but that the Internet amplifies and worsens bullying and harassment, because slurs can be so widely disseminated.(Sabella, 2009)

The contention is not just that children can access inappropriate sexual media, but that the Internet is worsening the sexualization of children and the corruption of their values and sexual development through exposure to pornography or sexual media that are more easily available than they used to be.(Anderson, 2008; Olfman, 2008)

The contention is not just that they can access anti-social material, but that the Internet is corrupting young people's values and promoting crime and hatred through exposure to extreme violence and hate materials that wouldn't otherwise be accessible.(Media Awareness Network, 2010)

Similarly, that the Internet is degrading children's mental health by facilitating exposure to pro-suicide or pro-anorexia sites that they wouldn't otherwise have been able to access.(Morrison, 2010; Scientific American, 2008)

Similarly, that the Internet threatens children social and academic and physical development because of its encumbrance on their time and the potential for addictive involvement.(Bullen, 2010)

The common denominator of these concerns is that the Internet is more corrupting or dangerous than pre-existing developmental environments, although that is not often said explicitly. Rather it is implied by highlighting the specific features of the Internet that purportedly explain this overall deviance amplifying dynamic. These dynamics include the anonymity which dis-inhibits deviance, the easy availability which makes people do or see things

more often than they otherwise would, and lack of clear norms for appropriate behavior online.(Cooper, 1998) So it is not just that as children go online, bad things can happen as they can happen anywhere. It is that intrinsic features of the internet augment ordinary risk, create a special vulnerability, and act to amplify the deviance.

One metaphor about the Internet that has some charm, but that reinforces this same implication comes from the British social critic, Stephen Fry, who likens the Internet to a city, and therefore migration to the internet as akin to urbanization.

> *"The internet is a city and, like any great city, it has monumental libraries and theatres and museums and places in which you can learn and pick up information and there are facilities for you that are astounding - specialised museums, not just general ones.*
> *But there are also slums and there are red light districts and there are really sleazy areas where you wouldn't want your children wandering alone.*
> *And I think people must understand that about the internet - it is a new city, it's a virtual city and there will be parts of it of course that they dislike, but you don't pull down London because it's got a red light district."*(Fry, 2009)

This is a thoughtful metaphor. People are drawn to the Internet, as they are drawn to cities, for excitement, exposure to new and different things, for aggregation of like minded people, and for opportunities. But of course, as every good sociologist knows, urbanization has promoted deviance, for some of the same reasons highlighted by the Internet alarmists.

So this is the narrative in the media and much private discussion: that the Internet has been a deviance and danger amplifying technology, and that makes the Internet more worrisome

than if what was going on was simply that problems of bullying or sexual abuse or suicide were migrating to the Internet because it is one more domain of social interaction.

Now it is important to see that the claim about the Internet as youth deviance amplifier is simply a hypothesis, not an established fact, and one that should foster some scrutiny. This is especially true because if one looks for evidence that the Internet is increasing risk and deviance among youth, the remarkable and jarring thing is that in the last 10-15 years while this anxious narrative about the Internet has been coming to dominate parent and media discussions of childhood, we have been observing a dramatically contradictory positive pattern in the social indicators. In the US there has been a remarkable improvement in social problem and risk indicators young people, including many of them that you might expect would be "the canaries in the coal mine" if it were the case that the mass migration of the young people into this technological world was really having such a corrupting and deviance-amplifying influence on them.

Just to set the context, Figure 1 shows how dramatic and rapid the adoption of the Internet has been among both adults and teens, with the big rush to the Internet occurring between 1995 and 2005.(Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010)

So what has been going on with respect to youth risk and deviance during and after this period of widespread Internet adoption? Regarding sex crime, the concern has been that Internet was making children more vulnerable to sexual victimization. But sex crimes overall and against children in particular have dropped dramatically in the US during this period. According to FBI data, forcible rape is down 33% from 1992 to 2009 (about half of forcible rape reports involve juveniles). The child welfare data show sexual abuse of children down 61% from 1992 to

2009.(Finkelhor, Jones, & Shattuck, 2011) Those statistics reflect reported cases, but self-report data from the National Crime Victimization Survey and other sources also show big declines in sex offenses against juveniles.(Finkelhor & Jones, 2006) So both sex crimes reported to police and child welfare authorities and sex crimes self-reported by victims in various victim surveys are down.

Is the Internet making kids more sexualized? Although adults tend to think so when they look at media, the statistical trends in serious sexual risk outcomes actually look fairly positive in the US. The trends show fewer teen pregnancies and births for 15-17 year olds (down 43% 1991-2007),(Child Trends, 2010c) fewer teens with multiple sexual partners (down 26% 1991-2009),(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008) fewer young people reporting sexual intercourse before 9th grade (down 19% 2001-2009),(Terry-Humen, Manlove, & Cottingham, 2006) fewer students in grades 9-12 saying they had intercourse in the last 3 months (down 10% 1995-2009),(Child Trends, 2010m) slightly fewer teens who say their first sex was with considerably older partners (down 10% 1995-2002),(Child Trends, 2010n) and better contraceptive usage (up 27% 1991-2009),(Child Trends, 2010d) This is generally encouraging news and if the Internet is sexualizing youth, it does not seem to be reflected in some of these important outcomes.

What about negative effects on mental health: Is the Internet promoting suicide? Here again, in actuality, the number of teens committing suicide has been dropping dramatically for many years in the US (down 38% from 1990-2007),(Child Trends, 2010l) In addition, the percentage of youth saying they had contemplated suicide in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

has declined as well (down 52% 1991-2009),(Child Trends, 2010k) The percentage of kids reporting feeling sad or hopeless was slightly down 17% 1999-2009.(Child Trends, 2010h)

What about negative impact on academic and extracurricular activities of all this presumed additional time online? Math and writing proficiency have modestly increased during this period of increasing Internet usage.(Child Trends, 2010e, 2010o) The percent who said they were engaged in extracurricular activities has increased 10% from 2002-2005.(Child Trends, 2010b) The percent of adolescents who met recommended physical activity levels was steady from 1993 to 2005.(Child Trends, 2010a) The percent of 8th graders who spent 4 or more hours watching TV on a typical weekday has gone down 27% from 1993 to 2008.(Child Trends, 2010g) High school drop-out rates have also declined considerably (down 33% from 1995-2008).(Child Trends, 2010i)

What about bullying and delinquency: Has the Internet allowed groups of antisocial kids to coalesce, increased bullying of other kids, or promoted antisocial and criminal values? Actually crimes committed by young people have declined dramatically in the US (the arrest rate for juveniles is down 33% from 1996 to 2008)(Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, 2010a) School violence reported in the National School Crime Survey was down (60% 1995-2005)(Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, 2010b) Hate comments reported by school children down 27% from 1999 to 2007(Child Trends, 2010i) Ninth to twelfth grades who got into fights according to the Youth Risky Behavior Survey declined 16% from 1991 to 2005.(Child Trends, 2010f) The percent of teens who feared attacks at school or on the way to school declined (down 55% from 1995-2007).(Child Trends, 2010j)

To be clear, none of these indicators can individually or collectively dispute the idea that the Internet could have been amplifying deviance and increasing risk. They do NOT provide a rigorous test of the hypothesis about risk amplification. The increased risks from the Internet may still be new enough that they have not started to influence these macro trends or influence them very much. These venerable social problem indicators may also not be good at picking up the specific Internet component of the danger. So for example the sex crime measures may assess violent sex crime but not statutory sex crime, which could be what the Internet is fostering.

But taken as a whole, they do create some basis for skepticism about the deviance amplification hypothesis. Given the convergence of positive indicators regarding children, there is a good chance that we will look back on this era as one of major and widespread amelioration in the social problems affecting children and families. Can a large scale social change like the Internet revolution occur, involve so many children who invest so much of their time, have such a worrisome influence as has been asserted and yet leave no trace of such toxicity evident in these general social indicators.

At the least, the inspection of these indicators reminds us that the hypothesis about deviance amplification is just a hypothesis, and must still be proven. The amelioration shown in these indicators also suggests that we ought to be entertaining contrasting hypotheses about the Internet influence. Maybe the Internet revolution is having some influence, and that influence is on balance **protective, not endangering**. Perhaps it is deviance **dampening** rather than amplifying. The improving indicators during the time of expanding Internet involvement demands us at least to consider such hypotheses.

Are there plausible mechanisms to suggest the Internet might be deviance dampening? Here are a few ways in which the Internet might be seen as an antidote to some youth problem behavior. Perhaps these influences are more important than the deviance amplifying scenarios that have received so much attention.

Reducing Boredom and Alienation

The Internet is an engaging medium even for the most difficult kids. They find stuff to interest them, they find places to connect, and they find engrossing activities. Some youth deviance is an attempt to create excitement, interest, and group bonds when more conventional avenues for those rewards are not readily available.(Agnew, 2004) Kids break windows when they have nowhere to play. A whole infrastructure of afterschool programs and youth recreation is built around this hypothesis with some justification. Some deviance is also an attempt to cope with negative emotional states (Agnew, 2004), something that the Internet as a distraction may also remedy. The Internet also is a place where kids who do not feel a sense of mastery in other environments may find realms where they experience a degree of mastery. Through alleviating boredom, alleviating negative emotional states, and providing mastery the Internet may be undercutting some of the motivation for or providing alternatives to delinquent and risk taking activities.

Safer Independence Exploration

A key element in adolescence is exploring social, intellectual and physical capacities and their associated freedoms and experimenting with greater independence.(Dacey, Margolis, & Kenny, 2006) It may be that more of this exploration is being done online today. While this may lead, as it always has, to risky and dangerous encounters and exposures, the actual risks and

dangers may be less immediate and serious online, even if they are more frequent. So in the adolescence of an earlier generation, for fun and excitement teens might go joy riding in a friend's car, or go to a party at the home of someone whose parents were away, or go to the quarry where someone was rumored to be bringing beer. In those situations, bad judgment could lead to tragedy much more quickly, as an aggressor needs to simply grab the victim, or the teen accept the drugs or alcohol being proffered, or the car driving turns reckless, or someone trips and falls into the quarry or the ravine. On the Internet when you are taking risks, a few more steps need to occur before the crime or the sex or the substance ingestion or the physical injury, and this may allow better judgment to prevail. Interactions online tend to be drawn out and may allow more thought and less impulsiveness. At the same time, the internet may have enticed kids to actually stay at home more, to do their adventure seeking from their armchair, which may be a safer place. It may permit or encourage more interaction with parents in between adventuring, which may also dampen risk taking.

Increased Deviance Detection.

Much has been made of the dis-inhibiting influence of the Internet. You act out because you think you are anonymous. But the electronic environment also allows improved **detection** of deviance. So, yes, if you call George a #$%^&* online it can quickly be disseminated to 30 other kids, but it may also be increasing the chance that you will be discovered as a bully by someone who will do something about it, not only because so many know about the offense, but because the offense leaves a trail and evidence. If it is in your log, you can't just deny to your parent and say that George is lying. Bullying online is not just a rumor or hearsay that a parent learns about indirectly as was once the case. Much of it is discovered by parents or other

authorities in black and white. So it is possible that more youth are being called on the carpet by parents and authorities for infractions that they have concrete evidence for. Perhaps norms are being reinforced. Perhaps because of anxiety about civility, abuse and bad influence in this new medium, parents are now having discussions with kids about things that they were not so specific and explicit about previously.

Surveillance Effects

Another pro-social influence of the new electronic media may be their surveillance effects. To use these media, we have all had to abdicate some element of privacy, and people have wondered whether norms about privacy have changed. But contrary to the idea that the anonymity empowers deviance, it may be the knowledge that you can be tracked and recorded by it has discouraged deviance as well.

Think about the safety enhancements from the communications technology, as well, particularly cell phones. They allow parents to be in much more immediate touch with youth and youth with each other, all of which may help to reduce certain kinds of dangers – young people getting stranded in dangerous locales or with dangerous people or headed on their way to do unwise things without someone else knowing about it or someone else to provide counsel. These are very plausible safety promotion mechanisms that may be at work with new technology.

Now readers may be excused for having skepticism about such speculative hypotheses as these. They fly so diametrically in the face of the dominant narrative. It is a mistake to rush to embrace them, as well. They may have little merit. But the fact of the improvements in safety and risky behavior do behoove us to investigate such possibilities. Elsewhere, my colleagues

and I have offered many possible explanations for the improving child welfare trends in the US, most which have nothing to do with the Internet. Among other things, during parts of the amelioration the US had a sustained period of economic growth and optimism. Many of the largest improvements did actually occur during the boom time 1990s when employment was high, opportunity expanded and there was a strong sense of optimism. Another important plausible explanation for the positive trends is that we also had an era of deploying many new interventions and prevention programs to deal with social problems. The criminologists talk about broken windows and community policing. But we also had a big expansion of youth focused social policy innovation and it included – school resource officers, bullying and abuse prevention programs, drug and social skills development, sex education, community mental health, parent education, domestic violence intervention, and children's advocacy centers, to mention a few.(Finkelhor, 2008) Among the improved tools we got for dealing with personal and social problems one in particular has not having got enough attention – the dissemination of psychiatric medications with the power to produce behavior change among troubled adults and youth.(Finkelhor, 2008)

So it is very possible that things got better for young people in spite of the Internet or irrespective of the Internet. Or it may be that the Internet both increased risks in some way and buffered them in others and the net result was mostly no large influence on the social problem trends either way. This is all speculation right now. But such hypotheses about the Internet as a deviance buffering innovation should be considered, and considered as seriously as the deviance amplification hypotheses. When you start to consider a possibility, you may begin to notice evidence. Just as the Internet as social problem buffer is only a hypothesis, we have to keep in

mind that the deviance amplification narrative is only hypothesis, too, and besides some anecdotes, we do not really have good evidence for the deviance amplification idea either.

JUVENOIA

The absence of clear evidence that the Internet has increased risk raises another question: why has this idea seemed so plausible? Why do writers and parents so readily agree with the risk amplification premise?

Among the common explanations: "people are just afraid of technology", or "afraid of change" or "that technological and social change always spawns anxiety".

But almost always in social change, and for a long time in history, the anxiety appears to be particularly focused on children. The tendency deserves more formal consideration. A term for it might be "Juvenoia" – an exaggerated fear about the influence of social change on children and youth.

This tendency to worry about youth gets some attention, and is often referenced for its ancient pedigree. For example, this quote is attributed to Socrates:

> *The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.*(Socrates, 2010)

Another is to Peter the Hermit from 1274 AD:

> *The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew*

everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behavior and dress.(Peter the Hermit, 2010)

One particularly salient and instructive example of a full blown juvenoia from recent time was the comic book scare of the 1950s, elaborated in a fascinating book by David Hajdu, *The 10 Cent Plague*.(Hajdu, 2009) Hajdu recounts how in 1954, psychiatrist Frederick Wertham wrote a book, *Seduction of the Innocent,* accusing comic books of breeding juvenile delinquency. There followed a tremendous public outcry against comics led by editorialists and religious leaders. Estes Kefauver, senator from Tennessee and subsequent Democratic vice presidential candidate, organized congressional hearings at which the comic book publishers were excoriated. There were comic book bonfires and the industry was decimated.

Another example was the super-predator scare of the 1990s. Criminologists John DeIulio and others predicted at the time an increase of 270,000 violent juveniles, a "crime bomb" of "fatherless, Godless, jobless" super-predators who would be "flooding the nation's streets." Of course, the opposite happened, juvenile crime started to decline right around then and has ever since. But the scare led to the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act of 1997, and legislation in 47 states that toughened their penalties on juvenile criminals, sending many into adult criminal court, removing confidentiality protections from juvenile proceedings, and increasing sentence length and severity.(Krisberg, 2005)

In very contemporary period, in addition to the Internet anxiety, there have been recent books lamenting children who are being over-coddled and protected by helicopter parents,(Honore, 2008; Skenazy, 2009) children who no longer have any free time to

play,(Elkind, 2001) and a generation that is growing up thinking they are the center of the universe.(Twenge & Campbell, 2009)

These examples may make us aware that there can be different flavors to juvenoia, different kinds of concerns or different subtypes. For example, it might be useful to distinguish the fear *of* young people, like the super-predator scare – something that might be called *ephebephobia* (fear of youth from the Greek) -- and contrast that with the fear *for* young people. Maybe this latter should be called "youngsternation" – consternation about the young.

Not all the perils to youth that society gets anxious about turn out to be exaggerations necessarily. The propensity to worry about children has certainly helped draw needed attention to problems like child abuse, bicycle safety, obesity, but even in these cases there may be instances in which we overreact. A key differentiating element to juvenoia, however, is the assertion that social and technological change lie behind the problem. In the discovery of child abuse, for example, the assertion was that a long hidden problem was being uncovered, not that social change had created a new peril.

Nonetheless, juvenoia is an ever-present tendency in our modern society, a bias that we are continuously vulnerable to. Its frequency makes it worth considering what some of the origins of this tendency are. Here are some speculative candidate explanations for juvenoia from sociology, psychology and evolutionary biology. Some may seem far-fetched, but it is worth considering a broad spectrum hypotheses.

Evolutionary Biology

According to Darwinians we are replicating organisms trying to promote the survival of the genes we pass on to our offspring. It seems evolutionarily adaptive for us to be equipped

with highly sensitive alarm mechanisms concerned about threats to those offspring. And it may well be that since we live in environments that have changed drastically from those we evolved in, leaving our intuitions about the dangers to these offspring are easily misguided or hijacked. In fact, the changes may leave prone to both overreactions and also lapses.

If we did evolve to raise children in fairly stable tribal environments with a relatively large number of kin helpers who shared a common culture, it is easy to see how modern mass society and its diverse conditions may be particularly threatening to our instincts. Our children grow up surrounded now by so many people who are so different from our family, and they are exposed to so many contrasting values and beliefs so different from their parents'. This is likely naturally threatening to the parents. It is a curious observation that, in spite of all the tremendous resources our advanced societies offer to foster child well-being (schools, medical care, libraries, books), virtually every parent from every station of society sees him or herself as raising their children in opposition to the common culture, or at least wide expanses of it. Common culture in modern society is not seen as an institution that supports parenting, but rather one that undermines it. The common culture that parents feel pitted against include (depending on your point of view) TV, consumerism, secularism, sexual licentiousness, government regulation, violent images, junk food, heterosexism, anti-intellectualism, the public schools, and religious, racial or ethnic bigotry. It is ironic, but parents in the most elite environments in America feel desperate as everyone else to shield their children from much mainstream cultural influence. Modern society has so many different kinds of people and so many different values that it overwhelms the restricted resources parents have to limit their children's exposure. This leads to a constant anxiety about external threats, and particularly the institutions that promote and

increase this diversity. The Internet is clearly one such institution that increases this exposure, and not surprisingly a big target.

Demographic Change

Adding to the diversity problem, the demographics of youth are changing. As Ken Johnson pointed out, the new generation of young people is increasingly different from the past image of the America, it is increasingly minority.(USA Today, 2010) So to paraphrase the famous proverb by Kalil Gibran, "Our children are not our children". When parents from the dominant culture look at children today, they don't see themselves and their own childhoods. They see a different set of ethnicities and cultures. To the extent that they have biases or anxieties about these groups it exacerbates fears about children and what they are becoming.

Generational Conflict

Another set of explanations of juvenoia draws on the dynamics of generational conflict and the competing interests of different social groups. Social and technological change can indeed exacerbate conflict between groups who are differentially affected, and one of the main fault lines is generational. Young people tend to have more time, space and cognitive agility to embrace new technologies and associated new values. They have less stake in older patterns and habits. The terms "digital native vs. the digital immigrant" have been applied to the generational divide in regard to the Internet.(Prensky, 2001) Of course, this distinction is an exaggeration, but it certainly has some truth. Once there is differential adoption of change along generational lines, the older people become both fearful of the threats that the changes pose to their values and ways of doing things, and they are also anxious because they may not fully grasp or understand the full context of what is happening. This can breed juvenoia.

Developmental Life Course Role Shift

Even without rapid social change, however, the simple process of aging itself could account for some tendency toward juvenoia, because aging entails a number of life course role shifts. In youth, your commitments are not yet fully defined: you haven't decided where you will live, what you will be, what activities you will pursue. In a meritocratic society the challenge for youth is to establish themselves. This means that youth is an inherently self-centered time to some degree, as young people try to work out these commitments and achieve success. Then as you get older, your commitments solidify, and you acquire responsibility for people and things like children, family, organizations, and property. When elders notice self-centeredness among the young and their lack of commitment to established institutions and values, it makes them anxious. But they rarely notice that it is they themselves, not young people who have changed.

Another role shift that comes with aging has to do with parenting. The natural course of family development is that children grow up, become independent, and loosen their ties with their parents. Sex plays a big role in this transition since it is the formation of a new pair bond between the young that in part motivates children to become independent. So parents see in their children's sexuality the seed of the eventual loss of their primacy in their children's lives. Parents blame sexualization and external influence for this loss of parental authority, but the loss is in large part just the life cycle at work. Social change can compound it. The Internet and technology may particularly contribute to the sense of loss because it 1) makes the emancipation seem earlier, 2) looks like another medium that may be particularly good at undermining the illusion of parental control, and 3) provides such visible evidence of differentness. But it may

just be that because of this new technology the normal emancipation processes have become more visible.

Nostalgia

It is instructive to note how often when parents talk about their fears for children, it is couched in nostalgia: "When I was a kid, we would go out and play all day, we never worried about molesters, we made up our own games, there wasn't all this structure, we went places on our bikes, we weren't driven everywhere, we were polite to our teachers, etc." These express a nostalgia for parts of their childhoods and a general perception that kids were better and better off then. Surprisingly forgotten are the bugaboos of yesteryear: the polio scares, the nuclear bomb drills, the racial and ethnic bigotries and hostilities, the gender straightjackets, and the harsh corporal punishment in families and schools. A recent review suggests that nostalgia is a cultural, universal, increases with age and may play some role in fostering optimism, giving meaning to life and combating loneliness.(Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008) Some part of juvenoia may be promoted or exacerbated by nostalgia which prompts adults to make unfavorable comparisons between their childhood and today's children.

Two cognitive biases may contribute to this nostalgia. One is the widely discussed phenomenon of loss aversion.(Tversky & Kahneman, 1991) Loss aversion means that in making judgments we tend to give greater importance to things we might lose even over completely equivalent things we might gain. In a widely cited experiment, if you get a free mug and soon after are asked how much you would pay not to have to give it up, you will pay more to keep it than if you had been asked beforehand how much you would pay to acquire it in the first place. Once you have defined something as yours or as "of your experience" that something acquires a

special value, and this transformation can happen in just a few moments. This means presumably in comparing things that social change deprives us of, we regret more those things we have lost than the new positive things that social change has afforded us. To the extent that children highlight this exchange, we tend to complain about them.

Another somewhat similar cognitive bias phenomenon is called asymmetric feature matching. In this process when we start with any dissatisfactions about the present and then think about the past,(Schwarz, Wanke, & Bless, 1994) we are not as likely to notice or attend to things that have changed for the positive. Few people start with their contemplation of the present state of affairs (and its problems) and are prompted to remember that parents do not any longer live in fear of polio or remember crawling under their desks to learn to prepare for nuclear missile attacks. So perceptions of change may be biased by this feature matching process, leading to negative judgments about children

Social Problem Mobilization

Some important dynamics of juvenoia can obviously be ascribed to familiar processes of social problem mobilization.(Best, 1993) If I am a teacher or a social worker or a legislator who wants to help children or help my organization or profession, it is a lot more persuasive to portray the problem as the cusp of a crisis, the coming of an epidemic, a threat to the social order, or the loss of some very important value and to have a social theory that supports this portrayal. In most of the juvenoia episodes, for example, the comic book or the superpredator scares, there were indeed some social problem entrepreneurs hard at work, trying to build a reputation for themselves or a constituency for their organizations. It makes sense to tie a cause

to some feature of social change that makes it seem less transitory and more ominous. Juvenoia is often the by-product of a social movement trying to create some energy.

Political Demagoguery

Juvenoia tends to get particularly insidious when it demonizes children themselves.(Males, 1996) This can happen unfortunately often because children and youth have little political influence, so politicians can militate and legislate against them with relatively little political backlash. Examples are the call to stiffen sentences against juvenile offenders or register them as sex offenders for sending indecent photos of themselves. These are easy proposals that do not encounter push back from the affected populations, who are unfortunately disenfranchised.

Stranger Danger

Beyond this catalogue of possible contributors to juvenoia, there are some additional points to be made about the current juvenoia about the Internet. First, the internet juvenoia has been the occasion for a resurgence of the classic and misleading "stranger danger paradigm." One of criminology's signal accomplishments of the last generation has been its insight into how much crime, violence, exploitation and victimization occur at the hands of intimates and known offenders,(Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006) and how comparatively little at the hands of strangers, in spite of fears in this regard. But although social science is in consensus on this point, the primacy of intimate violence is a hard recognition to sustain in public perception. In public perception, stranger danger has an archetypal pull. The stranger is always easier to demonize than the family member or even acquaintance. The reasons are clear. We have to operate on the basis of trust and reciprocity with intimates and acquaintances, and it is hard to

simultaneously view them as threatening and trustworthy. Moreover, intimate criminals do not seem like the same serious threat to the general community. The father who rapes his daughter down the street generates outrage, but not the kind of fear as the stranger who rapes a girl in the neighborhood park. The father does not seem like a threat to my family, the stranger does. So, stranger danger will always find ways to reassert itself. In the Internet alarmism, we see its appearance again.(Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008) Interestingly acquaintances make up a large portion of internet offenders, both sexual solicitors and cyber-bullies and harassers. But that is not part of the core narrative. In the internet juvenoia, the anxiety is very much about those strangers.

Generation Gap Exaggeration

A second observation about the Internet juvenoia is its exaggerated emphasis on the generational rifts caused by the electronic technology. In the context of generational rifts that have been observed in recent history, however, it is doubtful that the so-called cyber-revolution will be regarded as a big one. In the generation rift of the 1960s, by contrast, we saw mobs of angry young people, the rejection of patriotism and religion, the alteration of century long gender roles, and the adoption of radical new sexual mores. A case might be made that the new technology is actually bridging generational differences to some degree. It is actually a social change – unlike say sexual liberation -- that many generations are embracing simultaneously. And it has built new ways to connect between generations. But in any case, it does not involve a change in fundamental values the way of some these other revolutions did. Changes in peoples' notions of privacy or how many "friends" they keep in touch with, or whether they can multi-

task are not in the same category as when a generation rejects religious authority or decides that women should have complete equality with men.

Conclusion

1) We can educate children and families about the dangers that surely exist in the Internet world, without having to exaggerate the nature of the danger and the degree to which the Internet itself is a risk amplifying environment.

There may be people who conclude from this essay that all the talk about Internet danger is an exaggeration. But this is also wrong. There are dangers on the Internet. We need to understand them, prevent them and eliminate them. We need active police presence online, hotlines, prevention programs, and pressure on ISPs and social networking sites to minimize risks. We only need to know that there are dangers in order to warrant this. We do not have to argue that the Internet is especially dangerous, any more than we have to argue that our local town is especially dangerous in order to justify law enforcement and crime prevention activities there. We justify airline security not because flying is particularly dangerous, it is not, but because there are some dangers. Even in a comparatively safe city or environment, there are crime and social problems there that warrant serious attention. We are comfortable with this kind of logic elsewhere, we should be comfortable about it in regard to the Internet neighborhood as well.

2) More generally, we need to have a healthy skepticism about claims that the lot of children is changing for the worse, and the social and cultural changes are posing big risks for their healthy growth and development.

Behavioral economists have being doing a lot of work identifying the cognitive biases that heavily influence our decision making in ways that deviate from how the world really is – our tendency to irrationally overvalue some things.(Ariely, 2008; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) This discipline encourages people in general and policy makers in particular to take these biases into account and counteract them in social policy. Obviously there are the same kinds of biases at the sociological level. A familiar one is our understanding, for example, about the pull prejudice and how we have a tendency generalize negative stereotypes about people and groups that are different. Juvenoia may be another of these tendencies, to exaggerate the negative effects of social change on the young, and one that we might more consciously try to resist.

3) We need good epidemiology and other research to be able to assess claims about the impact of social change on children.

Not only would better epidemiology allow us to quell anxieties more quickly and convincingly, good research would also point out what is almost certainly the inevitable conclusion. Change has different effects on different subgroups. So some may benefit and some may suffer (Willoughby, 2008). Assessing these complex effects should be the ultimate goal.

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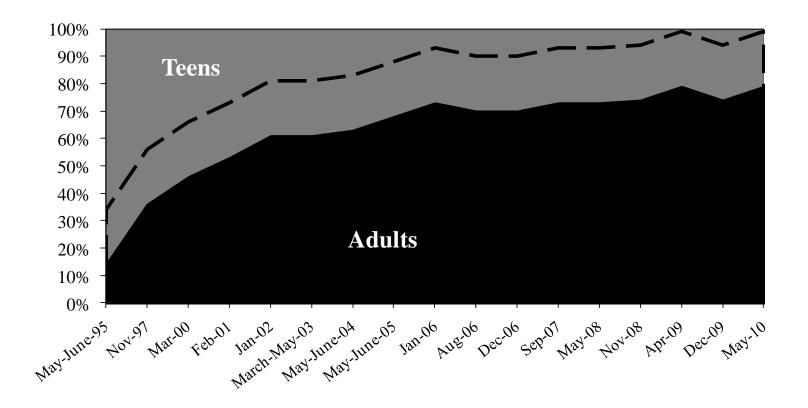
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Figure 1.

Internet Adoption Trend: The Percentage of Americans who Use the Internet, 1995-2010

*Source: *Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000 – May 2010*