“I would never post that”: Children, moral sensitivity and online disclosure

# Details

## Year

2014

## DOI

10.1515/commun-2014-0112

## Issued

2014

## Language

English

## Volume

39

## Issue

3

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Communications

## Publisher

Walter de Gruyter GmbH

## Topics

* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Researching children online: methodology and ethics
* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

25 preadolescent children living in Belgium (Liedekerke; a rural community and Hoeilaart; in the immediate suburban sprawl of Brussels) varying in age and gender.
Participants included 12 boys and 13 girls; 21 were between 9 and 10 years old and 4 children were 11 years old. Several children hinted at their international, mostly Western-European, family background and ethnicity.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

This article explores young children’s moral sensitivity regarding online disclosure. Drawing on psychological theory, moral sensitivity is defined
as the ability to express and show moral consideration in terms of empathy,
role-taking and pro-social moral reasoning. Twenty-five preadolescent children
aged 9 to 11, all living in Belgium, were asked in focus group interviews to
share their reflections about and experiences with self-disclosure and privacy
in internet environments. The findings demonstrate that young children are
capable of imagining the moral consequences of disclosing personal information about oneself and about others. Their moral reflections are embedded in
a more general concern of children’s vulnerability to other, more powerful information circulators in their social networks, such as older children, siblings,
but also parents or the internet crowd. A strong sense of children’s entitlements
to online privacy is articulated. Also, the decision of disclosing personal information about the other is carefully considered when the other is emotionally
important to the children.

# Outcome

"Children’s moral reflections were characterized by an underlying attitude of care towards the self and others. We found that children are capable of imagining the moral consequences of disclosing personal information about oneself and about others in various ways. In terms of empathy, the children recognized sensing the feelings of others affected by online disclosure. Importantly, we found that self-empathy, associated with psychological health and well-being, can shape children’s disclosure decisions. It can offer protection against harsh (self-)judgment and make individuals more able to notice what is right and what is wrong. Intriguingly, we found that children morally disapprove of parents disclosing information about their children without consent. They claimed
their rights to privacy, autonomy and self-identity, disclosing personal information such as secrets, pictures and (negative) comments came across to them as an invasion of their privacy, often most critically when the ‘intruders’ are parents." (Mostmans et al., 2014, pp. 361-362)