Are victims to blame? Youth, gender and moral discourse on online risk

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## Sample

171 participants aged between 13-16 years

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

This article takes a discourse analysis frame to understand how young people’s
norms and moral evaluations of their practices on digital media are culturally negotiated between their own and their peers’ experiences, parental concerns, awareness programmes and media representations. It draws on focus groups and interviews with 171 participants aged 13–16 from nine European countries, analysing how young people position themselves towards online experiences,
particularly bullying, sexual communication and contact. While teenagers can sympathize with victims of bullying, especially if they perceive them as vulnerable, they can blame older teenagers, girls or parents for initiating or being
co-responsible for risks young victims are involved in. They are judged as in failing, when they choose to not comply with self-protection and self-vigilance
(Giddens 1991, Dobson and Ringrose 2015, Gill and Scharf 2011), which can be detected in young people’s moral discourses as a successful way of being and
behaving online.

# Outcome

"By taking a focus beyond (gender and sexual) self-presentation practices online, specifically sexting, we were able to detect that the victim-blaming process occurs for other types of online practices, such as contacts with strangers or Internet addiction. While teenagers can sympathize with victims of bullying, especially if they perceive them as vulnerable, by defining victims as initiators and co-responsible for risks they are involved in – especially in the case of sexting – young people create a double punishment for those who are affected by negative experiences online... Girls are especially affected by this process...
This is evident in girls’ and boys’ discourses and especially in older participants’ voices, some of whom echo the discourses spread by digital safety campaigns and news stories." (Jorge Farrugia, 2017; p. 296).
"While younger users exposed to risks are excused for the lack of parental support, teenagers are expected to know how to behave online. In fact, young people’s moral discourses seem to promote a self-responsibility that is positioned as a successful and ethical way of being and behaving online, of navigating successfully the online world. Those who don’t succeed in following those principles may be recriminated – and since girls are portrayed as more exposed to harm, their understanding of privacy seemed to be more restrictive. Associating this self-responsibility with parental mediation, girls seem to be under particular pressure to negotiate support from family, advice on safety, and monitoring of their online behaviour." (Jorge Farrugia, 2017; pp. 296-297).