

ANNA MARIA PASSASEO
Editor

CURRENT ISSUES
IN MORAL MATTERS

A Call for Education



MESSINA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ANNA MARIA PASSASEO

Editor

**CURRENT ISSUES
IN MORAL MATTERS**

A Call for Education

The present work is released under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 - CC-BY-NC-ND, the full text of which is available at the URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



ISBN 979-12-80899-14-9

DOI 10.13129/979-12-80899-14-9

© The Authors for the text 2024

© Messina University Press for this edition

Published by:

Messina University Press

Piazza Pugliatti, 1 - 98121 Messina

Web site: <https://messinaup.unime.it>

First edition: October 2024

This volume has been submitted to an external refereeing process under the responsibility of the Editorial Board and the Board of Editors-in-Chief of Messina University Press. The works published are approved by the Board of Editors-in-Chief after the Editorial Board assessment and must comply with the Code of Ethics of the publishing house.

The online digital editions are published with Open Access at:

<https://messinaup-pubblicazioni.unime.it/index.php/mup>

CONTENTS

Presentation ANNA MARIA PASSASEO	p. 5
PART I <i>Phenomenologies of Moral Apathy</i>	p. 11
The Empathic Erosion: the Loss of Values ALESSANDRO VERSACE	p. 13
Ethics of Success and Praise of Waste: Paradoxes or Trends in Today's Search for Meaning? ROSA GRAZIA ROMANO	p. 27
New Adolescent Behaviors in the School. Process Analysis and Useful Suggestions GIOMBATTISTA AMENTA	p. 37
Suspended Adolescents. New Fragility and Fragmentation of the Self CATERINA BENELLI	p. 51
Navigators Without a Compass. Adolescents between Disorientation and Self-Care KARIN BAGNATO	p. 61
Bullying as a Moral Issue ANNA MARIA PASSASEO	p. 73
Adolescents and Online Risk Behaviors CLARA LOMBARDO, CARMELA MENTO, MARIA CATENA SILVESTRI, FRANCESCA GODFREY, CHIARA LA BARBIERA	p. 91
A Call for Action: Contrasting Cyberbullying and Protecting Minors' Rights at EU Level FRANCESCA POLLICINO	p. 101
Migrants at Sea, Rescue and Management of EU External Borders: an Issue of Accountability CINZIA INGRATOCI SCORCIAPINO	p. 115
Teenagers and the Truth of the Fake: Living with Fake News on the Web FRANCESCO PIRA	p.135

Artificial Womb as New “Birth” Possibility: New Frontiers for Education	p. 145
NATALE EMANUELE DI NUZZO	
PART II	p. 153
<i>Education Proposals</i>	
Moral Education and Moral Growth as Elements of Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Education	p. 155
DOROTA CHIMICZ	
Teacher Identity: Being a Good EFL Teacher According to Pre-Service Teachers	p. 171
M. GARCÍA-SAMPEDRO, M.A. GONZÁLEZ-RUA, A. TORRALBA-BURRIAL	
Practical Wisdom as an Exercise of Moral Responsibility at School	p. 189
DOMENICA MAVIGLIA	
What Kind of Moral Education at School? An Empirical Research in Messina	p. 201
VALENTINA FRASCÀ	
Mediation with the Participation of Youth in the Context of Moral Education	p. 221
AGNIESZKA LEWICKA-ZELENT, AGNIESZKA MARKIEWICZ-GOSPODAREK, ANNA MARIA PASSASEO	
“Liberi di Scegliere”: the Moral Alternative for Children of 'Ndragheta Families	p. 235
ENRICO INTERDONATO, NATALE EMANUELE DI NUZZO	
Disgust and Morality in Contemporary Art: an Aesthetic Education Perspective	p. 249
ALICJA LISIECKA	
Theatre and Education, between Theories and Practices	p. 265
KATIA TRIFIRÒ	
Dilemma. An empirical Investigation into the Moral Development of Adolescents and Young People through Role Play	p. 281
UMBERTO SPATICCHIA	
Bibliography	p. 301
Authors	p. 320

ADOLESCENTS AND ONLINE RISK BEHAVIORS

Clara Lombardo

Ph.D. Student in Psychology
'Magna Graecia' University of Catanzaro

Carmela Mento

Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology
University of Messina

Maria Catena Silvestri

Ph.D. Psychiatry Unit,
AOU G. Martino, BIOMORF Department.

Francesca Godfrey

PsyD. Psychiatry Unit,
AOU G. Martino, BIOMORF Department.

Chiara La Barbiera

Ph.D. Student in Psychology
'Magna Graecia' University of Catanzaro

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. Psychological aspects of online risk behaviors. – 3. The role of prevention. – 4. Conclusions. – 5. References.

1. Introduction

Web use has increasingly become a means of aggregation, exchange, and communication among young people. Adolescents often find gratification in spending more time online than in real life, experiencing a new social competence. Frequent web use can lead to psychosocial distress. New technologies are sometimes used to intimidate, harass, embarrass, and make people feel uncomfortable. This phenomenon is called cyberbullying. In recent years, other phenomena such as sexting, revenge porn and grooming have also emerged. Sexting consists in sharing sexually explicit texts, videos and images. In the solitude of their rooms, young people feel free to

explore, even take naked pictures of themselves and send them. Whereas revenge porn consists in sharing intimate photos or pornographic videos on the web as a form of blackmail or revenge, usually after the end of a relationship or a betrayal. Grooming, on the other hand, is a form of psychological manipulation used by potential adult abusers with the aim of establishing an emotional bond and engaging in sexual activity.

Moreover, “Challenges” are a recent phenomenon which consist in recording while acting dangerously, and then post everything on social networks, inviting other people to do the same. The consequences can be severe: decreased self-esteem, depressive episodes, fear, frustration and scholastic problems. Being exposed, directly or indirectly, to harmful content is considered a risk factor for young people. For this reason, awareness and digital education should be promoted on digital platforms.

Internet is increasingly influential in the lives of adolescents, and it has radically transformed the way young people interact, communicate, and socialize. Adolescents are spending increasing amounts of time online, and they are uniquely vulnerable to the development of addictive behavior.

Certainly, the use of online communication has become a focal aspect in adolescents’ life, providing several chances for psychosocial development and the formation of intimate relationships and offering multiple opportunities for connection and exploration for young people.

On the other hand, it also poses significant risks and dark implications.

While social media platforms continue to gain widespread popularity, growing evidence indicates significant correlations between their use and mental health and behavioral issues in adolescents. Heightened engagement with social media has been associated with reduced self-esteem and body satisfaction, elevated risk of cyberbullying, greater exposure to explicit content, and risky sexual behaviors¹.

¹ J. SHAH et al., *New age technology and social media: adolescent psychosocial implications and the need for protective measures*, in «Current opinion in pediatrics», 2019, 31.1, pp.148-156.

2. Psychological Aspects of Online Risk Behaviors

Cyberbullying is a form of online aggression, increasingly prevalent among adolescents, represents a dangerous manifestation of the digital dimension in daily life. Cyberbullying is not limited to occasional negative interactions but can take various forms, including intimidation, harassment, embarrassment, and the generation of emotional distress.

Victims of such behaviors often find themselves facing constant and pervasive pressure from various online channels, which can have serious consequences on their mental health and emotional well-being²

Cyberbullying can manifest through offensive comments, spreading false information, image manipulation, and more, amplifying the harmful potential of this practice. The victim, often isolated in their digital experience, may find themselves in a situation where constant pressure and ongoing threats compromise their self-esteem, lead to depressive episodes, and generate a profound sense of fear and frustration. In some cases, cyberbullying can even result in educational difficulties as the anxiety and stress stemming from negative online interactions can adversely affect academic performance³

Over time, the percentage of adolescents who have experienced the phenomenon of cyberbullying at least once in their lifetime has increased from 20.8% in 2010 to 33.8% in 2016⁴.

This phenomenon emphasizes the urgent need to promote awareness among young people about the dangers of cyberbullying and to develop effective strategies to prevent and address it. Digital education plays a crucial role in providing teenagers with the necessary tools to navigate the online world safely and responsibly, while also

² E. MENESINI et al., *Prevenire e contrastare il bullismo e il cyberbullismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2017, pp. 35-45.

³ D. OLWEUS, S.P. LIMBER. *Some problems with cyberbullying research*, in «Current opinion in psychology», 2018, 19, pp. 139-143.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

encouraging a culture of mutual respect and compassion⁵. Only through a holistic approach involving parents, educators, and digital practitioners can we hope to create a healthier and more inclusive digital environment for the younger generations.

Parallel to the phenomenon of cyberbullying, additional serious issues emerge directly involving young people in the realm of their relationships and online sexual activities. One of these challenges is represented by sexting, a behavior where teenagers explore their sexuality by sharing explicit content such as texts, images, or videos. The increasing ease of access to communication technologies has made sexting more prevalent but it also brings forth significant risks, such as the non-consensual dissemination of intimate material and the potential exposure to manipulation or coercion⁶

Revenge porn represents a highly concerning form of online abuse where individuals, often motivated by revenge or resentment after the end of a relationship or due to a betrayal, deliberately disseminate intimate photos or videos of their ex-partner without their consent⁷. This practice goes beyond a violation of privacy, evolving into an inherently harmful act that can inflict deep and lasting psychological damage on victims involved. The non-consensual dissemination of intimate material in the public domain exposes the victim to extreme emotional and psychological vulnerability, promoting public humiliation and negative social judgments⁸.

Among the consequences of revenge porn there are the deterioration of the victim's self-esteem and mental well-being. Being the target of this form of online abuse can generate feelings of shame, guilt, and isolation, as the victim faces the challenge before a wide online audience. The societal judgment associated with revenge porn can

⁵ M.T. KAARAKAINEN, L. SAIKKONEN. *Remark on digital accessibility: educational disparities define digital inclusion from adolescence onwards*, in «Universal Access in the Information Society», 2023, 22.4, pp. 1279-1292.

⁶ J. BURÉN, C. LUNDE. *Sexting among adolescents: A nuanced and gendered online challenge for young people*, in «Computers in Human Behavior», 2018, 85, pp. 210-217.

⁷ C. MENTO, F. PIRA. *La violenza in un "click": Profili sociologici, psicologici e giuridici del revenge porn*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2023, pp. 43-51.

⁸ A. SORGATO. *Revenge porn: aspetti giuridici, informatici e psicologici*, Milano, Giuffrè Francis Lefebvre, 2020, pp. 270-279.

further exacerbate emotional trauma, contributing to a sense of mistrust in future relationships and having a significant impact on long-term mental health ⁹.

The fight against revenge porn requires not only a strict enforcement of existing laws on privacy and cyberbullying but also significant efforts to raise public awareness about the damages caused by this behavior. Promoting a digital culture that is respectful and aware is essential for preventing revenge porn and providing support to victims. Additionally, it is crucial to engage in the development of policies and resources that enable affected individuals to defend themselves legally and psychologically against this type of abuse, allowing them to rebuild their lives after such a traumatic experience.

Another widespread phenomenon that raises concerns for young people is Grooming. It's described as a continuous procedure wherein an adult prepares a minor, along with their surroundings, for potential sexual abuse. This is achieved by establishing emotional connection with the minor and obtaining compliance and secrecy from them ¹⁰

Online sexual grooming is distinct from online sexual solicitation as the solicitation is a single occurrence of behavior, while grooming is a systematic process that leads to an intimate relationship. The grooming process unfolds through a series of stages, encompassing victim selection, the cultivation of trust and rapport, desensitization to touch, and the introduction of sexual content¹¹

This process highlights the vulnerability of young people in the digital environment and the need for increased awareness regarding online relational dynamics. A study by Resett et al.¹² aimed to test whether emotional problems and dark personality were predictors of sexting and grooming and whether this behavior differed by gender and

⁹ A. M. GASSÓ et al. *Sexting, mental health, and victimization among adolescents: A literature review*, in «International journal of environmental research and public health», 2019, 16.13, p. 2364.

¹⁰ E. A. GREENE-COLOZZI et al., *Experiences and perceptions of online sexual solicitation and grooming of minors: A retrospective report*, in «Journal of child sexual abuse», 2020, 29.7, pp. 836-854.

¹¹ G. M. WINTERS, E. L. JEGLIC, *Stages of sexual grooming: Recognizing potentially predatory behaviors of child molesters*, in «Deviant behavior», 2017, 38.6, pp. 724-733.

¹² S. RESETT, P.G. CAINO, B. MESURADO, *Emotional problems, dark personality, sexting and grooming in adolescents: the role of gender and age*, in «CES Psicología», 2022, 15.2, pp. 23-43.

age. The results of this study clearly show that in female cases, older age and psychopathy were the significant predictors. In the case of males, less anxiety was the significant predictor. Linear regressions to predict grooming from sexting also suggested this relationship was moderated by gender.

Griffith e Roth¹³ agree that online grooming, aimed at the sexual abuse of minors, is not a new phenomenon but argue that the internet has opened new possibilities for its implementation. The distinctive features of online grooming listed by the authors include shorter timelines compared to face-to-face grooming, the opportunity for offenders to gather more information about victims from online databases, the use of various tools such as images, videos, and audio during the grooming process, ease in masking identity, the ability to keep the relationship more effectively secret, the absence of access and time limitations, and the potential for abusers to be more selective in choosing victims and to target multiple victims simultaneously.

O'Connell was one of the first to examine online grooming, considering it as a phase within the broader process of cyber-sexploitation¹⁴. He identifies six phases through which the process of online grooming develops, a model also corroborated by other research, such as Katz's study on the accounts of young individuals suspected to be victims of online abuse. These phases include friendship formation, relationship building, risk assessment, exclusivity, sexuality, and the request for the creation or exchange of erotic or child pornography materials. Katz¹⁵ finds that the approach of the offenders was linear and structured, starting with online contact, communication on the internet, building a relationship, requesting risky information, and concluding with the sexual phase and requests for compromising material. Therefore, online grooming represents a serious threat, with offenders exploiting the internet to approach and abuse minors. Understanding the phases of this process is

¹³ G. GRIFFITH, L. ROTH, *Protecting children from online sexual predators*. Sydney, NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, 2007, pp. 6-12.

¹⁴ R. O'CONNELL. *A typology of child cybersexploitation and online grooming practices*, 2003, pp. 1-19.

¹⁵ C. KATZ, *Internet-related child sexual abuse: What children tell us in their testimonies*, in «Children and Youth Services Review», 2013, 35.9, pp. 1536-1542.

essential for developing prevention and protection strategies against this form of online abuse.

The widespread prevalence of these practices highlights the complexity of challenges related to online navigation for young people. To effectively address such issues, it is crucial to implement educational programs that teach not only the technical skills necessary for using the web safely but also an awareness of relational dynamics and the risks associated with online interactions. Additionally, it is essential to promote a culture of digital respect and responsibility, involving parents, educators, and online safety advocates to create a safer and more aware virtual environment for young people.

Today, we also witness an increasingly widespread dissemination of challenges online, typically involving the creation of short videos in which individuals encourage others to replicate a dangerous action.

Various studies indicate that one of the main reasons viral challenges become prevalent on the Internet is the need for social belonging. Feeling accepted and included by peers is crucial for positive development; thus, challenges become a means through which adolescents can feel an integral part of a group¹⁶. The challenges pose an additional cause for concern in the realm of young people's online interactions, bringing with them a series of risks and negative consequences. These challenges often involve young individuals actively engaging in recording and sharing risky behaviors on social networks, ranging from physically dangerous acts to extreme and sometimes illegal behaviors, which are then documented and disseminated online.

The consequences of such practices are serious and can leave a long-term effect on the mental health and overall well-being of the young individuals involved. Exposure to harmful contents can significantly affect self-esteem, with young people constantly facing negative judgments or offensive comments on social media¹⁷. This can lead to

¹⁶ S. FERREIRA DESLANDES et al. *Online challenges among children and adolescents: Self-inflicted harm and social media strategies*, *Salud colectiva*, 2021, 16, p. 3264.

¹⁷ C. MENTO et al. *Who Believes in Fake News: A Study on the Relationship between Affective Temperament, Cyberchondria and Problematic Use of the Internet during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, in «OBM Neurobiology», 2023, 7.1. pp. 1-16.

depressive episodes, fuel fear and frustration, contributing to a cycle of emotional stress that can extend to the academic sphere as well.

The decline in school performance is one of the most tangible consequences of these negative digital dynamics. The negative effects on emotional well-being often translate into difficulties in concentration, anxiety, and reduced motivation, directly impacting students' academic performance.

3. The role of prevention

Young people have increasingly free access to the beauty of innovation with all the dangers it contains. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an overuse of social networks and an increase in anxious-depressive features, which could lead to a certain emotional lability resulting in the use of compensatory mechanisms. The promotion of awareness and digital education across all online platforms becomes crucial to mitigate the negative impact of these dynamics. Efforts should focus on raising awareness about the danger associated with the use of web, encouraging responsible digital practices, and creating an online culture that fosters mutual respect and compassion.

Prevention plays a crucial role in managing online risks for adolescents. Key aspects include education and awareness, as adolescents need to be provided with adequate education about the potential risks they may encounter online. This includes understanding the consequences of sharing personal information, recognizing cyberbullying, and being aware of online predators¹⁸

¹⁸ Y. L. REID CHASSIAKOS et al. *Children and adolescents and digital media*, in «Pediatrics», 2016, 138.5.

4. Conclusions

Digital literacy is equally essential. Promoting digital literacy skills ensures that adolescents have the knowledge and critical thinking abilities to navigate the online world safely. This includes understanding how to verify information, assess online content, and protect their privacy. In the hypermodern era, it is also necessary to educate parents about online risks, and the importance of monitoring their children's online activities helps create a supportive environment. Open communication between parents and adolescents is crucial to addressing concerns and providing guidance. Setting up appropriate school programs allows adolescents to develop a comprehensive understanding of potential risks and how to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. Implementing technical measures, such as privacy settings, parental controls, and age-appropriate content filters, can add an extra layer of protection for adolescents online. Recognizing the potential impact of online risks on mental health means that prevention efforts should include support mechanisms, counseling services, and resources to help adolescents manage issues such as cyberbullying or online harassment. Finally, involving the community, including educators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals, would foster a collaborative approach to preventing and treating online risks for adolescents.

By combining these preventive measures, it is possible to create a safer online environment for adolescents and empower them to make informed and responsible decisions in their digital interactions.