Press Book

CyberEthics Public Forum

Trinity Long Room Hub

Monday, 14th April, 2014
Introduction

The impact of the internet on child development and privacy and the growing issue of cyberbullying were among key issues debated at a CyberEthics Public Forum in Trinity College Dublin held on April 14th, 2014.

The rapid growth of cyber technologies and the profound influence of the internet on human behaviour formed the backdrop to the public form, which was organised as part of Trinity’s contribution to the President of Ireland’s Ethics Initiative. The event, hosted by Trinity Long Room Hub, the University’s Arts and Humanities Research Institute, heard from experts from the fields of education, law and psychology who addressed the many complex issues associated with our massive reliance on the cyberspace for communications, business and entertainment.

Speakers at the event included cyberpsychologist Mary Aiken, from the RCSI CyberPsychology Research Centre, Dr Conor Mc Guckin, Assistant Professor in Education in Trinity and Dr Eoin O’Dell, Associate Professor in Law at Trinity.

Broadcast Coverage

- RTE, Radio 1, April 14th, 2014, Today with Sean O’Rourke
- Newstalk, April 14th, 2014, Lunchtime (Part 2, Scroll to 14.03)
- East Coast FM, The Morning Show, April 15th, 2014

Online Coverage

- IrishIndependent.ie, April 18th, Video of CyberEthics Public Forum
- TheJournal.ie, April 14th, 2014, Column: What is the psychological impact of spending so much time in ‘cyberspace’?
- Medical Independent, April 10th, 2014, TCD forum to explore impact of internet on child development and bullying

Print Coverage

- See overleaf
Victims of bullying ‘won’t tell parents’

by Alan O’Keeffe

CHILDREN who are being bullied online may fail to tell their parents for fear their phone or laptop could be confiscated, an expert has warned.

Teachers are now obliged to deal with cyber-bullying under their school’s anti-bullying policy.

All schools in Ireland must have a policy that specifically addresses dealing with cyber-bullying and homophobia.

But Dr Conor McGuckin said parents should not presume their child is not a victim of bullying simply because they haven’t been told.

And he said that it is often the case that young people may decide to suffer in silence rather than open up to adults.

UNDERSTANDING

Parents seeking to help their child deal with cyber-bullying need to admit to their child their own lack of understanding of social media and the Internet, Dr McGuckin said.

This admission may help a parent to have an open conversation about the problem, he added.

Dr McGuckin, assistant professor in educational psychology at Trinity College, Dublin, said that unlike schoolyard bullying, four out of 10 victims of cyber-bullying respond “instantaneously”.

However, rather than reacting immediately to bullying messages, it may be better to “slow down, think about it and cool off”, he said.

“As a society, we now have more connected devices in the world than there are humans, and the ‘always-on’ generation are the digital natives and pioneers in this emerging new world,” he said.

hnews@herald.ie.
Parents warned over ‘secret’ world of cyber-bullying

Alan O’Keeffe

YOUNG victims of cyber-bullying may avoid telling their parents because they are afraid their phone, iPad or laptop could be taken away, an expert has warned.

Dr Conor McGuirk said parents cannot presume their child is not being bullied on social media just because they have not been told.

Young people may often choose to suffer in silence rather than tell their parents or teachers.

Parents seeking to help their child deal with cyber-bullying need to admit to their child their own lack of understanding of social media and the internet, he said.

This admission may help a parent to have an open conversation about the problem. It is important to make the child feel understood, said Dr McGuirk, a world expert on bullying problems.

Dr McGuirk, assistant professor in educational psychology at Trinity College, Dublin, said that, unlike schoolyard bullying, four out of 10 victims of cyber-bullying respond “instantaneously”. However, rather than reacting immediately to bullying messages, it may be better to “slow down, think about it, and cool off,” he told the Irish Independent.

It may be better to switch off the technology, to ignore it, and to seek the advice and support of parents, teachers, and friends, he said.

A parent may find it is better to have an open conversation with a child about a cyber-bullying problem while on a short journey by car, which would not necessitate direct eye contact, he said.

Teachers are now obliged to deal with cyber-bullying under their school’s anti-bullying policy. Since last Friday, all schools in Ireland must have a policy that specifically addresses dealing with cyber-bullying and homophobia, he said.

Dr McGuirk addressed a ‘Cyber-Ethics Public Forum’ at Trinity College, which explored the rapid growth of cyber technologies and the profound influence of the internet on human behaviour.

It was organised as part of the college’s President of Ireland’s Ethics Initiative. He focused on how to help children, adults, and educators cope with both the positive and negative issues that new technology brings.

He said: “To understand cyber-bullying, we need to understand the fundamental characteristics of traditional bullying. But we also need to understand the separate, and thorny, issues that are related to the law, technology, marketing, and the modern lives of children and young people.

“Just when society was getting to an understanding of how to deal with ‘traditional’, or ‘face-to-face’ bullying in schools, along came the Internet, smartphones, and issues related to cyber-bullying.

“As a society, we now have more connected devices in the world than there are humans, and the ‘always on’ generation are the digital natives and pioneers in this emerging new world,” he said.

“However, we must remember that childhood and
Our children are spending a lot of their time in cyberspace – we have to make it safe for them

Mary Aiken

"We are living through one of the largest unregulated social experiments of all time."

These are the words of Michael Seto, a leading forensic psychologist, referring to the potential impact of online material on young people's psychological development. Can we assume this will be a positive experience?

Children worldwide are now online at a very young age, and are increasingly immersed in cyber environments. For example, a recent UK report highlighted that 28pc of three to four-year-olds now use tablet computers.

In South Korea it was found that 63pc of three to nine-year-olds go online for an average of eight to nine hours a week. In the US 25pc of three-year-olds go online daily, rising to nearly 30pc by age eight, in Australia 79pc of five to eight-year-olds go online, and in Ireland 63pc of children report using the internet several times a day.

The results of these studies pose an important question: who is responsible for protecting the developing child in an age of rapid technological change?

Traditionally parents are designated as being primarily responsible for child welfare and protection. However, in an age of ever-pervasive technologies, and sophisticated access routes and devices, is it really fair to expect parents to shoulder most of the responsibility?

We don't expect parents of young teenagers to guard the entrances to public houses and off-licences, or man the cigarette counter in newsagents; as a society we recognise the collective responsibility for creating an appropriate environment in which to raise children.

The word environment is key, because technology is so often viewed as simply just another communication medium, an evolution of the telegraph or telephone: as cyberspsychologists we disagree. When children have their smartphones in their pockets 24/7 this is no longer simply communicating, but living online.

Our role is to deliver insight at the intersection of technology and human behaviour. In this case the intersection of technology and the child. Online and offline are generational constructs – children nowadays are "always on". Our studies support that youth can consider cyberspace as an environment, somewhere to go and hang out. Even cyber descriptions, domain, chat room, forum etc imply a sense of place.

It's important to recognise that 'real world' and 'virtual world' behaviours can be very different. Professor John Suler highlights that the online disinhibition effect has an impact on behaviour in cyberspace.

He argues that child (and adult) behaviour in virtual environments can be very different to real world behaviours, and this may explain some risk-taking activities online.

Online disinhibition may be compounded by what Suler describes as the "minimisation of status and authority online" in other words, in a real world environment you have older brothers and sisters, parents, relatives, care-givers, neighbours, teachers, policemen and so on, however in cyberspace it can appear that nobody is in charge.

The figures outlining the access to the internet by very young children support what we already know, and is, that children have embraced new technologies with great enthusiasm. While the internet provides excellent opportunities for children to be creative, learn, communicate and socialise, it also poses risks.

Some of these risks are apparent such as cyberbullying, and some have not yet been fully investigated.

In the real world, parents and caregivers decide what is suitable for children, but in cyberspace artificial intelligence seems to be in charge.

From the point at which a child logs on, they are in fact interacting with algorithms, from search, to gaming, to social networking.

To be fair to the algorithm, it cannot verify that it is dealing with a child, and this is where perhaps we should consider the ethical implications of this transaction. In fact, there are many ethical issues to be explored concerning the impact of technology on the child.

Psychologists would of course agree that exploration is a healthy and necessary part of the developmental process, however age is very important, "child" can refer to anybody under the age of 18; 'teen' can vary from 13 to 19. The point is that age is critical in terms of 'age-appropriate' experience in an online environment. There is very little research and debate regarding the societal impact of machine intelligence on vulnerable populations.

The last 30 years has seen an explosion in the development of information technology, to the point where the younger generation, in particular, spends a lot of its waking life in this new space, in 'cyberspace'. It is important that this entirely new environment be examined scientifically both to maximise its potential benefits, and to avoid potential risk or harm.

A generation of children have now grown up in a time of unprecedented advances in technology, and only longitudinal studies will provide evidence of any possible impact – but do we really need to wait for evidence? Or can common sense prevail? Children and young people need safe spaces online.

Last night at the TCD Long Room Hub Cyber Ethics debate, I discussed the impact of technology on the developing child, Dr Conor McGuckin, assistant professor in education in Trinity, discussed cyber-bullying focused on how to help children, adults, and educators 'cope' with the both positive and negative issues that new technology brings, and Dr Ron O'Dell, associate professor in Law at Trinity, talked about the significant challenges the Internet poses for our legal, philosophical and ethical conceptions of privacy.

Ultimately an inter-disciplinary approach is needed to address these issues; psychologists, sociologists,
legal experts and computer scientists working together to create an optimum environment for children.

This does not necessarily mean turning the internet into a playground for children, or restricting adult freedom online. Rather a collective forum to create smart, workable and practical solutions – just as we do in the real world.

Last night's debate was part of the President Higgins Ethics initiative; the President has said that his would be a “Presidency of ideas ... recognising and open to new paradigms of thought and action ... seeking to develop a public discourse that places ... an ethic of active citizenship at its heart”.

As cyberpsychologists we are grateful for this opportunity to raise these important issues, and in particular we are interested in “active cyber citizenship” that is, how does an ethically aware society step up in an age of technology, and ensure the well-being and welfare of our younger citizens?

An old proverb reminds us that it “takes a village to raise a child” ... this is also true in cyberspace.

Mary Aiken, director of the RCS CyberPsychology Research Centre, is a sensing fellow at the US IBM Network Science Research Centre. She is also an observer to the INTERPOL Group on Crimes against Children.
Why children take online risks

YouNG people take more risks online because they feel the rules of the real world do not apply, a leading cyber-psychologist has claimed.

Mary Aiken (above), of the Royal College of Surgeons, told a cyber-ethics debate in Trinity College that young people view going online as "somewhere to go and hang out"

"In cyberspace, it can appear that nobody is in charge," she warned, adding that even very young children had embraced online technology.
YOUR DUBLIN WEEK
WITH SHARON O’CONNELL

BUY POPCORN FOR...
Pioneer
Nordic noir gets deep in Erik Skodsbø’s Norwegian thriller about the oil industry’s shenanigans in the 1980s. Washed with the murky ochre-yellow palette of Tin Tin, Thunder Soldier, Spy. Pioneer sets out its stall as a conspiracy drama, involving competing Norwegian/US interests trying to exploit the North Sea oil and gas resources. Axel Honne is monocled Norwegian dinner guest, whose brother’s death during a deep-sea test drill leads him to start challenging what the dives are being exposed to in the lush for contrasts. Just as in Mjølberg’s Insomnia, the extremes of human endurance are explored with claustrophobic intensity. On limited release.

FEAST YOUR EYES ON...
Fergal McCarthy
To coincide with the 1,000 year anniversary of the Battle of Clontarf—one of the most influential and controversial events in Irish history—a visual artist, Fergal McCarthy, has responded to the question of how by creating an epic graphic novel on the walls of the Little Museum of Dublin. Taking a characteristic retentive approach to this subject, McCarthy has rewritten the story of the 12th century Brian Boru with drawn of humorous, monochrome drawings to explore the battle’s background and legacy. By way of an interactive element, children have been invited to contribute to the mural through their own drawings. 

DUBLIN FOR FREE...
One City, One Book
This year’s One City, One Book choice, the book-to-cinema adaptation Film And Song, continues to be celebrated in a series of events across the capital throughout April. Tonight, music from the collection will be performed live in the Church Café & Bar on Mary Street (7:30pm, free). See website for more events, which take place in a variety of locations daily until April 30. www.dublinonebook.ie

Cyberethics Public Forum
The impact of social media on child development and the attendant issue of cyberbullying are among key themes to be debated at a Cyberethics Public Forum taking place in Trinity College Dublin this evening (Biomedical Sciences Institute, 6pm). Speakers include cybersecurity expert Mary Allen and Dr Conor McCarth, Assistant Professor in Education at Trinity College. See www.tcd.ie for details. Free, although advance booking is necessary.

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Cut Copy
Dave Whelan is one of those annoyingly multi-talented types for whom a single creative outlet just isn’t enough. He was pulling in a perfectly good wage as a graphic designer before music led him to desert his day job for good in 2009. While still working on unsalvageable decks and drum machine edits until his sampler blew up, at which point he decided to replace the offending object with a new human being: Tim Heery, Ben Browning and Michael Scott. The resulting blend of real beats and cost beats has made Cut Copy a vital proposition. Expect the party.

The Tram Factory tonight. Button Factory, Curved Street D2, 8pm, €20, £20 on the door. www.buttonfactory.ie
Toddlers tapping into tablet computers

MARK HILLIARD
Children as young as three are using tablet computers at home, prompting calls for a debate in Ireland on how use of the internet should be controlled.

Research from Britain, to be cited at a forum on cyberethics in Trinity College Dublin tonight, has found 28 per cent of three and four year olds use tablet computers.

The 2013 Ofcom report also found 14 per cent of parents of children of that age conceded the children knew more about the internet than they did.

Irish context
Psychologist Mary Aiken, a speaker at tonight’s forum, said: “The Irish experience is similar, and if we are not there yet, we are certainly heading in that direction.

“What we need to do is to consider what that means in an Irish context. What it is saying is effectively that it’s not just up to parents to try to look out for the welfare of children online, there is a societal duty there to help.”

The forum will also hear talks on coping with cyberbullying and on the legal, ethical and philosophical questions surrounding online privacy.
Warning on dangers of toddlers using iPads too soon

Caroline Crawford

Experts are warning of the developmental dangers for children from toddlers using tablet computers and smartphones before they have even learnt to read.

As online technology takes over, psychologists are concerned about allowing children to spend significant amounts of time online.

Research in the US and UK has revealed a growing number of young children are now using mobile devices, with the number of babies and infants under two using the technology rising to 38% in the US.

Leading academics here are warning similar figures would apply to Ireland, in line with the number of people using tablets soaring 60% over six months and now standing at 1.4 million.

"These findings would hold up for Ireland as well. We're exposing children to developmental levels that they are not ready for," warned Dr Conor McGuckin, assistant professor in educational psychology at Trinity.

"Basically, at that age children should be learning the art of conversation, how to take turns and mimicking behaviour. They need to be exposed to social norms. If they are mostly interacting with a tablet they are not getting that feedback from others."

"A lot of children are getting to pre-school and they have never read a nursery rhyme, never recited a nursery rhyme," he said.

Dr McGuckin said the increased use of technology by younger children could be putting them at risk of nature deficit disorder.

"There is a great social network available for children and it's called 'outside'."

"In their formative years, children should be learning experiences from outside. Now we're in a situation where many have never collected frog spawn or gone for nature walks."

"We have developed a fear of the outside, that it is not safe for children because of paedophiles and inappropriate adults. We are trying to overprotect children from the outside."

Skills

He added: "Just because technology has increased doesn't mean a child's development has. They still develop at the same rate as our parents or we did."

"In the real world we teach children to cope. We teach them to wear a coat if they go outside or to take care when crossing the road."

"We've no idea how to teach them to cope with the online world. We wouldn't just allow a child out to play on the road by themselves. We make sure they have the skills they need, but we are letting them play in the online world by themselves."

The psychologist also urged parents to stay with children if they are watching children's programmes on tablets.

"The programme may be age specific, but the adverts and information that surrounds it are often not," he said.

However, experts acknowledged the positive aspect of children using such technology if properly monitored, allowing them to gain the digital literacy skills they will need in the future.

"There can be positives to this if parents are learning with their children, going online together, so that from an early age being online is something they share at home instead of being something private," said Dr McGuckin.

Dr Ciaran McMahon, of the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, also praised the social advantages of online literacy - but stressed there must be debate among the public and policy makers on the implications for young children.

"This is not just an issue for parents. The onus is on us to think, as a wider society, of the implications of very young children using this technology."

"Society dictates what is not suitable for children and legislates for that. This is in the hands of the people and therefore in the hands of government and policy formation," he added.