Trash Talk and Trusted Adults:
An Analysis of Youth Internet Safety Discourses in New York State

by

Nathan W. Fisk

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Approved by the
Examining Committee:

_____
Nancy D. Campbell, Thesis Advisor

_____
Kim Fortun, Member

_____
Edward J. Woodhouse, Member

_____
James P. Zappen, Member

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ABSTRACT

There is currently a tremendous effort being put forth towards educating today's youth on the "safe" and "appropriate" use of communication technologies through various educational programs nationwide. These programs are prepare youth Internet users to become "cybercitizens," fostering safe online environment for both educational and corporate activities. Additionally, they seek to assist seemingly confused parents to better understand what youth are doing online, and the potential risks they face should the Internet be used inappropriately. These curricula provide significant insight into the ways in which youth Internet safety has emerged as a problematic for policymakers, school administrators and parents. I ask three main questions throughout this work: first, *what dynamics have produced, or made possible current youth Internet safety discourses* ; second, *how have various groups understood the risks involved with youth Internet use*; and finally, *what is the work of youth Internet safety discourses*. In answering these questions, I draw on an analysis of youth Internet safety policy and curricula, in addition to a student survey, student and parent focus groups, and interviews with school administrators across six school districts within New York State. I argue that information technologies have made everyday youth lives available for adult surveillance, through social networking and video hosting sites. Such surveillance demonstrates the failings of what I describe as technologies of childhood – the techniques and pedagogies which construct and govern particular concepts of youth and development. Through the works of Foucault and Donzelot, I describe the ways in which youth Internet safety discourses have emerged from historical anxieties over the appropriate roles of adults and children in

society, seeking to reconfigure families and institutions in order to protect and reproduce

existing technologies of childhood.