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Parenting Minors in the Age of Social Media and the Internet: Are Parents Doing Enough to Protect Their
Children?

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ABSTRACT

A study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2020 was used in this research in an attempt to better understand the relationship between parents with minor-aged children and the potential exposure to various threats on social media and the internet. Using various attributes of parent respondents, this research is able to relate said attributes to possible attitudes and opinions parents may have on numerous aspects of social media. With the hopes of furthering the discussion of safe online use, this research aims the discussion onto the responsibility of parents to be the protection and advocate of those who can't, children. A newer social media phenomenon named "sharenting" has also been the center of internet safety discussion as it opens the possibility of greater threats towards children. The data shows statistical significance pertaining to multiple variables including the significance of household income, age of the respondent, education level, and more to multiple dependent variables. These findings lead us to conclude that parents do indeed need to be more aware of what they post of their children online, what their children post, what their children watch, and much more.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Within the last few decades, there has been a major increase in average social media use. The Pew Research Center contributed to this fact when they began tracking social media adoption in 2005 finding that only 5% of American adults used at least one major platform and later documenting a 67%-point increase in 2021(Auxier et al., 2021) social media has essentially become a major part of day-to-day life, especially in younger generations. Surveys conducted by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry found that 90% of teens aged 13-17 have used social media, with 51% reporting the visitation of a social media sites at least daily.

As social media has become an integral part of everyday life by fostering instantaneous communication, enabling widespread information dissemination and allowing connection on a global scale, social media apps have been catering towards a younger audience (Suciu, 2024). With apps such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to name a few, a discussion on minor safety has become a notable concern. Some of these concerns include the risk of encountering online predators, exposure to age-inappropriate content, and other privacy issues that could result in the inadvertent sharing of personal information. While many states have attempted to enact legislation that promotes the safe use of social media and “mitigate the impact social media has can have on kids,” few attempts have succeeded to actually pass (Ryckman, 2023).

While age of internet users plays a major factor in the discussion it is also important to address the protections in place that can prevent children from these harms. This means starting with the parents. Ensuring that parents are aware of these dangers, and promoting safe internet use is a must. Parental supervision, knowledge and experience is vital to protect those who cannot always protect themselves. There is even room for discussion around the new phenomenon appearing on a variety of social media

apps, referred to as ‘Sharenting’- a combination of parenting and sharing, which refers to the practice of parents frequently sharing pictures, videos, and updates of their children online. There seems to be an obvious disconnect between what *is* and what *is not* appropriate for parents to share, and thus could be responsible for the exposure of their children to the threats of the internet. Turning our focus to the potential risks of not starting at this major source of internet safety could mean a safer space for all ages on the internet.

This study aims to analyze attributes of parents with young children and the effects of these attributes on their various beliefs and opinions of social media use allowed by their children. With very limited data pertaining to safe use of social media, it is important to provide context to any ongoing threats whether it be exploitation of minors, predatory behaviors, etc., as well as provide useful background for parents with children of any age to further push a needed conversation.

Using data from the Pew Research Center collected in 2020, this study further articulates potential relationships between parenting styles related to social media to their level of parental supervision, prior knowledge of internet safety and regulations, and much more. Internet crimes against children are not uncommon and thus teaching parental figures about the dangers their children and other children can face is essential to alleviating the problem. Whether it’s giving minors access to social media at a young age or limited parental supervision, there are many variables that can open children to harm online that may be responsible.

The following question will be determined and analyzed in this study- what are the key factors influencing the implications of internet safety measures for minors, and how can a comprehensive understanding of these factors inform the development of more robust strategies to protect young users from online threats and promote a safer digital environment?

Chapter 2

Research Questions

Hypothesis

1. Parents with a lower education level will be more likely to believe the acceptable age for children to use social media is at a younger age.
2. Parents with a higher education level will be more likely to believe the acceptable age for children to use social media sites will be at and older age.
3. Parents with a lower education level will be more likely to have shared photos, videos, or information of their children online.
4. Parents with a higher household income will believe they have less responsibility in protecting their children from inappropriate content online and believe the government and technology companies should have more responsibility in doing so.
5. People who are divorced, separated, widowed, or have never been married will be more likely to believe the acceptable age for children to have social media is younger.
6. Republicans are less likely than Democrats to have shared photos, videos, or information about their children online.
7. Republicans are more likely to believe the government and technology companies have less responsibility to protect their children from inappropriate content online than parents or guardians.

Chapter 3

Review of Literature

As mentioned previously, prior data surrounding some of the issues mentioned are either too broad, or not directly related to my objective. The research that *is* available, however, is still valuable.

Rise of Social Media

Society has seemingly come to terms with the idea that social media is an essential part of day-to-day life and has in turn had a significant impact on many generations, but more specifically younger generations. The “Net Generation” which is the cohort of young people “born between 1982 and 1991, has grown up in an environment in which they are constantly exposed to computer-based technology” (Sandars & Morrison, 2007). Being a part of the Net Generation is correlated with many positive and negative aspects of life including, a strong advocacy of lifelong learning, the need for instant gratification in various scenarios, and a need for collaboration in the workplace which leaves the rigid hierarchy in a compromising position as the new generations begin to enter the workforce, to name a few (Leung & Zheng, 2012).

When popular sites such as The Facebook popped up in 2004, notably changed to just be referenced as Facebook in 2005, users quickly became enamored with the ease to keep up with distant friends and family, post about their greatest accomplishments, and even recognize advertised posts more frequently (Phillips, 2007). In fact, users remain quite active on the platform today, even with other competitors vying for the majority of social media users. Seven in ten Facebook users “use the site daily, including 49% who say they use the site several times a day” (Auxier et al., 2021). With this new norm, the creation of apps geared towards younger generations was almost an expectation. In 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger released a new photo-sharing platform that later turned into a multi-billion-

dollar app actively used by over 2.4 billion people (Bruner, 2016) and is widely recognized as Instagram. Within just the last few years, the newer generations have come to be more familiar with these specific downloadable apps, and therefore make up a considerable number of users on Instagram. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2022 found that roughly 62% of their respondents, who were teenagers aged 13-17, used Instagram. This may be due to the fact that prior research has indicated that youth social networking sites “behavior entails exploration and self-presentation, which is potentially associated with the pivotal task of identifying development” (Stapleton et al., 2017) or simply because “we are all addicts to a degree” (Waters, 2021). According to Anna Lembke, a world-leading expert on addiction, she finds that social media has turned a large percentage of the population into addicts to the quick validation and distraction social media can provide. She even refers to smartphones as the “modern-day hypodermic needle” (Waters, 2021). Another app that has only continued to become prevalent in the lives of these younger generations is the international twin of China’s mobile video app Douyin, once called Musical.ly, before transforming into what it’s more notable name in 2018, TikTok (Kaye et al., 2020). TikTok primarily rose to fame seemingly overnight and “cemented itself alongside touchstone digital media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp both through its popularity in massive markets...” (Kaye et al., 2020). TikTok consists of easy-to-make “user-generated” short videos that are generally anywhere from 15 to 60 seconds (now with a feature that allows users to make videos up to ten minutes long). Within the same Pew Research study previously mentioned, some 67% of teens surveyed claimed to have used TikTok, with 16% of all teens saying they used it almost constantly. Teen girls are more likely to respond to using TikTok and Instagram rather than teen boys (Vogels et al., 2022), which could be due to the nature of its content including a heavy trend of influencing which has been recognized as career by many of Gen Z (Liu, 2023).

Sharenting and Parental Use of Social Media

While people generally associate social media with the younger generations, a new issue that has entered discussion is that of 'sharenting.' 'Sharenting' has been a new term coined to describe the online use of parents, caregivers, or relatives, to discuss aspects of parenting, or sharing information about their minor-aged children online. This can include videos, pictures, stories, or any other various updates about a child's life (Rachini, 2023). Because these adults post their children online, typically without their consent, critics have realized that the children's digital identity has been shaped "long before these young people open their first e-mail" (Steinberg, 2017). These parents act as both gatekeepers and narrators of their child's personal lives and stories which can lead to consequences and complications in the future. Steinberg notes that "a conflict of interest exists as children might one day resent the disclosures made years earlier by their parents" (839). Many have discussed the potential harms of minors and teens posting online with little to no discretion, but others have failed to consider the idea of parents doing this for them, especially in legal settings (842). Digital footprints are being created *for* children *by* their protectors.

While many consider sharenting to be harmless, the issues start to arise when questioning the content itself. There is considerably less harm being done when parents join a parenting group online to ask questions about their newborn or post privately to their families about accomplishments made by their children, however, there becomes a much more definitive line drawn when the posts become embarrassing in nature, or too specific making their children easily identifiable. It also starts to become an issue when it is exploitative in nature. Family influencing has become quite a popular source of income with the rise of social media. Posting precious moments of their children to thousands and sometimes millions of viewers can seem intriguing when the possibility of making money is introduced. Before social media, big families were a spectacle to watch on television with notable families such as the Duggars, starring in their own show "17 Kids and Counting", and "John and Kate Plus Eight" which

followed the Gosselin family. Now with the ease of apps and other streaming services such as YouTube that allow a quick and easy way to access content, and an easy way to make money, family influencing has become a more popular career choice. The hashtag #bigfamily got 2.7 billion views in the past year, while #largefamily got 1.1 billion according to Vox News and TikTok.

Families with more kids aren't the only ones participating either. Anyone with a camera on their phone and access to social media can simply participate and post their kid online. Single mothers and fathers with one child, households with few children, etc. are still susceptible to the idea of influencing and its intriguing benefits. Influencers have become a "contemporary incarnation of Internet celebrity for whom microcelebrity is not merely a hobby or a supplementary income but an established career with its own ecology and economy" (Abidin, 2017). While family influencing is typically associated with the family as a whole, the children (often minors) are pushed to the center of attention. They become "child microcelebrities" (2) who have gained enough exposure and fame from their prominent families. In a sense, they are essentially "groomed to inherit" the social capital of their families and have become vessels curated to "maximize advertorial potential" (2).

Internet Safety

Safely being able to browse the internet, and the various sharing websites online is a crucial aspect of proper use. Nobody desires to find out their children have been talking to a stranger they met through a social media site or have their private information distributed to online personas. It has been recognized that a large majority of research dedicated to internet safety focuses on the safety of children and adolescents. As previously stated, they are the most active users, and therefore targets of potential predators, scammers and online bullies. And while adults are still susceptible to online risks, adolescents are more vulnerable "because they are, among other things, more stimulated by short-term rewards than by long-term prospects and because they have a higher tendency to take part in risky behaviors than

adults” (Kimpe et al., 2019). Adolescents also have different access to the internet differing from prior generations considering devices that allow online use to have become more portable, and therefore allow more private and general use.

Published in February of 2022, *Online safety awareness and human factors: An application of the theory of human ecology* written by Taufik Mohammad, Nur Atikah Mohamed Hussin, and Mohd Heikal Husin found that “relevant factors range from biological influences to the relationships that individuals have with their surroundings, including their family members and the community” and thus, “comprehensive partnerships among various parties are necessary to ensure that the strategies for improving online safety awareness are effective and comprehensive” (Mohammad et al., 2022). I see this as a major factor to what we will recognize in my data; the potential that factors such as relationships, education levels, age, etc. will reflect varying outcomes on the answers of respondents regarding their opinions and views of social media.

The Ecological Systems Theory

Within the same research referred to above, *Online safety awareness and human factors: An application of the theory of human ecology*, the authors refer to the Ecological Systems Theory explained by Russian American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner to further develop our understanding of how behaviors are affected by our environmental surroundings. According to this theory, “there are five layers of the environment, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem” (3). By applying the two most direct layers related to human development, the microsystem- which refers to “individuals and organizations that directly influence a child’s development” and, the mesosystem- which refers to “interactions between such influential parties,” to highlight the idea that social interaction begins a child’s most immediate environment, i.e., neighbors, parents, and friends. Furthermore, they used this theory to further demonstrate the application when in relation to online safety. For example,

because of the varying limitations of young age, children are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors and thus “need parents who are ideally more vigilant and can protect their children from cyber-threats” (3). However, they also must consider the exosystem which is involved indirectly in the individual’s life but can still affect the development or behavior of an individual. Mohammed and other authors used the example of an exosystem in which the parents' interactions outside of the home-workplace, outings with friends, etc.- where children are not directly involved can be of importance. The knowledge of online safety they obtain may differ in these forms whether they are constantly exposed to the internet or not, and in turn can reflect onto their children. Financial, social, and cultural differences can also be determinative of a parents’ own level of online safety awareness.

This brings us to the context in which Bronfenbrenner’s theory was used to show cultural effects on the behavioral and developmental influence of children. In his theory, the macrosystem consists of the cultural, religious, and political ideas that can result in positive or negative development of a person. Different countries have different cultures whether they be based in religion or the possibility of political influence or interference. This can mean their exposure to the online world is much more or less than what Americans would consider “normal,” hence the indication that culture and technological advancements impacts online safety awareness. Socioeconomic status is another example of cultural influence from an individual level they focus on. For instance, they implied that “families with lower socioeconomic statuses have generally dismissive attitudes to online safety, which are often shared by their children...” “increasing their exposure to threats in the cyberworld” (3). Finally with reference to the chronosystem, they explain how an individual's historical context affects development. Generational gaps, such as an older generation who had little opportunity to learn about the internet and its capabilities at an acceptable age, can reflect on the generations that follow. An older mother who grew up without the numerous technological advancements of today, will be less likely inclined to teach her children about the numerous risks of modern technology.

With this research in mind, the goal of this thesis will aim to continue to add context to the numerous factors implicated in parental discourse surrounding the idea of minors on social media.

Chapter 4

Data and Methods

The data used for this research was drawn from a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 titled “Parenting Children in the Age of Screens.” The online survey conducted used 3,640 U.S. parents who have at least one child or children ages 17 and under for the similar purpose of demonstrating *relationships* between parental use of social media and basic technology as well as their child's use. Their survey also aimed to discuss the difficulties of parenting in a new age of technology versus parenting 20 years ago. It's no surprise, 26% of their respondents who agreed parenting is harder today blamed it technology and 21% (Auxier et al., 2020) mentioned the negative effects of social media in their answer (48).

These respondents consisted of members of their own nationally representative online survey panel composed of more than 10,000 randomly selected adults across the United States- the American Trends Panel, or ATP, as well as the Ipsos KnowledgePanel. This data set includes a weighting variable that allows interpretation of the results to be reflective of a national sample. Using Stata, a statistical software for data science, I have chosen relevant information and variables included in Pew's report that I have found to be beneficial to my overall research question.

Exclusion Criteria and Changes

In total, the original survey conducted by the Pew Research Center received 3,640 respondents, however, my data only analyzed 3,031 of these 3,640 respondents. This is due to the fact that when asked if the respondent had ever used social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, 609 people answered “no.” These people were excluded from my data set in order to make sure I was giving a fair representation of parents who have shared images, videos, or information of their child online before, and would therefore leave less opportunity for open interpretation of my results.

Independent Variables

The independent variables I chose to include are age of respondent, sex, race and ethnicity, political affiliation, household income, marital status, and finally the level of education completed by the respondent.

Dependent Variables

As for the dependent variables, the list includes the responsibility levels of parents/guardians in protecting children from inappropriate content online, the government and technology companies in protecting children from inappropriate content online, ages found to be acceptable for children to use social media sites, and whether or not parents have shared photos, videos, or information about their children online. While there were many more variables I could have used in my study from Pew, I chose the ones I thought would be able to make sense of my research question the most.

The variables chosen, worded as questions to the respondents, were further broken down into categories in the initial Pew research based on possible answer choices. For example- when asked for their age, the respondents could answer in categories (i.e., 18-29 years, 30-49 years, etc.). Because of this, I recoded some questions to have less possible category options. This is most notable in the question referencing the respondent's household income. In Pew's data, there were 9 possible answer choices ranging from less than \$10,000-to \$150,000 plus. While I still managed to keep the quality of the answers, I combined some of the options to reflect the same range of income. This can be seen in **Table 1.1**. This was also the case for questions regarding marital status, acceptable age of use for children to use social media, the responsibility of the government, technology companies, and parent/guardian(s) in the protection of children from inappropriate content, and party affiliation. I have also renamed some of the variables to allow my data set to run properly through Stata. I purposefully renamed the variables to still be recognizable and closely affiliated with the original variable.

Breakdown of Tables

As shown in **Tables 1.1** and **1.2**, I coded to show the proportion; represented in percentage form and numerical form, for how many respondents chose each answer choice. For example, the majority of respondents that participated in the original survey include 74.4% aged 30-49 years, while the minority age group was people aged 65 or older with only .25%.

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent (%)</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Independent Variables | | |
| Age | | |
| 18-29 | 279 | 13.75 |
| 30-49 | 2,301 | 74.40 |
| 50-64 | 422 | 11.60 |
| 65+ | 29 | .25 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 1,151 | 40.66 |
| Female | 1,880 | 59.34 |
| Race & Ethnicity | | |
| White non-Hispanic | 1,739 | 57.83 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 281 | 11.31 |
| Hispanic | 806 | 21.28 |
| Other | 205 | 9.58 |
| Household Income (\$) | | |
| Less than 10,000-30,000 | 753 | 32.46 |
| 40,000-75,000 | 1,202 | 39.11 |
| 100,000-150,000+ | 1,086 | 28.43 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 2,189 | 67.73 |
| Living with a Partner | 280 | 11.13 |
| Divorced, Separated, Widowed | 345 | 11.56 |
| Never Married | 217 | 9.58 |
| Education Level | | |
| Less Than High School | 112 | 6.97 |
| High School Graduate | 380 | 24.07 |
| Some College, No Degree | 555 | 20.53 |
| Associate Degree | 323 | 10.81 |
| College Grad/Some Post-Grad | 873 | 20.56 |
| Postgraduate | 788 | 17.07 |
| Political Party Affiliation | | |
| Democrat | 1,743 | 55.52 |
| Republican | 1,288 | 44.48 |

Table 1.2 Descriptive Statistics (continued)

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent (%)</i> |
|---|------------------|--------------------|
| Dependent Variables | | |
| The Responsibility of Parent/Guardian(s) to Protect Children from Inappropriate Content Online | | |
| None or Not Much | 42 | 1.71 |
| A Lot or Some | 2,989 | 98.29 |
| The Responsibility of the Government to Protect Children from Inappropriate Content Online | | |
| None or Not Much | 992 | 35.02 |
| A Lot or Some | 2,039 | 64.98 |
| The Responsibility of Technology Companies to Protect Children from Inappropriate Content Online | | |
| None or Not Much | 578 | 22.58 |
| A Lot or Some | 2,453 | 77.42 |
| Acceptable Age for Children to Use Social Media | | |
| Under age 12 | 226 | 7.87 |
| 12-14 | 1,114 | 36.07 |
| 15-17 | 1,333 | 44.26 |
| Not Acceptable | 358 | 11.81 |
| Shared Videos, Photos, or Information about Children Online | | |
| I Have Done This | 2,547 | 81.98 |
| No, I Have Not Done This | 484 | 18.02 |

Represented in **Table 2.1**, is evidence of how each independent variable is associated with each dependent variable. This was done through coding for ordered logistic regression or *ologit* and *logit*. Ologit is used to estimate relationships between an ordinal dependent variable and a set of independent variables. Because ologit is only used when a dependent variable has more than two categories and the value of each category is higher than the previous one, coding for ologit was only used for the age found to be most acceptable for children to have social media according to the respondents. *Logit models* are used when your dependent variable is binary (meaning a variable has two outcomes coded as 0 or 1), therefore they estimate the probability of your dependent variable to be 1, or the probability that some event happens. Logit was run for each of my dependent variables except age of acceptable social media use.

Table 2.1 shows the odds ratio and 95% confidence interval for each coefficient in the models. The odds ratio is “a measure of how strongly an event is associated with an exposure” or “how likely an exposure is to lead to a specific event” with a formula that can be broken down to look like the odds of the event in the exposed group divided by the odds of the event in the non-exposed group (Tenny & Hoffman, 2023). Odds ratios are relative meaning they must be analyzed respectively to the base category, which in the case of my data is shown as “**BLANK.**” So, if the odds ratio is less than 1, that means the odds for that group are lower compared with the base category.

Chapter 5
Results and Findings

Table 2.1 Multi-Variate Table

| <i>Variables</i> <i>X(Y-Z)</i> <i>Odds ratio (confidence interval)</i> | <i>Shared Videos, Photos, or Information About Children Online</i> | <i>Parent/Guardian Responsibility</i> | <i>Technology Companies Responsibility</i> | <i>Government Responsibility</i> | <i>Acceptable Age for Children to Use Social Media Sites</i> |
|--|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Age | | | | | |
| 18-29 | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| 30-49 | 0.72(0.43-1.23) | 2.30(0.95-5.57) | 1.20(0.83-1.75) | 0.94(0.65-1.36) | 1.27(0.94-1.73) |
| 50-64 | 0.39(0.21-0.71) | 12.59(2.07-76.54) | 2.12(1.21-3.72) | 1.49(0.93-2.38) | 1.22(0.84-1.77) |
| 65+ | 0.21(0.07-0.65) | - | 1.25(0.35-4.45) | 1.69(0.55-5.20) | 1.10(0.42-2.89) |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Male | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| Female | 3.63(2.72-4.86) | 0.83(0.33-2.07) | 1.03(0.79-1.34) | 1.07(0.86-1.33) | 1.03(0.84-1.25) |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | | |
| White non-Hispanic | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| Black non-Hispanic | 0.68(0.42-1.09) | 0.42(0.14-1.26) | 0.82(0.53-1.26) | 1.13(0.75-1.69) | 1.06(0.71-1.58) |
| Hispanic | 0.61(0.43-0.87) | 0.55(0.18-1.66) | 1.00(0.70-1.42) | 1.46(1.07-1.99) | 1.19(0.91-1.55) |
| Other | 0.70(0.45-1.10) | 0.67(0.18-2.46) | 0.89(0.56-1.44) | 1.15(0.78-1.71) | 1.07(0.76-1.50) |
| Marital Status | | | | | |
| Married | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| Living with a Partner | 0.78(0.48-1.27) | 0.51(0.18-1.45) | 0.96(0.63-1.44) | 1.11(0.76-1.61) | 1.32(0.90-1.94) |
| Divorced, Separated, Widowed | 1.32(0.79-2.21) | 0.32(0.10-1.10) | 1.31(0.84-2.06) | 1.12(0.76-1.67) | 0.81(0.60-1.10) |
| Never Married | 1.01(0.54-1.87) | 0.25(0.09-0.71) | 0.74(0.46-1.17) | 0.87(0.55-1.37) | 0.87(0.56-1.35) |
| Education Level | | | | | |
| Less Than High School | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| High School Grad | 1.03(0.51-2.06) | 5.56(1.74-17.80) | 0.91(0.50-1.67) | 1.27(0.72-2.24) | 0.94(0.53-1.70) |
| Some College, No Degree | 1.29(0.65-2.56) | 3.89(1.20-12.59) | 0.86(0.47-1.58) | 1.17(0.67-2.05) | 0.95(0.54-1.69) |
| Associate Degree | 0.85(0.54-1.80) | 6.27(1.16-23.00) | 0.70(0.37-1.34) | 1.13(0.62-2.05) | 0.84(0.46-1.55) |
| College Grad/Some Post- Grad | 1.39(0.69-2.81) | 13.08(3.52-48.60) | 1.18(0.64-2.19) | 1.55(0.88-2.72) | 0.87(0.49-1.53) |
| Postgraduate | 1.09(0.53-2.24) | 2.46(0.38-15.86) | 1.35(0.71-2.58) | 2.19(1.22-3.94) | 0.91(0.51-1.62) |
| Household Income (\$) | | | | | |
| Less than 10,000-30,000 | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| 40,000-75,000 | 1.30(0.86-1.95) | 2.47(1.03-5.96) | 1.48(1.06-2.07) | 0.97(0.71-1.32) | 0.89(0.68-1.18) |
| 100,000-150,000+ | 1.28(0.82-2.01) | 1.74(0.21-14.64) | 1.71(1.15-2.55) | 0.82(0.58-1.18) | 0.78(0.58-1.05) |
| Political Affiliation | | | | | |
| Democrat | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK | BLANK |
| Republican | 0.92(0.69-1.23) | 1.10(0.42-2.88) | 0.69(0.52-0.91) | 0.70(0.56-0.88) | 1.31(1.07-1.60) |

Findings

Referring back to **Table 2.1**, each statistically significant variable is represented in bolded red. For an event to be statistically significant, we must refer to the confidence intervals which are represented as the two numbers in parenthesis (Y, Z). The first number in the parenthesis shows the lower bound while the second number shows the upper bound. For a variable to be statistically significant, both bounds (Y, Z) need to be either greater than or less than 1. As shown in the table, there are 18 variables of statistical significance. The single number to the left of the parenthesis (X), is the odds ratio. As discussed previously, this number is representative of a measure of association between an exposure and an outcome. Once again reiterating, relative to the base group, represented as “**BLANK**,” if the number is greater than 1, the odds of some event(s) are more likely whereas if the number is less than 1, the odds are lower. The variables with significance that have an odds ratio greater than 1 can be interpreted as the following:

1. The age group containing respondents 50-64 are 12.59 times more likely than the base group (age group 18-29) to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
2. The age group containing respondents 50-64 are 2.12 times more likely than the base group (age 18-29) to that believe technology companies have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
3. Females are 3.63 times more likely than males to have shared videos, photos, or information about their children online.
4. Those with an education level of “High School Grad” were 5.56 times more likely than those with an education level of “Less Than High School” to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.

5. Those with an education level of “Some College, but No Degree” were 3.89 times more likely than those with an education level of “Less Than High School” to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
6. Those with an education level of an “Associate Degree” were 6.27 times more likely than those with an education level of “Less Than High School” to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
7. Those with an education level of a completed “College Degree and Some Post-Grad” were 13.08 times more likely than those with an education level of “Less Than High School” to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
8. Those whose highest level of education was “postgraduate” were 2.19 times more likely than those with an education level of “less than high school” to believe the government has the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
9. Those with a household income of \$40,000-\$75,000 were 2.47 times more likely than the base group (respondents with a household income of less than \$10,000-\$30,000) to believe parents/guardians have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
10. Those with a household income of \$40,000-\$75,000 were 1.48 times more likely than the base group (respondents with a household income of less than \$10,000-\$30,000) to believe technology companies have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.
11. Those with a household income of \$100,000-\$150,000+ were 1.71 times more likely than the base group (respondents with a household income of less than \$10,000-\$30,000) to believe

technology companies have the most responsibility to protect children from inappropriate content online.

12. Republicans were 1.31 times more likely than Democrats to believe that the acceptable age for children to use social media should be an older age.

As a reminder, the variable “acceptable age for children to use social media sites” was coded with *ologit*, meaning the odds ratio is not only relative to the base group, but the higher the ratio is, the older respondents felt was appropriate for children to use social media sites.

Something worth noting is the significance of education levels on the responsibility of monitoring. As seen in the table, every level of education besides postgraduate was significant, in regard to the responsibility of parents/guardians to protect children from inappropriate content online and had an odds ratio's much greater than 1. This is very telling of a strong relationship between education level and beliefs in responsibility of protection.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

Looking back at the hypotheses laid out earlier, parents with a lower education level are shown to have shared photos, videos, or information about children more than those with higher education levels based on their odds ratio, however not significantly more considering those with who graduated college and had some post-graduate education were 1.39 times more likely than those with an education level less than high school. Parents with a higher household income did not believe they had less responsibility than the government or technology companies in protecting children from inappropriate content. Republicans were 0.92 times more likely than Democrats to share videos, photos, or information about children online. Republicans think that parents/guardians have more responsibility than technology companies and the government in protecting children from inappropriate content online. As for the hypotheses involving acceptable age of use, we must refer back to the base group, once again reiterating the higher the odds ratio, the higher the likelihood of thinking and older age is more appropriate for children to use social media sites. This means that the likelihood of parents with a higher or lower education level do not find that older age groups are more acceptable for use of social media sites. Parents who are divorced, separated, widowed or have never been married have odds ratios of 0.81 and 0.87, respectively in reference to acceptable age for children to use social media sites which makes it true that they find the acceptable age for children to use social media sites to be lower.

With these hypotheses now answered, we are more able to discuss the implications some of these factors may have on the safety of minors on the internet. After discussing the Ecological Systems Theory, we are aware that our surroundings, environment and other factors can be responsible for implications on those around us. If you surround yourself with people who are less likely to have positive opinions about social media, there are greater chances, these opinions will begin to change how you view social media. If you live in a less affluent county or neighborhood, resources, including the internet may be limited and

thus you are less likely to be technologically educated. As a parent, it is important to be aware of this. Parents are not only the first line of defense for their children, but they are also some of the first educators and using the data from my research is further confirmation.

Another aspect of this study was the implications of the new phenomenon “sharenting.” As previously discussed, “sharenting” is a term used to describe parental sharing online using photos, videos, or other information of one’s own child. It’s no secret that social media influencing, and content creation has become a widely sought out career, and for many families, it’s a way to bring in another form of income. When you look at the benefits of family blogging, or centering your social media page around your child, it’s hard to resist! However, doing so without caution is not advised. Posting your child onto public (or even private pages) gives easy access to child predators to consume your content. Whether or not you notice it, it’s most likely happening, and the data shows, sharing these photos and videos is not uncommon. It’s also important to consider the reasons you choose to expose your child to the internet. With family channels and family content creators getting millions of views per video, it may be time to ask yourself “am I using my child for views?” Now that content creation is a profitable job and, in some instances, can make an income some don’t even see after years of hard work in an atypical job, using your kids as the face of your posts seems like a good way to bring in the “likes” and “comments” and further bring in money, however this brings in the idea of morality. Is this truly an okay way to make money? Will your kids be upset you have created a digital footprint for them before they themselves have expressed the desire to have one?

There are many considerations of child exploitation and privacy is just another. “Sharenting” can take away the right of a child’s privacy. Suddenly anyone who sees their parents can know their deepest secrets, or most embarrassing stories. Sometimes lack of privacy can come from the child’s mistake. If children are given access to social media too soon, when they lack the proper internet safety and knowledge, there may be greater risks for them. It is important to set up a monitoring system in a family household, or even have a discussion with your child about guidelines that need to be made when they use

the various social media sites. A discussion is the easiest way to possibly prevent much worse scenarios. Regardless, parents are clearly major factors into many outcomes their child may face on social media and the internet as a whole.

The original goal of this study had the safety of young children in mind. With numerous possible dangers and threats online, children are easy targets. Discussions of internet safety are not new, but there is more to contribute nowadays. It should be our main objective to protect those who cannot protect themselves and ensure the conversation does not die out. With such little research with the same purpose of protecting children, this researched aimed to contribute more findings based on the first line of protection- parents. We can now see how parents are a major factor to what our children are and are not exposed to. Because of the various factors tested, there are new considerations we must take to make the internet a safer experience for the youth of our society. Whether these considerations be new policy implications, stricter online restrictions, or something as simple as more exposure to the problem at large, it is safe to say that parents are a major target audience to the findings. Protecting our children from predators, exploitation in all forms, and the potential to expose their privacy should continue to be discussed in all settings.

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