Book Review

Review of Fisk, Nathan W. 2016. *Framing Internet Safety: The Governance of Youth Online*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

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In *Framing Internet Safety: The Governance of Youth Online*, Nathan W. Fisk (2016) examines how the differing expectations of children, teenagers, parents, teachers, law enforcement officials, the media, businesses, and legislators have constructed online social spaces and, perhaps more importantly, the roles played by adults and children in these spaces. Fisk's research is theoretically robust, drawing upon several authors whose works are relevant to the topics of technology and social control, such as Gilles Deleuze (1992a, 1992b), Michel Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980), and Nikolas Rose (1990) to support its arguments, and its rigorous research methods include quantitative and qualitative data obtained through surveys, focus groups with both students and parents, and interviews with school officials. Throughout *Framing Internet Safety*, Fisk carefully examines how the conflicting practices and expectations of adults and teenagers lead to misunderstandings and missed opportunities for discussing and improving children's safety. Although the book focuses on the American context, its findings are thought-provoking and should be of interest to anyone who wishes to understand how the Internet changed—or did not change—the way people socialize.

In fact, the second chapter, on the study's research methods, provides some of the most interesting insights in *Framing Internet Safety*. Fisk presents a personal account of the difficulties he encountered while conducting research with children and teenagers without relying on the dominant framework of developmental psychology. Before data can even be gathered, it is clear that youth are considered cognitively underdeveloped compared to adults and that they must be protected from harm, even if doing so undermines the research process or denies young people's own agency. Fisk reports that "[d]espite proposing a project that centered on issues of youth Internet safety, [he] was asked repeatedly if it was truly necessary to involve young people in the project—if it was truly necessary to speak with the people whose best interests and safety were at stake" (30). These hurdles are further amplified by the author's struggle with his self-described role as a "social scientific predator" (24). Despite his interest in ensuring children's online safety, Fisk was viewed with suspicion by educational institutions and "safe" adults who were considered more trustworthy researchers and experts because they had received specialized training in child psychology or education. This engaging first-hand account of the research process raises ethical questions that all researchers whose work concerns children might face and demonstrates how the research subject can shape the research process. Perhaps more importantly, the concerns expressed also reflect

broader trends, beliefs, and doubts about the maturity of youth, which are prevalent in the study's findings. Fear of the child predator is a recurring theme throughout Fisk's book.

Following this, the third chapter describes the history of young people's place on the Internet from the perspective of government officials and society in general. Hackers were once the definitive representation of young people's online activities, but as times changed, pornography and young people's *exposure* to pornography—a term which Fisk contrasts to the *consumption* of pornography, which indicates “a capacity for interpretive processing” (54)—became the larger concern, resulting in legislation and regulation. These changes show that, while adults' attitudes towards children's place on the Internet shifted over time, they remained largely focused on risk. The discourse of criminals and victims remained much the same; children were simply moved to the “victim” category. Youths who possessed superior knowledge of the Internet and who were considered a danger became inexperienced and innocent victims who could not cope with the content of the Internet and who needed adult supervision to guide them and protect them from harmful material and predators.

The need for children to be protected is a prominent topic of *Framing Internet Safety*, particularly in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the surveillance of young people's online activities. Fisk concludes that “[c]hildren and teenagers who are subjects of surveillance are rendered as untrustworthy and unable to conceptualize the truth of any given situation appropriately” (89). Software is used to monitor young people's activities and identify keywords associated with “risky” topics such as gender and sexuality—which can make it difficult for LGBT youth to express themselves—but there is a strong emphasis placed on “trusted adults” who can act as “final arbiters of risk and appropriateness” (70) and who are only found offline, in contrast to the adult sexual predators who lurk online. Once again, the research shows that children are not considered mature enough to discuss personal issues that affect their lives. Instead, they are expected to directly or indirectly report to adults who are not part of their digital social sphere, but who are nonetheless considered competent to determine what children should and should not be talking about.

In the fifth chapter, the author examines the culture of the online world. While adults can cleanly separate their online and offline activities because they “adopted information technologies primarily through their business uses rather than as social platforms” (93), young people find themselves becoming part of a digital social world which adults have difficulty relating to and understanding. Adults often consider the technology itself to be problematic and attempt to resolve cyberbullying by placing young people under stricter observation instead of paying attention to their broader social environment. As a result, Internet safety presentations address young people as victims or criminals, leaving “little room for safe, legal Internet use by youth” (114). This chapter contains some of the most important analysis in the book. The difference in perspective between work-focused adults and children who simply want to extend their social network into the digital realm shines a new light on the difficulties encountered by all parties in their attempts to make the Internet safer. From the adult point of view, sharing any sort of personal information on the Internet is unnecessary and potentially dangerous, but to young people, the Internet is simply another means of communication.

The sixth chapter examines how “adults ... are constituted and positioned by youth Internet safety discourses” (119). In many cases, adult perspectives are paradoxical; they admit to being less informed about online technologies and interactions yet claim to know more about the dangers involved than their children do. Parents monitor and control their children's access to computer technologies to protect both their children *and* their reputation as good parents, whereas parents who are less involved are considered part of the problem. The chapter also describes how, in response to certain incidents, “the discourse of the Internet predator was mobilized [by parents] to fill in and make sense of the situation” (147), which, for example, transformed acts of relatively simple trolling into more serious child grooming. In a way, this

explains the paradox mentioned above. Parents have an incomplete understanding of how their children socialize on the Internet, so they refer instead to their knowledge of dangers and threats.

The seventh chapter examines online activities, including young people's attitudes towards the Internet, their fears of viruses and malware, their reaction to encounters with potential cyberpredators, and their experiences with cyberbullying. Students often express frustration with the Internet safety curriculum of their schools; they want to know more about safety measures, but the material taught does not reflect their concerns or it repeats old information instead of teaching them new things. When children discuss bullying, they eschew the distinction between the online and offline worlds, as online interactions can have consequences offline. They also prefer to talk about drama, "a tactical game where young people make interpretive moves and counter moves that reposition themselves and others within networks of power relations" (173), rather than bullying, which teenagers consider "an annoying, inaccurate [*sic*] word used by adults" (177). This is another example of the difference between adults and children that makes it difficult to properly address the safety needs of young people. Adults are aware of the dangers, but they do not know how, exactly, children are affected by these dangers.

The conclusion broadens the scope of the book and discusses the implications of Internet safety and threats by comparing the concerns over national security to those over cyberbullying. The difference between the two is stark; while the solution to cyberbullying is to limit and control young people's online activities and communications, cybersecurity demands widespread and easy communication and data collection to facilitate cooperation between national security agencies and private corporations. In any case, the restrictions placed on young people's online interactions merely encourage them to find workarounds and create a market for more anonymous social platforms. Finally, the author argues that effective Internet safety measures for young people should acknowledge that online and offline social activities often blur together and should expand to include topics such as "intellectual property, algorithmic culture, and mass surveillance" (190). As the digital world expands, children will be confronted by threats and dangers that do not accurately map to the cyberpredator discourse. To better protect children, adults will need to learn more about the nuanced complexities of the Internet.

Fisk provides a detailed, nuanced analysis of how adults' and children's differing perspectives on the Internet and new communications technologies lead to miscommunication and make it difficult for either party to address Internet safety. Adults want children to be safe, but they do not pay enough attention to why young people want to use the Internet. Their concerns are occasionally overbearing or misguided, but they are never presented as malicious. Children want to be informed about the risks, but lessons and teaching programs fail to address their concerns or provide dubious information, making it more difficult for them to learn how to use the Internet safely. Overall, *Framing Internet Safety* demonstrates that while the Internet has its own norms, customs, and needs, it is still a social space and should be thought of as such. It is recommended to anyone who wishes to know more about Internet safety, but also how people—young or old—communicate through and construct their place in digital spaces.

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