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CHILDREN'S DIGITAL MEDIA PRACTICES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN FAMILY HOME: DOES PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION MATTER?

Jan Bosman, Fatih Bayraktar and Leen d'Haenens

This article builds on unreported data from the EU KIDS ONLINE project (25,142 9–16 year-olds, fieldwork mid-2010), presenting findings about children viewed by their parents as being discriminated against (n = 774), compared to a group whose parents held no such opinion (n = 22,690). We look at majority youth, excluding ethnic minorities. Since reasons for discrimination were not asked for, we suspect they may be diverse. Our central question is whether the feeling of being discriminated against has a bearing on children's experiences with respect to online risks and on their parents' response in the form of online mediation strategies. We hypothesize that perceived discrimination will lead to more exposure to online risks, but not necessarily to more harm. We expect that parents of children who are perceived as discriminated against will be more worried about their children and, will restrict their digital media use. Generally speaking, these hypotheses were confirmed.

KEYWORDS country classification; EU Kids Online; online risks; parental mediation; perceived discrimination

Introduction

Cyberspace is rife with both risks and opportunities (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). In this article, we address the internet use of ethnic majority children and adolescents, aged 9–16, whose parents reported them as “belonging to a group that is being discriminated against”, and we compare them with children and adolescents who are not perceived as being discriminated against. This implies that the “group” under study is not being marginalized for background-related reasons (skin colour, religion, language, etc.). The main reason for excluding minority groups is that these groups are not sufficiently represented in our sample to perform the necessary analyses and that their presence in the different countries of our sample is too varied to treat them as one group. In other words, we look at majority children who are suffering from discriminatory behaviours for other reasons. While such reasons were not explicitly asked for in the study, we suspect they may be quite diverse, ranging from social inequality to academic underachievement and from physical disability to mental illness. The aim of this study is to identify whether there is a link between perceived discrimination as a result of some physical or social disability and participation in online risks. This entails the

question whether parental mediation might be a protective factor against high-risk behaviour online.

The data used for this analysis originate in the EU Kids Online research (www.eukidsonline.net), and they pertain to internet users only. Compared to older age groups, young people tend to use digital media more often (Genta et al., 2012). Russell and Holmes (1996) introduced the concept of *Electronic Nomads* when referring to adolescents, because of their greater ability to adapt to digital media platforms and tools (i.e. the internet, tablets, mobile phones) than people at other developmental stages (see evidence from the USA by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; and from the Czech Republic by Lupač & Sládek, 2008). Children can also cope relatively well with the negative aspects of the internet. However, given their perceived discrimination or marginalization, the children under study may not all be equally well equipped to both take advantage of the internet and simultaneously manage online risks.

In Europe to date, only a handful of studies focus on (digital) media use by young people who are “discriminated against”. Most of these deal with ethnic minority as the source of discrimination. A smaller set of studies look at discrimination as a result of sexual orientation. Studies belonging to the former group tend to focus on the social capital potential (or lack thereof) of internet use by ethnic minority youth (de Waal, 2003; d’Haenens, Koeman, & Saeys, 2007). One study examined the risky online behaviours of Turkish minority youth across Europe (d’Haenens & Ogan, 2013). In this study, European ethnic majority children were found to have more experience with receiving sex-related images and messages as well as with face-to-face meetings with online contacts than Turkish minority children and Turkish children residing in Turkey. Meanwhile, Turkish diaspora children were found to have more experience with cyberbullying.

More relevant for the present topic are a few studies that focus on people who are marginalized because of psychological difficulties or developmental disabilities and the enormous potential that the internet has to offer for them. Raghavendra et al. (2013), for instance, investigating youth with cerebral palsy, physical disability or acquired brain injury, conclude that the internet can be an effective tool to facilitate social participation. Noble (2013), investigating adults with disabilities, concludes that cyberspace enables them to manage their self-presentation, to overcome stigmas and to “open up new lifeworlds”. These studies support the idea that the internet can serve a compensatory function; it can serve as a means to develop alternative social networks for those who are having trouble to engage in more traditional networks. Youngsters who are discriminated against may find friends on the internet who are not available in real life. On the downside, the literature also indicates that children and adolescents with disabilities or other difficulties are much more vulnerable to online risks and harm than children without these problems. For instance, Katz (2001) found that adolescents and young adults with developmental disabilities had problems related to online sexual and emotional victimization. In another study, Didden et al. (2009) found that cyberbullying and cybervictimization occurred more frequently among students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder than among those without.

Parents and family are often shown as one of the most protective factors in children’s lives. Parental style is

... a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which the parent’s behaviours are expressed and

composed of parental practices which are behaviours defined by specific content and socializing goals and used by parents to help children reach those goals (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; p. 492).

Parental mediation, as a parental practice of broader parental style, is found to be associated with lower risk media use (Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 2006). Kirwil (2009) defined parental mediation as all attitudes and behaviours of parents which aim to increase the opportunities of internet while decreasing the risks. Two main parental mediation strategies have been described for internet: active mediation which includes explanatory and directive attitudes and behaviours and restrictive mediation which includes controlling and regulating both the timing and content of internet use. A third mediation strategy which is called parental monitoring refers to checking the internet sites visited, the emails, social media profiles, etc. This third one is mainly used as a continuum of either restrictive or active parental mediation (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006).

Different parental mediation strategies were found to be functional for different online risks (Mesch, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Mesch (2009) found that higher parental involvement (as a part of active mediation) is a protecting factor that reduces the risk of cybervictimization. A study by Livingstone and Helsper (2008) showed restrictive strategies to be related to reduced online risk. However, the samples in these studies were relatively homogeneous and different parental mediation strategies were not yet systematically compared among different groups of children and parents. There have been few studies of parental mediation strategies of children's internet use in reaction to perceived discrimination. Again, most studies focus on groups being discriminated against due to their ethnic-cultural background, looking at ethnic minority parents as users of digital media (e.g. d'Haenens, Beentjes, & Bink, 2000) or assessing how they value digital media use in their children's lives (e.g. d'Haenens et al., 2007).

Aims and research questions

The following research questions and hypotheses will be addressed:

- RQ1: How do children who are discriminated against differ from other children in their online practices and in their experiences with online risks, harm and coping strategies?
- RQ2: How do the internet mediation strategies of parents who consider their children discriminated against differ from those of other parents, and are these strategies related to the online risks that the children experience?

More specifically, the differences and discrepancies between these two groups of children and parents will be explored. Offline and online vulnerabilities are known to be interrelated (e.g. d'Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013; Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Roe, 2012). The so-called double jeopardy effect assumes that children with more physical or social disabilities of all sorts are exposed more to both online and offline risks. It is plausible that as teenagers feel discrimination, they also feel loneliness. For that reason, in order to compensate, they will turn to the internet to "find" new friends and will be expected to engage in online risk behaviour.

- H1: Perceived discrimination will lead towards more exposure to online risks.

However, children and adolescents who have been exposed to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours have also been in a position to build up adequate coping strategies, leading towards less harm. In other words, exposure to online risks does not necessarily lead to more harm. We will explore how online risks affect both groups of children under investigation.

Four types of parental internet mediation will be assessed along with the categories used in other research in the framework of EU Kids Online: active parental mediation of use, active parental mediation of safety, parental restriction and parental monitoring. The differences and discrepancies in parental mediation practices between both groups of parents will also be explored.

- H2: Parental mediation practices will differ between the groups in reaction to online risks run into by discriminated-against and non-discriminated-against groups. More specifically: parents who believe that their children are discriminated against will restrict their use of digital media, thereby limiting their online opportunities.

Finally, the results at the level of the children and parents will be interpreted in light of a country classification based on opportunities, risks and harm, and parental mediation strategies derived from Helsper, Kalmus, Hasebrink, Sagvari, and De Haan (2013). Clearly, a host of contextual factors—other than the country of residence—affect the online risks the children may experience or the mediation strategies the parents may deploy. Nevertheless, an overall informative country clustering based on online opportunities, risk and harm, and mediation dimensions deepens our understanding of cross-country patterns and differences as to user types, types of risks and harm, and mediation responses. The following labels, based upon the actual user types, risk and harm incurred, and respective parental mediation strategies, were attached to the four country clusters: (1) unprotected networkers (characterized by network opportunities and risks, and passive mediation); (2) protected by restrictions (few opportunities and risks and all-round, restrictive mediation); (3) semi-supported risky gamers (moderates and intensive gamers, higher risk/harm and all-rounders/active mediation); (4) supported risky explorers (experienced networkers and sexual risk groups with active mediation). Hence our third and last research question:

- RQ3: Does the country context differentially relate to the parental mediation strategies in the discriminated-against group in comparison with the non-discriminated group?

Methods

This study used data from the international research project EU Kids Online II, which was meant to enhance the knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safe use of the internet and new online technologies. Data collection took place in April–October 2010 across 25 European countries, where 25,142 children (50% girls) aged 9–16 years were interviewed, alongside one of their parents. Representative samples were stratified per country by region and level of urbanization. Addresses of households were selected by using a random walk procedure. In each family, one child was randomly selected among eligible children (i.e. all those aged 9–16 who use the internet). Professional agency Ipsos MORI provided support in designing the questionnaire and cooperated with local fieldwork agencies to ensure that a unified, standard approach was used

in each country. The research was conducted in line with the ESOMAR ethical guidelines and approved by the LSE Research Ethic Committee. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and all questions were explained to parents and children in an age-appropriate way and in the local language.

Sample

The parental reports on the question “Would you say that your child belongs to a group that is discriminated against in the country of residence” yielded 774 children and teenagers, compared to parents who reported otherwise ($n=22,690$). In our sample, we excluded ethnic minorities ($n = 1,448$) (based on the language(s) spoken at home, excluding the majority language of the country of residence) and respondents ($n = 230$) who did not answer the questions referring to perceived discrimination and/or language spoken at home. The EU Kids Online questionnaire did not explicitly inquire about the reasons behind this perceived discrimination. However, as shown in Table 1, up to 42% of youth whose parents viewed them as being discriminated against suffered from some kind of disability or difficulty, as opposed to about 8% of the children who were not discriminated against. Unsurprisingly, parents of the “discriminated against” group tended to worry more about hurtful or nasty treatment of their child by other children (47.8% vs. 29.7%; $p = 0.000$) and about their child’s school performance (52.5% vs. 43.7%; $p = 0.000$). The head of the household’s educational background was also somewhat lower in this group ($p = 0.002$).

Measures

Places where the internet is accessed. A total of seven locations were considered concerning children’s and adolescents’ internet access: school or college, living room (or other common room) at home, a friend’s home, own bedroom (or other private room) at home, a relative’s home, internet café and public library or other public place. Frequencies were compared between the discriminated and non-discriminated group.¹

Devices used to access the internet. A total of seven devices ranging from “more shared” to “more personalized” platforms were taken into account for children’s and adolescents’ internet access: shared computer, own computer, TV set, mobile phone, game console, own laptop and shared laptop. Frequencies were compared between both groups under study.

Time spent online. Both children and parents were asked how often they use the internet on a four-point scale ranging from *every day or almost every day (1)* to *less often (4)*.

TABLE 1
Has your child experienced one of the following problems (in percentages)?

	Not discriminated against $n = 22,690$	Discriminated against $n = 774$	χ^2	$p \chi^2$
Physical disability	0.4	4.4	237.0	0.000
Physical illness	0.8	3.9	81.4	0.000
Mental health difficulty	0.4	3.5	136.4	0.000
Behavioural difficulty	1.4	9.4	304.3	0.000
Learning difficulty	3.5	14.9	255.1	0.000
Other disability	1.3	5.6	93.6	0.000
Total	7.8	41.7		

Children's and adolescents' reported digital skills were measured through eight items: bookmarking a website; blocking messages from someone one does not want to hear from; finding information on how to use the internet safely; changing privacy settings on a social network profile; comparing various websites to decide if information is true; deleting browsing history; blocking unwanted ads or junk mail/spam and changing filter preferences.

Parental mediation. Four parental mediation strategies were analysed based on parental reports: (i) active mediation of internet use or co-using the internet (five items, Cronbach's α s = 0.67 and 0.68 for the non-discriminated and discriminated group, respectively), (ii) active mediation of internet safety revolving around guidance and advice (six items, Cronbach's α s = 0.66 and 0.75 for the non-discriminated and discriminated group, respectively), (iii) restrictive mediation by prohibiting the use of certain online applications (six items, Cronbach's α s = 0.81 and 0.87 for the non-discriminated and discriminated group, respectively) and (iv) and monitoring internet use, directly and/or using technical tools (four items, Cronbach's α s = 0.85 and 0.90 for the non-discriminated and discriminated group, respectively).

Online risks and harm. A total of six online risks were analysed based on children's and adolescents' self-reports: meeting online contacts offline, receiving sexual messages, seeing sexual images, cyberbullying, cybervictimization and excessive internet use. The intensity of harm was measured by asking how upset the child felt after a risk experience on a four-point scale, ranging from *very upset* to *not at all upset*.

Meeting online contacts offline was measured by two items ("Have you ever had contact on the internet with someone you have not met face to face before?" and "And have you ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that you first met on the internet in this way?").

Facing sexual messages was measured by two items ("In the past 12 months, have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet?" and "How often have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet in the past 12 months?"). Frequency was measured on a scale ranging from (1) *every day or almost every day* to (4) *less often than once a month*.

Seeing sexual images was measured by one item ("Have you seen images that are obviously sexual on any websites in the past 12 months?").

Cyberbullying was measured by two items ("Have you acted in a way that might have felt hurtful or nasty to someone else in the past 12 months through mobile phone calls, texting or image/video messaging?" and "Have you acted in a way that might have felt hurtful or nasty to someone else in the past 12 months on the internet?"). *Cybervictimization*, referring to being bullied online, was measured in a similar manner.

Excessive internet use was measured by five items ("I have gone without eating or sleeping because of the internet", "I have felt bothered when I couldn't go on the internet", "I have caught myself surfing when I wasn't really interested", "I have spent less time than I should either with family and friends or doing school work because of the time I spent on the internet" and "I have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet") with scales ranging from (1) *very often* to (4) *never/almost never*. Unlike other questions, these were only asked to 11–16-year-olds. Internal consistency of the scale was good for both groups (Cronbach's α s = 0.77 and 0.78 for the non-discriminated and discriminated group, respectively).

Risk-specific coping strategies were understood as thoughts and behaviours meant to adapt to stressful or disturbing situations in order to protect oneself from further

psychological harm. We distinguished three categories: fatalistic/passive coping ("Hope the problem will go away by itself", "Stop using the internet for a while"), communicative coping ("Talk to somebody about the problem") and proactive problem-solving coping ("Try to fix the problem"; "Delete unwelcome messages"; "Block sender").

- A *country classification* (i.e. a K-means cluster analysis on the 25 countries based on the proportion of children in each group per country) with the following labels attached to the country clusters was adopted from Helsper et al. (2013).
- "Protected by restraint" ($N = 10$; Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the UK): this is the largest country cluster situated in western and southern Europe, which has the highest number of "restricted learners". Few risks are run, and mediation is more restrictive than active.
- "Supported risky explorers" ($N = 5$; Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden): this northern European cluster includes the largest number of "experienced networkers" and smallest number of "restricted learners" and "moderates", and large proportions of parents who prefer active mediation.
- "Semi-supported risky gamers" ($N = 6$; Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland and Romania): this central and south-east European cluster includes a high proportion of "moderates" and "intensive gamers", with the highest proportion of children in the higher risk/harm group. Restrictive parental mediation is least frequent and other active mediation strategies also remain around the European average.
- "Unprotected networkers" ($N = 4$; Austria, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovenia): This central-European cluster is characterized by the highest percentage of "young networkers" and "all-round explorers", whose parents deploy more passive mediation strategies.

Selected for the segmentation of countries were the questions related to the range of opportunities young people encounter online, the types of risks that they experience online and whether they subsequently suffer harm from these and, last but not least, the strategies that parents employ across Europe to safeguard their children's well-being. Other commonly used dimensions such as GNP and Gini index were not included in the clustering.

Results

Places Where the Internet is Accessed

An interesting parameter is the location where the internet is accessed. Independent sample *t*-tests reveal that the group of children and adolescents who are discriminated against use the internet significantly more from school and public libraries, compared to the non-discriminated group. Children and adolescents in the non-discriminated group tend to use the internet more often from their own bedroom, which might lead to a greater exposure to online risks (see Table 2).

Devices Used to Access the Internet

Personal or shared ownership of a device that provides access to the internet is generally considered a prerequisite of internet use. The discriminated-against group uses gaming consoles and TV sets to access the internet significantly more often than the non-

TABLE 2
Places and devices to use the internet

	Non-discriminated group (%)	Discriminated group (%)	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i> (two-sided)
Own bedroom	53.7	48.4	2.87	822	0.004
Living room	66.0	67.2	0.74	826	0.463
At school	63.9	69.4	3.26	828	0.001
Internet café	7.8	8.1	0.28	814	0.776
Public library	13.9	22.5	5.64	799	0.000
Friend’s home	59.0	58.3	0.38	820	0.704
Relative’s home	44.9	47.1	1.19	819	0.236
Own PC	36.5	36.8	1.17	814	0.863
Own laptop	27.9	25.6	1.47	822	0.141
Shared PC	59.8	61.3	1.85	821	0.396
Shared paptop	26.1	26.7	1.38	815	0.705
Mobile phone	34.5	37.2	1.50	813	0.133
Games console	24.7	30.7	3.56	811	0.000
Television set	30.9	34.6	2.12	813	0.035

discriminated-against group. Although the difference is not significant, the children and adolescents in the non-discriminated-against group more often use their own laptops to access the internet, while children in the discriminated group use mobile phones more often to go online (see Table 2).

Time Spent Online

Children and adolescents in the discriminated group ($M = 1.46$; $SD = 0.68$) use the internet slightly less often than those in the non-discriminated group ($M = 1.41$; $SD = 0.63$) ($t = -1.84$; $df = 815$; $p = 0.066$).

Children’s and Adolescents’ Digital Skills

When examining the self-reported digital skills of the 9- to 16-year-olds, we did not come across statistically significant differences between the two groups, except for one item: the children in the discriminated group (61%) report a tendency to delete their browsing history more often than (57%) the non-discriminated group ($t = 2.17$; $df = 593$; $p < 0.05$). It is worth noting that this technical skill may prove helpful as a proactive, problem-solving coping strategy as a response to a negative online experience.

Online Risks and Harm

Restricting our study to internet use, we asked the children about their experience with five online risks in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Meeting online contacts offline. The children in the discriminated group showed a slightly more adventurous or risky online behaviour, by looking more often for new friends online (on a scale of 1 “every day” to 5 “never”: 4.0 versus 4.2: $t = 2.7$; $df = 687$; $p = 0.007$), sending personal information to strangers (4.6 vs. 4.7; $t = 3.7$; $df = 674$; $p = 0.000$), adding

more people to the list of friends whom they had never seen before (4.2 vs. 4.3; $t = 2.3$; $df = 691$; $p = 0.025$) and also pretending more often to be a different person online (4.6 vs. 4.7; $t = 4.1$; $df = 674$; $p = 0.000$). They also had more offline meetings with online contacts, but this difference (34% and 36%; $t = 0.536$; $df = 245$; $p = 0.593$) was not significant. Strikingly, more discriminated-against children (20%) felt bothered after one or more of these meetings during the last 12 months, compared to non-discriminated-against children (12%) ($t = 1.64$; $df = 71$; $p = 0.081$).

Seeing sexual images. 15.3% of children who are discriminated against report to have seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet, compared to 17.7% among the non-discriminated-against children ($t = 1.75$; $df = 820$; $p = 0.081$); 43% of the discriminated-against kids felt bothered after exposure to sexual messages, compared to 30% among the non-discriminated-against children ($t = 2.83$; $df = 131$; $p = 0.005$).

Sexting (seeing or receiving sexual images). There is a significant difference between the discriminated-against (12%) and the non-discriminated-against kids (9.5%) ($t = 2.1$; $df = 816$; $p = 0.033$) as to experience with sexting; moreover, 38% of discriminated kids as opposed to "only" 23% of non-discriminated-against kids felt bothered after a sexting experience ($t = 2.79$; $df = 88$; $p = 0.006$).

Cyberbullying and cybervictimization. 3.6% of the children and adolescents from the non-discriminated-against group, and 5.8% from the discriminated-against group had acted as a bully during the past 12 months ($t = 2.62$; $df = 807$; $p = 0.009$). The children in the discriminated-against group were significantly more victimized: 11.5% versus 6.9% of the non-discriminated-against group ($t = 3.96$; $df = 807$; $p = 0.000$). Unsurprisingly, both groups felt equally bothered (approximately 2.5 on a scale from 1 "very upset" to 4 "not at all upset for both groups; $t = 0.33$; $df = 76$; n.s.) when being the victim of cyberbullying.

Excessive internet use. Children and adolescents in the discriminated group showed less excessive internet use ($M = 3.52$) than those in the non-discriminated group ($M = 3.45$) ($t = 2.90$; $df = 596$; $p = 0.004$).

Risk-Specific Coping Strategies

Meeting online contacts offline. For both groups the communicative strategy (talking to someone) turns out to be the most recurrent action when bothered (50% among the discriminated-against group versus 60% among the non-discriminated-against group; $t = 0.67$; $df = 12$; $p = 0.518$). A noteworthy difference is the lower adoption of the passive coping strategy (i.e. stop using the internet) by the discriminated-against group (15% compared to 21%; $t = 0.51$; $df = 14$; $p = 0.62$). This lesser use of the passive way of dealing with online adversity by the group who is discriminated against is in line with consistently higher—although not statistically significant—adoption levels of proactive coping strategies (38% vs. 31% deleting messages; 31% vs. 18% changing filters).

Seeing sexual images. Coping strategies show very similar patterns across groups. Here again the strategy most resorted to is the communicative one, although somewhat less so among the discriminated group (42% vs. 48%; $t = -0.85$; $df = 57$; $p = 0.399$).

Sexting. Talking is again the most common coping strategy, even more so among the children in the discriminated group (59% vs. 55%; $t = 0.47$; $df = 36$; $p = 0.642$). They also show higher levels of proactive problem-solving strategies—deleting disturbing or

offending messages (55% vs. 35%; $t = 2.14$; $df = 34$; $p = 0.040$) or blocking the person sending such messages (55% vs. 42%; $t = 1.42$; $df = 34$; $p = 0.166$)—compared to the non-discriminated group.

Cybervictimization. The children in the discriminated group adopt all six strategies to a higher extent: talking (81% vs. 73%; $t = 1.64$; $df = 77$; $p = 0.106$), refraining from using the internet for a while (23% vs. 15%; $t = 1.54$; $df = 74$; $p = 0.126$) or blocking the source of adversity (55% vs. 44%; $t = 1.73$; $df = 76$; $p = 0.088$), although the differences between both groups are not significant. As to the following three strategies, between-group differences are even lower: deleting the message (41% vs. 36%; $t = 0.701$; $df = 76$; $p = 0.486$), changing privacy settings (16% vs. 16%; $t = 0.661$; $df = 76$; $p = 0.931$) and reporting the problem (12% vs. 9%; $t = 0.661$; $df = 74$; $p = 0.511$).

Summary Results Pertaining to RQ1 and H1

Children and adolescents who are perceived to be discriminated against show a little less internet use than other children (n.s.) and significantly less excessive internet use. They tend to use the internet more often from public places such as school and public libraries. In general, they are also more exposed to online risks. They exhibit more risky behaviour with regard to developing new friendships, they tend to be more confronted with sexting and to be more involved in cyberbullying, both on the giving and on the receiving end. There are no differences between the two groups in seeing sexual images. In general, these results support H1: children who are perceived to be discriminated against are more exposed to online risks. This finding suggests a compensatory effect: the internet is turned to seeking to remedy perceived discrimination. Moreover, children who are perceived to be discriminated against are generally, except in the case of bullying, more affected by the confrontation with these online risks. There are no significant differences to be found in the coping strategies that the two groups of children use.

Parental Mediation

Interestingly, according to the parents' self-reports, both parents' groups generally adopt very similar active mediation strategies towards their children's internet use (see Table 3). This, however, requires three caveats: parents of the discriminated group are somewhat keener on active mediation with a view to ensuring their children's internet safety, telling them why some websites are good or bad, than the parents in the non-discriminated group. Nevertheless, the latter tend to help their children when something has bothered them online. At the same time, parents in the discriminated group, who also tend to worry more about their children (see sample description), display more restrictive mediation as they limit their children's online use. Furthermore, they tend to be more involved in parental monitoring, checking the websites their children visit and the messages they send out online.

Correlations Between Parental Mediation Strategies and Online Risks

Generally speaking, all online risks—again for both groups of children and adolescents under study—are also positively correlated (correlations ranging between 0.12 and 0.42). Both for discriminated-against and non-discriminated-against children and

TABLE 3

Parental mediation strategies

	Non-discriminated group mean (SD)	Discriminated group mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i> (two-tailed)
<i>Active mediation of internet use^a</i>					
Sitting with the children while they use the internet?	0.45 (0.50)	0.47 (0.50)	0.79	820	0.43
Staying nearby when they use the internet?	0.61 (0.49)	0.62 (0.49)	0.37	819	0.71
Encouraging them to explore and learn things on the internet on their own?	0.56 (0.50)	0.57 (0.50)	0.71	813	0.48
Doing shared activities together with them on the internet?	0.48 (0.50)	0.47 (0.50)	0.19	816	0.85
Talking to them about what they do on the internet?	0.82 (0.38)	0.80 (0.40)	1.36	817	0.17
<i>Active mediation of internet safety^a</i>					
Helping them when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	0.68 (0.47)	0.66 (0.48)	1.07	816	0.28
Explaining why some websites are good or bad	0.73 (0.45)	0.70 (0.46)	1.67	800	0.096
Suggesting ways to use the internet safely	0.66 (0.47)	0.63 (0.48)	1.80	798	0.072
Suggesting ways to behave towards other people online	0.64 (0.48)	0.62 (0.49)	0.95	801	0.34
Helping them when something has bothered them on the internet	0.35 (0.48)	0.41 (0.49)	3.34	767	0.001
Talking to them about what to do if something on the internet bothered them	0.60 (0.49)	0.59 (0.49)	0.47	792	0.64
<i>Parental monitoring (checking any of the following things)^a</i>					
Which websites they visited	0.50 (0.50)	0.58 (0.49)	4.21	694	0.000
The messages in their email or instant messaging account	0.28 (0.45)	0.35 (0.48)	3.47	632	0.001
Their profile on a social network or online community	0.39 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	0.76	608	0.45
Which friends or contacts they add to their social networking profile/instant messaging service	0.40 (0.49)	0.43 (0.50)	1.66	612	0.097
<i>Restrictive mediation (permission/supervision required or blanket prohibition)^b</i>					
Using instant messaging	1.56 (0.79)	1.65 (0.82)	2.72	731	0.007
Downloading music or films on the internet	1.83 (0.86)	1.89 (0.86)	2.00	761	0.046
Watching video clips on the internet	1.48 (0.71)	1.54 (0.73)	2.13	778	0.033
Having their own social networking profile	1.75 (0.88)	1.79 (0.87)	1.00	748	0.32
Giving out personal information to others on the internet	2.56 (0.71)	2.50 (0.74)	2.10	753	0.036
Uploading photos, videos or music to share with others	2.07 (0.87)	2.07 (0.86)	0.14	750	0.89

^a Proportion using this strategy.^b The values run from 1 (can do this anytime) via 2 (only with permission) to 3 (can never do this).

adolescents, Pearson correlation coefficients show that all four parental mediation strategies are relatively highly correlated with one another (correlations between 0.37 and 0.54), except for restrictive mediation (between -0.05 and 0.21), which tends to be a strategy more often used in isolation. Parental mediation strategies (both active and restrictive) are generally lowly or negatively related to online risks (ranging from -0.23 to

0.12). More specifically, restrictive mediation seems to be the only intervention strategy that effectively reduces online risks (correlations ranging from -0.07 to -0.23), while the other intervention strategies are only moderately negatively or even positively related to online risks (correlations between -0.09 and 0.12).

Summary Results Pertaining to RQ2 and H2

Put differently, mediation does not seem to be effective in reducing online risks, unless this mediation consists of reducing the child’s online activities. Restrictive mediation tends to be a strategy used in isolation (not or lowly correlating with the other mediation strategies), but at the same time it is the only strategy that effectively reduces any online risk. This association can be expected because restriction has the merit of being clear, and boundary setting is key in problematic situations. The general pattern for both groups when it comes to the adoption of parental mediation strategies turns out to be similar. Our results support H2, as parents of discriminated children are probably more often aware that their children are being bullied and thus act accordingly, by monitoring their online activities more closely.

From the Group to the Country Level

Up to this point, our analyses were carried out at the group level (discriminated-against/non-discriminated-against children + parents), across the various countries. The

FIGURE 1
Country classification based on opportunities, risks and harm, and parental mediation (source: Helsper et al., 2013, p. 35)

findings of the hierarchical cluster analysis of countries (see Figure 1; Helsper et al., 2013, p. 32)—based on both mediation practices and the percentage of children experiencing the different opportunities, risks and harm—were used as our point of departure to answer our third research question on the impact of the country clustering on the parental mediation strategies in both groups. The country clustering brings up a twofold concern in that both excessive parental restriction in the “protected by restraint” country cluster and insufficient parental support with respect to children’s online use in the “unprotected networkers” country cluster might lead to higher levels of harm (Helsper et al., 2013, p. 5). How does this work out for our two groups?

We already noted that the country clustering still allows for a lot of differences within a country. Do these differences, we wonder, also include differences in parental mediation styles in our two groups under study? Table 4 does not confirm this, except for three noteworthy findings. Strikingly, in the “unprotected networkers” cluster, where parents mostly tend to exhibit a less active mediation style, the parents in the discriminated group tend to adopt a restrictive mediation strategy more often and also to monitor the activities of their children more often. In the cluster of “semi-supported risky gamers”, where parents are prominently involved in active mediation of their children’s internet use, the parents of the discriminated group are more active in parental monitoring, checking and controlling the child’s online activities with or without technical tools.

TABLE 4
Parental mediation styles in the discriminated and non-discriminated groups by country (in percentages)

Country types	Unprotected networkers	Protected by restrictions	Semi-supported risky gamers	Supported risky explorers
<i>Active mediation internet use</i>				
Non-discriminated	47	59	58	67
Discriminated	49	60	56	69
	$t = 0.38; df = 154; p = 0.700$	$t = 0.68; df = 316; p = 0.498$	$t = 0.71; df = 202; p = 0.477$	$t = 0.88; df = 148; p = 0.382$
<i>Restrictive mediation</i>				
Non-discriminated	34	59	40	38
Discriminated	49	60	38	44
	$t = 3.4; df = 145; p = 0.001$	$t = 0.24; df = 305; p = 0.814$	$t = 0.38; df = 198; p = 0.701$	$t = 1.3; df = 149; p = 0.186$
<i>Active mediation internet safety</i>				
Non-discriminated	52	60	63	70
Discriminated	48	60	66	69
	$t = 1.2; df = 152; p = 0.231$	$t = 0.11; df = 314; p = 0.914$	$t = 1.2; df = 203; p = 0.252$	$t = 0.48; df = 148; p = 0.632$
<i>Parental monitoring</i>				
Non-discriminated	30	45	44	43
Discriminated	42	48	51	47
	$t = 2.9; df = 112; p = 0.004$	$t = 1.1; df = 262; p = 0.253$	$t = 2.3; df = 182; p = 0.025$	$t = 1.1; df = 144; p = 0.255$

Summary Results Pertaining to RQ3

Overall, independent of the country cluster, parental mediation strategies in our two groups under scrutiny show more similarities than differences. Nevertheless, in the central European cluster of the “unprotected networkers” where parents generally deploy a passive mediation strategy, significantly more restrictive mediation and more parental monitoring are going on in the families of the discriminated group. In the central and south-east European country cluster of the “semi-supported risky gamers” where parents are more active in monitoring while the highest proportion of children belong to the higher risk/harm group, parents of the discriminated group monitor their children’s online activities more closely.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study intended to analyse the differences and similarities regarding internet practices and experiences between children and adolescents whose parents do or do not consider them discriminated against and the similarities and differences in mediation styles between those parents. We have no further information as to why the parents reported their children as being discriminated against. However, [Table 1](#) shows the range of problems, disabilities and illnesses the children and adolescents are struggling with, which suggests a number of possible discrimination sources.

The results showed that the children in the discriminated group tend to access the internet more often from public places and via more collectively used platforms such as game consoles and TV sets. These findings were consistent with earlier studies, which analysed the media use of other “marginalised” youth (e.g. Mertens & d’Haenens, 2010; d’Haenens, Koeman, & Saeys, 2007). However, we should not interpret this as proof of digital inequality, but as a trend or a preference. The parents in the discriminated group tend to go online just as often as those in the non-discriminated group. The children and the adolescents in the discriminated group use the internet a bit less, but not significantly so. This finding of comparable amounts of time spent online can be interpreted as indicative of a trend towards digital inclusion and shrinking digital inequality, which is in line with technological, sociological and economic realities of users (Dewan & Riggins, 2004; Mehra, Merrell, & Bishop, 2004).

Overall, children and adolescents who are discriminated against are consistently more exposed to all online risks under study (i.e. sexting, meeting online contacts and cybervictimization), thus confirming our first hypothesis. Seeing sexual images is an exception to this rule. Acting as a cyberbully also tends to be more frequent in this group. This specific result can be related to previous findings stressing that victimized people can become bullies online (see Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Strikingly, the discriminated group report being bothered more often as part of all these online experiences, except for cybervictimization, where we noted similar levels of harm.

Online activities from a common room of the house and/or on a shared device are certainly more conducive to the parental restriction and close monitoring practices, which characterize the discriminated group, than internet use in the privacy of one’s bedroom. Based on their children’s online risk and higher vulnerability patterns, the consistently restrictive and close monitoring practices of these parents, who also tend to worry more about their children, are not surprising, and confirm our second hypothesis. Moreover,

active forms of mediation (of internet use and safety) are less associated with risks than the restrictive strategies. One may then seriously question the effectiveness of restrictive strategies, as too much restriction and monitoring may impede online opportunities and even lead to higher levels of harm when risk is encountered. In other words, parents of discriminated children have some hard thinking to do.

For both groups, the occurrence of all mediation strategies is reasonably correlated, meaning that parents have a tendency to combine mediation strategies; a major exception to this rule being restrictive mediation. For the non-discriminated group, all parental strategies, except for active mediation of safety, seem to be somewhat more efficient, as adopting these strategies more consistently led to reduced online risks.

Children and adolescents from the discriminated group were found to use more proactive coping strategies except concerning sexual images. This may be related to the quality of special education and rehabilitation across Europe. It is well known that developing coping strategies against the difficulties of life is one of the main aims of special education and rehabilitation (see Abrahamson, 1991; Sinyor et al., 1986).

Notwithstanding their higher levels of harm and the more restrictive mediation strategies of their parents, the children and adolescents who are discriminated against spend more time on the internet (although the difference is not significant), and meet more online contacts offline, in short, behave in more adventurous and risky ways online. This result differs from a previous Sharabi and Margalit's (2011) study, which indicated that adolescents with and without learning disabilities were not significantly different from one another in terms of online social activities. The main reason of our conflicting result may be that our discriminated group was more heterogeneous than Sharabi and Margalit's sample, which only included the people with learning disabilities.

In sum, in light of the more restrictive and monitoring-oriented parental mediation styles displayed by the parents of the discriminated-against children—including the country clusters of the so-called “unprotected networkers” and “semi-supported risky gamers”—one may wonder under which conditions the internet does provide a remedy for the frustrations characterizing offline life among the discriminated-against group. This idea leads us to conclude that parents should more actively mediate their children's internet use, rather than imposing restrictions and impeding their search for online opportunities.

Of course our study was not free from limitations. First, age and gender differences were not analysed although parental mediation strategies and online risks for both groups may differ depending on the children's developmental stages, not to mention sex. Second, we did not incorporate the effects of (perceived) discrimination in minority groups. These effects might be very different from our results and are well worth investigating in their own right. More importantly, most of our results depend on self-reports from children and adolescents, and the questions often touched on highly sensitive themes. Moreover, in approximately 45% of the cases (38.5% for the face-to-face interviews and 51% for the written questionnaires), a parent or other adult was present when the child was interviewed. This may have led to an underestimation of the online risks that both groups have been exposed to. Nevertheless, the differences between the two groups regarding the presence of a parent or other adult were small (approximately 2%) and cannot have biased our results very much.

NOTE

1. The EU Kids Online fieldwork involved four questionnaires (a questionnaire for the children, a self-completion questionnaire for the children aged 9–10, a self-completion questionnaire for the children aged 11–16; a questionnaire for the parents). Full details on questions and response options can be found at: [www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20\(2009–11\)/Survey/Master%20questionnaires.aspx](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20(2009-11)/Survey/Master%20questionnaires.aspx)

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