

## Disconnected: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap (The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning)

By Carrie James

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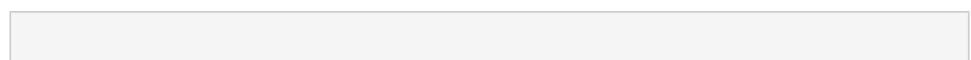
### Disconnected: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap (The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning)

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Fresh from a party, a teen posts a photo on Facebook of a friend drinking a beer. A college student repurposes an article from Wikipedia for a paper. A group of players in a multiplayer online game routinely cheat new players by selling them worthless virtual accessories for high prices. In *Disconnected*, Carrie James examines how young people and the adults in their lives think about these sorts of online dilemmas, describing ethical blind spots and disconnects.

Drawing on extensive interviews with young people between the ages of 10 and 25, James describes the nature of their thinking about privacy, property, and participation online. She identifies three ways that young people approach online activities. A teen might practice *self-focused thinking*, concerned mostly about consequences for herself; *moral thinking*, concerned about the consequences for people he knows; or *ethical thinking*, concerned about unknown individuals and larger communities. James finds, among other things, that youth are often blind to moral or ethical concerns about privacy; that attitudes toward property range from "what's theirs is theirs" to "free for all"; that hostile speech can be met with a belief that online content is "just a joke"; and that adults who are consulted about such dilemmas often emphasize personal safety issues over online ethics and citizenship.

Considering ways to address the digital ethics gap, James offers a vision of *conscientious connectivity*, which involves ethical thinking skills but, perhaps more important, is marked by sensitivity to the dilemmas posed by online life, a motivation to wrestle with them, and a sense of moral agency that supports socially positive online actions.



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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

Carrie James's thought-provoking book offers a nuanced and sobering account of how youth think about, and at times ignore, moral and ethical issues related to online privacy, property, and participation. Whether or not one agrees with her diagnosis of a moral and ethical gap, the book demonstrates uniquely the challenges of aligning fluid youth perspectives and practices with adult-normative views on ethical problems in the evolving digital environment.

(Urs Gasser, Professor of Practice, Harvard Law School; Executive Director, Berkman Center for Internet & Society; coauthor of *Born Digital* and *Interop*)

This book is a wakeup call for anyone with a stake in the health of online culture and society. James focuses on ethical breakdowns, disconnects, and blind-spots in young people's view of online life, while noting that the real responsibility lies in the adult world's failure to provide positive examples and meaningful guidance. She argues for the need to move beyond simple scare tactics about negative consequences to a deeper engagement with and reflection on what it means to be part of collective life in a networked era.

(Mizuko Ito, Professor in Residence, University of California Humanities Research Institute; author of *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*)

In this timely and fascinating book, Carrie James presents a revealing look at how today's young respond to ethical dilemmas in an online world. It should be essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the effect of the new media on young people's social and moral development. James offers wise guidance for developing sound ethical footing in the digital age.

(William Damon, Professor of Education, Stanford University)

American university presses have filled their lists exposing the "threat" of new media. But what renders this short book superior to the usual "young people are out of our control" diatribe is its focus on the ethics of online participation.

(*Times Higher Education*)

*Disconnected: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap* is an enlightening read, not only for its analysis of online decision making but also for its revelation of what youth have (and haven't) learned from the adults in their lives prior to making those decisions. James's work is relevant for any parent, teacher, graduate student, and professor who has ever wondered, in response to a young person's ethically questionable decision online, What were they thinking? Upon reading *Disconnected*, however, well-meaning adults will realize that the question they should ask: What are we teaching? After all, the so-called digital natives were born into a participatory culture. Their predecessors should be willing to inform them of and guide them with principles of ethical participation.

(Nancy Clare Morgan *Journal of Digital and Media Literacy*)

#### About the Author

Carrie James is a sociologist and Principal Investigator at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She was codirector (with Howard Gardner) of the Good Play Project, which collected the data that inform *Disconnected*.

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