

book review

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Emma Bond and Andy Phippen (2022)
Safeguarding Adults Online: Perspectives on Rights to Participation
Policy Press
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The internet and social media have brought about many changes in the way we relate to the world for all people, including people who require support measures for decision making, such as adults with learning difficulties. In response to this new reality, Emma Bond and Andy Phippen set out, from their extensive professional experience in the field of adult safeguarding, to raise a series of debates arising from the emergence of the internet and social media in this field. This objective is developed without trying to produce a manual for professionals but, rather, with a profound reflection to be approached from social work, as well as from other disciplines, such as law, analysing a large number of sentences and cases.

Throughout eight chapters, the authors analyse different cases, concepts and debates surrounding online adult safeguarding, especially differentiating in Chapter 2 this situation from that which can be found in the field of child protection. Chapter 3 then analyses the legal framework on the basis of the Cobb J ruling in *Re A* and *Re B*, presenting some of the dilemmas and guidelines that these rulings raise in relation to such issues as protection from participation and the effectiveness of rights, such as the right to privacy, non-discrimination, freedom or education. All of these issues are clarified in Chapter 4 through a detailed study of different judgments and the problems they may present in the best interests of the person concerned. For example, discussions are raised like the scale with which to measure the capacity to use social media, the moral biases with respect to certain sexual conduct that professionals, family members and judges may have, or the effect that this type of limitation may have on people's social development.

All of this leads the authors to analyse in Chapter 5 what they call a 'safeguarding dystopia', in which it seems that technology is required to protect against its own risks, abandoning the human aspect and placing surveillance versus security and rights in contradiction. These dichotomies are made visible in Chapter 6, showing how a systemic approach is needed in the case of online pro-harm content that includes the reinforcement of mental health services and the risk of prioritising criminalisation over intervention, and pointing out, moreover, that technological determinism can mask other factors associated with this type of risky behaviour. With all this in mind, and stressing that this book is not a manual for professionals, Chapter 7 proposes how to approach online adults safeguarding, based on actor-network theory and a systemic and holistic intervention, understanding, in turn, the difficulties for organisations and professionals that such issues as access to pornography can generate. To this end,

the support among agents and the work between training, practice and technology are defined as fundamental to being able to intervene in four proposed steps, which, rather than a handbook for professionals, are the kind of questions to be asked to try to minimise the dilemmas and effects on the rights of the people under safeguarding.

The field of adult safeguarding was already a great challenge on a professional and legal-ethical level, but has become even greater since the irruption of a scenario without borders that is highly difficult to control, such as the Internet and social media. This book invites readers to rethink their own work as social workers, as well as their understanding of such issues as risk, safety and freedom. The quandary of a person with learning difficulties accessing online resources linked to (legal) sexual fetishes or phobias for family members and professionals, or the demands of Internet and social media knowledge that are required of people with 'ordinary sensibilities', are exposed. But this also raises such questions as: why do we demand it of them and not of the rest? Do professionals know these tools well enough? Are they really risky behaviours, or are they risky because of our biases? It even opens the door to future research in relation to existing biases in this type of sentencing, for example, in terms of intersectionalities, such as disability and non-heteronormative orientations or identities. Definitely, this book is not for someone looking for magic answers or model interventions to follow to the letter, but it is a book for those who seek to challenge their approaches, rethink their work and ask more questions.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.