

Tim Lordan:

Welcome to the Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee Forum called “Just the Facts about Online Youth Victimization.” My name is Tim Lordan. I’m the executive director of the Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee that’s hosting this event. The honorary host Senator Leahy, Congressman Boucher, and Congressman Goodlatte. We’re thankful for them for helping us put this together.

Today we have assembled the foremost experts on the issue related to child online victimization or teen victimization in the country. I promise not to lay it on too thick about how important these four people are, but I’m really not gonna abide by that promise. These are really truly the best researchers in the country that are looking at this very issue about how kids and teens go online and whether they’re having problems, whether it be exposed to inappropriate content or exposed to inappropriate contact, whether it be by adults or by their peers.

We thought that since congress over the past two years, has been frenetically putting together legislative proposals dealing with this issue, varying from age verification to data retention, to the Deleting Online Predators Act, in the like, that we thought we would just present, get the researchers to talk about the state of the issue. These folks don’t deal in the legislative workings and what proposals get at what, but we thought if we could put together a panel of experts that could lay out the facts about what’s happening, it could better tailor and inform the decision making process.

So without really further ado, let me introduce our panelists, and they’re gonna give some opening statements about the research that they’ve done and what it says to them about the current state of the issue. Then we’ll go into some moderated Q&A and also some questions from all of you. Now, we’ll wrap this thing up pretty quickly by no later than 1:30.

So let me just introduce them one at a time in the order that they’ll speak.

First is Dr. David Finkelhor. He is the director of the Crimes against Children Research Center and the codirector of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire. Professor Finkelhor is also a professor of sociology there. He’s dedicated most of his career to the issues of victimization, child victimization and family violence. He’s been working on this in this capacity since 1977. He’s literally written a book about some of these issues.

Along with his colleagues, he has written perhaps the most authoritative and comprehensive pieces of research that we know of with regard to the instances of child victimization and exposure to inappropriate content.

The data that he has authored with his colleagues is probably the most quoted data that you've probably heard up on Capitol Hill, and often the most misquoted data that you've heard on Capitol Hill.

Next we go to Dr. Michele Ybarra. She is the president of Internet Solutions for Kids. Dr. Ybarra has published several articles about youth harassment, online sexual solicitation and mental health challenges of young people. She's trained in child mental health services and holds a doctorate in public health from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. And again, Dr. Ybarra has coauthored with Dr. Finkelhor some of the major works on this particular issue over the past five years.

Then Amanda Lenhart, who you may see quite often 'cause she does live in Washington D.C. and work here, is a senior research specialist with Pew Internet & American Life Project. She's been working with the project since its inception. She did her undergraduate work at Amherst College in anthropology, which is appropriate for this particular panel, and English. She did her graduate work at Georgetown University.

The research areas that Amanda does at the Pew Internet & American Life Project include children, teens, parents, the internet, digital divide, education, content creation, blogging, and instant messaging. So she covers the waterfront, essentially, on those issues.

Then we'll do cleanup with danah boyd, who's a researcher at the University of California at Berkeley where she's a PhD candidate. She's also a fellow at the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center for Communication. And according to danah, I should really read this, "Her research focuses on how people negotiate a presentation to self, to unknown audiences in mediated context." Maybe she can explain a little more about what that means. And not to embarrass danah, but the *Financial Times* has dubbed her the "high priestess of social networking."

So without further embarrassment to our panelists, let me just open it up to opening statements from Dr. Finkelhor and et al.

Dr. D. Finkelhor: Thanks, Tim. Thanks for inviting me.

It's nice to be here. I have to say it teaches me about American democracy that the quality of the intellectual content here seems to be higher than the quality of the food.

(Laughter from Audience)

I'd like to put this a little – this issue a little bit in context by thinking about it in terms of a variety of other kinds of threats that we get excited about as a society. And whenever any of these new threats suddenly bursts on the scene like school shooters, I think it's just absolutely crucial that we characterize them accurately and as soon as possible. Because really, first impressions in a lot of these topics turn out to be the lasting impressions and it's very hard to change people's ideas about what's going on after they've gotten one of these first impressions.

We need those impressions to be accurate, not just to prevent overreactions to some of these problems. But I think also to get people to do the right things prevent the spread of the dangers.

Now, on the case of internet sex crimes against kids, I'm concerned that we're already off to a bad start here. The public and the professional impression about what's going on in these kinds of crimes is not in sync with the reality, at least so far as we can ascertain it on the basis of research that we've done. And this research has really been based on some large national studies of cases coming to the attention of law enforcement as well as to large national surveys of youth.

If you think about what the public impression is about this crime, it's really that we have these internet pedophiles who've moved from the playground into your living room through the internet connection, who are targeting young children by pretending to be other children who are lying about their ages and their identities and their motives, who are tricking kids into disclosing personal information about themselves or harvesting that information from blogs or websites or social networking sites. Then armed with this information, these criminals stalk children. They abduct them. They rape them, or even worse.

But actually, the research in the cases that we've gleaned from actual law enforcement files, for example, suggests a different reality for these crimes. So first fact is that the predominant online sex crime victims are not young children. They are teenagers. There's almost no victims in the sample that we collected from – a

representative sample of law enforcement cases that involved the child under the age of 13.

In the predominant sex crime scenario, doesn't involve violence, stranger molesters posing online as other children in order to set up an abduction or assault. Only five percent of these cases actually involved violence. Only three percent involved an abduction. It's also interesting that deception does not seem to be a major factor. Only five percent of the offenders concealed the fact that they were adults from their victims. Eighty percent were quite explicit about their sexual intentions with the youth that they were communicating with.

So these are not mostly violence sex crimes, but they are criminal seductions that take advantage of teenage, common teenage vulnerabilities. The offenders lure teens after weeks of conversations with them, they play on teens' desires for romance, adventure, sexual information, understanding, and they lure them to encounters that the teens know are sexual in nature with people who are considerably older than themselves.

So for example, Jenna – this is a pretty typical case – 13-year-old girl from a divorced family, frequented sex-oriented chat rooms, had the screen name “Evil Girl.” There she met a guy who, after a number of conversations, admitted he was 45. He flattered her, gave – sent her gifts, jewelry. They talked about intimate things. And eventually, he drove across several states to meet her for sex on several occasions in motel rooms. When he was arrested in her company, she was reluctant to cooperate with the law enforcement authorities.

Many of these cases have commonalities with this particular instance. In seventy-three percent of the crimes, the youth go to meet the offender on multiple occasions for multiple sexual encounters. The law enforcement investigators described the victims as being in love with or feeling a close friendship for the offenders in half the cases that they investigated. In a quarter of the cases, the victims actually had run away from home to be with these adults that they met online.

So this is very different, I think, from the predominant impression that one might get from how these cases are being presented in the media. And also, I just think the inferences people make. And then I think it has a lot of implications for prevention just to go to that point. We can talk about some of these things in greater detail. But first of all, we think it means that our prevention messages really

need to be directed at teenagers themselves in language and format and from sources that they relate to.

So much of what we've been doing has been directed primarily at parents, but parents' credibility and authority have worn thin with this age group and especially among some of the kids who we found to be at most at risk for this kind of victimization. And these are kids who've been victims of sexual or physical abuse or kids who have substantial conflict situations in their family and within their parents.

In addition, we think we have to go way beyond the kind of bland warnings that have been typical to so much of the prevention that we're doing, that you shouldn't be giving out personal information.

Our research, actually looking at what puts kids at risk for receiving the most serious kinds of sexual solicitation online, suggests that it's not giving out personal information that puts kid at risk. It's not having a blog or a personal website that does that either. What puts kids in danger is being willing to talk about sex online with strangers or having a pattern of multiple risky activities on the web like going to sex sites and chat rooms, meeting lots of people there, kind of behaving in what we call like an internet daredevil.

We think that in order to address these crimes and prevent them, we're gonna have to take on a lot more awkward and complicated topics that start with an acceptance of the fact that some teens are curious about sex and are looking for romance and adventure and take risks when they do that. We have to talk to them about their decision making if they are doing things like that.

So for example, we have to educate them about why hooking up with a 32-year-old guy has major drawbacks to it like jail, bad press, public embarrassment. We have to educate them about the kind of ploys that people that they're gonna meet online might use to gain their trust. We have to talk to them about why they should be discouraging rather than patronizing sites and people who are doing offensive things online, fascinating as that may seem to them. But why that's not a good idea, why it encourages, and maybe puts other people at risk too.

And unfortunately, these aren't easy sells. It's just like discouraging kids from drinking or smoking. Simple scare tactics really don't work well. The effect of strategies require depth maneuvering within the complications of teenage psychology. I don't think we really know all the answers to that yet. We haven't got it figured

out. It's gonna take more careful development and testing. And in the meantime, I think we have to be cautious about promoting messages that turn teens off or that betray completely unrealistic ideas about internet and what's going on there, which may only make them less receptive to authoritative sources later on when we have other things that we want to communicate to them.

So I think we have to do our homework. We have to do our research here. A lot of what happens online is hidden and so we need good research to find out more about exactly what's happening with the dynamics where young people are. We have to understand what's going on. I think it's as simple as that and as complicated as that as well.

Tim Lordan: Dr. Ybarra?

Dr. M. Ybarra: I want to highlight a couple of things that Dr. Finkelhor said because I think they deserve repeating. First, thing that we assume to be true did not seem to be worn out by the data. For example, we assumed that if adult men are meeting young women online, deception must be involved. We assumed that if young people are posting and sending personal information to other people, this must place them at greater risk for victimization.

The data suggest that the vast majority of young people who are meeting adults online are not deceived and instead, knowingly, at least as knowingly as a young person can, consent to this relationship. And we're learning that it's not the sending and posting of personal information that increases one's risk for victimization online, but rather engaging in sexual conversations they know only online, harassing others online. These behaviors seem to be most strongly associated with increased risk for victimization.

Over and over, our assumptions turn out to be not reflective of the experiences that youth tell us. This is important because if we're to keep young people safe, we need to understand what truly puts them at risk and what the risks truly are.

Second, we need to understand that the issues are complex and they may be difficult to talk to kids about, but talking about sex usually is. Easy one-liners are unlikely to accurately reflect the reality that kids know online or measures that are likely to reduce the risk of victimization online.

We need to stop trying to scare our kids and start trying to hear what they're saying to us.

One child told me about seeing a website that shows dead and dying people. Some know it as a snuff site. She was really kind of disturbed by what she saw. When she tried to talk to her parents about it though, they thought that she was kidding and so they refused to even engage in a conversation. It's not that they're bad parents, they're just not listening to what they're child was saying. We need to listen to what our youth are saying to us.

I also hear about how parents are so overwhelmed with new technology, MySpace, instant messaging, everything, that they don't even know where to start. It's almost as if this new technology is so new that it requires new parenting skills, but the same rules apply. Just as you need to know where your children are before, during, and after school and who they're with and what they're doing, the same applies for the internet. It's as simple as talking to your kids about who they're with, where they are, and what they're doing online.

I want to make clear that all adults need to be talking to kids. The responsibility does not lie just with parents. That includes teachers, legislators, baby sitters, aunts and uncles, all of us. And by kids, I don't mean just young kids. I mean middle teenagers and especially older teenagers because it's the older teenagers that are most frequently reporting the harassment and sexual solicitation.

We need to understand the internet from their perspective, what it is and what it isn't. And by doing so, we can help them understand even more what the internet is and what it isn't. Otherwise, they're likely to think that we just don't get it and ignore it what we're saying, and they might be right.

Thirdly, we need to put data in perspective. One victimization is one too many. We watch the television, however, and it makes it seem as if the internet is so unsafe that it's impossible for young people to engage on the internet without being victimized. Yet based upon data compiled by Dr. Finkelhor's group, of all the arrests made in 2000 for statutory rape, it appears that seven percent were internet initiated. So that means that the overwhelming majority are still initiated offline.

I want to talk about the statistic that a lot of us are familiar with. This one in five young people are targeted by unwanted solicitation; it's now one in seven. What do we mean by unwanted sexual

solicitation? Because there's a lot of unclarity. When we talk about unwanted sexual solicitation, we're talking about being asked to talk about sex, being asked to provide personal sexual information. We're being asked to do something sexual when the young person is not comfortable with it. These can be very serious and upsetting events. This is different, however, than being solicited for sex.

If we are to our kids safe, we need to work with data and we need to know what these data are telling us about the risks that youth are facing online as well as offline.

I also want to highlight another type of internet experience that youth are facing, which is cyber bullying. The estimates vary mostly because measurements still vary. But it appears that between three and seven percent of young people are targeted by frequent bullying on the internet and text messaging. By frequent I mean at least once a month or more often.

We find that youth who are targeted for internet harassment are sometimes distressed by the incident. They're more likely to report social problems, depressive symptomatology. They're more likely to report internet personal victimization, being beat up by other kids, having things stolen from them. This is truly an emerging adolescent health issue and it deserves as much focus as sexual victimization.

I urge you help us think about policy applications of our data for internet harassment. They may include fostering inclusion of technology-based harassment programs in existing school curriculum, anti-bullying programs, encouraging schools that don't have anti-bullying program to implement them.

I don't want to lose sight of the fact that the internet is good. The internet has brought us together in many ways. It's made us easier to connect with people we care about, to get information that is important to us, to even express ourselves in who we are. Like any environment, however, like the school, community, the mall, the internet has opportunities for both positive as well as negative behavior and exposures for young people.

We are all here today because we want to make a difference. We know that the internet issues of health in kids are complicated and they therefore require a complicated response from us. But with research, using research to inform decisions, we have the possibility of formulating legislation that has a long lasting and positive impact on the vulnerable minority of youth.

Amanda Lenhart: As some of you know, my colleague Mary Madden and I released a report just last month titled, “Teens, Privacy & Online Social Networks,” which had a number of new findings that I think are quite relevant to this briefing which I’ll go over.

But first, I want to start with a little bit of context. We need to remember that ninety-three percent of American teens between the ages of 12 and 17 use the internet. So it is nearly ubiquitous. However, when we start talking about online profiles, it’s a lot less. Fifty-five percent of online teens have an online profile of some kind. That could be at an instant messaging site. It could be in a chat room. But for the most part, they are on social networking websites.

Social networking websites are places like MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Tagged. I’m not gonna define them right now, but in questions, if we’d like to define what a social networking website is, the panelists can go at it on that topic.

But I also want to highlight that forty-five percent of teens who do not have a profile on social networking sites. So while I think there’s this impression that social networking really is a ubiquitous experience for teens, it’s not. Among older teens it is a greater part of their online experience. But for younger teens, in particular, it is not as large a part of their online experience as I think we might think.

There’s been a lot of concern that teens are giving out too much information online as we’ve been talking about here today. Now, we’ve heard that perhaps this isn’t what necessarily results in victimization, but it may have impacts on their future job prospects, on their future ability to get into college, on their global reputation, among other things.

And what we found is that teens are cognizant of the fact that they do need to limit the amount of information that they need to give out online. They’re taking different steps to do so. So sixty-six percent of teens with a profile of some kind online, restrict access to that profile in some way.

In most cases, those teens are making their profiles private and available only to their friends or those who are in their friend network.

Of those with currently visible profiles, about forty-five percent of teens are actually posting false information to those profiles. Now, in some cases, that's for fun. But in other cases, that's as a way of shielding their identity, of protecting pieces of information about themselves from others.

Other teens just simply – and in fact, most teens, simply limit the information that they share online. We asked teens, “Do you share your first name? Do you share photographs? Do you share your city and state name?” We found that only ten percent of teens actually share both their first and their last name on their online profile. A lot more just share their first name. An even smaller percentage share first name, last name, photographs, and city and state.

So teens are restricting the amounts of information that they do share online and on their online profiles.

So that we know that teens are taking steps to preserve their online privacy, but how many of them are actually being contacted by strangers. And now, I will say that our research at the Pew Internet Project does not look at sexual solicitation. It looks only purely at online contact by people unknown to you and your friends.

We found that thirty-two percent of online teens had ever been contacted by somebody unknown to them and their friends. It's forty-three percent for those who use social networks, so it's a little bit higher.

It is important to remember broadly how “stranger” might be defined. On many social networks, you can be solicited by a band asking you to listen to their new song posted to MySpace. You might also be solicited truly by somebody who is a peer who is interested in looking for new friends, or by somebody playing a joke on you, somebody you already know who's using a new user name, created a new fake MySpace page. But it also could be an adult with perfectly innocent or not so innocent intentions.

I think what's also going on here is there's real tension in social networking because the point of a social network is to put a profile of yourself online for the purposes of connecting with others. In many cases, that's a network of people you already know, but you still want to be findable by the people on the peripheries of your offline network. So the kid at school who's in your chemistry class, the person on your sports team, or who you know from church, you want them to be able to find you online. So the tension is between

trying to be findable for the people who you want to find you and not findable for everybody else.

So let's get back to the teens who are contacted online, this thirty-two percent. What did they do when they were contacted? Well, sixty-five percent of teens, two-thirds, ignored it or deleted it. They brushed it off. Twenty-one percent said they followed up with the person to find out more about the person, which could be construed as either a risky act or the act of somebody who's simply curious about somebody who appears to be a peer. Eight percent followed up and asked to be left alone. And three percent actually informed an adult.

So how many of these teens were actually made uncomfortable by this contact, of those were contacted? Less than a quarter of teens who were contacted said that the contact made them feel scared or uncomfortable. To put that number in it's full context, that's seven percent of all online teens have had some kind of stranger contact that made them feel uncomfortable or scared. It's not that large of a number and I think not the number that might have had in our minds from the media coverage of this topic.

So to wrap up, where do parents fit into this picture? Parents are a part of a teen's internet use or – well, teens might prefer that they were not, but parents are involved. They're in the home. They bring the computer into the home. They provide the internet access. Parents are taking steps to actually keep their children safe, to protect them in a variety of ways. It's not all parents, but it is, in some cases, the majority of parents. So fifty-three percent of online households have filtering software installed on the computer at home. Forty-five percent of online households have monitoring software of some kind on the computer that the children use.

Sixty-five percent of parents report checking up on their child after the child has gone online. Parents also make rules about internet use. Eighty-five percent say they have rules about where teens can go online and the kind of information they can share. Sixty-nine percent have time use rules. These rules are actually – the internet as a medium is more likely to have rules than either the television or video game playing.

So what's the message here? Many, but not all, teens are taking steps to protect their privacy online. Many, but not all, parents are taking technological and non-technological steps to regulate and monitor their child's internet use.

And while a third of teens have been contacted by people unknown to them, most of them brush off that experience.

So what's next? The answer, of course, from a panel of researchers is more research. In particular, research like that conducted by Dr. Ybarra and Dr. Finkelhor, as well as by danah boyd, research that helps us to understand the nature of the risks that are occurring. Who is really at risk? And then how to tailor messages to reach those kids.

Thanks.

Tim Lordan: Thank you. danah?

danah boyd: I was asked to do qualitative cleanup because the way that I collect data is quite different. I spend my days and nights hanging out in the places where teens hang out, in parents' homes, in schools, in different kinds of parks, at parties, you name it. I kind of visit there and talk to teens of all different sorts from all different parts of the country. What's interesting is to realize that, by and large, what you see is not that different in many, many ways than what you are familiar with in your own communities.

And what you see that happens online mirrors and magnifies what happens offline. That mirroring and magnification is actually really critical because it means that the good, the bad, the ugly that you see offline, comes in online. What is weirder about that mirroring is that it's often the kinds of stuff that adults normally don't have access to that is mirrored.

It is the conversations that happen in the school locker rooms. It is the conversations that happen behind closed doors, the things that actually put teens at risk that normally parents wouldn't see that they now can see. Typically, the tendency is to blame the technology rather than realizing that there's a much broader, deeper problem or situation to actually address.

The other issue is that it magnifies it and that magnification can be good. This is how you get 50,000 kids to stage a protest because they've used the technology as a scaling force to realize that they can communicate with one another. It also means that when they want to torment one another, the magnification can be very great as well.

But this process, it's very easy to look at the technology and assume that the technology is bad. I worry about a lot of the band-aids that

happen because they are often meant to get rid of what we can see rather than getting rid of the root causes.

Over and over again in what I see from young people, is that when they're in trouble offline, it seeps onto online and they look for validation both from peers and from people beyond that if their peers are part of the problem. This is actually where there's a set of danger to be made.

There are two in particular kinds of offline dangers that I – or offline home situations that I see put kids at risk. One is the abusive parenting situation. This doesn't necessarily mean physically abusive, although it can. It means verbally abusive. It means absent. It means all sorts of negative home situations that make home a not safe place.

One of the things that I often ask teenagers is how they perceive home. It's amazing how many see it as less of a private space than school, all right, because the home is not safe for a lot of kids. When it's not safe, they go online because online is more private than offline for them.

They go there to seek some sort of solace in communities that might not hurt them. I talked to a boy in Iowa who had just gotten out of the hospital because his father had beaten him up so badly, the father being an alcoholic. He kept running away and the police kept bringing him back. It's a situation that is so heart wrenching to watch. He knows that he goes online and that's his community of people that love him no matter what and aren't gonna beat him up.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, which is probably more familiar to some of you, is what happens when there's a level of pressure, unbelievable pressure, that's placed on kids by their parents, the pressure to get into the Ivy League school, the pressure to get straight A's, the pressure, pressure, pressure to succeed. This is almost always middle and upper class communities. This is kids who are told that no matter what, they're not doing it right. They're not winning the games. They're not succeeding. They're cracking. And their parents, most of them are extremely well intentioned and they really want their kids to succeed, but the pressure is breaking them. And when they see this kind of pressure, when they crack, they do some pretty damaging things.

Some of this we see as self-harm, things like cutting, anorexia, bulimia. Some of this is reaching out to people who have more freedom online. Interestingly, I deal with a lot of these kids who are

reaching out to older adults, right, not 45-year-olds. But the aim is the college senior, the 21-year-old who has a car, who can get alcohol and who can get freedom. These are the people they want. They have this dream of freedom because their home, again, is not free, so they're desperately seeking it out.

So when we look at all the stories we get, and I can't agree more with what we're hearing, they're hearing them too. They hear all of the predator stuff.

The number of times that *Dateline* comes up in my interviews, I want to die. *Dateline* sort of says the worst of the worst. The fact is if you are a police officer pretending to be a 14-year-old seeking sexual solicitation, you can get it. Any one of you can get it. But this is not what the teenagers are doing. In fact, they don't even recognize a lot of the sexual solicitations that are what we would normally talk about. They see it as just another dumb sketchy guy trying to sell them something because they're so used to being marketed to that they relate those sexual contacts as marketing and their approach is, "You just delete that." That's all they think about it.

Interestingly, when I have them go through examples of sexual solicitation in the home, I've gotten more images or sort of feedback of Viagra ads. They see that as a sexual solicitation. So there's a little bit of confusion also as to what is spam and scamming and fishing and marketing, and what are sort of the problematic content that they receive. But most of the real sketchballs they delete unless they're actually seeking it out. That's a whole separate version of what goes on.

What goes on in terms of bullying also has a similar valance to it. Most of the bullying is happening by people that they know unless they are a part of online communities where they're trying to get to know larger groups of people, because they don't tend to hang out in places with unbelievable numbers of strangers. Even in a place like MySpace where there is theoretically 170 million strangers there, their world, they don't search. They don't look around. They hang out. They go and they immediately log in and check their messages. They talk to their friends. They reciprocate comments that they received. Most of the bullying that you see comes from – it's more women than men. It is ways of negotiating status or controlling status within the school. A lot of times what you see is a continuation of the same patterns even it's not the same people of the offline places. Sibling games are intense.

The interesting thing is how many people see their actions as pranks, not bullying. So most of it is that they are trying to just sort of joke around and the jokes go a little too far. Some of it is the point of a little bit humorous. For example, I've been tracking what happens when people break up, when teens break up with one another. So it's like, "You break up with me and I get pissed off at you. So I'll start sending as many SMS messages as I can so that you're in trouble with your parents." This is an amazing tactic of trying to use the technology and they don't even see that as bullying. They just see that as, "Getting back at you for breaking up with me." So there's also some levels of confusion.

When I look at what can be done, I have to say the legislative proposals drive me mad. The reason is that regardless of whether or not things are technologically feasible, like age verification, the kids who are lying about their age are doing it for good reason, often better reasons than their parents who are lying about it to look younger, which is pretty common. But they're doing it to just sort of get away and to move away from the spaces, to move away from the advertisers who they see as their primary predator because they're constantly being solicited to by people who want to make money off of them.

The age verification thing, it doesn't actually solve the relationship problem at all. Parents will give permission to be on these sites. Oh, my God, so many of the kid who are in most danger, parental permission will put them more at risk rather than less at risk. Good kids already have parental permission. They are already having the conversations. In every positive household I've been to, there's a conversation between the parents and child.

What I desperately, desperately, desperately want is street outreach, digital street outreach. We do this in the streets of our cities with kids who are running away, we go in and we talk to them. In some cities it means handing out condoms and clean needles at the most extreme cases. Some of it is much more relaxed and laid back and more like, "Hey, do you need some help?" We do this with guidance counselors in schools. We do this with police officers when they're hanging out and they see kids sort of causing trouble on the streets. We don't have the digital street outreach that we need, which are not people that hold direct power over kids, not people that are going there to get them into trouble, but to make sure that they're okay.

I've notified police all too often on kids who I look at and I go, "Uh oh, problem." And almost always, when I hear of a kid who's killed

their parents or I hear a kid who's done other terrible things, I go to their profile and the signs were there. The signs were all extremely there.

We all know the story with Columbine. It was all online. It was all reported to the press long before the incident took place. The press did nothing. These kids are in trouble. They give huge signals of their difficulties and this is an amazing opportunity for intervention because of the mirror and magnify, because we can finally see what it is that teenagers are going through. Instead of going around trying to obscure it, let's try to actually help them.

Tim Lordan:

Well, what I'd like to do – thank you all for those opening comments. And what I'd like to do is actually go to Q&A. I have one question before we do. So if you can all think of what questions that you have at the tip of your tongue, please get them ready. I want to ask a question about the profile of the kids that are getting into trouble. And if we can try to create a profile, a statistical profile if it has to be, what do they look like so we can target either messages or legislative proposals towards that profile. Then later, what I'd like to do is kind of pick up on the content issues.

One thing none of us addressed was – and something Congress is interested in is access to inappropriate, age inappropriate content, like pornography and the like.

But first, with regard to the statistical analysis that Dr. Finkelhor addressed and everybody else elaborated on, who are the kids that are getting into trouble? You said that they are 13- to 15-year-old girls that were having some serious psychosocial issues. They're reaching out. Is that – what they look like? How many of them are there out there? Is this a very common situation, a common profile? Or is it particularly rare? And if you tailored messages, what would it look like? Would it be 13- to 15-year-old girls who don't talk to older guys about having sex? Is that the message that we should be building our campaigns around and how do we direct it to them?

Dr. D. Finkelhor:

Well, that's a good – I wish I knew all of the answers. Unfortunately, we have more information on what they do offline than they do on, at least from our research, other aspects of their life. But we do have the sense being victimized in other places in ways and having difficult relationships with their parents. I would guess – I don't know the exact percentage. I would guess we're talking about five percent of the cohort.

We need to think about multiple ways of reaching them. Obviously, online messages are one source, but probably these kids have access to a variety of other people who know about problems that they're having in other aspects of their lives. We have alert, for example, people in guidance departments at schools, and mental agencies, and family counseling agencies about things that young people may be doing online and difficulties they're getting into.

It is a little bit concerning to me that I think people in the mental health field and the child protection and social work ends of things do not tend to be particularly computer internet savvy. So it's not a place that they automatically go or know about. If they were armed with more information to help them impart information to the kids and ask questions that might allow them to identify someone who's at risk of getting into trouble online, I think that might help out.

Tim Lordan:

Michele?

Dr. M. Ybarra:

I really like this question because it raises the issue. Is it the internet that increases the risk of kids or is it kids that are increasing their risk? So is it the internet that's causing victimization or is it these life situations, these characteristics that kids have? And what if instead of trying to address the internet, we try and address the kid?

I think that the first thing in that plan would be to recognize that these kids are likely experiencing multiple challenges. Kids don't grow up in vacuums. They tend to not have one type of victimization. They tend not to have one type of problem. It all comes together, which means that one-liners, public service announcements, are important. They do lots of really good things. For example, they do good things in terms of public perception and, say, stigma. They are not good in doing intensive interventions. That's not what public service announcements are.

These kids need intensive interventions. I think that what danah was talking about is so important and that maybe we should a little more about it. It's recognizing that perhaps the biggest impact we could have instead of restrictions on places in websites, perhaps instead of public service announcements, is funding these types of intensive interventions for those young people who are at greatest of risk.

Dr. D. Finkelhor:

Can I just make – just one other group that I'm concerned about. It's a difficult group to address. And those are kids who are having sexual orientation issues. I think that, unfortunately, we don't have enough research on that specific group and they are relatively small. But our research suggests that – particularly boys who are looking

for information about sexual orientation stuff go out online because they don't feel like they're authoritative and trust the places they can get it locally or from members of their family, and that's when they run into trouble 'cause they encounter people who want to victimize them.

Tim Lordan:

Well, if I could interject. Just one point is that the – we've been doing online safety education to parents for a decade now. Our organization hosts GetNetWise.org. The cornerstone of our education has been, "Tell your kids not to share their personal information online in any way, shape, of form." That really – I can think back 150 times where I've been in places where I've said that's the No. 1 message.

Now, Dr. Ybarra and Dr. Finkelhor, you've authored a paper in February of 2007, which basically says that message is all wrong. It doesn't put you statistically at any greater risk of having a problem than other issues. So in a way, a lot of us in the child safety advocacy field have said, "Well, we've been messaging all wrong for a decade." I think some of the congressional attention on this issue was predicated upon that cornerstone, "Don't share your personal information online."

Social networking sites were – they basically allow to share a lot of personal information online, but you're saying that that isn't necessarily due to high risk. Can you comment on that? Can you elaborate on that? And how can we have been so wrong, meaning us?

danah boyd:

I do think you had a side effect that was really positive, which is that the college admissions officers and the future bosses have not been able to find them. I think that side effect has actually been positive and that's actually how it's be repurposed. That's what you hear kids finally repurposing it, is they heard it because of sexual predators, but they realize it so they're like, "Oh, phew, now I can't be found when I'm going to into college." So it's kind of had a funny effect.

Dr. D. Finkelhor:

Obviously, we do want them to think about issues related to what they want to disclose and for all kinds of reasons. It's a decision making thing that we should certainly get them to think about. But if we're really – if the issue is preventing sexual victimization, I don't think it's the top issue. I actually, frankly, think we're gonna have to do more research before we have really the answer of just how to go about doing it. I think we need to take a variety of these messages, pilot them, focus group them, and really see what takes.

Tim Lordan: Michele?

Dr. M. Ybarra: I think – this is just one of many. This is where we're very well intentioned. We were wrong. We were well intentioned. We just spoke before we had the data. I know that we're now beginning to sound like broken records here, but I can't tell just how important it is, because as you know, legislation has such a huge impact, and if we guide with our gut instead of data, the worst consequences that we just miss, we miss our target. That's not the worst. We could miss our target or we could actually do some – there could be some unintended consequences. I think it's so very important.

So we talked to about 1,600 kids, between the ages of 10 and 15, about their experiences on the internet. And kids who said they had been targeted by sexual solicitation, we asked where it happened, okay. So about a third of them said – and we're talking about frequent – kids who have been targeted by frequent solicitation, so it's happening about once a month or more often. A third said that it happened in a social networking site at least once.

But forty-seven percent said that it happened while they were playing a game online. Twenty-three percent said it's happening while they were – sorry – I'm looking the wrong line. Don't, scratch that part out. So thirty-four percent on social networking sites, but fifty percent on email, and twenty percent in chat rooms. So we need to keep everything in perspective. We need to have not only data, but understand how it relates to other data.

danah boyd: I think that also some of it is about relating to the offline and connecting it. I think that there's – I totally agree with the points that were made about, yes, when you see kids engaging in sexual conversations online, they're at risk. The question is sort of where does that come from before that.

There's an interesting side effect of other policies that were made. My favorite of which is the difficulty there is not to acquire a fake ID, means that there's a deep incentive for minors to reach out to 21-plus year olds to get them alcohol. You would like to think that alcohol's gone away in the schools. That's not even close. In fact, it's gotten worst in a lot of the places that I'm seeing because kids are so bored out of their mind because school is actually more boring and all of the sort of new research that's coming out about schools that it's actually more boring to be in there than it was in the years past. Great.

So but you hear from them I had this kid was point blank, he's like, "Give me something to do and I'll stop drinking." And I'm like, "Working on that, honey." So drinking hasn't gone away, but when you start to see kids making relationships with 21-plus year olds to get alcohol, they start to form a set of patterns about these much older interactions that play out both offline and online.

Drinking is not something that I think is going to go away anytime soon until we find ways of relieving the massive amounts of boredom. But if we recognize that and we can watch the kids who are engaging in those kinds of risky behaviors, we can see it play out online too because a lot of it is deeply connected.

The other things that are just deeply connected that I see over and over again, pressure, abandonment. One parent abandonment is usually a huge issue. Workaholicism by parents, that's – in the middle-upper class, that's a huge, huge problem and usually a big indicator of uh oh's. Poverty on the other end, and which usually also results in parents not being home at night because they have night jobs.

Those are the four forces that I see continuously offline, resulting in risky behaviors online, and risky behaviors in school and risky behaviors elsewhere.

A really amazing – it's now ten years old, which is fascinating to me – a PBS special, a *Frontline* special, was called *The Lost Children of Rockdale County*. I think that they actually captured the dynamics of what was going on in middle-upper class boredom, and that it's actually gotten worse than that because you no longer have the parking lots to hang out in, especially if you live in towns that are all big boxes now. So there's no place to hang out, and it's really interesting to see what they try to do as substitutes for hanging out. And the internet is a substitute for hanging out when there is no other place to hang out.

Amanda Lenhart:

One other thing that I'll just add is that one take away is that we were pretty effective at getting out this message about getting – about keeping your personal information close to your chest. What we heard in the focus groups that we did was that teens really were, quite particularly younger teens, particularly girls, were quite concerned about keeping their personal information private online, and that their one main concern was being findable physically. They were afraid of this mythical 40-year-old man who would come after them and hurt them.

Now, we know – we’re starting to realize that that’s extremely, extremely rare, but that’s what teens fear. And to a certain extent, the messages that we’ve gotten out about privacy, about keeping your information safe, has created a sense of fear in teenagers, but has also created this particular behavior that we were looking to create. So on one level, we were reasonably successful though, maybe not in the way we might really have wanted to be.

Tim Lordan: Okay. Well, thank you. I’d like to open up to any questions that people have at the moment.

Sir?

Audience: Is there any research on how with sexual assaults, bullying, are following these children, be it cell phones, other mobile devices, particularly ones with location-based features that can be used to track? Has that even begun to study yet?

danah boyd: I ask all the questions qualitatively. They don’t have location-based phones yet, by and large. They’re not just there yet. They’re starting to exist in the market, but not in terms of what teenagers have. The bullying is peer to peer. There’s definitely peer to peer bullying, because you have some of these cell phones.

Interestingly enough, prank phone calling, which was a favorite of my generation, doesn’t actually seem to exist as much anymore, and I don’t entirely know why. But they do get those – they do get each other’s numbers through word-of-mouth networks. But you’re not getting the random phone calls or any of the random strangers at all. I have yet to hear of a single incident of that. It’s more like wrong numbers. They all get wrong numbers.

Dr. M. Ybarra: We have a little bit of data. We talked to kids about some of the messages that they’re receiving on text messaging. About fourteen percent said that they had had a rumor spread about them at least once in text messaging. Ten percent said that they had received a sexual – an unwanted text message that was sexual in nature and then six percent said that they had received a sexual picture that they had not wanted to receive in the last year.

Tim Lordan: And with regard to geo-location, in the wake of E911 Legislation that Congress has passed, is all the handsets in America are being – capable of geo-locating – by the law enforcement also in a peer to peer manner, I think we’re on the cusp of that. We actually – this organization had a briefing last week, a three-hour conference, on location meets social networking, and the question is when youth

and other people can locate each other on the street, what are the implications of that? I think we're almost there.

Helio is cell phone service in California that has just launched their Buddy Beacon. There's another service called Loopt, which is available for Boost wireless users. So you're starting to get penetration and only a couple hundred thousand in that marketplace. It's coming.

danah boyd: They're not, by and large, teenagers yet, but it's helping young adults, early adapters.

Tim Lordan: Paul?

Audience: So _____ identifies with the trouble _____? I guess I ask _____ more than people doing _____ aspect and _____ behaviors that are sort of _____ or control that _____ online _____ school _____ that data _____ school P _____. _____ a lot of _____ do more _____ to be able to identify _____ or is it all being done _____?

danah boyd: The fact is that most schools have preemptively blocked these sites and blocked anything that lets you communicate with each other. Now, they have all figured out proxies on how to get around it. But they don't use it as much in school. In fact, it's actually problematic because it's created yet another digital divide, which is just great to see. And actually, the digital divide is what's motivated the proxy, so middle-upper class kids don't actually look at the sites at the sites at all online. It's the working class kids who have no access at school.

The behaviors, by and large – there's offline behavior at school, but not mediated. The exception is the cell phone. The cell phone text messaging in the classes has already started up. But this is not permitted. In fact, it's explicitly banned in every school. You can't text message during class, and that doesn't stop anybody, just like note passing didn't, and poster writing didn't, and graffiti didn't go away.

So most of it is happening at home and it's mostly happening at home when they have tons of time and they're really bored, which translates to after parents go to bed, immediately after school and after parents go to bed.

Dr. D. Finkelhor: Let me suggest an idea on this. A concept that's turned out to be very useful in combating bullying and also date rape is the

mobilization of bystanders. It turns out that there are generally people around when bullying is going on or when there's a threatening sexual situation who sees something, but who typically don't do anything about it.

Those are people who typically have fewer problems than the people who are getting victimized and maybe having more resources to kind of either intervene directly with one of the parties or appeal to somebody else to intervene.

I don't think we've thought enough about how to mobilize bystanders on the internet. One of the things that's really interesting from our research is how few of the kids and the parents we talk to have any idea of where to go for help or have any idea – or have ever – even when they've encountered pretty uncomfortable things, have actually told someone about it or reported it.

I think we need to think more about establishing on the web and places where kids are, mechanisms for alerting them to where help can be gotten and where they can report things and what resources are available. There's a – it's a kind of form of community building. I think people and kids and adults don't feel a sense of responsibility for what's going on in the internet neighborhood yet.

I think a good model of a place where they've had to establish kind of norms that allow for the reporting of bad stuff is eBay because eBay couldn't really couldn't operate if there was a lot bad stuff going on there. They have to implement a lot of mechanisms to create social trust there. So everybody gets to rate everybody else after all their interactions, and people's ratings are kind of highly publicized. And I think people know exactly what they can do and they've gotten ripped off.

I think those kind of mechanisms need to be available to a lot of other places. Or for example, if people knew when going into a site how many other – what percentage of the people report something that happened to them there. It might allow people to make choices about where they want to go.

Audience:

Backing up ____ your point about ____ mobilization, ____ with what education programs are out there in the schools, ____ schools that have program _____. ____ is being used _____. So anyway, is that a piece of – in other words, are students taught not just for their own ____ what to engage in and what not to engage it, or they look for friends or classmates who _____, sort of some education there about what to look for in a friend, when is it

appropriate to the teachers what you see _____, like see other classmates do _____? Is that a part of the education _____ program in schools?

Dr. D. Finkelhor: It is part of the conference in bullying and prevention education programs that are now being used in schools.

Dr. M. Ybarra: But I also – I want to make clear that risk identification is really hard. So that it is one thing to kind of mobilize bystanders and say, “Hey, something’s going on. This kid is being bullied and we need to stop it.” But not all kids that show risk signs actually engage in risky behavior. So that is to say that as we know, not all kids who harass are distressed, not all kids who are distressed are distressed because they’re harassed.

So identifying that group of kids is difficult, but there are things to do like mobilization. I think also, one thing to think about is how we can extend services offline, online. So for example, where do kids go to get support in the community? And what if we also created an online – extended that community to online? One example would be, say, the suicide hotline, 1-800-SUICIDE, which is – there’s data to suggest that it actually does make an impact. People call. And it does prevent suicide. What if there was a chat? So the kids who are online and suicidal instead of having to pick up the phone are able to chat. That’s how they communicate now.

So just kind of thinking about ways that we can extend traditional services into the online world.

danah boyd: The difficulty with a lot of the sort of collective behaviors – for example, even in the school, the bullies tend to have power in the school. The adults tend to actually support them having power in the school because often these are the jocks. These are the people who have structural power within the school, who are engaged in a lot of the bullying and those – in those dynamics, nobody wants to get in the middle of it because they don’t want to be the victim of the jock just for backing the sort of dweeb or whatever, the dynamic that is in the situation.

The same goes out online because these are people they know in school. Even getting them to collectively intervene – the kids who do intervene are the really well intentioned kids and there is some success there. The difficulty for me is I don’t look at even some of the intervention and be like those kids who are bullying, they are in trouble. They are engaged in that very problematic behavior

because they're usually getting bullied themselves by some other adult in their life.

So stopping it isn't just a matter of intervening at that level. It's about figuring out the broader systemic problem that is motivating this sort of dog kick dog kind of behavior. That's really difficult because this goes back to, more often than not, absent parents, absent on many different levels, will prompt that kind of attitude.

And so this is where it becomes more systemic issue, which is – as a researcher, it's fascinating, and as a lawmaker, it has to be frustrating as anything, because there's not just one thing that will sort of put in and solve the problem.

Audience: I have a question about effective methods on messaging for a target audience that you've identified _____. How are we going to engage them in ways so that they get the messages that we want them to have?

Dr. M. Ybarra: They partner with advertisers who have figured it out. I think as vilified for rightfully so, as they are, secret companies figured it out. So it's not that it can't be done, and it's not that people don't know how to do it, it's that we need to form partnerships. We need to get good people who are good at what they do all together in the same building. And I think that we need to be careful that people who don't know what they're doing recognize that and not try and do it. So that we should get people who know how to message to kids because they've done it. They've sold other products. We should partner with them to get them to sell healthy behavior.

Amanda Lenhart: And also remember that's it a moving target. I think once you've – I just think about the whole brain on drugs, which was successful for the first year or two it was out. Then it kind of morphed into kind of a collective joke, "This is your brain on drugs," to the sight of bacon. You have to keep your message moving and remember that teens are changing a lot, coolness changes, and you and every marketer who's trying to market teens is trying to figure out how to do exactly what you want to do.

Tim Lordan: Can I build on that question? I hear a lot of in a lot of different circles based on the question, how do you message to teens? In keying off of Paul's question, a lot of what I hear is people saying, "What we need to do is try to enlist teens to message to other teens the appropriate messages." What do you think about peer messaging?

danah boyd: It depends of the status of the peer. That's the difficulty, right? You have the goody two shoes kids messaging. You're not gonna get very far. The interesting thing that has worked that I've been playing with is I – luckily I have the opportunity to work with a lot of different groups within MySpace.

And one of the groups that I work with is bands. And one of the games that I play Bands – celebrity really matters to these kids, whether we like it or not. One of the dumb things that I do is that I get like some of the cool bands to mess age – to leave comments on like geeky kids' pages, which amazingly raises their status and gives them sort of like something they're really stoked about, just what it does to sort of balance out the dynamics. And so some of it is about recognizing the structure.

It's not just pure messaging in a broadcast, but we live in a Web 2.0 era. These kids are participating in a Web 2.0 era. It's about doing these relational engagements. And if you can leverage meaningful celebrities to do some of these interactions, to rebalance some of the social dynamics, it's impressive what can be done in the classroom.

Tim Lordan: So all we have to get Bono off of the Africa thing and onto the –

danah boyd: Bono is not quite the right target right now.

(Laughter)

Tim Lordan: Steven?

Audience: Just interested to know if any of the academic research or the street research has been looking into some of the virtual worlds, like _____, massive multiplayer among games, and what's going on there, and what we should or shouldn't – I'm just curious about your digital screen outreach. _____ avatar flying in _____. What's the research and what would be a good way to reach out in those spaces?

danah boyd: What we know of Second Life _____ know that everybody's fetishizing it to no end right now. Second Life is not a place where most teens are hanging out. The teens that are hanging out are the geeky teens. You don't need to worry about, by and large, the teens that are currently hanging out on Second Life, and I don't see it picking up anytime soon.

World of Warcraft is a different game, a totally different beast. World of Warcraft is often the ostracized kids. It becomes their

social space. It is a different kind of geeky kid. It is a very masculine environment where you gain status by being this huge orc and you can kind of run around and beat up people in the game.

In some ways, it's an amazing outlet for people and it's also one of the few spaces other than Church, where I've seen genuine age diversity in a social activity, which I have to say is a blessing because we don't have situations where people are running around with older people.

And so the kids who are running around and **WOW** with – actually, have more street outreach than anybody else because there's a lot of well-meaning adults who are like, "Don't do that. You're not helping the guild." And so when you have really good guild masters who are sort of looking out and being like, "Stop being a 13-year-old," amazing things happen. And actually, some of the dynamics – and they are unbelievably healthy – and I've been astounded by it.

There's – research is really in its nascent stages. Most of it is done by the people called Terra Nova, T-E-R-R-A, N-O-V-A. They do an amazing job of documenting everything that they're doing online, so it's really accessible. And they're just finding – it's bridging parent-child gaps for – a lot of parents are participating with their kids. It is one of the few places online where it's okay to be in a whole room full of strangers 'cause guilds are, by enlarge, strangers, not people you know offline. And it's been really, really healthy for the kids that participate, but I don't see it as something that I expect to see all kids participating in. But for the kids who've been participating, there's some problematic behavior that seeps through, but a lot of it's been in check in better ways than a lot of other sites.

Dr. M. Ybarra:

And just to put that in perspective. So we ask kids, "What are the two top – what are the two activities you do online that you spend most time doing? So pick two." Seventeen percent say social networking sites, but forty-seven percent said playing games. So it's common activity for a lot.

danah boyd:

But most of the games that they play are not – they're casual – what are called "casual games," which means that they're playing against a computer. They're playing, "Please let me shoot the little thing until it goes away," like that kind of stuff. So it's – those who are engaged in the immersive virtual world like WOW, like EverQuest, are really immersed. They're there all the time. But the majority of gaming when you actually sort of work through and ask them about it, isn't that kind of immersive gaming.

know whether there's a legislative role here, but I am concerned about the vigilante and the *Dateline* and the entertainment dimension of this. I don't think that that is a particularly good development. I think *Dateline* is to be congratulated for raising a lot of awareness about the problem. But I think now there's a big risk that it's getting institutionalized, that it's metastasizing and other people are getting involved in the act.

I don't think this is a good development. This is a highly technical and professional activity that needs to be done by a well trained professional law enforcement people. There are lots of dangers. I really foresee the potential of some very bad activities going on discrediting the whole undercover effort that the good law enforcement is doing in this area.

So I don't know whether there's actually a legislative solution or not. I definitely think there's kind of a public pressure the opinion leaders can take to emphasize that this is something that we want our official law enforcement officials to be doing, not combinations of vigilante groups and entertainment corporations.

danah boyd:

I agree that the law enforcement is doing an amazing job of a lot things. And even some of the companies are working well with law enforcement to make certain the information flows. And we have to say that that's amazing to watch. But I do think there are roles for police officers that are not just about enforcement of laws. And most of the roles of police officers online have been about enforcement of laws. That is actually scaring away the teens from even engaging with them. Like if the police is gonna see a red cup and assume that the kid's drinking and gonna get them into trouble with their school, which is happening all over the place, they're not gonna want to talk to them.

They don't want to talk – if they've got pictures of graffiti in any form in the background, on their pictures, they're not gonna want to talk to them because they've been arrested for tagging.

So there are roles also for people can play that are not just about going to get the kids into trouble, that I think that we do need to be funding. This is social work. This is people who are really well intentioned and realize that sometimes these kids are doing drugs. Sometimes these kids are drinking. Sometimes these kids are engaging in things we don't like and are going to accept that, and help the kid move in the right direction without just getting them into trouble.

And we need to be funding and legislating more that actually supports and helps that and that effort rather than running away from it, and rather than just assuming that it's all about enforcement.

Tim Lordan:

We don't have much time left, but I wanted to get to the porn. Another aspect a lot of unwanted contact, and now a major issue that everybody's concerned about if we unpack it is access to age inappropriate material by young people, teens, younger youth.

And the seminal work on the youth internet safety survey from 2000 and 2007 that Dr. Ybarra and Finkelhor participated in basically shows that from 2000 – well, unwanted sexual solicitations, however that's defined, as you define it, have gone down in that time, from 2000 to the followup study in 2007. The exposure to unwanted sexual explicitly material has actually gone up during that time, from 2000, 2007, from twenty-five percent to thirty-four percent. If I can ask you guys to comment a little bit about that and what you think that means.

And secondly, one thing that has caused a lot of stir in the circles that I work in, is that in one of the papers you've written, you've written that exposure to sexually explicit material has become normative as a teen experience. That is disconcerting.

Dr. D. Finkelhor:

Well, it has increased. I think it's increased for several reasons. One is that the spammers got more creative of how they were doing it. And of course, bandwidth increased. A lot of people in the time between 2000, 2005, got hooked up on – in ways of – it was much easier to access pictures. It has become normative in the sense that it's much – that it is very common. But it's also become normative in the sense that I think that the vast majority of young people kind of dismiss it as kind of litter on their information superhighway. And when we ask them, "Was this is a problem for you? Did this have any negative effect on you?" they say, "No."

But there are a small percentage of the kids who have fairly intense negative reactions, particularly to the unwanted exposure. I think, one, because it's unanticipated, unlike pornography exposure in the past, where I think young people tended to have some ability to anticipate that they were gonna see it because the kids over there were making a fuss about it or their friend was telling them what they were gonna see. Now, they're being confronted by it when they weren't anticipating it. I call this kind of an "ambush exposure," which is something, I think, that is developmentally new.

I think, also, there's probably have been a change because they're likely to see more extreme images than what was conventional in the past.

To be honest, I think there's reason to be concerned about the kind of impact that this may have on this small group of kids who report it's negative. But we really don't know enough about it. We don't know if there are developmental residues. It really hasn't been studied. If there are, we don't really don't much about how to protect them from those impacts.

I would say the vast majority of kids it's not a problem for, but this small number, and we don't know exactly how many. I think that's a very – that's a concerning issue and I really feel like it should be a priority to do some research on that.

danah boyd:

For me, also, it's not just an unwanted contact for young people. Adults don't like it either. And I think that there's this interesting issue where it's like what does it mean that the technology enables certain kinds of ambushing of things that you're just like, "Eew," and how much do you run away from it.

Most of the time – most of this content, the first point of access is via email, via spam. 'Cause actually, the search engines have done a decent job of cleaning things up surprisingly. And it's interesting to watch what the effects the spam has. Young people aren't using email like we did. They don't like it. They think it's filled with spam. They don't – it's just blah. They don't – it's all spammers, phishers, marketers, parents, authorities, adults. There are no friends there. They don't want email. The primary communication for peer to peer has moved to a combination of IM, SMS, and social network sites, as the way of peer to peer communication because it's seen as less filled with crap.

I think that as we think about issues around this, every single one of the major technology companies that hosts this stuff, is trying to get rid of spam. This is not something – legislation, frankly, doesn't make the technology capability happen. Every company has a deep, deep, deep incentive to make this go away, and they've been working very hard to. It's really, really hard. Hotmail, Yahoo!, Gmail, AOL, these are your players for email that are still stuck with it.

So I think that there's a certain amount of balancing to realize that there's a deep corporate incentive to not have it, but they're still failing as hard as they try.

Tim Lordan: Dr. Ybarra?

Dr. M. Ybarra: Well, I think also it's important, again, to put everything into context. We don't – as far as I know, we don't have data about how many unwanted exposures to pornography or even sexual images that youth are having in other media. But we do know that television, movies, media, is filled with sexual images. So I think that's an important point.

I do have data on intentional exposure 'cause there also has been some voice to concern that with the increased ease of access on the internet to pornography that maybe kids will kind of lose themselves, if you will, and they'll be this huge avalanche of young people in intentionally seeking out pornography. The data don't seem to support that.

We have – so about ten percent of the youth that we talked to said that they'd used the internet to look intentionally for pornography. In comparison, thirteen percent said that they've looked at pornography in magazines, and about ten and a half percent have looked at pornography in movies. So kids are looking, but it doesn't seem like it's a much more common or any more common source than other traditional sources of pornography.

Dr. D. Finkelhor: I guess one point that I'd like to make that isn't often recognized, it hasn't been really well publicized. There's a lot of concern about the impact of pornography and other dangers online and its ability to corrupt young people today and create a generation that is kind of irretrievably sexualized.

But the data suggest that since about 1995, around the time that the internet really began to take hold, rates of sexual assault and sexual abuse have actually been declining. They're down about – they're down over fifty percent since 1992. That rates of teen pregnancy are down very substantially. I think almost about a third since the mid-1990s. Sexual intercourse at an early age has actually been declining as well.

So I think there are things that we need to be concerned about, but there isn't any evidence from some of the macro indicators that we have that we have somehow seen a terrible corruption of a generation of youth.

Tim Lordan: Well, let me just close by saying – and I'm gonna ask each of the – that was a great closing – if we can go through the rest of you for a

30-second wrap up. But before I do that, some of Dr. Finkelhor's studies are up here. Amanda has a two-pager on her studies at the front desk. A lot of their research is posted on our NetCaucus.org website. I think we emailed everybody that RSVP'd to this a list of that research.

Audience: Has danah published – _____ your research?

danah boyd: I've published various versions of it. I can give you a card where I have stuff online.

Tim Lordan: And that's linked too on the website as well. I want to thank all of you for coming from great distances, in many cases, here to brief Congress. I want to thank everybody for their patience in coming to this briefing today. I know there's a lot going on in Congress right now.

But in closing, can I just let you be 30 seconds to wrap up and we'll call it a day?

Amanda Lenhart: Am I supposed to go?

Tim Lordan: Yeah.

Amanda Lenhart: Okay. I would say that – I actually just want to reflect back on this panel and say that it's really exciting to hear and to get together this group of people to talk about these issues because – not to toot my horn, but I do think that the others here assembled at the table are really some of the foremost researchers on this topic, and to hear them come out and talk about this in a dispassionate, but I think really accurate way, has been delightful. So that's my wrap up.

Tim Lordan: That's good.

Dr. M. Ybarra: Thank you all for being here today. I guess I would just want to reiterate that these issues are complex. They require us to be thoughtful, which we are capable of doing assuming we stop and do it, and to recognize the distinction between the technology and the kid.

Danah boyd: I guess my only request is to realize that the technology is new and many of us didn't grow up with it, but the practice are old and continuing on, and that we need to look at how we deal with the practices, not just fearing the new things that we don't yet understand.

Tim Lordan: Well, I'm honored. And thank you all for being here and thank everybody for coming today.

(Applause)

[End of Audio]