

Research Panel

Moderator: Adam Thierer, President, The Progress & Freedom Foundation

Panelists:

danah boyd, Social Media Researcher, Microsoft Research & Harvard Berkman Center

Carrie James, Research Director and Principal Investigator at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

Carly Shuler, Fellow, Joan Ganz Cooney Center

The panelists discussed how children interact with the Internet including how they think, learn, and relate to others online. The panelists agree that the entire community including parents, older siblings and cousins, teachers, non-custodial adults, and peers have a responsibility to act as mentors to teach youth how to be responsible digital citizens.

boyd presented youth and social media research in four different areas including sexual solicitation, online harassment and bullying, access to problematic content, and youth-generated problematic content. boyd said that the majority of sexual solicitations of minors are initiated either by minors or young adults. Minors also act as agents in aiding solicitations. boyd claimed that the statistics on cyber bullying differ dramatically depending on how bullying is defined as it can encompass everything from lightweight teasing to full violence. She suggested that cyber bullying is not radically different from bullying in the physical world; it is just more visible online. boyd also said that the number one issue with youth access to problematic content is how to deal with kids who are seeking out the content. She emphasized that there is an extreme class divide and that kids living in lower socioeconomic families are more likely to be exposed to R and X-rated films. Finally, boyd claimed that the youth most likely to generate problematic content are those most likely at risk offline. Those living in wealthier families are also more likely to produce self-harm content.

James' research focused on whether youths are changing because of exposure to virtual media. James highlighted five "ethical fault lines" including identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility and trustworthiness, and participation. James claimed that in order for children to act as good online citizens they need to think in the ethical zone. Interviews with youths showed that the most prevalent kind of online thinking is consequence thinking where youths online consider what will happen to them as a result of their online actions. The second most prevalent kind of thinking is moral thinking where youths consider interpersonal relations including how to respect others online and how others will feel as a result of their online actions. The least prevalent form of thinking is ethical thinking, which is an abstract consideration of how actions will impact the community, society, and the world. James claimed that there was a "near absence" of adult role models and mentors online and that youths were more likely to claim that peers influence what they do online. James claimed that youths need community support in order to engage in ethical thinking online.

Schuler's research focused on younger preschool-aged children including how emerging media can help children learn. She highlighted two video games that were successful in encouraging healthy habits including Horsepower Challenge, which uses a pedometer to track children's steps and exercise, and Remission, which helps young children battle cancer. She also presented new

research, which showed that 47% of the top 100 selling paid applications for the iPhone targeted elementary and preschool children. Schuler suggested that this new finding should lead to more research into how mobile devices can be a useful learning tool for children.

Thierer asked the panelists how their research should inform policy. James suggested that there should be a focus on schools and that community can be supportive by providing grants and creating a digital curricula. boyd claimed that there should be a focus on children most at risk and that non-custodial adults can play an important role for these children. Shuler proposed a focus on standards for educational applications so that parents will be able to tell if video games actually have an educational benefit or if companies label devices and games as educational simply for marketing purposes.