

Testimony of Dr. Kimberly S. Young for COPA Commission

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BACKGROUND

Dr. Kimberly Young is a licensed psychologist and founder of the Center for On-Line Addiction. Dr. Young is also an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, Bradford, and a member of the American Psychological Association, the Employee Assistance Professionals Association, the National Council for Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity, and a founding member of the International Society of Mental Health On-line. Dr. Young serves on the editorial board of *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, is the editor of the *CyberHealth E-Newsletter*, and serves on the advisory board for Addictionsolutions.com and the Web Development Task Force at the University of Pittsburgh, Bradford. She recently served as the National Spokesperson for Reuters International, Inc., regarding their study on Information Addiction Worldwide.

Dr. Young travels both domestically and abroad to conduct workshops on the treatment of cyber-related disorders and the development of comprehensive web-based treatment programs for healthcare organizations (e.g., Support Group Management, Aftercare Programs, Staff Training, and Supervision). She has testified in both state and federal courts regarding her pioneer research and recently authored *Caught in the Net*, the first recovery book for Internet Addiction, already translated in four languages, and she is a frequent speaker on how technology impacts human behavior. She has published numerous research articles on familial and social impact of the Internet and her work has been widely covered in the media including major articles in The New York Times, USA Today, TIME, Newsweek, and the Wall Street Journal. Dr. Young is also a frequent commentator for radio and television including ABC World News Tonight, Good Morning America, Fox News on Health, and CNBC Market Watch.

The Center for Online Addiction was founded in 1995, and is considered the first training institute and behavioral healthcare firm to specialize in Internet-related conditions such as problem day trading, compulsive online shopping and gambling, cyberaffairs and infidelity online, cybersexual addiction, and the social dangers of computing on children. The firm conducts diagnostic and forensic evaluations for criminal and domestic legal cases, provides outpatient clinical services to individuals and families, and conducts healthcare workshops. In conjunction with the Bradford Area School System, the Center is currently producing two educational videos for parents and educators concerning Internet use and abuse among children and adolescents. The Center for Online Addiction is internationally recognized as a leading healthcare research firm and regularly consults with corporate and government agencies. Netaddiction.com serves the firm's web-based resource network and offers consumers the most comprehensive educational resources on e-behavior including a bibliography of references, a bookstore, message boards, research articles, referral links, an array of self-tests, and a monthly e-newsletter.

HOW THE INTERNET DIFFERS FROM TELEVISION AND WHY WE SHOULD BE AFRAID

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I have been asked to provide testimony regarding the psychological ramifications of online sexually explicit material on children and adolescents. With the advance of technology, we have created a medium that far surpasses the role of television in our lives to create something that has revolutionized the way we conduct business and communicate. We have encouraged children and adolescents at younger and younger ages to use this new technology. Computer makers have now launched

entire computer systems and software designed for toddlers, who will surely learn how to use the computer long before they learn how to read. And we now have a young digital generation where the Internet has become an integral part of their daily lives. At a recent lecture I presented to the Arkansas Governor's School for the Gifted and Talented, I saw how immersed teenagers had become with the Internet. The mere mention of "Internet Addiction" and all its associated societal problems made them feel as if I had launched a personal attack on their lives. As one young male put it, "The Internet is my life, so by calling the Internet bad, that is like calling me bad."

We initially encouraged children to view television with the same zeal, as we believed that television would offer vast educational benefits for children, only to realize much later that we were wrong. With decades of research, studies have documented the negative impact of entertainment television viewing in terms of intellectual and social abilities, and its potential to influence violent behavior among children. And the American Academy of Pediatrics has recently announced a ban on television viewing among children under the age of two years. By the same token, while we have encouraged young people to utilize information technologies, we have subsequently come to realize several severe and dangerous disadvantages especially towards children and adolescents.

As I present my testimony on how the Internet differs from like television and why we should be afraid, I do not mean to be an alarmist. Nor, in any way, do I mean to minimize the positive educational qualities the Internet has to offer. I am merely trying to be a pragmatist and a realist as we search for the best answers that will benefit the future well being of our children, and I submit my observations to the commission in the hope that it will assist you in developing positive, effective remedies and solutions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS TO CHILDREN

Even without decades of research, we have already come to understand the significant dangers that lurk in cyberspace for children such as cyber-predators and the inadvertent exposure to pornographic images. In the following passages, I profile the psychological impact these dangers have upon children and adolescents. Integrated with this discussion, I will highlight instances of how television differs from the Internet and the role cyberspace plays in the development of these risks.

A. Unwanted Pornography in an Unregulated Society

Television stations and cable channels are owned and operated by an entity, typically a corporation like Time-Warner, Disney, or General Electric who must comply with governing bodies, such as the Federal Communications Commission. By comparison, the Internet is a global communication medium not owned by any one person, company, or country. As such, the Internet is therefore uniquely positioned as the first completely unregulated entity and uncensored communication and information device. So then how do we regulate an unregulated society? In my view, this is perhaps the toughest obstacle we face today as we contemplate how to remedy the situation under discussion today.

1. Transmission of Illegal Pornography

Reports from industry analysts support that adult entertainment is the largest online industry. Online pornography, more commonly known as Cyberporn, is so abundant and intrusive that innocent keyword searches can lead to pornographic material. The range of

pornography varies from centerfold *Playboy* types of images to graphic, obscene, and possibly illegal material, turning words such as “young” “teen” “child” or “boy” into trigger words to find indecent online pornography. For example, a friend of mine who happens to be a priest wanted to learn how to surf the Internet. We logged on to my home computer and he typed in my name, Kimberly Young, as a keyword search. My web site came up and two other related sites followed. Much to our surprise, and to my embarrassment, there were several adult web sites that were found such as “Kimberly’s Penthouse” “Kimberly’s Playmates” and “Young Teen Pics”. Cyberspace, with its lack of restrictions, is laden with hard-core porn, banned in many parts of the world, such as child pornography, and with a click of button may be transmitted across continents.

2. Aggressive Marketing Tactics

Sexual online content is not only abundant, but the industry utilizes aggressive marketing tactics designed to reach unsuspecting e-consumers. Marketers deliver unsolicited email advertisements to users to encourage adult viewing and cleverly disguise pornographic web sites in hopes of generating new business from accidental searches. For example, one pornographer registered the URL *Whitehouse.com* so when unsuspecting users search for the White House’s official web site (*Whitehouse.gov*), they will mistakenly reach a porn site.

To exacerbate the problem, the major porn providers (it’s believed that four huge operations control about 80% of all the porn sites) have all implemented newer Hypertext Markup Language code on their pages that does not allow a user to exit the site, more commonly known as “mouse jacking”. New pages are loaded when you either try to exit the page or go backwards with the reverse arrow, making it easy to get stuck in one of these endless porn loops.

These sites show lewd and graphic pictures on their opening screens, making it especially troublesome when children stumbles onto one of these sites.

3. Children Intentionally View Online Pornography

While much of the concern has focused children who accidentally bump into pornographic web sites, there is a growing concern among those who go in search of such material. Unlike computer use, television use involves listening to televised programs. While some web sites utilize audio and streaming video, making the Internet more television-like, the majority of users surf through readable content, making the Internet experience quiet with the exception of keyboard typing noise. Without the availability of sound, parents are unable to overhear what children are doing on the Internet.

While many parents utilize parental filtering software, computer-literate teenagers can easily dismantle this software. In fact, several web sites are available that show teenagers how to get around monitoring and filtering software. In other instances, parents mistakenly trust their children not to view sexual material online or are completely unaware of how accessible it actually is. For example, I met one teenaged-male who downloaded nearly 8,000 pornographic images from the Internet. When I asked about his parents, he explained that they both worked full time and left him home alone with his own computer and telephone line.

Additionally, through the invention of the Internet, the adult entertainment industry has found another distribution source for adult movies through the application of streaming video that online users can download. Therefore, not only should we fear how easy it is for children to

access pornographic still images but we should also consider their access to X-rated moving pictures and video from the Internet.

B. Interactivity and its Impact on Children

Television viewing is a one-way, passive communication medium. A simple-point-and-click of the remote will guide a viewer through various televised programs. In comparison, the Internet is an interactive two-way electronic medium. A person must type messages in a chat room to meet virtual partners, to read or write a post in newsgroup, to search out web sites, or to scan streaming video online. We can exchange ideas and thoughts via interactive chat rooms. While this is one healthy use of the technology, more often than not, these chat rooms contain sexually explicit dialogue, even in non-sexual chat rooms.

A chat channel is a virtual community designated with a specific name where people with common interests can get together to exchange ideas or files. The theme of the room is designated by its name, and many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) permit sexually oriented chat channels to exist with names that clearly indicate the types of sexual practices which will be “discussed” by the participants. Those practices range from the most ordinary to the most deviant.

People communicate with each other in chat channels in real-time by typing messages to each other. These messages can either appear in the public forum for the entire room to read or an “instant message” that can be sent privately to a single member of the room. I have observed that people can engage in erotic dialogue with each other, commonly known as “cybersex”. That is, two or more users can co-create a sexual fantasy together, typically tailored to each one’s desires, and the act may be accompanied by sexual self-stimulation. Most often, the assumption

for what is mutually desired is taken from the chat room where the “cyberlovers” meet online such as “Married and Cheating,” “SubMan4Female,” “Fetish Fantasies” or “Bisex Fun.” Names of chat rooms may also include highly deviant and repulsive themes such as, “Daddy4daughter” “Men for Barely Legal Girls” and “Incest Room”.

To facilitate the experience and meet others, online subscribers invent screen names or handles that permit them to participate anonymously within all online activities. With respect to sexually explicit chat rooms, it is not uncommon to find handles such as “MarriedM4Affair,” “Kinkygirl,” or “SubM4F”. Online users may go by several different handles changing their on-line persona according to their moods and desires. For instance, a 51-year-old corporate executive can go by the handle “College Stud” and pretend to be a young college football player, or “lovetoy” and pretend to be a thirty-year-old woman. In this manner, it is unclear who you are really speaking with in a chat room. It is unclear if a user is talking with a twenty-year-old female or a fifty-year-old male. The availability of anonymous, interactive, fantasy role-play chat rooms leads to the following implications for children.

1. Online Victimization

Sexual offenses against children constitute a significant proportion of all reported criminal sex acts. Rather than playgrounds and schoolyards, cyberspace now provides an easy breeding ground for child sex offenders to engage and meet children. Pedophilia and paraphilia are the most common classifications with respect to sex crimes involving the Internet. Pedophilia involves sexual activity with a prepubescent child (generally age 13 year or younger). Pedophiles online demonstrate a past history of sexual conduct with children and transfer this sexual interest to cyberspace. This generally involves producing illegal images to trade online

(i.e., child pornography) or making contact directly with children through chat rooms. Paraphilia involves recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors generally involving 1) nonhuman objects, 2) the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one's partner, or 3) children or other non-consenting persons that occur over a period of at least 6 months. A paraphile demonstrates a predilection for arousing fantasies that he or she can now sexually act out through fantasy role-play chat rooms that cater to that particular sexual urge (e.g., bondage, rape, or incest).

The Grunwald Associates, a California marketing firm, found that there are now 25 million 2- to 17-year olds on the Web, up from 8 million since 1997. By the year 2005, the number of children online is expected to increase by another 70 percent, the survey projected. According to Peter Grunwald, president of the firm, children were found to be the primary reason behind household decisions to purchase a computer and gain Internet access. Another study conducted by the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire found the following statistics related to online victimization:

- 1 In 4 Children Who've Gone Online Have Been Solicited
- 1 In 5 Has Been Sent Provocative Pics Thru Web Contact
- 725,000 Have Been Asked To Meet For Sexual Purposes

Studies repeatedly show that the Internet is not a safe place for children, and extra precautions such as careful parental monitoring and the implementation of filtering software should be taken before children should be allowed online.

2. Teen Sexual Experimentation

Television is seen as social activity as we can watch our favorite sit-coms, the evening news, or the latest movie on HBO together with family and friends. In comparison, using the computer is generally seen as a solitary activity, with smaller viewing screens than television and a single keyboard unit. With the advent of Internet-enabled devices such as the Palm Series, the Internet is becoming increasingly more personalized and solitary. At an alarming rate, children are still left unsupervised at the computer.

Children who are unattended can easily enter these chat rooms. One suspicious mother used a pair of binoculars through an open window to spy on her fifteen-year-old daughter only to discover she was having cybersex with men who were in their thirties and forties. Another mother discovered her sixteen-year-old son had corresponded with thirty-eight different women online, all over the age of eighteen. Worse yet, we hear horror story after horror story of teenagers who run off with people they met over the Internet.

New technological advances create a new set of problems that make it increasingly difficult to protect children. Beyond the scope of our discussion involving interactive chat rooms, live web cam sex is an increasingly popular form of online sexual behavior. That is, the use of video cameras that allow two (or more) users to simultaneously broadcast to one another via the web to view faces or body parts, while typing messages or talking on the phone or through a voice chat system. It is not uncommon for children to interact with friends, meeting new people, and sexually experiment through web cams, opening up even more opportunities for cyber-pedophiles to reach children.

3. A Community for Pedophiles

Television broadcasts are limited in scope by the number of channel selections available via cable networks and the range of viewer programming. Television stations pre-determine broadcast sequence and time slots. In comparison, the Internet is an infinite loop of information, news, chat rooms, discussion groups, and content that collectively provides a continuous stream of changing, evolving, interactive stimulation. With over an estimated 3 billion web sites, each Internet session can be a unique experience customized to your specific interests. Plus, unlike television, the Internet affords users the opportunity to *create* new dynamic content. The uncensored nature of cyberspace coupled with its seeming anonymity provides child pornographers with a new medium to pursue potential contacts and clients (both in terms of children and fellow pornographers). Child pornographers will not only create their own web sites but frequently *spam* (send child porn pictures to multiple and random online users) in hopes of finding others who share their interests to trade pictures and secrets about ways to meet children.

4. The Growing Prevalence of Travelers

There is a sharp rise in the number of sexual predators who prowl the Internet looking for vulnerable children, and who then make arrangements to meet the child for sex. The FBI calls these criminals - “travelers”. The numbers are hard to document, but travelers are clearly part of the Internet-era crime way. According to a recent CBS News report, the FBI alone opens up six new traveler investigations every week. The Center for Missing and Exploited Children receives about 15 new leads about online enticements each week. A traveler is arrested somewhere in the United States almost every day. The profile of the traveler is that of a first-time offender with no previous history of criminal activity or psychiatric illness. Some noted examples are Patrick

Naughton of Infoseek/Go.com, Terry Spontarelli, a Los Alamos research chemist, George DeBier, a former Belgian diplomat, William Bowles, former CEO of iBeam.com.

How does cyberspace serve to encourage this type of behavior from otherwise pro-social and law-abiding citizens? Are these just pedophiles in disguise or does cyberspace serve as an enabler for sexually deviant behavior to develop? My contention is that the Internet's sexually graphic, uncensored, and interactive online culture serves to encourage and validate such sexual acting out online. This explanation is not intended to rationalize or excuse this type of behavior, but rather to understand how cyberspace contributes to its development and growing pervasiveness.

First, the proliferation of sexually explicit chat rooms, groups, and games contributes to easy access for a curious person's initial exploration. Most people do not yet realize that there is any risk involved in engaging in online sexual pursuits. While in some ways it may seem like a journey into "foreign territory," online sexual behaviors occur in the familiar and comfortable environment of home or office thus reducing the feeling of risk and allowing even more adventurous behaviors.

The anonymity associated with electronic communication, and the general milieu of the Internet often facilitates more open and frank communication with other users. Within the anonymous context of cyberspace, conventional messages about sex are eliminated allowing users to play out hidden or repressed sexual fantasies in a private virtual lab. This leaves curious individuals the opportunity to sexually experiment online and these fantasies may progress gradually into darker and darker themes that in real life, they would normally find reprehensible only to become increasingly acceptable online. Among incest-theme chat rooms, users typically participate with others who take on character roles and *pretend* to be younger. With repeated

exposure, users may become desensitized to the experience and this may possibly reinforce future real-life actions such as traveling. More often, in my experience, these ‘fantasy’ users engage in virtual role-plays without the intention of making direct contact with children. However, the potential *creation* of travelers via cyberspace increases the risk to children’s safety as well as raises legal questions about the role of Internet-enabled pathology in the development of online criminal conduct and its ramifications on rehabilitation efforts and sentencing judgments.

IN CONCLUSION

Due to its lack of restriction and interactive nature, we can see that the Internet has more far-reaching implications than television ever had in children’s lives. We have struggled to find fair and equitable remedies to a complex problem. Hopefully, technology itself will be able to provide some of the solution by creating individualized Internet channels that separate pornographic and other unsuitable material for children. However, the main points presented here clearly indicate that the problem goes beyond regulation of “Internet smut” as the interactive capabilities pose an equal, if not more dangerous threat to the welfare of children.

In the future, with computer technologies becoming increasingly more personalized through Internet-enabled devices, monitoring children will pose an even greater challenge to parents and families. Some general solutions that we at the Center for Online Addiction have developed include:

- 1) Incorporate comprehensive child and parent Internet safety educational programs throughout K-12 school systems designed to aid in prevention of child victimization.
- 2) Develop media campaigns akin to public announcements such as “Don’t Drink and Drive” to raise public awareness of the social dangers of cyberspace.
- 3) Launch “E-User Education Programs” to promote responsible online usage and computing behavior among adults.
- 4) Enlist the help of Internet Service Providers themselves in the close supervision of inappropriate online conduct, especially among crimes against children.

Together I hope we can find ways to harness the Internet’s positive potential while making it safer place for children as well as adults.