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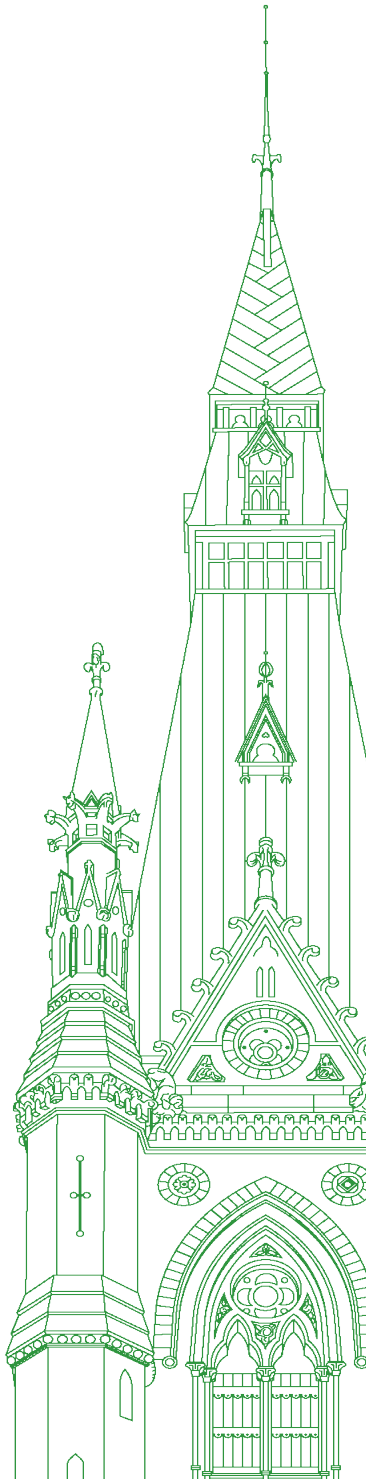

Chair: Lisa Hepfner

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Wednesday, November 26, 2025

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 16 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I'd ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines on the updated cards on your table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will notice there is a QR code that links to a short awareness video, should you need that.

Pursuant to the routine motion adopted by the committee, I can confirm that all the witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, November 5, 2025, the committee is meeting to study the effects of influencers and social media content on children and adolescents.

With us today we have Natalie Coulter. She is an associate professor of communication and media studies from York University. We have Holly Wood, a research and advocacy coordinator from Defend Dignity. She is joining us online. We have, also by video conference, Naomi Holland from Escalate the Conversation. Here in the room, from MediaSmarts, we have Kathryn Ann Hill, executive director; and Matthew Johnson, director of education. Welcome. Humberto Carolo, chief executive officer of White Ribbon, is joining us online as well.

Welcome, everyone. You have five minutes per organization to give us your opening remarks, starting with Natalie Coulter.

You have the floor now for five minutes.

Natalie Coulter (Associate Professor, Communication and Media Studies, York University, As an Individual): Thank you very much for having me here today.

I've spent the last eight to 10 years thinking about the deep connections between young people and their digital worlds. The question of the impact of children's and adolescents' exposure to online content is crucial, especially as we're in this moment of great change with the web as we move to one centred around AI and an unfolding metaverse.

To start, I have a few points.

Young children and adolescents are deeply entwined with their online culture. The old way that we might think about the digital space as separating a real life from an online, digital life no longer works. Children are enmeshed in the digital, so any sort of abstinence-based solution, such as turning it off or blocking youth from social media, is not really a viable option.

The second point I want to make is that the Internet has enhanced children's lives in many ways. It's a space of social connection, community, play, fun and information. There's lots of research indicating this. For example, a lot of LGBTQ youth have found social media to be a lifeline for their own identities within communities, but of course, as we do this, we need to make sure that children have safe, productive and ethical Internet experiences on social media.

Social media influencers, unlike in other forms of media, are often young people themselves. They often come from the same communities that their young followers come from, and this creates a certain authenticity and credibility that these influencers have with young users. Often, young people can develop parasocial relationships, meaning that they feel like these influencers are their friends or they have connections with them, so they give them a lot of their trust and their time.

Social media platforms, as you know, are designed to keep a user on and scrolling for as long as possible. To do this, they have access to a huge amount of data that keeps users endlessly scrolling and trolling, and they can tweak their algorithms in real time to ensure this. There are all these pervasive design features baked right into social media platforms to capture and hold users' attention. This puts young people and children—and, frankly, all of us, as I'm sure we all know that endless scrolling—at a massive disadvantage in countering this, because we don't have access to those same resources.

Knowing all of this leads me to thinking about the impact that social media influencers have on young people.

First, they have a huge influence on how young people spend their time. Many young people—like us, probably—struggle to control their use of social media. The World Health Organization recently surveyed 280,000 youth aged 10 to 15 and found that more than one in 10 teens indicate that they struggle to control their social media use and experience feelings of withdrawal when not using it, and I think this is only growing.

At the same time, a survey in the United States reported that 51% of teenagers spend at least four hours a day using a variety of social media apps. There's little information on young children using them, because they're not supposed to be on social media, even though we know they either are on social media as content or are on social media themselves; there's not a lot of information on young people.

All of this being always on and always scrolling has a huge impact on children's overall health. Research has indicated that there is lower academic performance and that it often impacts young people's sleep, along with many other health and well-being impacts.

The other aspect I talked about is trust. Influencers on social media are given a huge amount of trust by young people, but these influencers, as we know, aren't regulated and often don't have qualifications. We can be really concerned about the long-term social media habits of young people when they're learning information coming from these influencers that is based on unregulated content, unlike the traditional media sources that many of us grew up with, which have professional infrastructure such as fact verification, qualified media professionals, etc.

There are numerous outcomes that result from this increased trust. First, there's a wider dissemination of disinformation, which has a huge impact on young people. We have this spread of false information around health, politics and social issues, leading to widespread disinformation. Recent examples include a reinforcement of unrealistic beauty or lifestyle standards. We know that social media influencers curate these images that look authentic but are highly constructed, which can lead to dissatisfaction, negative self-comparison and maybe lower self-esteem. Also, there is the promotion of unhealthy, harmful or dangerous products like diet pills, detox teas and a range of products that are unapproved.

● (1635)

The second impact of the trust is that there's a huge potential for the radicalization of young people. We can see this clearly with the growth of social media influencers like Andrew Tate, who are currently radicalizing young boys into extreme misogyny. This has far-reaching impacts on young people—those who have been radicalized and also the culture of young people as a whole. Current research shows that this has had an impact on both school environments and the professional life of female teachers. A lot of female teachers are struggling, teaching these misogynistic boys.

Finally, there are concerns globally about children's exposure to hate messages and violent images online. This, of course, impacts their well-being and also their sense of their rights. A recent UNICEF study found that globally there's a steep rise in exposure to this. This exposure can lead to potential mental health issues but can also have an impact on perpetuating racism, hate and deeper misogyny.

My last point is on the lack of privacy in the collection of data by social media companies. We know very little about where this collection of data will go and about where it will go over the long term. I think this is a really important focus. What happens for a child over their entire life course when this information may be bought and sold to third parties and end up in many different spaces, particularly when it's scraped up into AI predictive tools? We could imagine an AI predictive tool designed for university admissions, insurance companies or employee services having access to data from across a child's life course when they become an adult. There are many serious concerns about the impact of this on young people over their life course.

Children have a right to a safe, productive, diverse and ethical Internet experience, and yet we also know that the social media spaces our young people take up and spend so much time in were not created for young people and were not created with their needs and interests in mind. I ultimately think that tech companies need to be held accountable by governments, by the media and by the public to live up to their social licence to operate and their social and corporate responsibility to create a fun, productive, safe, diverse and ethical Internet experience.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go online to Holly Wood from Defend Dignity.

Go ahead. You have the floor for five minutes.

Holly Wood (Research and Advocacy Coordinator, Defend Dignity): Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Holly Wood. I am the coordinator of research and advocacy for Defend Dignity, a national organization that has been working to end sexual exploitation in Canada since 2010. In 2015, we began offering our survivor support fund to financially aid individuals who have experienced sexual exploitation. We are actively engaged in advocacy with all levels of government, and we educate the public.

For this presentation, I want to speak to three very important points about the effects of influencers and social media content on children and adolescents.

My first point focuses on how we have allowed social media influencers to become unregulated educators to children across Canada. Social media influencers and the content they post teach things like appearance, identity, idealized beauty and values, all without educational training or strict standards and with very limited, if any, oversight. Social media influencers post a variety of content, from makeup to promoting facial filters to adult beauty routines and highly sexualized dances, all things being adopted by and ingrained in children as young as 10 or 12. While this may seem harmless, research indicates that it deeply affects identity development and increases vulnerability, especially to sexual exploitation.

Second, online algorithms have now become, in a sense, parents. With children spending up to seven or eight hours a day online, doomscrolling Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat, they are being shaped by big tech algorithms rather than by parents, teachers and communities. On the surface, algorithms may appear harmless, because they're suggesting content that relates to what a child shows interest in when they are browsing, but under the surface, algorithms are teaching our children values, appearance standards, popularity cues and social norms. Algorithms do not consider age appropriateness, safety or mental health. The algorithm is not our friend, and it certainly cannot replace parents and communities, who are the most valuable for guiding our children through the building blocks of life.

All this said, my final point is that parents need to parent, but governments need to govern. Parents already juggle school schedules, meal prep, sports schedules, child care, mortgage payments, heating bills, dentist appointments and their own mental health. Yes, some families are under huge stress, but even parents who are organized, attentive and doing everything right still can't keep up with big tech. This isn't about effort; it's about reality. No parent can outsmart billion-dollar algorithms designed to pull our kids in and hold their attention. It is unrealistic, and I would even go as far as saying that it is impossible. I hope any parents present in this committee meeting can agree with me on that.

We don't treat any other issue this way. We don't ask parents to personally regulate alcohol or tobacco for minors. We don't expect them to set the voting age or decide when a child can drive. Governments set these rules, because protecting our kids protects all of us. Why would big tech be the one area where we leave parents on their own? The world our children are growing up in is more dangerous and complicated than ever before, and there is no parenting manual that prepares you for that. While I appreciate that the government is invested and supportive of prevention education, we must remove the unfair burden placed on parents to teach their children everything.

Therefore, I argue that governments must be responsible for setting guardrails so parents' best efforts are enough. We need legislation and policy that protect our kids, but we also need legislation and policy that prioritize the importance of parenthood in shaping our children.

I have two suggestions.

First, we need policy and legislation that protect our children. Senate bills like Bill S-209, or any other bills in the House of Commons related to this, are a prime example of what we need. Some countries, for instance Norway and Denmark, have taken stronger steps, setting strict limits on children's access to social media and smart devices until they reach a more appropriate age.

As my colleague Val Caldwell pointed out in our presentation in Saskatchewan last week, children do not need cellphones with cameras. They don't need Instagram or TikTok when they're 10 years old. Yes, parental controls can help, but children are clever. They often find a way around these controls, and parents may not even know how to use them properly. That's why we cannot rely on parents alone. We need laws and regulations that set clear boundaries so all kids get the same protection.

Second, we need our government to incentivize social media influencers so they post age-appropriate, positive content, and we need to remove all content creators who do not, or we need to add age controls to certain apps that require parental permission to access harmful or suggestive content. We need policies that protect kids and policies that support parents in the most important job there is—raising them.

● (1640)

Thank you to all parliamentarians who continue to raise the alarm on issues that deeply affect childhood, and thank you for working so hard to protect it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we will go to Naomi Holland, also online, from Escalate the Conversation.

Welcome. You have five minutes, starting now.

Naomi Holland (Founder, Escalate the Conversation): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

Unprecedented rates of depression, eating disorders, skyrocketing visits to the ER for self-harm, overdoses from drugs purchased through social media, and suicides and deaths caused by viral challenges are some of the harms scientifically proven to be caused by social media use. Today, I'll highlight three harms caused by social media and influencers on tween and teen girls. I will focus on girls because, according to research, girls use social media more than boys and are more vulnerable to it.

The first harm, performing for likes, is addictive. Many girls today strive not to experience life, but to stage experiences that will garner likes and elevate their status online. Social media's intermittent reward system, or notifications, capitalizes on this desire. Built by design to addict, these apps take advantage of adolescents' undeveloped brains, tethering girls to their phones, endlessly scrolling for affirmation and validation.

Let me give you an example of what this looks like for a 12-year-old girl. A few years ago, a plank challenge went viral. Girls soon discovered that if they positioned the camera at a certain angle in front of them, they could get more likes and be pushed up the algorithm ladder. Very quickly, girls learned that removing their bra would see an even more dramatic surge in responses. Despite the cruel comments and inappropriate requests from adult men, the brain registers the red notifications and releases dopamine, signalling to the brain to do it again and again.

A second harm on social media is regular exposure to highly sexual content. The prevalence and frequency of hypersexualized content have desensitized girls and contributed to a concerning trend whereby 25% of children view sending nudes as normal. Sharing nudes or self-generated child sexual abuse material opens the door to cyber-bullying, sextortion, sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as a plethora of emotional and mental torment.

These two behaviours, the addictive dopamine cycle and the sexualization of children, create the perfect storm for another harm gaining momentum on social media: OnlyFans. OnlyFans is "pornified" social media with a monetary intermittent reward system. Technically, anyone over 18 can create and sell subscriptions to their own porn channel. Ask anyone working with youth today, and they will tell you it is common to hear girls say, "Only ugly girls get diplomas," implying that when they turn 18, they plan to become an OnlyFans content creator—a more accurate term would be porn producer.

What's the connection to social media? Strategically, OnlyFans does not have a search bar. No one can log on to OnlyFans and find their favourite porn producer without a direct link, so where do 4.6 million porn producers market, recruit and normalize porn production and consumption? They do it on social media. OnlyFans and underground OnlyFans agencies have cultivated a culture of exploitation on social media, where they aggressively promote the illusion of freedom, wealth and empowerment, while softly grooming a generation to idealize becoming sex workers.

To be clear, content creators do not just produce porn. Many are in the sex trade. The small minority who make money openly normalize and glamorize sex work while insidiously masking and minimizing the many harms. On every social media platform—especially Instagram, TikTok, Snap and YouTube—OnlyFans influencers have hundreds of millions of followers. Many are underage girls who idolize them, follow their fashion tips and duplicate their cute TikTok dances. Underage girls even send in application videos in the hope of getting invited into this girl power community. All of this predatory grooming behaviour is promoted and normalized on social media.

The undeveloped adolescent brain and we as parents do not stand a chance against expert predators, nefarious algorithms and apps designed by neuroscientists, nor against the grooming tactics of a multi-billion dollar sex industry. The Canadian government must act quickly to intercede and protect childhood.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: That's very disturbing testimony so far today.

Thank you for that.

MediaSmarts, you're next. I'm not sure if you're sharing your time, but, Kathryn and Matthew, you have five minutes altogether.

Kathryn Ann Hill (Executive Director, MediaSmarts): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is Kathryn Hill. I'm the executive director of MediaSmarts, or HabiloMédias. We are a registered charity. We're Canada's centre for digital and media literacy. I'm joined by our director of education, Matthew Johnson, who will join me in presenting and responding to questions.

I'll tell you a bit about us. MediaSmarts has been researching and developing educational resources about youth, media and technology for almost 30 years. We were founded in 1996 and we advocate for an approach that emphasizes conscious and positive media habits to equip all Canadians, particularly young people, with the skills they need to thrive in the digital age.

In this complex area with many conflicting ideas and opinions, we have set verified scholarly evidence as our north star, and that informs our approach, our content development and our comments.

● (1650)

Matthew Johnson (Director of Education, MediaSmarts): Research has shown that some patterns of social media use are consistently linked to harm, such as engaging in social comparison and the displacement of essential activities like sleep. However, the evidence shows that social media is not intrinsically bad for youth. It also offers significant benefits like social connection, education and self-expression.

How we use social media is significant. Researchers have found that activities like messaging, posting or communicating with others are associated with positive well-being and social connection, whereas passive use such as scrolling feeds or browsing profiles is associated with higher levels of loneliness and negative well-being. Youth who feel that they are in control of their media use also report better mental well-being. Conversely, feeling dependent on social media is associated with feeling worse after using it. If youth constantly hear that they are addicted to social media or to digital devices, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Boosting self-efficacy—the feeling of being able to use media for one's own benefit—leads to better outcomes by helping people see their use as meaningful. In order to do that, we need to educate young people to feel empowered to take control of their digital habits.

Influencers may be seen as a microcosm of the risks that youth face from social media. Young people often form parasocial attachments with influencers, which may affect their self-image and they may also take influencers' messages as though it were personal advice from a friend. Influencers may promote unrealistic body images and share health misinformation, such as false treatments.

When it comes to advertising, while the disclosure of influencers' relationships with sponsors is important, evidence shows that just knowing that a post is paid content does not guarantee that youth will engage with it critically.

Addressing digital risks like the ones associated with influencers requires us to move beyond trying to avoid them completely and instead move to empower youth to manage them. To do that, we need to acknowledge that most young people have mixed feelings about social media and digital technology, and recognize that while most have a generally positive experience with it, they also often have qualms about its role in their lives. The youth in our research have advocated forcefully for healthier online spaces that embrace rights-respecting approaches such as safety and privacy by design.

Alongside any regulatory approaches that may be considered, any effective policy must include digital media literacy education, which equips youth with the critical thinking skills they need to learn how to recognize and counter the ways in which apps manipulate us into spending more time on them than we want to. It teaches them how to curate their feeds, how to choose healthier activities and content and how to recognize the blurred commercial intent of influencer marketing. We need to teach young Canadians that they, not their devices, are in control.

Kathryn Ann Hill: Digital media literacy education must be introduced early. It must also be revisited throughout childhood, adolescence and, frankly, into adulthood. It should be part of lifelong learning. For example, it should help to teach parents how to guide their kids' online lives in a supportive way, not through restrictions and surveillance only but by having open and honest conversations about what their kids are doing online and what the risks might be. They should model and show them better ways to behave online.

At MediaSmarts, we have been advocating, for more than a decade, for a national digital media literacy strategy. Canada has fallen behind compared to examples like Finland, the United Kingdom and Brazil. They have implemented national strategies with positive results.

A national strategy would foster a collaborative and community-centred approach to helping youth, educators, parents and all Canadians develop healthier media habits. Most of the countries engaged in regulation efforts have also equally invested in national strategies for lifelong digital media literacy education and learning.

Despite repeated calls for action and investment from multiple studies in Canada over the past 15 years, Canada has still not acted. Once a leader, we have fallen behind many nations, and we will continue to do so unless we act now.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, we have Humberto Carolo from White Ribbon joining us online.

You have five minutes.

Humberto Carolo (Chief Executive Officer, White Ribbon): Thank you so much for the opportunity to join you today.

My name is Humberto Carolo. I am the CEO of White Ribbon, based in Toronto on the traditional territory of many indigenous nations. White Ribbon is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end gender-based violence. This work is both my personal and my professional commitment. I grew up witnessing violence in my home and community. As the adoptive father of three young men, I see first-hand the pressures that boys face in increasingly complex digital worlds.

As a member of the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, I've observed that misogynistic attitudes and prejudice against women are key risk factors in intimate partner violence death. Research shows that supporting boys early, before harmful patterns and ideologies take root, is critical to preventing cycles of violence.

Social media is central to youth identity and belonging, but it also exposes boys to content that reinforces misogyny, unhealthy stereotypes and radicalization. Boys who begin in milder online spaces focused on men's issues often progress to forums that blame women and girls and promote gender-based violence. Some spaces, such as incel forums, have been directly linked to sexual violence and homicides of women. CSIS now classifies violent misogyny as a form of ideological extremism, the foundation of the online manosphere.

The influence of online content is reflected in troubling statistics: 99% of perpetrators of sexual violence towards women and girls are male; 75% of ideologically motivated violent extremism profiles belong to boys and men; and 83% of all sextortion victims are boys and young men. CSIS recently reported that nearly one in 10 terrorism investigations now involves at least one young person under the age of 18. Earlier this year, the RCMP arrested a 15-year-old in Edmonton for alleged links to an online violent and misogynistic extremist network known as 764, which targets youth.

These cases highlight the urgency of prevention. This is why we created our recent campaign, “My Friend Max Hate”. We saw how harmful influencers and ideologies were in shaping boys' attitudes, leading to misogyny, isolation and radicalization.

We are pilot-testing lesson plans to help educators address these issues. White Ribbon's new research, “Boys are at Risk”, in partnership with Angus Reid, examined the impact of misogyny and online radicalization on youth from the perspective of parents and professionals in education, mental health and child and youth care across Canada. The findings are deeply concerning: 84% of the professionals have encountered radicalized ideologies among boys and young men; 67% have seen these linked to incidents of gender-based violence; and 89% feel they lack the adequate training or resources required. Furthermore, 71% of boys, in particular, worry about the hateful content online and its impact on them.

These harms are spilling over into classrooms and communities. Research with the Canadian Institute for Far-Right Studies revealed similar trends in rural and francophone communities: 59% of educators described students making racist jokes or comments, with incidents escalating to physical violence. Parents and professionals are asking for tools—tools currently unavailable—to help boys and young men navigate digital spaces safely and develop critical thinking skills, empathy and resilience. Primary prevention can create the most transformative and lasting change. Studies show that prevention strategies yield two dollars to $20 for every dollar invested. Emerging research demonstrates the effectiveness of “attitudinal vaccination”, which exposes youth to a small and controlled portion of harmful online ideology to inoculate them against it.

We can ensure that boys and young men are supported, not blamed, as they navigate increasingly complex digital worlds. I urge you to prioritize investments in primary prevention and partner with organizations like White Ribbon. We have much more to share about the impact of misogynistic influencers on boys and young men, and in turn on women, girls and gender-diverse people.

● (1700)

We'll follow up with a fuller brief, but I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this study. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: You're right on the five minutes. You are a practised testimony-giver. I remember you from the status of women committee last Parliament, sir. Thank you for your good work.

I will turn now to questions from committee members, starting with Mrs. Thomas for six minutes.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Great.

Thank you so much to each and every one of you for being here. We really do appreciate your taking the opportunity to share your research, knowledge and experience with us.

My first question is for Defend Dignity.

Ms. Wood, you made an interesting statement. It was one of your first three points. You said, “parents need to parent, but governments need to govern.” I would like you to expand briefly on what you mean by “governments need to govern”. What policy requirements are needed right now in order to better protect children?

Holly Wood: Absolutely. I used Bill S-209 as an example. It is about the age verification for pornographic material online. That bill has been in Parliament for five years, and it is a prime example of how slowly Parliament moves on issues critical to protecting our children. I think the government does a great job of bringing these bills up and having conversations like this, but at the end of the day, when our kids are at the centre of this issue, I believe there should be some sort of rush on legislation that deeply affects them.

I think that we, as a government, as government bodies, need to invest in working with tech companies to provide those protections for our kids. We need to look at what the options are. I'm not a tech specialist, but I know that if we work with big tech, we can find a solution. I just hope that the government moves forward with meaningful conversations and a rush on legislation that can implement change so that our kids are protected.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I was reading some of the things that have been published over the years—things that you and others have said. At the time when Bill C-63 was before the House of Commons—and of course this has to do with online harms—it was brought forward in the last Parliament, and then, due to the government choosing to prorogue, it died.

Now, there were good things within that bill, but there were also a lot of problems with that bill, as was highlighted by many stakeholders. You highlighted this as well, that there was some good stuff but it didn't go far enough. One of the areas where you felt it didn't go far enough was that it was lacking a robust plan to protect kids from exposure to pornography, and of course the effect that it has on them during their childhood and later in life. Do you want to expand on that a bit more, in terms of what more needs to be done for kids?

Holly Wood: I'm a big believer in prevention education. I'm a nationally licensed prevention educator. I think that should be in every classroom across Canada, and it should be part of the curriculum, but it shouldn't necessarily be up to the teachers to teach.

When I talk about a robust plan, rolling out prevention education is at the top of that plan for me. There are so many organizations across the country, such as MediaSmarts and Defend Dignity. We want to be in those classrooms, and the biggest obstacle that we face is school boards telling us that they have to go above this person and up the ladder for someone to approve it. For us to get into a classroom and teach prevention education is extremely hard.

I think one of the key steps you can take is standardizing prevention education, allowing certain agencies or organizations into those classrooms, saying that we are allowed to be there as much as possible and allowed to work with the schools without facing any red tape or bureaucracy around it.

I understand that legislation and policy take time, but I just think that our kids are the most important thing in the world, and we should be moving legislation as quickly as possible when it comes to them.

● (1705)

Rachael Thomas: I understand that prevention education.... Absolutely, there is huge value there, but again, to come back to the point that you made, there is the parents' role and the educators' role or the school systems' role, and then there's the government's role.

As legislators, we have the opportunity to bring substantial legislation forward with regard to platforms, how they are used and how they are regulated. We have the opportunity to make changes to the Criminal Code. I'm curious if you can really get into the substance of what is needed to better protect children and also what is needed to better advocate for those who are victimized.

Holly Wood: Legislation-wise, I think there are a handful of bills currently in Parliament, which I understand have to go through studies and processes. If we passed the majority of the bills currently active in the House of Commons and in the Senate that protect children from online harm, our world would be a much safer place for our kids. The problem is that, as advocates and researchers, we look at that legislation and say that it's two or three years away, when our kids need to be protected now. That's my big thing with legislation, just how slowly it moves. I think it moves too slowly.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Holland, you seem to want to weigh in on this. I'd love to give you that opportunity. Unfortunately, it's probably pretty short, but I can come back to you later as well.

Naomi Holland: I just wanted to quickly say that, for me as well, trying to get into schools is very difficult. I try to organize parent nights, and parents don't come. If children are not being educated and properly protected at home, the best place to access them is in schools, yet getting into schools is harder than going through airport security. It's so difficult.

Funding is part of that issue. They can afford to pay you almost nothing. That's a big hindrance. Months have gone by, and I haven't been in a school. It breaks my heart, knowing the statistics that Holly talked about. The kids are suffering now. Their mental health is in a crisis now. We're in a mental health epidemic right now with suicides, depression and anxiety. All these numbers are through the roof.

It was good that we pulled phones out of schools, but we know that it's not really happening. I get a lot of reports from schools saying that the kids are on their phones in class, and they're sneaking in. Again, it falls on the teachers, and that's not right.

Our kids are addicted to their devices. We're not really acting fast enough to help them get off them or to know how to maintain that addiction. There's just so much more. It has to be done quickly. We are losing our youth.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, you have six minutes. You have the floor now.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's good to see you, as always.

Thank you to our witnesses for being with us today. It is, of course, truly appreciated.

At the risk of annoying my colleague, Mr. Champoux, with yet another reference to my youth, I remember that when I shifted to *secondaire 1*, my parents sent me to school with what was by then already a relic—a flip phone. At the time, not having a smart phone when my peers did annoyed me. However, my parents' decision to do that has only been further justified as time has moved on. The ease of access to social media on devices has granted predators a degree of access they never previously had to children.

Ms. Holland, in a LinkedIn post you wrote six months ago, you said, “For 2 years, I lived as the house mom in an emergency home for women fleeing the sex trade. I saw first hand the violence and devastation at the hands of pimps and predators. When phones came out, I saw these same men move online and be given full access to our children!”

From your perspective, how did this change not just the method but also the nature of grooming? What behavioural patterns in victims or in perpetrators emerged that were previously less visible or even impossible?

● (1710)

Naomi Holland: Yes, it's exactly that. When the phones came out and almost every child was given one, we did not know then what we know now. When social media came out, especially in 2010 and 2011 with Snapchat and Instagram, all the predators basically went online. They had full and easy access to all of our children, because we did not realize what was happening for so long. With gaming now, they can chat directly with kids through games. They can pretend to be anybody they want to be. They can create their own avatars.

Currently, the platforms give predators direct and easy access to our children. Since our children are spending so much time online, they're very vulnerable and very open with some of their struggles, with their mental health issues. Maybe they are angry with their parents, or maybe they're complaining about not having enough money for this or that. Then, that gives the predators easy information from which they are going to try to feed that need or address that emotional need that isn't being met.

They create this friendship and this trust very quickly, and they bring that child into a place where they feel like they're best friends. Then they slowly start to groom them and slowly move the chat perhaps somewhere more private like Snap. Eventually comes the ask for a photo, for a nude, for a more explicit photo. From there, that just opens the door to all the things we talked about: sextortion, trafficking, sex trafficking.

Kids are being sex-trafficked from their bedrooms, because when sharing that photo, they don't realize that the average nude image of a child, a CSAM, is viewed 400,000 times, as stated on Defend Young Minds. That is sex trafficking right there. It's being sold, traded and uploaded to Pornhub, where it's monetized. Kids are being trafficked from their bedrooms through the devices that parents have given them, and parental controls are not enough.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Ms. Holland.

Mr. Carolo, as you noted, your work with White Ribbon has long focused on preventing gender-based violence by addressing the social norms and cultural narratives that shape boys' understanding of masculinity. I know that Next Gen Men, whom I had the pleasure of meeting yesterday, operates in a similar space.

In an article with GlobeNewswire about a White Ribbon campaign called “My Friend Max Hate”, which you referred to in your opening remarks, you state, “It's alarming to see the growing impact of the manosphere and how they are conditioning vulnerable populations such as teens, particularly young men”.

What patterns are you seeing in how algorithmic content and influencer culture are shaping early attitudes towards gender? What makes these online narratives so effective at pulling vulnerable young men into misogynistic world views?

Humberto Carolo: Young boys and young men are turning to the Internet for connection: to learn about dating, to learn about what it means to be a young man, looking for social supports and looking to figure themselves out. As they do these searches, they are presented with these deeply misogynistic and hateful videos and resources put out by these social influencers.

We are seeing more and more of that kind of impact, and these young men start to take on those narratives. They start to accept those ideologies, those ways, those narratives and that advice, which are often disguised as improving self-esteem, improving their own looks and physique and so forth, but they often incorporate deeply hateful, misogynistic attitudes blaming women, immigrants and newcomer communities for all the problems that men, boys and young men are experiencing today.

It's that kind of increased ideology, that increased presence and impact that's deeply concerning. More and more young people are falling prey to those types of narratives in the absence of good, positive role models, influencers who talk about what it means to shed those harmful gender stereotypes and social norms that so many young men are pressured to live with and grow up believing in.

We need to change that around. We need to quiet those hateful voices, misogynistic voices, and instead present good role model voices, influencers who can share supportive, allied narratives that young men can take on.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I found the witnesses' opening statements extremely interesting, and their answers to questions are just as interesting. It is very enlightening, but also very disturbing, let's be honest.

I will come back to the issue of exploitation, which Ms. Wood and Ms. Holland mentioned. It is a disaster that we are standing by and watching happen.

I would first like to turn to our friends at MediaSmarts, because if we conclude that the effects of social media on young people are generally negative, one of the main factors contributing to this is disinformation. There has also been talk of radicalization, which I would also like to discuss.

There are, however, positive initiatives that can help us find interesting solutions and improve education. Obviously, when we want to counter disinformation, we have to do it through education. At MediaSmarts, you conducted a research project called “Motives and Methods”. I'd like you to tell us a little bit about it, because there are some conclusions from this study that I find very interesting.

So I'll let you tell us more about this project.

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: This research project that you're referring to, “Motives and Methods”, was a project that we designed to test the effectiveness of our “Break the Fake” resources, which are designed to teach quick and easy steps for verifying online information, in the hopes that people will make a habit of verifying all the information they encounter—particularly information that they may use as the basis for important decisions and particularly, as well, before they share information.

This research project demonstrated quite strongly that very limited exposure to this program had significant impacts on people's ability to identify false content but, just as importantly, to identify real content. There is a lot of evidence that it is the discernment between true and false information that is so important in avoiding the backfire risks that sometimes come when we focus excessively on teaching people to debunk false information.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: In your conclusions, you talk about discernment. You say that most participants had difficulty distinguishing between truth and falsehood, but that in general, most of them had a false belief bias, meaning they were more likely to say something was false, even if it wasn't. I find that somewhat positive, in a way, because it suggests that people are inherently suspicious of the content they see.

We keep telling people to check their sources. Do you conclude that this bias means that we may be on the right track and that the message is starting to get through?

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: Unfortunately, this is not necessarily a positive sign, because what we see is what some scholars have referred to as trust compression, where people see any strike against a source as disqualifying it completely. What this means, of course, is that there is no sense that any sources are reliable. If a source has to be absolutely unimpeachable before it can be seen as a reliable source, it becomes impossible for us to have any shared sense of what is true, which makes it impossible to have any kind of civic discussion.

It's just a generational quality. It is also the impact of AI. It has had a corrosive effect of leading people to doubt things and cast doubt on things that are true, because it has become so easy to create convincing false content.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: So we still have work to do, if I understand correctly. We will do it.

Ms. Holland, you mentioned algorithms earlier and you made an interesting comment about the dopamine that surfing the Internet releases in young people. That's very interesting. We can't pretend that digital companies aren't aware of this. It is hard to believe that they are not using it as a tool. We have banned advertising aimed at children, precisely because this type of advertising excited children and made them very vulnerable. We do the same thing for a whole range of products. Earlier, Ms. Wood said that we do not ask parents to regulate alcohol and cigarettes, for example. The same logic should apply in this case.

Do you think digital companies are mocking us by claiming they don't control this, when in all likelihood they know exactly what they are doing by pushing this kind of content towards our children?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Naomi Holland: Yes, 100%, they know what they're doing. Last year, social media companies made $11 billion off under 18-year-olds. They completely know what they're doing. They want to put it on parents. They want to put it on kids: “Kids should be taught more.” Yes, but that's putting it on kids. The way these apps are designed, they are so addictive. Neuroscientists are hired to study the brain. The apps are using biometrics and studying the faces of children. They know exactly what they need.

Social media companies are after two things from kids: time spent on their app and scroll speed. They want kids to scroll faster and faster, where you have to get the brain almost to a zombie-like state. The faster they scroll, the more ads they will see. They know, especially on TikTok, what they need to feed them. They feed them something shocking, like a car accident. They look, and then they show them something sexy. They look out of curiosity. Then they show them something disturbing that makes them feel gross, so they scroll faster. They are being fed content that is truly like a dopamine drip. Their brains are just hungry and wanting more and more.

Asking children to make reasonable decisions on social media is like asking them to bench-press 300 pounds. It is not realistic. It is not physically possible. It is not fair for us to ask children to be responsible for their own social media use.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's another good metaphor. Thank you very much.

Mr. Diotte, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We obviously all care about the health of children and about online harms. That's a no-brainer.

I guess the big question is.... Looking at something like Bill S-209—I believe, Ms. Wood, you mentioned that bill—we see that there are concerns that, for instance, using third party age verification providers could risk a second harm, meaning that a lot of these websites are located outside of Canada. You have to feed it data, highly personal data, and that could cause a real problem. Obviously, there's the argument about freedom of expression and censorship. There's also criticism of that bill because there is a very broad definition of what is sexually explicit material, and it could inadvertently apply to mainstream images and so forth.

The big question is this: How do we walk the fine line between too much government control and too little government control in protecting children?

I'll start with you, Ms. Wood, on that question.

Holly Wood: Thank you very much.

I think Bill S-209 is a prime example. As I said, it's been in Parliament for five years. It's had three reiterations, three rewordings. They've done extensive studies. The big part of Bill S-209 is that other countries are already doing it. It's already successful. It's been implemented, and it's making a difference.

When you look at things like this, look to other countries, do international studies, work with international partners to understand how they implemented it, how it's working, and what the VPN matters are—because children can dance around VPNs, unfortunately.

Again, the material in Bill S-209 is a prime example of what's working and what's not and the language. When you look at government control, it's important to understand that children are children. They can't vote until later in life. They can't drive until later in life. They can't smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol until later in life, so why can they view harmful content with their adolescent brains that aren't fully developed?

When it comes to our kids, yes, parents have a role, but governments also have a responsibility under international laws, regulations, charters and covenants. I think that part of due diligence in government—

● (1725)

Kerry Diotte: Thanks. I think that suffices.

I just want to ask a couple of other participants the same question.

Ms. Holland, you probably heard the question, I assume. How do we walk that fine line between too much government control and too little?

Naomi Holland: Well, right now there's not enough. Tech companies basically have.... It's the wild west. They have no accountability. They know that their products hurt children, and they're not putting in safety measures.

There was a study recently looking at Instagram. They looked at 47 safety measures, and only eight of them were effective. They know what they need to do to protect kids. They don't want to. They don't have any incentive, and they have no accountability, so why would they do it when they're profit-driven companies?

The other thing I want to say about free speech is that we have to ask who is raising these concerns. Oftentimes, the concern is coming from people who are funded by tech companies. I'll give you another analogy: Saying that putting any restrictions on tech companies would hinder your freedom online is like saying that the laws that regulate driving—speed limits and seat belts—are going to hinder your ability to drive safely on the road.

I think it's a lot of smoke, and I don't think the data is there.

Kerry Diotte: Finally, it's the same question for Ms. Hill.

Kathryn Ann Hill: I'm sorry. Are you asking how we navigate that fine line?

Kerry Diotte: Yes, basically I'm asking about the fine line between too much government control and not enough. I think that's what we're all trying to determine.

Kathryn Ann Hill: I'll preface this by saying that I'm not a lawyer or a legislator.

What we believe, and what we know, is that the expertise does exist in Canada. I would say that how we navigate that fine line is by consulting with the best thinkers we have in our nation and by consulting with civil society organizations about the concerns that may be present.

If we look at some of the legislation that's gone through or was attempted to be passed, we see that there were a lot of critiques that came from academia, from civil society and—for legislation that was directed at youth—from youth themselves. I think it's figuring out a process, when we're drafting this legislation, where we're including those voices up front so that we have an opportunity to look for where the pitfalls are and to learn from other nations where they've encountered those pitfalls—because, without question, we need regulation.

As you said, we all want children to be much safer. Nobody is fighting that fight; everybody believes and supports that. It's about how we get there. Part of that is by finding legislation that will protect privacy. That is critically important. We can't pass legislation that infringes on children's or adults' privacy rights and guarantees of freedom of speech. We absolutely must do that as a democracy—we care about that very deeply—but we can also protect children. We can do all those things.

The Chair: I will turn now to Ms. Royer.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Professor Coulter, you noted an uptick in the number of violent images that young people are exposed to online. I'd love for you to elaborate on what you're seeing in the research as to the psychological or behavioural impacts of that repeated exposure and what that looks like for adolescents.

If you can, I'd also like you to give us a rough idea of how many images the average young person is exposed to by the age of 16, and what that level of saturation means for their ability to process that harmful or graphic content.

There's a third piece here: Are these impacts experienced differently by boys and girls emotionally, socially or in terms of risk behaviour?

Natalie Coulter: Thank you very much for that question.

I don't have any hard numbers, but I do know that UNICEF has done a worldwide study looking at over 280,000 young people. I can draw that up if you'd like.

What I would like to say, in terms of pushing images online, is that one of the important things to remember about social media is that the way the algorithms work is designed to make money off harmful and hateful images because they circulate faster and they move faster. This is embedded right into the design of social media companies. We can see that in the way hate speech and a lot of different images get circulated.

I think that's an important piece to remember, that part of the business design and the nature of the way it's making money is actually to circulate and promote these kinds of images, because they do circulate a lot faster. They move a lot faster. Every time they move and circulate, it keeps young people online and scrolling more, but it also means that content is moving, which means that they make much more money from that. I think the impact it has on young people is that it's very difficult for young people to protect themselves from it, to not have those algorithms push that content towards them.

I think the impact it has on young people is very different in different communities. This is one place where we really have to think about how it's easy to talk about children and it's easy to talk about young people, but when we see something circulating, like an image of.... One of the images that have circulated.... In the United States, we see a lot of horrible images of people being harmed by police that get circulated over and over and circulate to young people, and that has a much bigger impact on young people of colour, and maybe on boys of colour, than it does on other young people.

I think we always have to be really critical in thinking about how it's easy to paint young people with one brush, and we have to think about how the intersectionality of all these different kinds of content does shape and impact young people from different kinds of points and perspectives.

● (1730)

Zoe Royer: Thank you for that.

I seem to recall a statistic from at least 10 years ago, which was that by the time a young person is 16, they've seen over 100,000 violent images, and what happens is that they develop a bit of numbness, including many of the things that you describe.

I'd like to go to Ms. Hill now.

You mentioned that countries such as Finland, the U.K. and Brazil have national digital literacy strategies, while Canada does not yet. Could you please outline what those strategies typically include and how they support safer online experiences for young people?

Kathryn Ann Hill: I'd be happy to.

Finland is one, globally, that we turn to fairly regularly. They started very early on in Finland. They started their media literacy education in the 1950s, and that was necessitated by issues of exposure to propaganda for their citizens. They started addressing how to improve critical thinking and build the resilience of their citizens to the misinformation, disinformation and lies that exist in propaganda. They started that in the 1950s.

Their strategy is lifelong learning. We have a lot of evidence to support that lifelong learning is incredibly valuable and important, and that it is the one way we're going to build our resilience. They start at pre-kindergarten and continue through to seniors' centres. It's a national strategy with national leadership, saying this education matters and it needs to exist in all types of environments.

We're not just talking about K to 12. We've allowed ourselves, to some degree, in Canada to be distracted by that. We say it's an educational issue, hence it's a provincial mandate and we can't do anything federally because this is about kindergarten to grade 12. We need to take it out of that narrative and perspective and say, no, this is about lifelong learning and learning everywhere all the time. As we know, the AI we're living with today is already different from the AI we were living with six months ago, and the technology we had a year ago already seems out of date. Lifelong learning is critical if we're going to have generational opportunities to protect children and youth.

We have to think about the vulnerable members of our society, as well, and the people who are highly marginalized. We talk to seniors. They feel incredibly excluded and unsupported and unprepared to deal with the technology that exists and that they must interface with. You cannot find housing, get a job, access health services or access social services without using a smart phone or some kind of Internet-mediated device.

Finland is doing lifelong learning. In the United Kingdom, they are only about six or seven years ahead of us. They started investing about seven years ago through the regulator Ofcom. Ofcom is their version of our CRTC, with a slightly broader mandate. They invested heavily and developed a strategy and a platform called “Making Sense of Media”. We have the privilege of sitting as an adviser to the evaluation committee for “Making Sense of Media” in the United Kingdom.

They looked at what existed at the time and what was in place. What were all of the education efforts happening across the U.K.? There was cataloguing, benchmarking and identifying strategies that were effective. That's one of the things we don't know. We don't have benchmarks. We don't know what the media or digital literacy levels of our students and all adults are in Canada, but we also don't know what the best strategies are. That's why we're evaluating our resources to see what—

● (1735)

The Chair: We've run out of time for this question. I don't know if you can wrap it up quickly.

Kathryn Ann Hill: I can talk about it for half an hour. I'm sorry.

Very quickly, I will say that Brazil did it within six months. When the new government was elected and they realized they needed to work really hard and really fast to combat anti-democratic forces, they knew the place they needed to invest in most quickly. Within six months, they had a strategy for the nation. It's not perfect. Brazil is working on it. It's going to take a couple of years to improve and enhance it.

The Chair: It's not too late.

Kathryn Ann Hill: It's not too late, and it's possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I find it very interesting that we are talking about digital literacy. Ms. Wood, you mentioned earlier that governments have a duty to legislate and regulate this, because it is not up to parents to do all the policing. However, even though Ms. Hill is still optimistic and says it is not too late, I feel that we have delayed too long, as we usually do when it comes to regulating new technologies. Some go so far as to say that we may have missed the boat with the current generation.

Many say that we should follow the example of Australia, Finland and Denmark and restrict access to social media for young people under the age of 18, 16 or 14, depending on the case. Shouldn't we instead step up our game in terms of education and digital literacy, and implement programs to ensure that young people are more cautious and informed?

It seems to me that prohibition is not always the right solution. It may be, and that is why we are studying the issue, but I wonder if we should not become more aware and follow the example of countries that have focused on education instead. Even if we are behind, we could redouble efforts and move in that direction.

I would like to hear your opinion on this, Ms. Wood. The data presented to us today is concerning. I also heard your response to Ms. Holland's comments earlier, so I will give you the floor.

[*English*]

Holly Wood: Prevention education is absolutely the most important thing, specifically when it's age-appropriate, culturally inclined and ever-changing with the reality of what's happening in the world our children live in.

The barricades to providing that prevention education.... As I believe Ms. Hill said, it's a provincial matter. It's in Ontario, but it's not everywhere and it's taking forever to roll out. This is immediate. This should be implemented immediately.

When I look at social media, do I believe that it needs to be absolutely cut off? No, but I do think that parents struggle to understand parental controls. Therefore, prevention education for parents is as important as it is for students.

The last thing I want to say is that there are phones out there—I believe it's called a Pinwheel phone—that we should be pushing to parents. It's a phone that doesn't have social media. You can buy phones for your kids that don't have everything you can put on an iPhone these days. That should be front and centre on the billboards across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: I have teenagers, and I couldn't imagine giving them a phone without access to social media. It's just not an option. It's part of their world. That's why I find this discussion difficult. I'd like to give them a phone just for texting and calling me, but unfortunately, they also want to use Snapchat, Instagram, etc.

I find today's discussion very interesting. I think it gives us a lot to think about, but I am even more confused and lost than I was at the beginning of the discussion. However, we will sort it all out, and I am sure we will come to some good conclusions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. You have the floor for five minutes.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the entire committee for allowing me to participate in this important study today.

I agree with my colleague. I too am much more confused than I was when I arrived. Yet this is an extremely important issue.

Today, while preparing, I was reading a 2020 study which stated that in Quebec, 88% of 14-year-old boys and 39% of 14-year-old girls had already viewed pornography. That is incredible. We are talking about 14-year-olds, but I am sure that many younger children have done so too, but perhaps we don't dare ask them. It is shocking to see that our young people have access to this.

Furthermore, from what I know about the school environment, tablets are used as rewards when young people do good deeds. There is currently a contradiction in the school system. On the one hand, we reward those who have had a good week by giving them access to a tablet for an hour. On the other hand, we take no measures to properly educate children on the use of tablets. There will be no content of the sort on the tablet at school, but there will be other things on the tablet at home.

Are there any initiatives in place as part of university training for future teachers to raise their awareness of social media and encourage them to educate children in this area? What do you think is the responsibility during teacher training? We know that a prohibition approach will not work. As for implementing a program, it will take years to get there. How are universities training our future teachers for this new reality?

I would like to hear Ms. Wood's opinion first, followed by Ms. Holland's.

● (1740)

[*English*]

Holly Wood: I believe that teachers and parents are one and the same. They juggle a lot of different things.

In Ontario, our curriculum for human trafficking prevention or prevention education is on the shoulders of teachers. They don't have time to learn about human trafficking, build a curriculum and then put it into their daily teaching schedules.

What can we do for teachers now? We can provide them with prevention education. On professional development days, give them access to this training and fund this training and this education, because it's such an important piece. Do it regularly. Have a schedule—once a month or biweekly; I don't know. Have it be part of their professional development, but also understand that the programming we're talking about will take years to build. You have so many organizations that would be happy to build it with you. We're willing to spend a year working to bring that to fruition. Baby steps would be to put it in professional development days right away.

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: What do you think, Ms. Holland?

[*English*]

Naomi Holland: I would love to address this. I have a real problem with screens in schools.

I don't think teachers are being educated, or at least many of them don't seem to be aware of the problem of screens. I understand that they're stressed and overwhelmed, but too many teachers are giving screens to kids to keep them quiet and asking them to do their homework on a screen when the other tabs could be YouTube and their video game. This is happening in the classroom. It is so ridiculous that kids are pretending, and when the teacher comes, they swipe out of it.

If I were a teacher, I would turn all the desks around so that the screens face inside. The teacher's desk should be right in the middle of that U shape so they're seeing the screens all the time, because kids cannot be held responsible. They do not have the brakes installed in their brains. They cannot do their math on one screen and resist YouTube on the other screen. I think we should definitely be getting screens out of classrooms.

I'd like to address the confusion. In *The Anxious Generation*, Dr. Haidt says we can turn this mental health epidemic around in two years if we follow just four simple norms: no social media before 16, no smart phones before high school, more free play and get phones out of schools.

It's not that hard. We can do it, but we have to do it collectively so that the one family that does it isn't the weird family on the block, like our family is. My child did not have a smart phone until she was 18. It can be done. My son is 14, and he has a flip phone. He's a pretty cool kid, but I'm biased.

Luc Berthold: Thank you for those suggestions. I think they are really good.

[*Translation*]

What do you think, Ms. Hill?

[*English*]

I'd like to hear from MediaSmarts.

Kathryn Ann Hill: Do you want to go?

Matthew Johnson: We absolutely believe that teachers need support. They need professional development. That's something we provide. We provide a significant number of professional development resources for teachers to help them know how to teach about these—

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: I would prefer to know if you are in direct contact with the universities that provide teacher training. I think that this needs to be done at the basic level. Teachers need to arrive at schools having been trained in this regard.

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: Yes, we work with teacher candidates at faculties of education across the country. We've done programs where MediaSmarts staff have travelled around the country to train teacher candidates in person. Just two weeks ago, I was training 300 teacher candidates at Lakehead University on our materials.

This is something we offer for free. We also offer this material as self-directed professional development on our website that teacher candidates or teachers can go through on their own time.

Luc Berthold: Do they do that on their tablets?

The Chair: Maybe we should legislate that everyone read Jonathan Haidt's book. I think that's a great idea.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Personally, I am not so confused; I somewhat understand what this is about. At some point, the state has a responsibility. Parents have a responsibility. Experts like the ones we are hearing from today also have a responsibility. As for children, they have rights, but they also have duties. That is how my parents raised me. There comes a time when we have to turn off our screens.

Tablets exist, and some do not come with applications such as Facebook or YouTube. Schools may also choose to purchase these tablets, give them to children in class, and ensure that these tools are not already installed on the devices or that they can't be downloaded.

Do you think that a solution could be to start with schools only providing children with devices on which these tools have not been installed?

I would like to point out that Quebec has banned mobile phones in schools. Could this measure also help reduce screen time among young people?

What do you think, Mr. Johnson?

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: I don't think there is anyone, young people included, who feels that students should have unlimited access to digital devices during the school day.

There is also a lot of evidence that, particularly for older students, such as teenagers at the secondary level, there is a point where they need to learn how to manage their device use, because this is not something that happens magically when we graduate. When we go on to post-secondary education or when we go on to the work world, all of those distractions will continue to be there, but we will have fewer opportunities to make up for our mistakes.

I do think there's a lot of good evidence that suggests that for older students, the digital devices can be used as a way of learning to manage those distractions. We have to teach them how to make these a healthy part of their lives, how to use them effectively and how to manage the distraction of digital media.

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I will seize the opportunity and address this issue with you, Ms. Wood.

Earlier, you said that you also wanted access to classrooms for prevention activities. I was wondering what legislation the Canadian federal government could introduce to allow this, given that education is a responsibility that falls entirely to the provinces. Will the framework legislation introduced here give you access to classrooms? I don't think so, unless you tell me otherwise.

That said, let me explain the point I want to make.

At 16, I can drive a car with adult supervision. At 18, after having a probationary licence for two years, I can get my full licence to drive my car.

As we have said, having a mobile phone that gives you access to everything can lead to mental health problems. Mental health is very important. We take care of it because it is intangible.

Isn't it more important to protect children and young people by limiting their access to these tools than to teach them how to use them at an early age?

[*English*]

Holly Wood: I know that education is a provincial issue, but protecting children is a national issue. That's the way I look at it. While I understand that provincial governments are the ones that put education in place, the federal government should be working with all levels in all provinces across the country to make sure that prevention education is nationwide.

In terms of devices, I understand that children want to be on Snapchat because other kids are. They want to be in the group chat. They want to post photos. I understand that. I understand that you, as the federal government, can't go into a home and tell a child not to be on Snapchat, but you can look at the regulations and the security and parent controls around those apps that are taking away our children.

Legislatively, I believe someone else pointed out that there are so many professionals—Jonathan Haidt is an example—who are out there and saying exactly what we need to do. To look at that from a legislative perspective, look at the research. Talk to the researchers. Put together a committee like this one that can do a deep dive into what sorts of policy and legislation are required to make that happen.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Ms. Wood.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ntumba.

[*English*]

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor now for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Wood, one of the things you talk about is the importance of making sure that kids are educated really well in terms of their online use, but also, of course, there are mental health concerns and there are so many social concerns. There are concerns around gender and sexuality, etc. One of the things you talk about is the importance of equipping parents and the importance of entering into classrooms. You've discussed that further here today.

One of the things that I'd love for you to touch on, if you're able to—and if not, that's okay—is to outline how social media channels are used by those who are wishing to lure, groom and exploit young people. What does that look like in terms of how social media is used to accomplish those ends?

Holly Wood: Absolutely.

That's a loaded question. There are a lot of different ways to look at it.

One of the biggest things that I look at is the fake profiles or fake accounts on Snapchat. Kids are getting friend requests from people they don't know. They're adding people they don't know. They're snapchatting with people they don't know. They assume that it's just someone from their community or someone whom someone else knows. That is having a deep effect on our children. They are conversing with a lot of strangers.

Then there's the comparison culture piece, where they're watching influencers on social media posting things, and they become popular because they have the most likes. There are so many things on social media that are terrifying our kids into this comparison culture and making it unsafe. They don't feel adequate, and exploiters and predators prey on that. I will follow up with a deeper explanation, but it's mostly that they create a sense of vulnerability, and human traffickers, exploiters and predators prey on that. They know exactly where to find it, based on a child's social media presence or profile.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you for that.

Ms. Holland, when you go into a school system and you teach this.... Of course, I understand that you teach different things at different grade levels. I would imagine there would be a grade level where this would be appropriate to talk about. I would hope that it's actually sooner rather than later. When you do that, what do you teach kids?

Naomi Holland: This conversation applies to all levels and, absolutely, it's always age-appropriate, but you have to start now.

They say that one of the first places where children are exposed to pornography is on the school bus. That means you have to be having conversations with children about what to do when they see a naked body. You don't have to tell them about pornography, and you don't have to tell them the stats, but do it before they get on the school bus, which is at five years old. Absolutely, you can have age-appropriate conversations at all ages, including with five- and six-year-olds. My emphasis would be spending as little time on screens as possible, playing outside and just getting together with friends.

We have to change the culture. We can't just accept that kids are going to have screens so therefore let's make sure we can limit and stuff. We absolutely have to change this culture. I think someday we're going to see giving a child a tablet as a form of child abuse, because you are already allowing technology to rewire their brain. At a young age, try to get them off the screen as much as possible, but also ask questions about what they're on, to get a sense of where they're at, and teach them red flags. Red flags are people who are too friendly, people you don't know who all of a sudden think you're amazing and want to know about what you like to do and what your favourite food is, and they want to know everything about you. Those are red flags. When they ask to move the conversation somewhere else, it's a red flag.

Kids are fantastic. They're not scared of all the things that we're scared about. They're hungry for knowledge. They're not getting the knowledge at home. They're not getting it at school. You do need advocates like us who can give them age-appropriate information in a way that doesn't make them fearful of the Internet but does make them rethink how much time they're spending on it. You can talk to them about dopamine as well. They need to know these things. They're already feeling it. They just don't have words for it. We need to help them understand what it is. The eyes cannot see what the brain does not know. We need to talk to them about their brain so that they can identify harmful behaviour when they're feeling it.

● (1755)

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Coulter, did you wish to speak to that?

Natalie Coulter: I would love to speak a little bit about the fact that while I think there have been a lot of really interesting things said, I agree exactly that young people are very smart. They're very excited. They want to know a lot.

Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I'm just going to hone in on my question. My question is, what is the path that is exploiting young people, luring them in and then ultimately resulting in their exploitation? How is that happening?

Natalie Coulter: I'm not exactly sure how it's happening, but I do think that we need to look at the technology itself, at the aspects of each individual platform and the affordances of the platform that allow these things to happen. I think leaving it to parents and even leaving it to kids themselves to circumvent these things is really problematic. I think every platform is designed a little bit differently, but there are a lot of pieces of the platforms themselves that allow for these sorts of things to happen, and I think we need to build.... The platforms were never designed with young people in mind. They were built for adults, and young people were never considered. We need to take a step back and think about how we can include young people in thinking about creating ways so that aspects of these platforms can be designed to meet their needs and keep them safe. We need to implement a lot of discussion with these different platforms and different companies, and they need to be included in part of our policy.

Rachael Thomas: It's safety by design.

Natalie Coulter: Safety by design, that's exactly what I'm trying to say, as well as including young people in those conversations of safety by design, because we're excluding them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Myles, you have the floor now for five minutes.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks, everybody, for this great conversation.

Like Martin, I am more concerned now than I was at the beginning of the study. I have two young kids at home. I'd love to hear some of the positive results. Let's start there. You did mention some of the educational programs that have happened and where they've happened, but we didn't really dig into whether there have been statistical results so we can look at those jurisdictions where this education has actually made a difference in terms of behaviour.

Matthew Johnson: We don't have results at the level of jurisdictions. That is one of the reasons why we need a national policy, so that we can establish benchmarks and so that we can more clearly establish what are the best practices. We do have evaluation data on some of our own programs where we've been able to establish how well they do in raising knowledge, raising efficacy and encouraging and making young people feel more confident that they know what to do if they are in a risky situation, or if they encounter inappropriate content or hate content online, to empower them to push back and improve the social norms of their communities.

We already talked about misinformation and disinformation, and we have significant data there. It's not on a jurisdiction level. It's not on a level that we can apply across the country or even across an individual province or territory.

David Myles: What about Finland, and what about England? That's what I meant by “jurisdictions”, the other countries that have been doing this for a long time. Are they giving us signs that those programs have led to more responsible use? Are there statistics that suggest that this has been effective?

Kathryn Ann Hill: Yes, Finland has some great data about resilience. In particular, they're focused on resilience to misinformation and disinformation, and that really has broad reach in terms of how we understand media, how we understand news and how we understand information. It's all about critical thinking. Finland has great data.

The U.K. is starting to collect some really good data. They're seeing some really good results in terms of the interventions they've identified and the best practices they've identified, and now they're starting to measure the impact of those. They are starting to see some good results.

A few other countries are in the process of starting to identify what the metrics are, because we have to set a baseline. We have to start to measure, and then we get to see the change. We want to know all those things to be sure that what we're measuring is real and we're not just saying, "Well, a lot of people feel this, or a lot of people feel that." We want to really have some rigour in our research.

In terms of looking for hope, we do a study called "Young Canadians in a Wireless World". We talked to 5,000 youth. We've been doing this for about 20 years, every five years or so. During the last iteration, we talked to young people about their experiences. They wonderfully answer over 100 questions for us. It's a fairly major study guided by ethics at the university. What they disclosed to us in the area of online harms, for example, was that the young people who are in families or with guardians who are engaged with them in their online use.... If they have a device, it's in the home or in the kitchen where the parents are. The parents aren't looking at everything they're doing on their screen, but it's just that it's open and there's a conversation about it. They were seeing something like 80% less harmful content. Some of them were seeing no harmful content.

From that, we were able to extrapolate that if children are in an environment where the adults are engaged with them around their technology use and where they're setting rules that are age-appropriate, appropriate for the maturity of those children, and they're having those conversations, it makes a huge difference in terms of prevention and experience.

● (1800)

Matthew Johnson: That same research showed us that when only technological strategies were being used to manage children's online experience, it was the opposite. They had more negative experiences and engaged in more risky behaviour when only things like surveillance software were being used.

David Myles: Would abstinence fall into that? Would age restrictions maybe fall into that? When people are rebelling, they're actually more likely...whereas if there's an educational.... The thing that I think we're all struggling with is.... We've identified that the algorithm doesn't have the wellness of our children in mind. We all agree, so now it's about how much exposure, how to expose and at what point. Is it a hard line or is it education? There is a little bit of difference among the witnesses we're hearing today. Some say that it's a hard line and not to touch it. Other people are....

Can you maybe just dig into that a little bit?

Matthew Johnson: There is definitely evidence that excessive restriction can backfire and that it pushes youth to take more risks. It takes away positive experiences and positive opportunities and replaces the education, either at the school or at the home level, that young people need.

Again, there's nothing magical about any age. There's no particular point where kids or adults magically become able to manage risks. They have to be given opportunities to make mistakes safely.

Our approach is very much influenced by the approach that's been taken to physical playgrounds over the last decade or so. The approach has changed from making playgrounds as safe as possible to making them as safe as necessary. The approach has changed from removing all possible risks to embracing appropriate risks for children while removing all of the hazards that children either are not ready to deal with or are simply not capable of dealing with because they're not aware of them.

David Myles: Am I done?

The Chair: You're out of time. I'm sorry.

That's a very good point, Mr. Johnson. I'm having flashbacks to the very dangerous playgrounds of my childhood. On the merry-go-round, you'd go flying up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bonin, welcome to the committee. You have the floor for five minutes.

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to join the committee today.

My first question is for the people from MediaSmarts.

With regard to radicalization, what are the indicators or signs, or even behaviours, that parents or teachers could detect in order to intervene? Have these already been categorized? Are there tools available to teachers, for example, to help them detect this more easily?

● (1805)

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: Radicalization is not always easy to detect in the early stages. Obviously, young people are more likely to give clear signs of having been radicalized, because they don't necessarily have the experience to be able to conceal it. As we've heard earlier from other witnesses, it has become, unfortunately, common for teachers and parents as well to hear things from young people, indicating they've begun the radicalization process.

Unfortunately, the way radicalization works is that it often begins in ways that are not obvious. It begins with content that is designed not to immediately shock, not to immediately offend, but to seem reasonable at first glance. This can begin a radicalization journey where young people, or anyone in the process of radicalization, are brought in gradually, both by the hate movements and also, frequently, by the algorithms to more and more extreme content.

We also know that radicalization does not happen equally with everyone. This is a seed that will only grow in fertile soil. There are ways of preparing people to recognize it, to resist it and to understand the reasons why these messages are untrue and harmful.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: I think you mentioned that some young people who use social media are in control and derive great satisfaction from it, while others who are more vulnerable will have difficulties.

What should be done in the case of those who are not in control and are more vulnerable? How can we tell if our own children are in control or not, for example? It's not easy to determine.

[*English*]

Matthew Johnson: This is one of the reasons why we strongly discourage the use of addiction framing, because it makes people feel less in control. It makes it feel as though they are powerless with regard to the device or the app. We embrace what most of the recent research has shown as a more effective framing, which is looking at it in terms of habits. When we become aware of our habits, we can take conscious steps to change them.

This is the basis of programs we've developed, including one recently that's being launched with School Mental Health Ontario. It helps people feel as though they can make a difference. It helps them reflect on their usage, helps them identify what is working and what is not working about their current usage, and helps them take concrete steps to change it.

We do know that the impact of feeling in control or feeling out of control has a positive or a negative effect regardless of how much time people are actually spending or any other impacts it has. Even if you are not spending much time online, even if there are no other negative impacts of your online use, feeling like it's out of your control will have a negative impact on you.

The Chair: Mr. Diotte, it's your turn for five minutes.

Kerry Diotte: Thank you so much.

I'll go back to Ms. Holland.

Everybody in this room would agree that children seem to spend way too much time on social media. Can you recap what we could do as federal regulators, or politicians, to wean them off or educate them? What can we do? We did talk about the fact that it's a provincial matter in schools and so forth. What do you see in terms of regulating that? What could we actually do?

Naomi Holland: I think it would be interesting to track what happens in Australia. They just implemented a minimum age of 16 for social media. I think following that country to see what happens there would be really good.

We have to recognize that tech companies are after our youth. That is a huge market. They are profit-driven, so they do not have their best interest in mind. I see that MediaSmarts—that is, if I was on the right website and had the right link—is funded by Meta, TikTok and YouTube. I think that should be noted as well. The tech companies have a motive here. They are after our children.

I think there should be limits. I think too many parents are giving kids screens just hoping they will stay quiet for a few minutes. In reality, they'll stay quiet for 10 or 12 hours. It is not good for children's brains. We're not trying to control and limit everything and ruin childhood. We're trying to buy their brains time to develop without the quick, fast dopamine and without being exposed to algorithms and sexual content. Even some of their cartoons are programmed in such a way that it's releasing dopamine. Their brains are getting rewired.

To focus on your question, I think it's so important that there is legislation in place that doesn't put all the pressure on parents. There has to be something. It is no different from cigarettes. It is no different from alcohol. There have to be some limitations. It is no different from seat belts. We need some seat belts on social media and tech and children's access to it. Kids are getting too much access to it. There are links directly to porn sites. Our kids are being exposed to very harsh content at a very young age without knowing what to do or how to handle it. Parents can't be the ones who are blamed for their exposure. We need some structures in place. We need some boundaries. We need some limits. Tech companies need to be held accountable. Right now they have no accountability and no incentive to make their programs any safer.

In a Time magazine article that came out just three days ago, the former head of safety at Instagram says that Instagram has a 17-strike policy. Accounts have to be flagged 17 times for sex trafficking in order for it to be removed. They know that this harms and that they're not implementing the proper safety features in order to keep their young users safe. I think we have to recognize that and call it out.

● (1810)

Kerry Diotte: Thank you.

Ms. Hill and Mr. Johnson, I'll ask you the same question: Basically, what can we do? I've talked before about how we don't want to over-regulate and tell parents what to do. Logically, how do we make legislation that would help children?

Matthew Johnson: I think the most important thing is to make sure we are working from good-quality evidence. I think the line to be walked between over-regulation and under-regulation is the line that is identified for us by the people who are experts in the field. That's the people who are doing research on the various impacts, which is much more complex than a lot of the popular books and a lot of the popular speakers would suggest. We are still identifying what the different elements of social media are that can have better or worse impacts. How are the impacts different for different people? How are they different at different ages? How do they interact with how young people and others use these tools?

I don't think we can easily say that there is a single line. I think what is absolutely most important is that when that line is drawn, and we are certainly not opposed to drawing a line with regulation, that line must be informed by genuine scientific research.

Kathryn Ann Hill: On the particular question of how we do that as a family or how we do that in our homes in practical ways, we have lots of resources around that. As I think all the speakers have agreed, it's no devices in the bedroom and no devices alone for young people. It's contracts within the family, about when and how we're going to use these devices, that we all agree to and we all follow. It's talking about digital well-being. What does balance look like? What do the habits we're worried about look like? How are we going to replace those with more healthy things?

We want kids to be outside playing. We want them to be engaging in life. We want this just to be part of their lives as a technology and a tool that they have to learn how to use in order to survive in our world and be successful adults. There are lots of resources around that.

I would highlight that there are—

● (1815)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're out of time for that question.

Actually, I want to interject, with my chair's prerogative, to ask a quick question. In particular, Ms. Holland, a lot of your testimony reminded me.... I was at the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations earlier this year, and I was in a room full of legislators from all around the world. I don't think there is a country that has solved this problem or is on top of it, but in fact the concern was just palpable in the room. Children and young people all around the world are now seeing a rise in physical ailments because they're so exposed to pornography at a young age that they don't know how to have healthy sexual relationships, and so, physically, we are seeing these ailments grow all around the world.

Ms. Holland, can you just quickly comment on that, please?

Naomi Holland: Do you mean the physical ailments? Yes, I think part of what we're seeing with kids is that they're spending so much time in the virtual world that they don't know how to be in the real world. I mean, try to have a conversation with one or look them in the eye. We're not doing them any favours by allowing them to have so much access to their screens. Not only is the content harmful, but just the behaviour of it is not helpful, and so we are setting kids up for failure. So many boys now are dropping out of college and university. They go there, they're launched and the parents think, “Oh, this is great. They're going off to college.” What do they do? They're back in a couple of months because they cannot get off their devices. They're watching porn or they're video gaming all night. They're failing their classes, dropping out of school and moving back home. There are long-term ramifications here.

If we are serious about the future of our children and our generation, we have to.... First of all, delay is the way. We have to delay access. We know these devices are addictive, and so let's not try to limit here and there. They are highly addictive. Can we just give children a childhood that they don't have to recover from? Then, we're buying them time. When their brain is a little more developed, they will have to make the hard choices and figure out their own time limits and schedules. That will come, but while they're in our home and while their brains are developing, can we protect their brains and give them a healthy, normal childhood, as close to ours as possible? That's going to help them socially. It's going to help them in their future, and it's going to help them be better parents. We do not want screen-addicted parents raising our grandchildren.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Carolo, do you have thoughts on that question as well?

Humberto Carolo: I do. I would start by reminding all of us of the reasons that young people are accessing these platforms and social media. They're looking for support, for belonging and to figure themselves out because they're not able to do that in real life, in communities. We've seen the contraction of community-based programming and mental health supports for youth, and we've seen the impact this has had on young people's access to those supports.

I think this is an area where government can make a difference as well, by investing in those supports at the community level so that young people who need the support, who are feeling vulnerable and looking for belonging, friends and social engagement, are able to do that in person, in communities. We can't just take away the only source of support and connection for so many young people. Taking away phones and restricting access to social media are not the answers here. We need to invest in those community-based programs. Government has an opportunity to make a difference there.

I would also say that, just as we do for the environment, there needs to be a stronger code of conduct for technology companies, a social licence to operate. We are dealing with these problems after they cause harm. Why aren't we looking at how to create technology in a safer, inclusive and non-harmful way from the get-go? Why aren't we putting in place some of those checks and balances as new technology and platforms are being developed? We have to do a better job at that. I think government can also incentivize tech companies and platforms to work together with organizations, like these around the table today, to create the education, the prevention, the accountability and the policies. We are the experts. We know how to do this work on the front lines. Those companies should be working together with us and supporting our organizations in doing that kind of work so that young people don't continue to be exposed to these harms.

These are some key areas in which government could be making a difference.

● (1820)

The Chair: You mean all governments everywhere, right?

Mr. Myles, I'm sorry to have taken some time away. You have the floor now for five minutes.

David Myles: No, those were great questions.

I think we'll just continue on this line of questioning a little bit. I'll go right back to Mr. Carolo.

I just wonder, speaking of regulating tech companies, if you see a possibility of our being able to look under the hood of the algorithm, in a sense. That feels pretty darned tricky. This is what I'm struggling with. The algorithm itself is the problem, in many ways, because of what it responds to, and, again, it doesn't have the wellness of our kids in place. How do we manoeuvre in this system if we're not able to actually get under the hood and say, “Wait, we can't have this type of thing”? I agree that at some point we do have to reckon with this, but what is the right age to reckon with it? It's a really interesting conversation.

Humberto Carolo: I think we should turn this around and talk about the benefits of addressing these issues from a different perspective. We need to look at the tech industry as partners—with government, with educators, with organizations like ours—to prevent these kinds of harms from happening in the first place.

Yes, if that means reviewing how algorithms are being rolled out, how they're being created and how AI is being created now, and doing this right from the get-go, it benefits everybody. This is about calling in the tech industry to be good partners with us, and for us to work on these solutions together.

We need to start when they're young, yes, absolutely—I can't emphasize that enough. We talk to our young people about crossing the road safely, about riding a bicycle in good ways, about not talking to strangers. Let's talk about digital safety and citizenship in age-appropriate ways as early as possible, even before we start thinking about giving our kids telephones. Taking away phones, mobiles and access to technology is not the answer.

David Myles: Thank you, Mr. Carolo.

I'm going to share my time with MP Royer.

[*Translation*]

Zoe Royer: Thank you.

[*English*]

My question is for Ms. Wood.

You said that K-to-12 education is a provincial issue, but protecting children is a national one. I think there are places where this intersects with our government's initiative to try to make the national school food program permanent. That is in K to 12, and it is a huge benefit for families living in our communities.

I am certain that you are aware of our government's attempts to bring about Bill C-63, the online harms act. Based on your expertise, what part of that act do you find most aligned with what you believe is needed to actually protect young people?

Holly Wood: I've actually been following all of the legislation in Parliament. That has fizzled out since the most recent election.

I would love to provide a written explanation of that. I think the overwhelming message is that the stranger on the playground is no longer as dangerous as the one in our kids' pockets. When we look at online harms, we see that harm can be many things to many people. Maybe that's why it's so hard to sit there and try to put it on paper, and take it from paper to policy.

However, I would love to follow up with a written description of all the things I agree with and, more specifically, maybe things that aren't in there—suggestions for the future.

Zoe Royer: Yes, I think it would be amazing if you follow up with an online submission.

I also wanted to ask very briefly about government-issued digital ID for authentication of profiles and all of that. Do you think that would really help prevent parasocial relationships and reduce fake profiles online?

Holly Wood: It will, if it's done properly. I understand that privacy is of utmost concern, but I think we're in a very advanced technological era where it is possible, and it is possible without taking the most information out of people.

The fact of the matter is that we have our whole lives on our phones already. I would argue, what could we take, safely and securely, from what people have on their phones, to turn it into a digital ID, that they haven't already given the online world?

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Zoe Royer: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will follow up on Ms. Wood's offer to give us some more testimony by email, and I will ask all witnesses: If there's something that you think of later or if there's more information that you wish you had been able to get across, please email it to our clerk. We can include that information when we consider the final report for this study.

I want to thank you all very much for your participation in this rather disturbing but very fascinating study today.

I just want to mention to members quickly that we have a lot of witnesses we have not yet invited to this study. One of them is the Canadian Medical Association. Is there an appetite among members to extend this study into the new year? Shall we wait for Mr. Champoux to come back to have that conversation?

We'll bring it up again at our next meeting, but maybe just think among yourselves if it's worth doing a couple of extra meetings on this topic. I think it's really necessary, honestly.

Thank you all again for your time. I consider this meeting adjourned.