

Nothing is Private

New study finds that forty to sixty percent of 16-18 year olds participate in sexual activity online.

By karenschenk | Posted March 1, 2013 | Langley, British Columbia



My daughter was only 12 when she came to me said, "A boy texted me and is asking me to take off some of my clothes, do something flexible and send him a picture. What do I do?" We praised her for coming to us, called the boy's horrified parents and began a whole new outlook on teens and cell phone usage. Initially I thought it was an isolated incident, but it's not.

Simon Fraser University graduate Tatiana Buhler just completed a study on teen use of video cameras. Her findings were shocking. Forty to sixty percent of 16-18 year olds participate in sexual activity online. Many of the encounters start out privately but they can become public very quickly. The teens who engage in this behavior typically do so to be accepted, however they often find themselves to be the victim of their photos when they are sent to their classmates. The devastating effects of this kind of exposure cannot be overstated.

Amanda Todd, a teen from British Columbia, Canada, committed suicide on October 10, 2012 as a result of her experience being cyber bullied. Her death received national media attention. As the publicity increased, the bullying continued on her Facebook memorial pages. Family and friends helped clear out the hateful comments as people blamed her for causing her own demise. Just this week Buhler's paper was presented at the 16th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW2013). The paper, "How and Why Teenagers Use Video Chat", was written by T. Buhler, C. Neustaedter and S. Hillman.

As part of her presentation, Buhler worked with TruthMedia Films to create a short film that highlights the unintended consequences of being intimate online. The short film, "Nothing is Private" (<http://youtu.be/d179zMHCWt0>) has already been watched by people all over North America. Youth are unaware of the impact of their choices. It's not too late to help. The pressure to disrobe online and put those images into the hands of people who are also seeking attention can have devastating results for a lifetime. TruthMedia Films offers online mentoring for teens dealing with pressure to participate or the results of sharing these images online. Amanda Todd was not alone. She was one of 40 - 60% of teens who simply wanted to be accepted. Let's protect our youth.

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