

TECHONOMY NYC

LUNCH SESSION: Are We Addicted to Smartphones? Do You Really Have to Ask?

Speakers:

Charles Penner, Partner, Jana Partners

Catherine Steiner-Adair, Author and Clinical & Consulting Psychologist

Manoush Zomorodi, Host, Note to Self, WNYC Studios

Moderator:

Stephen Balkam, CEO, Family Online Safety Institute

(Transcription by [RA Fisher Ink](#))

Kirkpatrick: I'm going to talk even louder than I usually do, so people in the lobby will know to come in to this excellent session that's about to begin, which may be the most personal session, except maybe the morning meditation.

But Stephen Balkam, who has worked with us at Techonomy before and has written about things related to this for us, he is the CEO of the Family Online Safety Institute, and an expert in how we use our devices and did a whole thing for us about when Barbie listens to you. I remember that one was good. It's creepy, yes. But now we're going to talk about what we all are confronted with, which is our bizarrely altered behavior with our devices. There's a great panel here, which I'll let Stephen introduce, but we're very excited about this discussion, which will call for all of you to respond. So please do. Thank you, Stephen.

Balkam: Thank you very much, David. Good afternoon, welcome to lunch, and we're the lunchtime entertainment, I believe. [LAUGHTER] I know that you're eating. I would ask, once you've taken your pictures and tweeted out that you put your devices on shush mode. I don't know if anybody saw the Google developers' conference yesterday, but there is now a thing called shush mode, on it. It's a technical term, I know. But basically, when you turn your Android phone over it goes into 'Do not disturb.' So we can all pretend, okay, that we have the new Android phones, and please do that. That would be great.

As David said, I'm the CEO of the Family Online Safety Institute. We're an international nonprofit. Our mission is to make the online world safer for kids and their families. We have over two dozen company members from Amazon to Yahoo, in the alphabet, if you will,

Facebook, Google, Microsoft. Interestingly enough, Mattel just joined and we were just talking about Barbie. Toy companies are now in this business. They are cognitizing their toys. So it's all very interesting. We work in the three P's of policies, practices, and parenting. So we work on public policy, we work on the Hill and I was at the White House, believe or not, on Monday, with the First Lady's new initiative called #BeBest. Not the best grammatical hashtag, but there we are. We also work with the industry on their best practices, try to improve their safety features. And we have something called Good Digital Parenting, which we might talk about in a bit.

My preference is not so much to introduce these wonderful people, but to ask them to introduce themselves, so you hear from them directly. Also, this panel's going to be a little different. We are going to break at about halfway through, and we're going to come to you, because you have questions on your table to answer. And we're going to respond to your responses, if you see what I mean.

So, Catherine, could you start by introducing yourself?

Steiner-Adair: Thank you. My name is Catherine Steiner-Adair and I wrote a book called, *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*. It came out in 2013. I have been on the road nonstop since. To write that book I interviewed 1,000 kids between the ages of 4 and 18, 250 18 to 30-year-olds, 500 parents, and 500 teachers. Since then I've interviewed thousands more. My work is with kids, teachers, policymakers, C-level folks, people who are trying to figure out the best ways to maintain healthy relationships in the digital age, and grow healthy brains.

But I will say that I came to this not as a researcher at Harvard Med School, I came to this because in 1998 my 13-year-old son had just had his bar mitzvah; we were driving to his school in Cambridge. There was an announcement on the radio; the first 98 people outside a hall at MIT would get Windows 98 for \$98 dollars. He said, "Mom, I'm doing that." I said, "How?" He said, "You and Daddy will sleep on Mass Ave and keep me company." And so we did. And that began for my son a true love relationship with technology; he works in the gaming industry. And began for me, a nightmare. [LAUGHTER]

I have a love/hate relationship with technology. I love the way in which it's wonderful, for education, for medicine, for all the good things. But it began my own personal interest in how to raise a gifted gamer and not get them addicted to technology. How not to disconnect from his soul and his little psyche and his adorable spirit, and it was really hard. And half the time, I would say, I was a banshee. "Get off that thing!" And freaking out, because I'm also trained as a developmental psychologist. I could tell something was going on and about two days out of seven, I would be like, "Oh wow, you're so good at this. This is great." So I wanted to write a book to help folks understand what this research is about, especially now since there's a *lot* of research and it's really hard to listen to.

Balkam: Wow. Thank you. Not to disconnect from our souls. I think that's a phrase I'll remember. And speaking of teachers, it's Teacher Appreciation Day. Did you know that?

Steiner-Adair: Well, that is perfect timing.

Balkam: Check out the hashtag #TeacherAppreciationDay, there's some wonderful—a lot of celebs of course, but a lot of folks appreciating their teachers from way, way back. Charlie.

Penner: My name is Charlie Penner, I'm a partner at a hedge fund in New York called Jana Partners. We traditionally have done typical shareholder activism, which is getting companies to make changes either to the corporate structure or leadership, balance sheet, things like that. We recently launched a socially responsible, or ESG-impact investing fund, where we will be pushing companies to generate greater long-term value by following more sustainable business practices.

The reason I'm sitting here is because our first campaign was directed at Apple, which was to get them to update their parental controls for the first time in about 10 years, to make them more responsive to the research that people like Catherine have done, showing that they need to be more dynamic and kind of front and center. And similar to Catherine, you know, the goal is really to prevent parents from having to be banshees, but to have technology that assists them in doing their jobs. They still have to do their jobs, but to make it more possible for them to do it. So that's why I'm sitting here.

Balkam: Thank you. And Manoush?

Zomorodi: Okay, hey, I wrote a book called, *Bored and Brilliant*, that came out in September. It's about how disconnecting with your phone can actually be really great for your creativity. No surprise. But there was more to it than that. It was about—I was interested in what you said, Catherine. So my son was born the same month as the iPhone. And it really chronicled my journey of realizing that the first couple of years that I didn't have a smartphone, I was actually incredibly creative. And the minute I got a smartphone, it was great, because I could be a working mom; I could go back to work and like coordinate seven people's calendars. But I realized that all the little moments in my day, when I used to be doing my deeper thinking, were now commandeered by my phone.

So I took that sort of crazy experience, or unsettling experience, which is what the book is based on, and I did an experiment with 50,000 of my listeners. I hosted a podcast called Note to Self at WNYC Studios. And we spent a week sort of rethinking how we used our phones, seeing if we could be bored more often, and then trying to quantify what the results were. And this was in 2015, and it's hard to believe it was not that long ago, but at the time, there was really not that much research on how people were changing their habits, and so it was really fascinating to me to get calls from MIT and Stanford and all kinds of other places, who wanted to use the sort of results—semi-scientific results, I should add—that we discovered working with tens of thousands of people. So we're in Sherry Turkle's book at MIT. So that sort of became

my thing, which is experimenting with people, and with a podcast, you can do that. You can get—we did another one on digital privacy. Marc Rotenberg is here; he was an advisor on that. So really getting tens of thousands of people to really dive into some of these issues that are affecting their daily lives, that they don't totally understand, that don't have names, entirely either, and then rethinking how they sort of use their devices. And for the better.

So I just left WNYC, so it's really weird to see my new company's name up on the slide. It's very exciting. Because of the success that we saw with our podcast at WNYC, my executive producer and I have founded a company where we're going to be making media specifically about some of the issues that we're talking here. Also a lot of other issues like how do we save journalism? Rebuild trust in media? Make sure that women are more fairly represented in tech?

Balkam: Wow.

Steiner-Adair: Great. [APPLAUSE]

Zomorodi: Yay! Thank you. I needed you. Startups are hard.

Balkam: If you have any existential issues, please see Manoush afterwards.

Zomorodi: Totally.

Balkam: She will make a podcast. We should also declare, you're a father of three?

Penner: Yeah.

Balkam: And they're aged?

Penner: Six, four, and two.

Balkam: And full disclosure, I have a 32-year-old, who couldn't really give a whatever about social media. I have a 22-year-old who pretty much majored in Facebook at high school. [LAUGHTER] She's graduating in two weeks time from the University of Maryland, has already done a social media job last year and got paid for it. So all of that high school work actually has come to fruition. [LAUGHTER]

Let's have a show of hands, or maybe a show of thumbs, how many of you would describe yourself as addicted to your phone or technology? Okay, thank you for that. So let me start by attacking the premise—sorry, the title of our thing here, and ask the panel about the word 'addiction.' So in this country, at least, addiction has a very defined medical and legal terminology. And in fact, according to the DSM-5, for those of you who don't know this acronym, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, tech addiction, phone addiction, internet addiction, does not exist, at least in this country. You can be addicted to substances like heroin and cocaine and various things like that. You can actually be addicted to a behavior that is gambling. That they accept. But they don't accept that. Now, where do you stand on this? Where do you feel about the 'A' word—what do you feel? Let's go down the line here.

Steiner-Adair: Well, you know, there are seven countries that not only have identified tech addiction but have developed very thoughtful public campaigns. China has over 300 therapeutic programs from children who are addicted to technology between the ages of 4 and 18. France just eliminated smartphones from schools for children 15 and under, because they are really paying attention to the research, that even if your phone is on 'shush,' just having a phone on your desk will undermine learning.

So I guess my question about addiction is who benefits, in America, from us not labelling it an addiction? If it's not labelled an addiction, you can't get therapy. If it's not labelled an addiction, then teachers aren't as prepared and well-trained about how not to keep kids mindlessly on screens all day. And if it's not labelled an addiction, we don't have to pay as much attention to the real fallout of the fact that by high school, most kids are majoring in Facebook. They are texting nonstop during the day, getting dopamine hits all day. So I would say in my own private practice, I have seen people meet the criteria for addiction. I have seen kids, I have seen grown-ups, I have seen wonderful families really struggling, because—you know, some folks like you. They are C-level; they are working really hard; they are working foreign markets. How do you stay connected to yourself? How do you stay connected to your family?

I think tech addiction is real. I think, also, it's very important to have differentiated language. We talk about alcohol dependency. How many of you take your phone into the bathroom with you? [LAUGHTER] Okay, so that's not a sign of addiction, but it is a sign of psychological dependency on your phone. You know, you don't need your phone to pee. And it's not the best place for phones.

Balkam: No.

Steiner-Adair: How many of you have phantom ring syndrome?

Zomorodi: Oh yeah, totally.

Steiner-Adair: So you know, one of the things about this is these devices are such powerful neurological stimulants to our brains, and that everybody's brain is going to interact differently. Some people are more vulnerable to addiction. One thing we know about people who do get diagnosed, or would be diagnosed if we could do it with addiction, often have underlying other comorbidities like anxiety or depression or OCD or social anxiety or ADD or ADHD.

I guess the other question I would say around addiction is given how many folks in the room raised their hand, do you think you're addicted? What are we doing giving these devices that we either in a vernacular term, or seriously call something we're addicted to, why are we given them to two-year-olds? Right?

Balkam: Hmm. Charlie, jump in on this one.

Penner: So this is just an idiot's opinion. I don't have the training that Catherine does, but I would tend to agree just based on what I have learned since doing this. You know, if you look

at the things that qualify—and I also agree that things maybe one day will be regulated by the government or covered by the DSM, but that’s not kind of a current take on things. They tend to be trailing. But you know, for the kind of criteria for addiction, does it meet a psychological need? Yeah. Can you want it without liking it? Yes. [LAUGHTER] Well no, it’s true. I mean, the want center of your brain and the like center of your brain are different. Your like is very fickle, your want is very fixed. Quite frankly, the people who invented a lot of this stuff think it was designed to be addictive. The person who invented the ‘like’ button, the person who invented the ‘pull to refresh’ feature, which you don’t need to do. Your phone can refresh without doing that, but it gives you the kind of variable reward. So I think it’s probably yes.

I think the bigger issue, though, is that it doesn’t, I think, matter that much. The things that we identified in our letter, which, to be clear, we did not blame Apple for. I think the smartphone is a conduit for a lot of things, which even Tim Cook has said he thinks are not healthy. And I think they are a very responsible company and will work to address it, but you know, the things we complained about in terms of, you know, increased feelings of loneliness or depression or suicide risk factors or sleep deprivation, things that, you know, Catherine has really spent her career helping people with, it doesn’t really matter if you’re technically addicted or not. They’re standalone kind of bad things.

I think the second reason it doesn’t matter is I think it puts too much emphasis on the individual. I’m not addicted to Facebook; I never have used Facebook, but I feel like it’s negatively impacted my life. And I guess the other thing I would say is, you know, when you start just phrasing it as addiction and you’re lumping it in with the category of things like, you know, hard drugs or things like that, where moderation is very difficult, I agree moderation is difficult now, but I do think, and this was kind of the thesis of our campaign, was there are tools that can be created to help with moderation. If you’re checking Facebook a few times a day and making plans with friends and doing whatever it is people do on Facebook, probably not a problem. If you’re checking—you know, if you’re on it six, seven hours a day, and it’s the source of all your news, you know, it probably is. So to me, it’s an important question, but in some ways I think it’s kind of become a canard and in some ways a distraction. It’s kind of like, I don’t know if Trump was on the phone with Putin or not, but I’ve seen enough to know there’s an issue. [LAUGHTER] I think it’s the same type of thing.

Balkam: There’s definitely an issue. Manoush?

Zomorodi: Well, as a journalist I have to be extremely careful about what words I use. I was the person who went on NPR to talk about when your company was pushing against Apple, sent the letter, so I have to get it right. It was interesting when we did the original sort of survey of our thousands of listeners, you know, why are you doing this? Why are you giving us your life for a week and going to mess with your habits? And those with addiction said, “I feel addicted,” was the number one thing that they said.

However, I have come to believe that addiction is a cop-out word, in many ways. Because it takes away the power of the person using the stuff. This thing has control over me, and I have

to figure out how to live with it. Whereas for me, what I've really tried to do with my listeners, is to find solutions and so what we would do every day was try one sort of behavior tweak, to mess with it, to mess with that addiction or whatever you want to call it. So that could be as simple as trying, whenever you're in transit, not to have your phone in your hand. So just starting to notice little things, like our physical dependency, as you mentioned, Catherine, how often do you take it with you to the bathroom? Just like acknowledging that that's the case. And then trying not to do it and then seeing if you feel different or better. And so we saw a lot of interesting results, with people simply being more physically and psychologically aware of their habits.

Penner: Can I just make one very quick follow-on point to that? So there's a psychologist at the University of Michigan, Kent Berridge, who Adam Alter at NYU told me about, and he did a whole kind of paper on this question of is it a disease? Or is it a willpower issue? And he made it based on disabling the dopamine centers in rats and stuff, like really kind of hard research. And he agrees with you, you probably already know this, totally, which is that it's not an either/or. It can be both a disease, but that doesn't deprive you of your ability to deal with it.

Zomorodi: Because I think that worries me too, that like if we say that it's addictive, like nobody's going to take on Jim Beam, right? You know what I mean? But if we put the tech companies in the same categories, that takes away the power of the consumer, to me, to say like, "Wait, wait, wait. This isn't set in stone." Like there's only one way to make bourbon, right? Like we're all, we're at this crucial moment in history where we are deciding what the cultural norms are around all of our devices, and consumers should have a voice in that. And the shareholders should be using their voice in that. And so we need to tell people, it's not like, this is not just how it is. Yes, your phone comes with preset apps. But you can take them off, do you know what I mean?

Steiner-Adair: Yeah.

Zomorodi: I think a lot of people don't even realize that.

Balkam: Right. Oh, go ahead.

Steiner-Adair: Well you know, I think one of the things that's so hard is that, as with all addictions, or many addictions, like alcohol, you can drink very responsibly, you can use your cellphone very responsibly. The problem is that never before has there been a form of technology that our entire lives truly are intertwined with. And what's very interesting to me, is to just track, or listen to the kids I interviewed, their complaints about us as grown-ups and how addicted—you know, about 50 percent of kids will say their parents are addicted to smartphones. And we have developed such awful new cultural norms since these devices have come out, the thing that kids, beginning around age six, they say, "I hate the words, 'Just checking,' because my mom and my dad, they're always just checking." [LAUGHTER]

And you know, when you think about it, as I listened to 1,000 kids say this, we are justifying checking out on our kids. We ask them a question, "Oh honey, how was school? Oh wait, one sec. I just have to check my phone." We expect little people or big people or each other to stand frozen and time and space while we go into a conversation with someone who's not even in the room, as if this is normal. And so, in some ways, we're just the rat-in-the-cage stage of this, you know, because we hear the ping, we hear the thing. We want it, we crave it, and we know that as a species, our brains interact very differently with these fully loaded computers that we mistakenly call phones, because that minimizes the impact, neurologically and socially about how the impact us. And we have to also reboot and rethink, are we being the best role models for our kids? And as folks here who run corporations, what are your standards? When is it possible for someone who works for you to get off, be home, not have to be constantly worrying 24/7, which feeds the feeling, at least, of being addicted? So I think there's a lot about this—

Balkam: Yes. It's the number one thing kids are now telling us, when we work in schools. "I went to cuddle with my mom on the couch the other day, but she wouldn't put her laptop down."

Steiner-Adair: Right. Sad.

Balkam: So that's kids complaining about her parents.

You know, so speaking about a moment that we're in, I mean, Zuckerberg himself is now talking about 'time well spent,' and keeping people safe while they keep building. Yesterday, actually Shawn, if you could throw that screenshot up. So this is what Google produced yesterday after their developers' conference. And they have a lot of new tools to hope for us to get together and be a little bit more responsible with our tech use. "Great technology should improve life, not distract from it." Team, what do we think about that as a slogan from, of all companies, Google? Charlie, do you want to say?

Penner: I think the sentiment is fantastic. I think that it is also good business sense. You know, I mentioned before that the want center and the like centers are different and I think that over time, though, people with willpower, the want follows the like out the door. So I think it's smart if you want to have kind of a long-term business model. I think it's particularly interesting, you know, Google's business model is largely ad-supported. So in some ways it's actually, at least in the short term, counter to their own corporate kind of self-interest. I haven't dug into all the details exactly. I know you can like turn your phone upside down and it goes into sleep mode, and stuff like that, but I certainly, as a sentiment, it's great.

Balkam: Manoush?

Zomorodi: Yeah, I'm down with it. I think that sentence is actually in my book. But [LAUGHTER]—

Balkam: Okay.

Zomorodi: That's fine. No, like that's the purpose, right?

Balkam: Is there a lawyer in the room?

Zomorodi: To get it be more sort of mainstream. [LAUGHS] Charlie and I will talk afterwards.

Balkam: Right.

Zomorodi: But meanwhile, yes, absolutely, and I don't think they should be doing it out of the goodness of their heart. They should be doing it for their bottom line. Because we're at that point, finally. Thank you, Cambridge Analytica, for making it very clear, like when mainstream America actually knows why it's free to be on Facebook; that's a huge turning point. If you had told me a year ago, that Mark Zuckerberg would be testifying on Capitol Hill, I would be like [LAUGHS]. "No, I dreamt that last night. No, it was real!" And I mean, I have to say, we've got a long way to go.

I was at a very small conference last week that he actually came to speak to, of newsmakers, media executives, and he went on the record. But it was clear that he doesn't entirely understand what journalism is, which worried me. And I don't—I think, "Okay, this is a starting point." But all of these things, as Catherine has explained, are—it's very interdisciplinary. What you're talking about are cultural norms, what you're talking about are the history, you're talking about the design of all of this. And the teachers that I speak to, because I talk to a *lot* of teachers, somebody always says to me, like, "So is it the computer science teacher who wants to talk to you?" I'm like, "No, it's the computer science teacher, it's the religion teacher, it's the biology teacher, it's the English lit teacher, it's the history teacher. It's a type of person, who is watching their students and thinking, 'I need to teach differently because I have these tools in the classroom. I need to be teaching eye contact and patiently having conversations. Because they know how to use the screens. That they know. It's the other stuff that I need to now make more prevalent in the classroom.'"

Balkam: Talk about what teachers tell you.

Steiner-Adair: Oh. Well, teachers tell me they can tell very early on which five-, six-, seven-year-olds play on screens a lot at home and which don't. They certainly say they've seen, across the board, whether it's 5 to 18, a decrease in really critical things for learning and creativity like patience. Because you can't just hit reboot, restart, when you have to learn to do deep thinking. The ability for singular attention, which is so important for innovation. Gone. Multitasking, texting, on three screens doing homework. The ability to play well with others. The ability to calm oneself down, self-regulation. You know, learning is slow, it's hard, it's frustrating. And you hand a four-year-old, a two-year-old, a six-year-old, you know, Candy Crush to play with when they're frustrated, which now we see over and over, everywhere. And we are giving kids of stimulants instead of teaching them to calm down. "I know this is boring, honey. I know it's a long line. Let's play 'I spy with my little eye.' Oh here, have a little Candy Crush." Boing. Right? So this is showing up. Kindergarten teachers tell me, "I need to bring

buckets of glitter to school, because every time somebody matches lowercase a to uppercase A on an iPad you get butterflies. You get sparkles,” which is a hit neurologically.

So yeah, I think that in a lot of the schools I’m working in, which tend to be private schools, because they have freedom to address some of this stuff—I’m in some good public schools—but it’s really about rethinking the core. What are the tools students need today to thrive and become their smartest selves in the digital age? And I think there’s a whole new core curriculum that needs to be in there—

Zomorodi: *Totally* agree with you.

Steiner-Adair: —empathy. [APPLAUSE]

Zomorodi: Absolutely. Yeah.

Steiner-Adair: You know, moral character. Ethics.

Zomorodi: It’s a great, I mean, business opportunity, frankly. I mean, it’s part of the reason why I’m taking it. [LAUGHTER] But like, there are no curricula for this sort of stuff. I mean, Common—what am I thinking of? Common Cause has a very small, three to five grade curriculum. But it’s tiny. And so those are—like that’s who I hear from the most, is teachers saying that they’re taking our podcasts, turning them into curriculum, adding books where they need to, and really using that. Which is great. That’s what public radio is for, right? So I think it’s part of the public good. And there’s just not a—you know, I feel for, as a parent of public school kids, like they have a lot of other big issues that they’re dealing with—

Steiner-Adair: They sure do.

Balkam: Yes.

Zomorodi: So like I get it. And our librarian is *awesome*. But when I’m the person sort of talking to the school librarian about what changes he can make, that makes me—I can’t—you know, that’s not good.

Balkam: Okay, all right, I’m going to come to you guys now. And actually, I know that the right-hand side of the room had one question and the guys on the left, you guys had a different question. I’m going to ask you all a question, though, first of all: how many of you use your phone as an alarm clock? Oh! Ow! Okay, so this is a question I ask at the PTA meetings, particularly for parents with young kids. And the number one thing I tell them to do is not to do that. And the reason is, what’s the last thing you’re going to look at night, before you go to sleep? What’s the first thing you’re going to look at, when you wake up? And you be will like our Commander in Chief, by the way, who props himself up on his pillow at around 6:00 in the morning to text, before—I don’t know if he brushes his teeth—

Zomorodi: That’s a horrifying image. Why did you [LAUGHTER]?

Balkam: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. [LAUGHTER] Just trying to be topical.

Zomorodi: Okay, okay.

Balkam: That's okay. So yeah, and also, if you have young kids, what do young kids love to do? They love to run into your bedroom and jump on your bed. And they'll see that blue haze on your face, and they'll want it. Kids will do what you do, and not what you tell them to do, by the way. Just putting that out there.

Okay, so folks on the right-hand side, do you have specific techniques you use to keep your own use of your smartphone in check? Yes! We have a microphone coming your way.

Kelen: Hi, I'm Tanya Kelen from Promena VR and we are developing new tools in virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality for kids and families. And we're doing a lot of what you're discussing. So yes, my big tool for not using my cellphone when I know I have these problems, is leaving it in another room when I'm working. Or when I want to really sleep deeply, I have to stay from my phone for several hours.

Balkam: Great. Excellent answer. In fact, that's something we say to folks in the PTA meeting, is have a closet, where everybody locks their phones, including mom and dad, at night. It got so bad with our daughter when she was a teenager, that we actually—we took the router to bed with us at night. [LAUGHTER] Which worked for a while, but then she hacked into the next-door neighbor's router. Because she used to babysit for them, so of course you give the router details to your babysitter. Yeah, a hand right there.

Audience 1: Hi, we actually solved the problem by not having a TV at home in the beginning, so our daughter had to learn to read early and she still prefers to read it on paper, rather than on her iPad, which she uses for school and Chinese-language activities. So I think that's one of the possibilities, if you don't have the big screen which is constantly on.

Balkam: Wow. What year do you live in? [LAUGHTER] Just joking, just joking. We're going to come to this side. What features would you like to see in a smartphone that might help you use it more rationally? And that's kind of trick question, in a weird way, but does anyone have an answer on this side of the table? Yes, there's a hand there.

Faisal: Hey, how are you doing? My name is Mohammed Faisal and the co-founder and CEO of The Money Hub, and what we do is we use technology to teach financial literacy throughout mostly disadvantaged in New York City, and then ultimately nationwide. And I deal with a lot of kids, not as young as you guys were talking about, mostly high school to young adults and college, and one of the futures that I've seen that I would love implemented, not so much on a smartphone, but in some of these apps like Facebook and Instagram, is let's say I want to see a video, and something that I love is really looking back into my days of watching wrestling a lot. And so if you watch a video, and the next video will pop up right away, and it will be somewhat vaguely related to it, so you're like, "Oh," you know, "I didn't see this before. Let me now look

at it.” And then it will just kind of go in a cycle and the next thing you know, two hours has passed. So—

Balkam: So check out what Google announced yesterday. And there will be little reminders or nudges, or even shut it down, instead of YouTube just keeping going until you fall asleep.

Zomorodi: They’re going to get rid of Autoplay?

Balkam: No, [LAUGHTER] but they are going to be giving you little nudges and reminders. And if you set it to stop, then it will stop. Anybody else on this side of the room? Yes, there’s a hand there.

Hall: Hi, Michael Hall with W2O Group. I would just love to know what my usage is. I would like to see how much time is my screen on, and what apps am I on, and just total volume.

Steiner-Adair: Yeah, checking.

Zomorodi: So we partnered with a lovely software developer in Pittsburgh who works at Carnegie Mellon but who, because he and his wife; they were newly married, and they couldn’t get through dinner without checking their phones. So he built her a love app called Moment, and this is four years ago, where it measured how many times a day they checked their phones and how long they were on their phones. So fast-forward a year later, I call him, I was like, “You know, I’m doing this weirdo project. What do you think about partnering with us?” And so he made it so all our listeners could download the app. It’s only on iOS. It’s on Android now. And so that’s exactly what it did. And I think for some people, they’re like, “What the hell? An app to figure out like how long I’m on my phone? That’s ridiculous.” But for some people, like we love feedback, right? And so we were able to quantify how much we were on our phones at the beginning of the week, and see whether that changed by the end of the week. So those apps do exist. He is actually—his app is Thrive. There’s another one called BreakFree that’s really good.

Hall: What’s yours called?

Zomorodi: Moment was the one that we partnered on.

Balkam: It’s really good. It’s a really good app.

Steiner-Adair: Checky is another one. How often do you check your phone? Just checking.

Zomorodi: Yeah.

Balkam: And Android from, I’m not exactly sure when, but they announced yesterday there will now be a feature called ‘Dashboard’ which will give you all of that information integrated into the phone, so you don’t even have to download an app. Sorry about the app developers who have created that and are selling that product. But—and no doubt Apple will have looked at what happened yesterday, I would think, with a lot of interest.

Zomorodi: I mean, also, can I just say, like it makes me nervous that it's built into an operating system like that, because they're going to be tracking like, "Oh when are people deciding not to look at their—"

Balkam: True.

Zomorodi: I don't know. Let's just like say, like when it's the people making the stuff you're looking who are tracking when you're not looking at it.

Balkam: Yeah.

Steiner-Adair: Yeah, let me add to that a little bit, because, you know, one of the things we're talking about is outsourcing intrinsic motivation. And outsourcing our desires to connect to the people we love the most. And in my experience, you know, sometimes I talk to like 400 high school kids in an auditorium, and I talk about love, and hookup culture, and who benefits, and friends with benefits, and nobody does. And they know this. And they want the same things we want. They want really good relationships.

And I think one of the things we have to really do is speak to one another but also certainly speak to kids about their desires, what they want, what matters most. And what matters most to them is mattering to other people. And when you get them to engage in a dialogue about how you are the boss, you are the boss of your brain. You can either multitask for eight hours and then not be as smart as you are, or you're the boss of your brain. You can go on—you know, or your love life, you can go on Tinder or you can practice the awkward art of flirting, which will actually like make you a lot happier. And if you give kids a lot of information, and you do it in a fun way, I think what we also have to do is teach them: This is your brain on tech. This is what hookup culture is. You know, let's go beyond consent. Let's talk about reciprocity, let's talk about real love. We have to remember that one of the biggest disconnects here that's happening is it's a paradox. These devices are fabulous, never before has it been possible to connect to the people we love the most, and yet they are really straining our relationships. And we have to speak to the heart of the matter, intrinsically, as well as develop really good, differentiated use apps. So I think it's a both/and.

Balkam: We have one—a couple more. And the challenge only gets more so now that we have Alexa and we have Barbie—and we have all these screenless devices that are now connected and are being cognitized, in Kevin Kelly's terms. Yes, we had a comment.

Navarro: Alyson Navarro from Morgan Stanley. My last three firms have been BYOD, it's hard to draw a line between home and work. I would love to have that as a feature—

Balkam: Spell out your acronym, please.

Navarro: Sorry, BYOD is bring your own device. It's when instead of carrying two phones, you now install work apps on your phone. So when you go home you're still seeing blips from your

work email. When you're at work, you're seeing blips from Facebook. So how do we draw the line between the two? That's one.

Another would be could I please have a filter for true emergency? Because you can say, "Leave your phone in the closet," but if you've got aging parents, and you have started to use your landline as a spam filter, then you want to be sure to be able to get that emergency call. So you can't really put your phone away.

So those are two things I would like to see. True like family-only filters that are some kind of setting. And then work versus home.

Zomorodi: So there is a—depending on what kind of phone—hi, Alison. There is a setting where you can have only certain calls come through, but you know, obviously, more people should know about that. If you're like—I know you, and you're very well-informed, so that's interesting that you don't know about that. And I would also say that there are corporations, like BCG did do an experiment that they have continued to do, where they have prescribed time off for people, where they were one member of a team, for one day a week, was asked to be completely off their device. Because they were having a retention problem, and actually it made a huge difference. So that's an interesting like case study to look at.

Balkam: Okay, I just wanted to gather—there was another hand up. Yes, please. Microphone's on its way.

Audience 3: Okay. So I really appreciated your point that if we really start to understand like what is it that we as human intrinsically want, and then work out how do we use our phones to achieve that. Because I think there's so many false myths around how phone usage is going to help us achieve all these wonderful things, and yet that's actually not working. So I run a coding school in South Africa and right now, it will happen this Saturday again, my girls are busy working on—these are high school girls, they're busy working on a project to build a productivity app.

And so we said, "You're all high-achieving young women. Productivity is one of your number one goals in life. You want to be high-achieving. And so we're not going to have another workshop on like, 'How do you use Facebook to brand yourself better?' We are going to help you build an app. We're going to teach you how to code a quiz that judges your productivity." They're busy working on what questions they want to include in that. And then they're busy thinking about functionality that they can build to start self-correcting certain habits that they themselves are identifying.

Steiner-Adair: Beautiful.

Audience 3: And I think that kind of conversation, so firstly, including them in building technology that can change their lives, but then also just changing the narrative around that standard phone use being engaged on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook day-in and day-out, is

simply not productive. Sleeping really well and being able to build a sleep-tracker and a sleep reminder, that's probably more important for a teenager.

Steiner-Adair: Yes.

Audience 3: So I think including young people and speaking to that core motivation of being a productive human, and not just fantastic on Instagram, will help change perceptions.

Steiner-Adair: Beautiful.

Balkam: As the father of an Instagram star, I absolutely hear that. [LAUGHTER] She was told that walking across the campus of the University of Maryland. It scared the hell out of me. Any quick reactions to that?

Steiner-Adair: I find that just so hopeful. I mean, in my experience too, when you give kids research, when you get them to get a little indebted to what they're doing, how many hours they're wasting on Snap, and give them the tools. And what a great way to teach girls to code, so that they own their own lives more and they feel more in control and they're having the quality of really meaningful connections and really productive use of tech. That's a beautiful, beautiful story. I just want to say cool, great.

Balkam: Right. One last comment or question? Anyone's got a burning—yes! We've got a—

Raskin: Actually, I just wrote a story—

Balkam: Hold on, wait for the—Robin, wait, wait.

Raskin: Robin Raskin, and I think I've been working in this as long as Stephen. This morning I wrote a story called, "Digital Diet Mania," which there are a lot of tech products being announced now, in the Verizon/Spark family, Gryphon has a router, where you can actually, it will give you an emotional profile, behavioral, statistics about your kid, based on where they surf. Like, they really like horses, or they really like snot, you know, things you didn't know about them. [LAUGHTER] And historically, no parents have actually spent too much money on keeping their kids safe, whether it was the V-chip in TVs or whether it was cyber-patrolling software that you could buy to monitor where your kids went on the internet. And there's another new one for adults and kids called Zendesk, and it will actually send you motivational messages. My watch, which is a Garmin, tells me to move every 20 minutes. I actually find it really useful. I actually do get up and move. So it could probably go tell me, "Jump off the Brooklyn Bridge," next week, and I would listen to it also.

So the question is—

Balkam: Yes, what's the question? [LAUGHTER]

Raskin: As technology—will people buy technology to help them manage their technology? It hasn't been a great track record so far. And if they do, can technology—can that management technology make you even crazier? Because I've got to go move now. [LAUGHS]

Balkam: Just stay and listen to the answer. What do you think?

Penner: Well, yeah, I mean, we're kind of betting that they will. And I would say two things, one, I think that sentiments have shifted, even just over the last year. And I don't think it was just Facebook, I think it was a lot of things. And you mentioned—Catherine mentioned some of the research around how not just parents are feeling but about how kids are feeling about technology. But at least, again, our thesis is that it's got to be technology or technological changes that empower you to kind of implement your own belief systems over the technology. So some parents may want to hand their kids a phone and a pack of cigarettes and say, "Go at it." [LAUGHTER] And some, I think most parents, will want to be able to develop new norms around how kids use their phones, so that they're more kind of engaged and productive and deliberative and informed. But that's our best guess.

Balkam: Manoush, can tech save us from tech?

Zomorodi: Well, we did an episode specifically looking at how people respond to tracking their calories and miles, and what was so fascinating to me was the range of responses we got. Which was, we had some people who were like, "It's great. I tracked my thing, I lost 10 pounds. I feel so much better." And then on the other end of the spectrum you had a guy who was like, "I developed an eating disorder. I can't eat anything without measuring it and knowing exactly how many calories it has. It rules my life. I don't know what's happening." And so I think one of the benefits that we now have so much personalized technology, my phone looks just right for me, and yours looks just right for you, right? And it's the same thing with all of this technology. Some of it is right for some people, and others aren't right for other things. So one of—and this was a couple of years ago—but one of the things that I was talking to a technologist about was like, "So maybe for people who are a little more compulsive, maybe they don't have a scale that says a number. Maybe it shows a color and it shows green when you're in a certain range. Because for some people, they get a little nutso when it's like even just a pound or so off."

And so this idea of not depending on the technology to make us feel better, because we only know when we feel better. And that's my big thing, is like if you have to rely on the technology, it means that you're also relying on the technology for feedback as to how you are doing or feeling, when you don't even know how you're doing or feeling. So it's a combo thing.

Balkam: Okay, and a tweet-length response to that. [LAUGHTER]

Steiner-Adair: Let's not let any new app delete old truths, which is that as a species, we thrive when we have really good, meaningful relationships to the people we love the most.

Balkam: Oh wow. I don't think I can improve on that. A round of applause.

[APPLAUSE]

As a final thought, and we have something called the “Seven Steps to Good Digital Parenting,” which kind of sounds like a step program, doesn’t it? Only one of them involves technology. The last one, the most important, is “Be a good digital role model yourself.” Which is the most challenging for parents, I think.

I just was blown away by this and thank you guys also for contributing so much again. So thank the panel please.

Penner: It’s been good.

[APPLAUSE]

Kirkpatrick: That was a great discussion. I must say, though, I expect we will have technology telling us whether we are the kind of person who wants a green light instead of a number. Unfortunately, that’s just the world we’re in. But I also would echo another thing Manoush said, which is I personally believe that the Cambridge Analytica thing has tapped into and accelerated a sea change in awareness that is underway in real time, which is one of the reasons this discussion was so good and so well-attended. Suddenly, people are realizing this stuff is doing stuff to us we didn’t realize. And much as I detest many of the things Facebook is doing, the company that I celebrated more than anyone, at the moment, I think it’s leading to something quite positive in this change.

[APPLAUSE]