

Zack Yurick (00:11)

you would never let a stranger into your kids' bedroom. If they have a cell phone, they are walking into their bedroom with hundreds of strangers that could have access to them.

Snapchat.

it's often I've seen used to threaten the kids.

Siara Singleton (00:26)

To threaten

Zack Yurick (00:27)

Yeah,

to threaten them and scare them. Like,

I know

I know where you live. If you don't send me this naked photo of yourself, I'm gonna come to your house.

So one of the ways it is so perfectly set up for predators is this vanishing message. Its whole premise is what you're doing is secret.

You can hide what you're doing on this app. that makes the perfect environment for a predator to come in because If a parent doesn't get to the kid's phone right away, there's nothing to see.

Siara Singleton (00:57)

No receipts.

Zack Yurick (00:59)

No receipts. Exactly. There's no receipts.

that's the problem with the quick add find friends, is it is literally introducing the predator to the kid.

Siara Singleton (01:08)

hey y'all, happy Thursday.

So, as some of you know, sometimes I like to talk about internet child safety. And recently I stumbled across someone with a very unique position in the space. I actually met a former prosecutor whose work focuses on holding Snapchat accountable for the ways that the platform puts children at risk.

Zachary Yurik has spent more than five years prosecuting child sexual abuse cases, and case after case, he saw predators using social media, specifically Snapchat, to reach children. He eventually transitioned into civil litigation so that he could go beyond prosecuting individual predators and hold the platform accountable for facilitating their access to children.

Reason being, you can put handcuffs on a person, but you cannot put handcuffs on an app.

Moving into civil litigation allowed Zach to go after Snapchat itself and hit the platform where it will actually feel it. It's bottom line.

if you've never used Snapchat, you've probably heard of it. I've had Snapchat since I was about 16 or 17 years old. And there are some weird things that I did not know about Snapchat, even though it's been on my phone for over a decade. I learned quite a few things after this conversation.

First is that I'd always sort of thought of Snapchat as sitting slightly outside of the screen time and phone addiction conversation because it's not primarily a scrolling app the way that like TikTok or Instagram is. I was wrong. There is a scrolling component, but that's actually not the only way Snapchat keeps children compulsively engaged. So Zachary will explain that later.

The second is that many of the safety settings parents are told to turn on don't reliably work and don't always do what parents think that they're doing. So this is disappointing.

But for me, the most important takeaway from this conversation is that there is hope for child safety online. Zach explained something to me that I had somehow never heard of.

Apparently, there's a federal law that passed just before I was born, and for nearly three decades, it has functioned as a legal shield for these online platforms and protects them from being held legally responsible for content posted by their users. It made these companies extraordinarily difficult to sue.

But in 2026, some of the lawsuits over these companies are finally able to move forward. That means this year is somewhat of a reckoning. It's the year that we are really seeing these companies held accountable.

I'm recording this just in the beginning of September.

but just last week, if you hadn't heard about it, Meta agreed to settlements worth up to roughly 18 billion to resolve claims that it designed Facebook and Instagram to addict children and misled the public about the safety of its platforms. The main federal case is part of the broader social media adolescent addiction litigation.

Meta strategically admitted no wrongdoing, but the settlement requires actual changes. Users under 18 will have a combined two-hour daily limit across Facebook and Instagram for most

forms of use with mandatory pauses and reminders after extended periods on the apps. Access to feeds will be blocked from midnight to 6 a.m. and most notifications will be silenced overnight and during school hours.

In addition to all of that, Meta will also have to strengthen its age verification systems, restrict cosmetic procedure filters, hide visible light counts for teens, improve parental controls, and submit these protections to independent audits. Meta does still get to use its personalized algorithmic feed, but teens must be offered the option to switch to non-personalized chronological feeds, and parents using Meta's supervision tools can turn that option on on their behalf.

Also, now there's real financial and legal pressure on the rest of the industry to follow. So am I satisfied with the outcome of this case? Not necessarily.

I don't really think there's a settlement that can undo what these children and families have endured.

And I think \$18 billion spread across a decade is not exactly consequential for Meta. For perspective, Meta expects to spend between \$130 and \$145 billion on capital expenditures this year alone, largely driven by AI. At the high end, that's like eight times the maximum value of these settlements in a single year.

So yeah,

I do kind of think that they deserve more than an \$18 billion slap on the wrist, but I also think we need to hold on to every little win that gets us closer to a safer internet for our children because they can't continue to hide behind the idea that they're neutral spaces with no responsibility for what happens inside of them.

They're gonna have to change their products in meaningful ways, especially when those products are openly marketed to children. Which brings me back to Snapchat.

Today, Zach is going to explain why Snapchat has the perfect setup for predators, how the platform has failed to properly address those issues,

How Snapchat's unique features perpetuate phone addiction on the app.

And what parents with kids under eighteen should do tonight if their kid may be using the app.

Also, be sure to stay with me through the end of the episode because some new information about Snapchat has come to light since Zach and I spoke, and he sent me a note that I'm gonna share with you after our conversation.

The last thing I'll say before we get into it is that online child safety is a cause that's very near and dear to my heart. I remember being a kid online, I remember it not being the safest, and I do fear for the most vulnerable children in our society. But really, it could be any child, and it has been in many instances. That said, this conversation really did give me a lot of hope, and I think it's going to give you some too. With that, let's meet Zach.

Siara Singleton (06:31)
Hi Zach welcome.

Zack Yurick (06:32)
Hi Siara thank you for having me.

Siara Singleton (06:33)
thank you for being here.

you are in such an interesting position to shed a lot of light on what's going on with Snapchat but I thought that I would just give you a chance to explain how you got here and what you're working on.

Zack Yurick (06:46)
I went to law school.

To to be a prosecutor. I always wanted to be a prosecutor. And I graduated from Drexel, started at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. I was there for three years. I really gravitated towards crimes with victims. So instead of like drug cases and things like that, domestic violence, burglaries, I just really gravitated towards those kinds of cases. I'm from Chester County, right outside the city. I ended up coming out to the Chester County District Attorney's Office in twenty twenty.

And right away jumped into the child abuse unit and primarily worked on sexual abuse cases where adults had sexually assaulted kids. And I did a lot of those cases, a lot of those jury trials, and

Case after case, as I was prosecuting the individual predator, what I was noticing is they weren't meeting at malls, they weren't meeting at playgrounds, they were meeting on social media. So a lot of times they were meeting on Snapchat. And I was seeing how Snapchat was facilitating these predators having access to these kids.

So I prosecuted these cases for over five years, and then I got done one particular jury trial, and afterwards you can talk to the jury, and they had convicted the predator, and I was talking to them about the evidence and what they thought about the case and things like that. And afterwards, one woman hung back and she said, You got the guy who did this, but who's gonna hold these social media platforms accountable? So

I ended up then moving into civil practice where we can sue institutions and hold them accountable for being unsafe for kids. So I started with a boutique law firm here in Chester County called Goldberg, Goldberg, Maloney. they do a lot of crime victim work, a lot of work with veterans, and basic PI personal injury as well. And they kind of let me carve out my own practice area going after these social.

media companies and I started with Snapchat. And I ended up through law enforcement connections and connections with crime victim advocates, getting to know a lot of these kids who had been harmed by social media. And that's what led me to where I'm at right now.

Siara Singleton (09:03)

So it's not like you were in some specific sector for online crimes initially. You were prosecuting abusers, specifically focused on child abuse and sexual abuse, and it led you to Snapchat. So it's such a prominent issue that this became like the central focus of your work. Is that

Zack Yurick (09:24)

One hundred percent.

I mean literally case after case, whether it was just collecting the predator was collecting CSAM, so child sexual abuse material, or they were grooming the kid, or they were meeting up with the kid, just case after case involved social media platforms.

Siara Singleton (09:42)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (09:42)

So it just led me into this area just naturally.

Siara Singleton (09:45)

Yeah. So just like a quick aside on the predators themselves, have you noticed any patterns in terms of I guess I'm curious about age because it feels like, you know, the age old archetype of the predator is that like creeping on the playground or, in places they shouldn't be out in the real world and now it's shifting to the online world. Is this like

something that spans across many ages when it comes to the predators or is it like the new age of predators or is it just that all sort of predators have now realized that this was a vulnerable channel for them to find their victims?

Zack Yurick (10:23)

That's a really interesting question and most children who are abused know their abuser. So unfortunately, if it is

Siara Singleton (10:31)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (10:31)

a not online connection, it is usually a family member or a family friend, and those ages can vary widely.

What I've noticed is the age range of online abusers is a little bit younger, and I would say almost maybe 28 to 38. That age range

Siara Singleton (10:51)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (10:52)

seems to be the age range where they're savvy enough with tech, they know enough of the lingo, they can pretend to be 18.

So that range 28 to 38 is the most common age I saw of these online predators trying to abuse kids, and then the kids unfortunately range from eight to seventeen. Those

Siara Singleton (11:12)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (11:13)

were the ages I would see being abused with these social media platforms being the vessel.

Siara Singleton (11:17)

Okay. So you eventually left prosecution to go to civil cases, is that correct? that switch, like what did that enable? Like what can you do in civil cases that you couldn't as a prosecutor? Why did you make that switch?

Zack Yurick (11:31)

So as a prosecutor, you don't actually represent the victim or the survivor of abuse. You represent the county or the state. So you answer at the end of the day to I mean your bosses and

what's best for the county, which as much as we try to advocate for the victim, I didn't think we were always making the best decision for the kid. So this enables me in the civil realm, I answer to the kid and their families. Right? They're the only

Siara Singleton (12:00)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (12:01)

person I owe any kind of duty to. So whatever they want to do, I'm able to do and amplify their voice in any way they want. The other thing it allows me to do is a prosecutor's in the criminal sector and the

Criminal area is a restriction of freedom, is the punishment. And you can't do that to an institution. So you can't put handcuffs on a daycare. You can't you can't put

Siara Singleton (12:23)
Yeah.

Zack Yurick (12:24)
handcuffs on a school, right? You can on the individual predator. So what the civil realm has allowed me to do is sue these institutions.

Siara Singleton (12:32)
I see.

Zack Yurick (12:34)
And hurt them where is which is the only way you can hurt them and the most effective way to hurt them is their bottom line and gouge them financially. Because that's when

Siara Singleton (12:42)
Okay.

Zack Yurick (12:43)
they change. Right? When you hurt their bottom

Siara Singleton (12:44)
Right.

Zack Yurick (12:45)
line, that's when they're influenced to change.

Siara Singleton (12:48)
Okay, so this is allowing you to go straight to the root cause rather than like a case-by-case thing, which I'm sure was frustrating.

Zack Yurick (12:56)
Exactly.

Siara Singleton (12:57)
Okay, and so Snapchat, like for me, like when I think about the different predatory platforms, and like I've I've spoken with a few other experts on this, Snapchat doesn't even come up as often as you would think. And so, like, when we initially spoke, I was kind of like surprised to

hear what a huge issue Snapchat was, but then not that surprised. I remember using Snapchat. I remember how it worked, and it is sort of like a

I don't I wanna use my words carefully here, but like the platform is set up well for a bad actor. And so like I'd love for you to just shed more light on what makes Snapchat uniquely set up for a predator to groom a child and like what how the features contribute to that effect.

Zack Yurick (13:42)

What is interesting about Snapchat is it is universally recognized as the sexting app. Right? It is if kids are going to sext, if people are going to sext, there's vanishing messages, this is the app for that. So it's both universally recognized as the sexting app and is marketed to children. It's marketed to children 13 and up.

So that on its face is crazy. Right?

Siara Singleton (14:06)

Yeah. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (14:09)

And it's like not it's not a secret. People know that this is what Snapchat is used for. So one of the ways it is so perfectly set up for predators is this vanishing message. Its whole premise is what you're doing is secret.

You can hide what you're doing on this app. Your parents can't see it. You can't go back and rethink it a day later. It's you're under this guise of what you're doing is secret, and that makes the perfect environment for a predator to come in because their messages aren't there the next day. The pictures you get aren't there the next day. If a parent doesn't get to the kid's phone right away, there's nothing to see.

Siara Singleton (14:48)

No receipts.

Zack Yurick (14:49)

No receipts. Exactly. There's no receipts. And if you think about the origin of this app, this app was created by three frat bros

Who wanted vanishing messages in part so they could go hook up with Sorority Girls and not have to deal with any kind of consequences and not have to look at their messages the next day. Right? So that the fact

Siara Singleton (15:09)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (15:10)

that that has evolved into an application that they actively market to children is a huge problem.

And to more specifically answer your question, I'm always careful when I'm talking about it. Because I also don't want to give the blueprint to the predators. Too. You know what I mean? I'm always

Siara Singleton (15:27)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (15:29)

so careful about how. Because I'm always like, is somebody gonna watch this and be like, this is the way to do it? And just an aside, just in preparation of this, I was reading through some different materials that are out there. I get so

sad sometimes and scared just how many bad actors there are out there. There's

Siara Singleton (15:49)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (15:50)

just so many people who are looking to hurt kids. It's really difficult to comprehend sometimes. But some of the more global issues is vanishing messages.

Siara Singleton (16:00)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (16:01)

The quick add or find friend friends function is linking stranger adults with children.

Siara Singleton (16:08)

And can

Zack Yurick (16:08)

And then

Siara Singleton (16:09)

we explain I'm definitely gonna throw a screenshot for those people who maybe don't have Snapchat and don't know what that looks like. Can you just explain like the quick add feature for those who might not understand?

Zack Yurick (16:19)

Yeah, so

the quickhead feature has now evolved into they've renamed it Find Friends and they've renamed it under the guise of it being safer.

Siara Singleton (16:27)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (16:28)

anecdotally, I I don't necessarily see that it's any safer. But what that means is so the kid will get up, right, and they will pull their phone up and it will have a bunch of suggested profiles of

friends that they may know or want to link with. And

it's their profile name and then next to it is a bit emoji avatar of what the person looks like, which is another huge problem. And they can literally just

Hit the plus button and quick add this person, then this person's a friend, this person can message them, send pictures, send videos. If the snap map location data is set to general, they now can see that kid's location, their exact location at any time. And that's the problem with the quick add find friends, is it is literally introducing the predator to the kid.

Siara Singleton (17:19)

Yep. And and you reminded us earlier that a lot of times

The victim knows their abuser. So I've always wondered what actually goes into that algorithm for the quick add function. It's not an app I use often, but I know every once in while I'll see like a request, it's either someone maybe I had their contact in my phone or not. So I'm like, is it location based? Like I'm just always curious about how that algorithm even works.

And how they're suggested. Because I could just imagine a kid who knows someone like, a coach or like a family friend or someone in their network accidentally.

merging with their their digital network. Not that any given person is a predator, but for those who are, how are they suddenly getting access and like getting recommended these kids Snapchats or vice versa?

Zack Yurick (18:08)

I think one of the problems is the algorithms don't work 100% of the time. So there's always anomalies that happen as well. Like so do you y do you have Snapchat? And

Siara Singleton (18:20)

I do, yes.

Zack Yurick (18:21)

did you just allude to are you ever recommended someone you're like, I have no idea how I could possibly know this person?

Siara Singleton (18:27)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (18:28)

Yeah. So I think that they do have these security features.

And I think before we get into them, it's important to note that they don't seem to work all the time.

Siara Singleton (18:36)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (18:36)

So sometimes there's just flukes where

Siara Singleton (18:39)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (18:39)

kids are introduced to adults just because for whatever reason there's some misfire or some deeper code that they don't understand, I don't understand, that connects this too.

But then

Siara Singleton (18:49)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (18:49)

you're supposed to have either mutual contacts

Or you're supposed to have, for example, that number that's associated with the account, if that's in your phone, they'll suggest this friend because you already technically know them.

Siara Singleton (19:03)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (19:06)

But the big problem becomes and it's supposedly not geographic location. That's a that's supposed I think that used to be

Siara Singleton (19:12)

Okay. That's good.

I would not like that. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (19:15)

I think that used to be one of the issues. I think that used to be

one of the issues, but that so allegedly no longer is something that they factor in. But I still will talk to kids who are like, The only way I know this person is we live near each other.

We don't have

mutual contacts. so I don't know if it works all the time. I don't know exactly how the algorithm works, but I know that I've met with kids who are like, the o this guy lives five houses down, we have no mutual friends, and I have no I I don't have his phone number in my phone. So I don't know. Yeah. But the

Siara Singleton (19:44)

How scary. I don't like that.

Zack Yurick (19:48)

but the big hack is adult users are not supposed to be recommended to kid users. T right?

Siara Singleton (19:52)

Kid users.

Zack Yurick (19:55)

But all you all you do to verify your age on Snapchat is enter it in. So you have Yeah.

Siara Singleton (20:00)

Yeah, I was gonna ask you that, yeah.

Zack Yurick (20:02)

So you have predators who are 36 pretending to be 18, and you have eight-year-olds pretending to be 18. And then as soon as that predator, whether it's because it's a friend's son or somebody they play roller hockey with.

starts becoming friends with other underage accounts, legitimately maybe, now they are recommended to people in that same area called like the school zone, the local school zone.

Siara Singleton (20:30)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (20:31)

So that's a way that they're linked.

Siara Singleton (20:33)

Okay,

so predators are faking their age, which I kind of guessed that was happening. Why would a kid fake their age?

Zack Yurick (20:41)

kids well, they fake their age to even be able to get on it. The minimum age is thirteen. So a

Siara Singleton (20:46)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (20:47)

so a lot of times they're lying 'cause an eight year old wants to have Snapchat because everybody has Snapchat and they want to be, you know, cool. But

Sometimes a thirteen year old fakes being older just because I think

that they wanna maybe navigate Snapchat as an adult. And they don't

wanna be treated like a kid. They don't want to encounter the same maybe roadblocks that exist for a juvenile account and they wanna be an adult

Siara Singleton (21:09)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (21:10)

and have all the influence that's out there. So I think that's sometimes maybe that that's why they do that.

Siara Singleton (21:15)

And then is it easy to create are the accounts attached to a phone number? Is it easy to create duplicate accounts?

Zack Yurick (21:24)

So

to my knowledge, you can create duplicate accounts just by having unique email and a unique username. You don't

Siara Singleton (21:31)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (21:31)

technically have to connect a phone number with an account. So as many unique usernames and email addresses that you can come up with, which are infinite, you can have accounts.

Siara Singleton (21:41)

Have any solutions come up as far as making age verification more, accurate?

For Snapchat, is there any like way for this to be resolved? Because this feels like one of the initial issues

Zack Yurick (21:52)

Thank you.

Siara Singleton (21:54)

that if they solved this issue, I wonder how many of those other issues that we'll get into would even be possible.

Zack Yurick (22:01)

There are so you get into this space now of so the fight then becomes privacy and age verification. So there are ways to do it.

this is exclusively my opinion. Snapchat, regardless of what age you puts in, knows exactly how old you are. Because they

are harvesting your data all day, every day. They have your location.

They know that you are at a middle school from seven to three, Monday through Friday. They know that the things you're looking at and the people you're connected with are other seventh graders. They can see your messages. They know what you guys are talking about. and this is personally my opinion. I'm sure that if we dig into their internal documents, this is true. But they know how old everyone is. They know this person's

Siara Singleton (22:46)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (22:47)

an adult. They they know this person is working at Lowe's from nine to

To five every Monday through Friday because they're an adult, they know the kids out of middle school, they know all of this stuff. So the solution is admit it and audit.

Audit these accounts in the early stages of account with the f in the first 90 days. It people are like, we don't want them to track everything they're doing. I think they are.

Admit you're tracking everything we're Yeah. Admit we're

Siara Singleton (23:09)

You can there anyway. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (23:12)

you're tracking everything we're doing. Do an audit for early accounts so in the first ninety days, you can see who this user is connecting with, how this user is interacting with the app, you can see the pictures of them, you know what they look like, right? Because the snaps are pictures.

Siara Singleton (23:26)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (23:28)

So just self-police and if there's and if there's a kid

that you see is lied about their age, you disable their account.

Siara Singleton (23:35)

And this is possible for sure.

I can actually speak to this.

Zack Yurick (23:38)

One Hundred percent

Siara Singleton (23:39)

Actually, you know what? This is bringing up something really interesting. So I remember when I was eleven or twelve, I

Created a Twitter account, because everyone was getting a Twitter, it was cool to do. But I think you'd had to be 13 or 14. So I had to, I'm self-I'm I'm incriminating myself. I had to lie about my age to get on Twitter. I got on Twitter, I had Twitter for many years. Then I stopped using Twitter because it became uncool or something. Tried to log back in, they were like, hey, can you verify your age? And I forgot that I'd done this. So I was like, yeah. And I said my actual age. And they were like, you lied about your age, and they completely deleted my entire account.

Even

Zack Yurick (24:16)

Yes.

Siara Singleton (24:16)

though it was only two years that I probably lied about my age, they were like, account's gone. So we know this is possible. We know that

Zack Yurick (24:23)

Yes.

Siara Singleton (24:24)

you can you can almost trick the users just by being like, you probably don't remember what you even lied about. So just remind us, like, how old are you again? And

Zack Yurick (24:29)

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Siara Singleton (24:32)

you know, so it's really not that difficult.

Zack Yurick (24:35)

No, it's

it's not difficult. I think the difficulty is these social media platforms like Snapchat, they wanna pretend that they're not doing what they're doing and that we don't know what they're doing.

They are the currency for them is our attention. Right?

that is what they are profiting off of, our data. So they can sell it.

Right? And then they can do targeted ads. That's how they make their money. They need to know everything about us to target ads to us. So they know how old we are. Because that's part of factoring

in what they're going to advertise to the user. They're not gonna advertise to a 13-year-old girl a lawnmower.

Siara Singleton (25:18)

Mm-hmm. Yeah

Zack Yurick (25:19)

So I think

that so I think that's the one of the solutions they could do is is do an audit in the early in in the early lifetime of the accounts.

Siara Singleton (25:27)

Okay.

And I mean you make such a good point because I think that this is something like we talk about a lot of things on the show. Obviously protecting children is extremely important and important enough so that you start to think about some of the because one of the other things we talk about a lot is privacy and advocating for privacy. And I think privacy is often used as one of those reasons why certain age verification or other ways that we could protect children online are not possible or, at least

harder to implement because of privacy But the point that you're bringing up, which is that I guess we don't have the privacy anyway.

So if they're more forthcoming and transparent about how little privacy we have, and they can actually use some of those structures set in place to protect children, why are they not doing that? Like what is the incentive for Snapchat and other platforms to actually not take responsibility to protect children more?

Zack Yurick (26:25)
It's expensive.

Siara Singleton (26:27)
Mm.

Zack Yurick (26:28)
It's i it's expensive. So you know, you bring up such interesting points. I am I am pro privacy. Right?

Siara Singleton (26:35)
Yeah.

Zack Yurick (26:35)
I don't want a surveillance state. I am I am pro privacy.

it is expensive to self-police. It is expensive to deal with these threat actors. It's expensive to implement security protocols. It's difficult to admit that you were wrong and people got hurt. but

the other thing is from a business standpoint.

Let's talk about underage users. So we talk about in the child abuse world, there's a thing called the dark figure. And the dark figure is statistics may be 60%, but child abuse goes unreported historically. So we

We can't argue it's above I I'm using a the sixty percent isn't the real number. I'm using a fake number. But it's like we can't argue that it's more than sixty percent, but we're all aware of the dark figure, and it's actually more of that. There's a small percentage of of users who they know

are under the age of thirteen. I imagine with this dark figure, and just anecdotally, there's a lot. Ten is probably the average age they're getting on Snapchat.

Siara Singleton (27:36)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (27:37)

They want they don't want to stop that from happening.

Because they want Snapchat to be the messenger app

that this kid chooses, they choose it early and they choose it for the rest of their life. Because then they are able to to build a curated profile of this individual from the time they were ten years old until their whenever Snapchat ends, if it ever does, and they are able to target ad better, they are able to sell better, they are able to keep that individual from leaping off into the next app because Snapchat's all they've ever known.

So I think it's it's all business decisions.

Siara Singleton (28:16)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (28:17)

These these corporations, even though they're run by individuals who are human beings, they operate as a business and it's all financial reasons. It's expensive to police and they really don't want to stop kids from using the app.

Siara Singleton (28:31)

Mm-hmm. Cost of doing business, basically. Okay.

Zack Yurick (28:33)

Yes.

Siara Singleton (28:35)

And yeah, that's interesting. What you say is like they're building a profile. They want the kid to choose them first because they know whatever they choose will probably stick for a very long time, and that is true. so they want to start collecting data about this individual early. You're you're

Zack Yurick (28:53)

Yes.

Siara Singleton (28:54)

saying that's one of the big incentives as well. So that

Zack Yurick (28:57)

As early

as possible.

Siara Singleton (28:58)

in ten years time when they're twenty and they actually have some purchasing power, not that they already don't have some purchasing power technically with influence with their parents, but when they're really in the economy, you're saying like it's almost like a long game for data collection.

Zack Yurick (29:14)

Yeah, absolutely. Is that

and it's just they make money by their users and cutting out twelve and under is cutting out a giant population of

Siara Singleton (29:21)

Yeah. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (29:25)

of just humans that can use their platform. And s and sixty year olds aren't using Snapchat. Fifty year olds aren't you aren't using Snapchat, right? Well maybe they are. But that's not like their main platform. So

Siara Singleton (29:36)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (29:37)

it's a younger app.

So they only have a target audience so broad, so they want to skew younger because it's more users.

Siara Singleton (29:46)

Mm.

And this is like unique to Snapchat, you feel?

Zack Yurick (29:50)

I don't know if it's unique to Snapchat. I imagine it's not. I I imagine it's not. I'm I'm sure Meta with Instagram is similar and TikTok is similar, but I'm not as well versed in those platforms. I've really dug in almost exclusively to Snapchat.

Siara Singleton (30:09)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (30:09)

And actually Grok and Twitter is something else that I have cases against as well. so I think it might be

all social media though. Because they're all

Siara Singleton (30:17)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (30:18)

a business and they all have kind of the same way of making money.

Siara Singleton (30:21)

Mm-hmm. We were digging into the features and one that we kind of grazed over, but I think is really important is the snap map feature. So can you just explain a little bit more about again, I'm gonna definitely put a screenshot of what this looks like in practice, but can you explain a little bit more about how that works and then how predators exploit it? Because I think this is quite scary.

Zack Yurick (30:42)

So the SnapMap is a feature on Snapchat where it shows the user's geographical location.

Siara Singleton (30:51)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (30:52)

And it's pretty spot on. I mean, I've seen a lot of them, and it it won't tell you what room in a house the kid is in, but it'll tell you what house in the street the kid is in. It's that accurate. And

One of the ways that predator use the predators use it is they find kids. So I had a case that maybe we can talk about later that kind of was like the case that opened my eyes to Snapchat. That's like the original case that opened my eyes

Siara Singleton (31:18)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (31:19)

to Snapchat. But i they can find runaway kids that way, 'cause they can track them. But it's

often I've seen used to threaten the kids.

Siara Singleton (31:27)

To threaten

Zack Yurick (31:28)

Yeah,

to threaten them and scare them. Like,

I know I know where you live. If you don't send me this naked photo of yourself, right, I'm gonna come to your house. Or

threaten is one option, but it's also used to groom them.

Like, like I know that street. I used to bike down that street when I was a kid. Is that fire hydrant still there? That kind of stuff.

Siara Singleton (31:51)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (31:52)

That's how it's used.

Siara Singleton (31:54)

okay, I'm wondering about the case that you mentioned actually. the case that opened your mind to Snapchat. Let's talk about that.

Zack Yurick (32:01)

So it was and I'm gonna obscure the facts a little bit just to prov just to protect

Siara Singleton (32:04)

Yeah, please, yeah.

Zack Yurick (32:05)

the privacy of the kid, because it eventually did go to a to a jury trial.

Siara Singleton (32:10)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (32:11)

it's actually that trial I mentioned earlier where the juror was like, who's gonna hold Snapchat accountable? And here's here's what happened. A fourteen-year-old girl who is using Snapchat as a fourteen-year-old girl. She didn't lie about

her age. She

Entered in the correct birth date, she's on it, she's looking at the things that she's interested in, she's friends with her classmates and some family friends. She is suggested a quick add of a 28-year-old who's pretending to be 18. So there's only a four-year four-year difference.

Pretending to be eighteen. He then starts to talk to her.

and message her and begins to groom her for months. She is going through a very difficult time at home in her family

life, and he is able to take advantage of that and do all the things that

Unfortunately, we see that are so cliché and grooming, like I'm the only person that understands you. You're so much older than you seem. You need to get away from your family. I'll protect you. I'll keep you safe. And she runs away from her family. She runs away from her house. Her mom knows she's running away from the house. Is literally

At night chasing her down through the dark, she had told him she was running away. He had driven to where she was, was able to find her through SnapMap, get her in his car, and flee across state lines back into Pennsylvania, where she then finds out he's not 18.

She then unfortunately finds out they're not gonna live this happy life together, and he essentially kidnaps her in his house, where he sexually assaults her for a weekend until authorities can finally find him. And this was the case that really opened my eyes to how dangerous social media can be.

We teach kids all the time stranger danger, how to spot

Weirdos at the park, at the mall, on the playground, and you would never let a stranger into your kids' bedroom. If they have a cell phone, they are walking into their bedroom with hundreds of strangers that could have access to them. That could over a slow amount of time groom them.

and convince them to do something like send CSAM, meet up, contact crimes, run away from home, not to mention drugs and alcohol and all these other dangers. So that case really woke me up to this world of the dangers of social media.

Siara Singleton (34:49)

Mm.

I've thought about Roblox a lot. That's like a platform I'm kind of learning about. And it feels like there's a parallel from Snapchat to Roblox in that there's an avatar aspect of Snapchat where it's almost

Zack Yurick (35:02)

Mm-hmm.

Siara Singleton (35:03)

like child like the avatar. And so someone faking, like they don't even have to put up a fake photo. Like someone faking their age feels so easy because there's nothing to really represent them that's anything realistic.

Zack Yurick (35:19)

Yeah. So that Avatar, the kids call it a bit emoji. I've been corrected multiple times when I'm talking to these kids. I'm like an avatar. They're like you're old, it's a bit emoji. so th

Siara Singleton (35:23)

Yes. Right.

Zack Yurick (35:28)

these bit emojis, yeah, they look like they'll take any they can take anybody and make them look like a kid. But

more importantly, they make them look safe.

They're cartoonish, they're bright colors, they're safe, they're associated with gamification, they're associated with games and kid games. And that's a huge problem because this person who's sweet talking you isn't this creepy twenty-eight-year-old.

He's this little jolly looking bit emoji that feels safe. And you know that when you snapstreak with him, you get a gamified little trophy next to his username, and you're fed this dopamine addicting snapstreaks and these other design features, and it

all leads to the same place of you trust them and you feel safe on this app, and guess what? They're called your friends.

Find friends.

Siara Singleton (36:19)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (36:20)

This person was suggested. This person should and could be your friend.

Siara Singleton (36:25)

Right. I wanna talk about a lot of different things that people should consider when it comes to having this app if they choose to even have the app on the phone. But if there's anything, turn your location off on Snapchat. That

Zack Yurick (36:37)
Yes. It's called ghost

mode. It's

called ghost mode. Go ghost mode.

Siara Singleton (36:41)
okay, so what kinds of cases are you mostly seeing with Snapchat? We talked about sex tortion, are there other types of ways that predators go for children?

Zack Yurick (36:52)
So with

Snapchat we're actually seeing two kinds of cases that two issues that work together to create the single issue, and that's the sexual exploitation cases along with addiction cases. So

Siara Singleton (37:04)
Mm-hmm. Okay.

Zack Yurick (37:07)
kids are actually addicted to Snapchat, and maybe I can give you like a snapshot of what that looks like. Like just the other day I met with a client

She's 16. She's sitting in front of me. Bags under her eyes like I've never seen. She's yawning. She looks exhausted. She has her phone next to her. Every couple of seconds, she checks.

And what you find out is, and this is very s this is typical of what I'm seeing, is she's 16. She downloaded the app when she was eight years old.

She's had Snapchat for eight years already at 16. She,

confirmed by her mom, is on the app sometimes upwards of 21 hours a day. She's not sleeping. Because of all of this, now has anxiety, depression. Because of all of that together now, is failing out of school.

is labeled the bad kid just because she's struggling so much at school, has to go to an alternative school, is not getting the proper education. She's had to deal with cyberbullying and Snapchat group chats and all of these different issues on top of body dysmorphia because of the lens filters.

Which creates eating disorders. So she's not eating. So she this she hasn't even been sexually exploited yet. And this is this is the condition because of social media. She's entering the arena

of now I'm gonna be introduced to an adult. So she's so vulnerable. And what you see is a fine friend of an adult that she never would have known but for the fine friend function. And

Quick adds them so she can keep her snapstreaks up. Because all all they want to do is their snapstreaks and their snap score, and that keeps ratcheting up. That creates a message every day that she's interacting with this person. And this person ends up wanting to meet up with her, meeting up with her, giving her alcohol, drugs, and then eventually sexually assaulting her.

That is like a snapshot of the kinds of cases that I represent and that I'm seeing weekly with with this app.

Siara Singleton (39:14)
Hmm.

Zack Yurick (39:15)
This is something I see consistently. All of these different things at the same time working together to it in my mind to create the perfect victim.

Siara Singleton (39:23)
Hmm. So the kid who is addicted, what makes the Snapstreak such a powerful tool for creating an addiction to Snapchat for a kid?

Zack Yurick (39:34)
it operates the same kind of dopamine fueling psychological stuff that like slot machines do. Which is

Siara Singleton (39:43)
Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (39:44)
why you'll have somebody sit at a slot machine spending their last dollar for the chance of winning a hundred thousand dollars.

It's that same kind of whatever that dopamine hit is.

And the snapstreak, they get a little fire icon next to the username of the person who they're snapping with. And then they get the number next to that and it clocks up day after day after day every time they do one of their their snapstreak interactions. And then you lose it if you don't do it every day.

So so

the number goes away and the fire icon goes away. So when you're about to lose it, it puts a little hourglass that ticks down, so you're about

Siara Singleton (40:20)

Yeah. I remember that.

Zack Yurick (40:21)

to lose it. And it creates legitimate anxiety in these kids. They're like, I'm about to lose I'm about to lose my snapstreak. And I don't know why it matters to them so much, but it does. And then

Snapchat's sending you notifications. So even if you get out of the app, it's hitting you with notifications like, hey listen, just heads up, you're about to lose your snapstreak with Kevin.

Siara Singleton (40:41)

okay, this is where I was getting confused. So I thought that the Snapstreak was simply like if you use Snapchat once in a day, you still have your streak. But now I'm remembering, so the streak is with a specific person and you wanna

Zack Yurick (40:54)

Yes.

Siara Singleton (40:54)

keep you wanna have what? Like one interaction or one message or one pic shared per day with them? Like how do you keep the streak?

Zack Yurick (41:02)

Other super predatory thing, if you factor this in, how you keep your streak is it can't just be a message. You have to send a picture or video, and then they

Siara Singleton (41:11)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (41:11)

have to return a picture or a video. So also within

Siara Singleton (41:14)

Within a day.

Zack Yurick (41:15)

a day, it's per person, right?

Siara Singleton (41:18)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (41:19)

It's per user.

The more users that you have snapstreaks with the kids think is better. So think about that kid getting up in the morning, I've got ten quick ads. I don't know who they are, but who cares? There's somebody I can snapstreak with. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, accepts them as their friend, and now they're snapstreaking. They can't just do a message. They have to send a picture.

So now they're sending pictures back and forth with a stranger just for this artificial gamified dopamine hit

Siara Singleton (41:47)
Yeah.

Zack Yurick (41:48)
of a fire icon and a number next to it.

Siara Singleton (41:52)
So the more streaks they have, the better. Is there a number telling them how many streaks they have at anyone's house?

Zack Yurick (41:57)
Yeah, it's right yeah,

it's right next to it. Because I'll have kids they'll they'll pull their app up and they'll go, Me and Kevin, we're at we're at two hundred and twelve. Me

Siara Singleton (42:05)
Yeah.

Zack Yurick (42:06)
and so and so are at two thousand. Me and so and so and then that factors into how your snap score is. And you you want a great snap score. Yeah,

Siara Singleton (42:12)
Your snaps for

Zack Yurick (42:14)
you gotta have a great snap score if you're a cool kid. Like it's just all of this

Siara Singleton (42:16)
What is it? Like popular kids

have big snap scores?

Zack Yurick (42:20)

Yes. Yeah, because because

it's this metric and just think about being thirteen. Like how much

Siara Singleton (42:25)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (42:25)

energy was wasted on I just want to be cool and I wanna be accepted.

Siara Singleton (42:28)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (42:29)

Right? And if you're it is an artificial proof of I have a lot of friends who interact with me.

So I'm

cool, I'm popular, I'm accepted, life sucks, but I'm okay.

So it just fuels

all of that to keep them on the app so they can learn more and more information about them so they can sell to them.

Siara Singleton (42:50)

'Cause I do remember now like what that you're saying and I'm remembering that this was very popular in college and high school, Snapchat

Zack Yurick (42:57)

Mm-hmm.

Siara Singleton (42:57)

for me. And it was more so about like how close are you with someone that you have a streak. It was less so about the quantity of streaks. At least for me it wasn't. Maybe it was this. but yeah, this is really interesting. So are you seeing like a common number that kids have that they have to upkeep? Like how many photos did they have to on average send in

Zack Yurick (43:20)

hundreds the common number I see is hundreds to keep their streaks up. And one of the things that's funny is just very lazily I'll be having a client meeting with one of the kids and they'll be on their phone and very lazily they'll just take a picture of the desk and I'm

Siara Singleton (43:35)
Yeah.

Zack Yurick (43:35)
like, What are you doing? And she's like, I just I just gotta keep my snap streak up And

Siara Singleton (43:39)
my gosh.

Zack Yurick (43:40)
it's just you know, so it's just this thing that's ingrained in them

That it's just like, I'm cool, I'm accepted, I have a bunch of friends that were super and then that's speaking of the close, then you have like your I don't know exactly what it's called, but you have your best friends. That that yeah. It's all a it

Siara Singleton (43:56)
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Top friends.

Zack Yurick (43:59)
yeah. It's all a popularity thing, metric.

Siara Singleton (44:02)
And you can see other people's streak score scores or

Zack Yurick (44:06)
Yeah.

Siara Singleton (44:07)
okay, I see. Very interesting. Okay, and then are there any other aspects of the app that is making them addicted? Because it's like I know that there's some sort of discover like content feeding algorithm that happens, but what is really like being shown to these kids and is that contributing to the screen time issue on Snapchat?

Zack Yurick (44:27)
Y it's

the same kind of it's the same kind of brain rot that is on other apps that like even I'm susceptible to of just like short

video, quick dopamine hits. But as far as anything like actionable against Snapchat that is super predatory, for me it's just kind of the snapstreak thing.

it's it's this clearly addicting design that

Siara Singleton (44:53)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (44:54)

f feature that is just to keep you on the application, interacting with users, sending photos.

Siara Singleton (45:02)

So I guess my next question then

is have you seen cases where a victim and their abuser are in this like toxic streak relationship situation? Almost always. Wow.

Zack Yurick (45:13)

Almost always. Yeah, om almost

always that they're because this thirty-six year old who's pretending to be eighteen or has admitted they're twenty-eight they're building trust.

part of trust is friendship and connection and they are sending these messages back and forth to each other that vanish.

So don't worry about what's going on because your parents can't see it.

And they're developing that over time, days, weeks, months, and then it leads to whatever the crime's gonna be, whether it's assault or explicit photos or selling them drugs.

Siara Singleton (45:49)

I read that Snap says it acts on roughly 220 suspected sex tortion incidents per day. Is that surprising to you?

Zack Yurick (45:59)

The number or that it acts on them?

Siara Singleton (46:03)

that's a good question. I don't know. I guess the number was what I was asking about.

Zack Yurick (46:07)

It first of all, if i if I was never a child abuse prosecutor, I would never have like I am jealous of the uninitiated, right? I am jealous of people who are like

can think that this stuff isn't as prevalent as it is. I I really am.

Siara Singleton (46:21)

Right. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (46:22)

And then there's a piece of me that when I'm talking about this is always just like I want people to go about their day and not have to worry about child abuse. But it doesn't surprise me 220 alleged sex tortions a day, if anything, that sounds low. And

Siara Singleton (46:37)

Mm-hmm. Okay.

Zack Yurick (46:40)

I don't know what they mean by act on. Cause

Siara Singleton (46:42)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (46:43)

I don't actually know what they do.

There's a quote, you know, there's a quote I wrote down that from one of the internal documents New Mexico sued Snapchat.

Siara Singleton (46:54)

Yes.

Zack Yurick (46:55)

And one of the internal docs

specific to sextortion was an email, an internal email that they shared. And the quote from someone at Snapchat was, God, I'm so pissed, we're run over by this sextortion shit right now. We've twiddled our thumbs and wrung our hands all effing year. And then later they talk about not being able to to fix that problem because of disproportionate admin costs. It's like they know that this is happening everywhere.

All the time.

Siara Singleton (47:26)

Yeah,

they're not naive. What

Zack Yurick (47:28)

No.

Siara Singleton (47:29)

would you like to see happen? Like what would you like to see Snapchat actually do or at least regulators do?

Zack Yurick (47:37)

ban any addictive algorithm or or design features for kids under eighteen.

Siara Singleton (47:44)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (47:44)

we can't drink until we're twenty one, right? Maybe even twenty one, 'cause I don't know. I I don't think we're fully developed enough at twenty one to be even able to to handle these addictive features. So ban

them and then better audit minor accounts. So

have be stronger age verifications that aren't easily bypassed, so we know that kids under thirteen aren't using them. And then for that window of thirteen to seventeen or thirteen to twenty, whatever whatever it turns out to be, don't allow them to have SnapMap. Don't

Siara Singleton (48:14)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (48:15)

allow them to have fine friend functions. I think those are the best regulations to make Snapchat safe. Er.

Siara Singleton (48:22)

Yeah, safer. and then like something interesting that you said to me earlier was that you're not necessarily advocating for Snapchat to go away. Why is that?

Zack Yurick (48:33)

No.

Because I th if there ever was one, we've lost the culture war against Snapchat and social media. Unless they go under financially, I think they're always going to be here. kids are always gonna use it. I think that they won in that respect.

Siara Singleton (48:49)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (48:49)

So rather than driving them off a platform that we have evidence against and the ability to regulate and change and that kids are still going to use and drive them off into a platform that's untested and we have to go through this twenty year cycle with them until we find out what's dangerous about them, let's just make Snapchat safe.

Siara Singleton (49:08)
Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (49:09)
And they can go keep making money.

Right, so there's in some incentive to keep them safe. They can go continue making money, kids can continue using the platform and people are happier.

Siara Singleton (49:20)
Mm-hmm.

Have they done anything in recent years to try and reconcile some of their issues? Like what actions has Snapchat actually made? I know you mentioned that they sort of changed the quick add feature, but have they done anything else?

Zack Yurick (49:34)
Yeah, and that

was a huge one as they changed. They rebranded QuickAd to find friends. And allegedly they fixed some of whether it was location connections or whatever issues. I think that they've also tried to increase parental controls and things like that. But I'm anecdotally just not seeing that be effective.

Siara Singleton (49:54)
and then there's also an AI aspect to Snapchat called my AI, it's like a built in chatbot. Are you seeing any concerning applications here?

Zack Yurick (50:06)
So I don't know a lot about my AI, Snapchat's chatbot. I have heard the stories of it instructing kids on how to hide things from their parents and how

Siara Singleton (50:18)
Mm.

Zack Yurick (50:18)
to create sexually explicit content and things like that. Like I've heard that.

Siara Singleton (50:23)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (50:24)

But I don't know tons about my AI. I don't think anybody does. You know,

Siara Singleton (50:29)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (50:30)

I think that we're kind of learning that

No one really knows that much about AI. So my bigger issue is I don't think our kids should be the guinea pigs and test subjects for something we don't fully understand yet. So I don't think kids should have AI.

Siara Singleton (50:42)

Yep. Absolutely. Absolutely.

okay, so we have some action items that we'd like to see Snapchat do.

Is there anything that you'd like to see regulation-wise? Is there anything happening that you're aware of? there always seems to be a lot of different cases happening when it comes to social media and kids, but I'm wondering if there's any that you specifically have your eye on or if there's specific ones that you'd like to see

Zack Yurick (51:06)

The rapid expansion of social media outpaced or mental health research, consumer protection, regulatory guidelines.

One of the things beyond regulation that I'd like to see before before I answer that question, which is kind of interesting, is I just wanna see us move from this space of like digital literacy to more of like this digital systemic literacy. I just want us as a society to understand what they're doing and how they're doing it. I think that's

Siara Singleton (51:40)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (51:40)

really important. Everyone knows cigarettes are gonna kill you.

Everyone knows that alcohol can be addicting. Everyone knows that you can become addicted to gambling and it can be dangerous. And that's why there's commercials all the time or gamblers anonymous and things like that. I think that we're still struggling as a society to fully understand what social media's goal is over us.

Siara Singleton (52:02)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (52:03)

So I think we need to demystify that.

And we need to deconstruct their design. And the bottom line is they want your attention to sell your data, and they do it through addictive algorithms and addictive design features. One of the regulations I'd like to see because of that is.

Just like a kid can't have a cigarette legally, a kid can't walk into a casino and start gambling on a slot machine, I'd like to see the regulation being you cannot use addictive algorithms and addictive design features on children.

Siara Singleton (52:38)

There's a lot of cases happening right now with Meta. Is Snapchat involved in some of those conversations where they are making this distinction that addictive algorithms could be problematic for kids. Is Snapchat involved in those conversations? Okay.

Zack Yurick (52:52)

Snapchat is involved in those conversations. From a

legal perspective, Snapchat so Meta was j Meta just went, right? Like they're going toe to toe and losing

Siara Singleton (53:01)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (53:02)

legally, basically. Right? There's just that o almost a billion dollar verdict in

Siara Singleton (53:07)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (53:08)

New Mexico against them. And then actually right now, kinda current, the California this coalition of attorney generals versus Meta is happening right now. I think that this is

Siara Singleton (53:17)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (53:18)

the first week.

Snapchats in all of those conversations, Snapchat's being sued all over the place by attorney generals, by individual civil attorneys like me, they take a more wait and see approach. So they've hung back.

They haven't gone straight at us. They've kinda hung back and seen what happened to Meta. I imagine watching what's going on with Meta, because they have addictive designs and addictive algorithms, I imagine they're nervous.

Siara Singleton (53:45)
yeah, I imagine the same.

Do you have advice for parents who they maybe they don't know if their kids are on Snapchat? If they don't know, go check. But do you have advice for parents who know that their kids are on Snapchat? They might not have known a lot of the things until you've shared it with us today. What do you think that they should do? Because I feel like a lot of parents will go straight to take it off the phone. maybe that is the answer, but maybe there are specific settings that can change. what would you suggest?

Zack Yurick (54:13)
If they could successfully police their kids being on Snapchat, them not having it would be ideal. I don't

Siara Singleton (54:18)
Hmm. Okay.

Zack Yurick (54:20)
think that's realistic. I think that people who say like just don't have your kid download it, it's so h I mean, how often is your kid not around you with their phone these days?

Siara Singleton (54:30)
Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (54:31)
Some of the advice then you're gonna get is if the kid has Snapchat, turn on ghost mode.

turn off their find me in friends feature even though that this New York PhD students found that that's kind of broken and doesn't always work. That's the problem. A lot of these safety features don't work.

Siara Singleton (54:46)
Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (54:47)

But there are ones that they should implement. They

should go on their kids' phone and they should turn them on.

But advice I don't hear people saying, and I think this is the number one thing that parents should do tonight, is go and audit your kids' friends list. So go

Siara Singleton (55:02)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (55:03)

through each one of your kids' friends and go, who is that? Verify who it is. If you don't know or you can't verify remove

Siara Singleton (55:11)

Great advice.

thirteen's the minimum age. Do you think that's old enough to have a Snapchat?

Zack Yurick (55:17)

No. I don't think thirteen is old enough to have a Snapchat. Particularly when we're seeing eight to ten year olds are like the more common age of first logging on it. But no, I don't think thirteen year olds you it's just and it's so unregulated because do you know why

And this might be not this might be something you don't want to cover. Do you know why social media is unregulated and why it seemed so invincible until like this year? Have you had guests on who have talked to you about that?

Siara Singleton (55:42)

Maybe not that specific question.

Zack Yurick (55:45)

Because there's a reason everything's happening now.

Siara Singleton (55:48)

Now.

Zack Yurick (55:48)

Yeah. But do you want to hear why?

Siara Singleton (55:50)

Yeah, please.

Zack Yurick (55:52)

So social media started first with this thing called Blackboard. This social media platform called Blackboard. We

Siara Singleton (55:59)

Hmm.

Zack Yurick (56:00)

don't even remember it, no one remembers it.

Siara Singleton (56:02)

Okay.

Zack Yurick (56:03)

Right? Nineteen ninety-six maybe it was nineteen ninety-seven, but nineteen ninety-six.

There is, in my opinion, an outdated US federal internet law called Section two thirty. It had made up until twenty twenty-six these social media companies invincible. It had made

Siara Singleton (56:21)

Huh, okay.

Zack Yurick (56:22)

them and what invincible translates to in the legal realm is impossible to sue.

Siara Singleton (56:28)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (56:29)

And here's why. What the law says and of course lawyers

overcomplicate everything. But what the law says is you cannot be held accountable for third party content on your platform. So if a predator is doing something illegal on a social media platform, Section two thirty says you can sue the predator, you can prosecute the predator, but you can't

touch the platform because

Siara Singleton (56:57)

Mm

Zack Yurick (56:57)

they're just an open marketing place. Open market place. They are this passive place where people are invited to come in and interact just like the town square would be. That was in

nineteen ninety six. That has kept them impervious to lawsuit until twenty twenty six. And what struck me to bring this up is

you were talking about the the algorithms and stuff.

Siara Singleton (57:22)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (57:23)

Why they are finally cracking is they are being sued under products liability theories, which are saying you are no longer a passive town square. Snapstreaks, quick add snap map, those are functions not from third parties.

They are things you are designing, you are

Siara Singleton (57:42)

That's yeah. Yeah.

Zack Yurick (57:44)

implementing. You've stepped into the town square, and now you're speaking, and you what you're saying

Siara Singleton (57:50)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (57:51)

is dangerous. Courts have ruled, have started ruling that that is true. So now we've we've been getting around Section 230, and these companies who have seemed invincible since 1996 are starting to be like, my god.

We grew too big and we can be sued. And what's interesting is they were able to grow this big completely unregulated because they couldn't be sued. They were unbridled. They could just

move forward accruing as much power and money as possible because there was no one to slow them down.

Siara Singleton (58:28)

Yeah. I mean they're doing the same thing with AI right now. They're trying to put laws in place that protect them for some, you know, amount of years. And that's what I fear is that we're just going to enter a completely new era of internet that is even more dangerous and even more unpredictable for kids. And so yeah, that's crazy. I didn't know that. What was that law called again? Section two thirty. Okay.

Zack Yurick (58:51)

It's c it's section two thirty. Yeah, it's a US federal law

and it's it's kept them i it it's kept them impervious to suit since nineteen ninety six.

Siara Singleton (59:02)

Are there any other platforms that have been coming up pretty often in your cases?

Zack Yurick (59:07)

Instagram comes up,

Siara Singleton (59:07)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (59:08)

which is Meta, which I mean you just see Meta going down hard right now.

Siara Singleton (59:12)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (59:13)

TikTok for addiction and for body dysmorphia and mental health. And then you're seeing a lot of you're s you're I'm starting to see these little dating like have you heard of duet?

Siara Singleton (59:26)

That is an ad that I have definitely seen, but it's a dating app.

Zack Yurick (59:30)

Yeah. Yeah,

I think it's a dating app, but I've seen a couple of cases where people have met, people have encountered kind of predators on duet. That's popped up actually like twice in the last two weeks, which is just why it's like top of the brain. But yeah. I'm gonna d I wanna make sure

Siara Singleton (59:42)

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Zack Yurick (59:44)

and double check that's a dating app, but that one I've I've just I've noticed.

Siara Singleton (59:48)

Yeah,

any dating app targeting younger audiences, I feel like should definitely be we should be looking at that.

Okay, and then one more question I wanted to ask for parents are if you're a parent and you have learned that there's a problem happening and you don't know what to do. Maybe you found that your kid has shared with you a sextortion attempt or, you know, a stranger who's moved the conversation off Snapchat that was a different age than they were saying, like

you have determined that there's a problem, what should they actually do? Is there someone a line that they can call or is there some resource that they can go to?

Zack Yurick (1:00:26)

They should

immediately call nine one one and ask for a patrol officer to come out and take a report that then is gonna lead to a detective. So call nine one one. If you think about the danger of Snapchat being banishing messages, you take the kid's phone and you start screenshotting everything that you can find because you don't know if it's gonna be there in an hour.

Right? Start screenshotting everything

Siara Singleton (1:00:46)

Yeah, yeah.

Zack Yurick (1:00:48)

that you can find and saving everything you can and document. Unfortunately, because a lot of these kids have been groomed, they're going to be adversarial to you doing this. So you need

Siara Singleton (1:00:58)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (1:00:59)

to make sure you take all of their devices. Cause they're gonna go into their iPad

Siara Singleton (1:01:01)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (1:01:03)

and log in and start deleting. So you take all of the electronic devices, you're waiting for law enforcement to come, you are screenshotting everything, gathering everything you can, and when the police get there, be willing to give your devices to them.

the police. Criminal investigation is number one, it's the most important.

Siara Singleton (1:01:15)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (1:01:18)

And then afterwards, maybe call somebody like me.

Siara Singleton (1:01:21)

Yeah. Okay. so I mean you're doing some really heavy and dark work. I'm wondering like how you stay sane in all of this and like where you find hope.

like what is it like to be you? Because you're doing really important work and honestly, while this is all really dark and heavy, it is nice to see passionate people like you and like I'm sure your team going after this problem. And so I'm just wondering like what future you see for this problem if all goes well and if we actually make steps to fix it.

Zack Yurick (1:01:56)

I actually think we're in a really hopeful age right now with these things because this problem has been building for a generation of kids, maybe more.

And we are finally at the crossroads of these platforms being held accountable. And accountability is a line in the sand.

It needs to be for every hurt that they've caused, abatement, which is a legal term for clean up. So millions

donated into mental health and sexual assault resources to try to make whole everyone who's been hurt previously. Then on the other line of the sand, let's keep Instagram and Snapchat and all these other social media platforms, but let's make them safe.

Siara Singleton (1:02:41)

Yeah.

Zack Yurick (1:02:42)

So I actually feel hopeful right now because Section two thirty is crumbling to some extent. These companies are being sued successfully and it's going to encourage the kind of change. And then the next danger around the corner is AI.

Siara Singleton (1:02:58)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (1:02:58)

And I hope that this and maybe it's serendipity, but maybe this is hitting right at the birth of AI, so people wake up quicker to, well, we gotta regulate AI now,

Siara Singleton (1:03:11)

Now.

Zack Yurick (1:03:12)

or in twenty years, we're gonna be where we are with social media with AI, but AI I think has the potential to be way worse. So I feel hopeful.

And I do deal with since I've started with the child abuse stuff, I do deal with children who've been victimized. I never get they're more inspiring than anything.

Siara Singleton (1:03:31)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (1:03:32)

So I

don't know, I never get like it's I never get overwhelmed. I never get like it's too much or it's too dark because

I I end up just being more inspired by these kids than than having my light dimmed.

So I I am very

Siara Singleton (1:03:44)

That's good.

Zack Yurick (1:03:44)

hopeful right now.

Siara Singleton (1:03:46)

And you're sharing so much helpful information. Like where can we learn more about your work and like where can we find you online so we can follow what you're doing?

Zack Yurick (1:03:55)

So my law firm is Goldberg Goldberg Maloney dot com and my LinkedIn is Zachary Yurick Y U R I C K. Just go on to my LinkedIn. I I share stuff frequently about Snapchat and social media and being trauma informed.

Siara Singleton (1:04:09)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (1:04:09)

which I think is really important.

Siara Singleton (1:04:11)

Amazing. Okay, one last question for you. I ask every guest this so you can interpret it how you like. What are you logging out of this year and what are you logging into?

Zack Yurick (1:04:22)

So I'm logging out of YouTube and YouTube shorts because

Siara Singleton (1:04:25)

Mm.

Zack Yurick (1:04:27)

It's funny. like I work in this space, right? I work in this this realm and I'm just as susceptible to it as anyone else. And I will just lay in bed and scroll through meaningless YouTube videos of how to make like low calorie protein cheesecake, right? So

Siara Singleton (1:04:40)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (1:04:42)

I am logging out of that. I'm I'm giving that up for a while. specifically on the weekends, so I can have my weekends back. And I'm actually

The allure of social media and what they dangle in front of you is connection.

I'm leaning into tech that actually helps connect us. So I'm leaning into family shared albums. Like I have this

Siara Singleton (1:05:00)

Mm-hmm.

Zack Yurick (1:05:01)

nephew that I'm obsessed with that I'm absolutely, you know, so just family albums and just my calendar on my phone. Just being using tech to be organized and family shared calendars and and things like that. So

Siara Singleton (1:05:13)

Brilliant.

Zack Yurick (1:05:14)

that's what I'm I'm logging into.

Siara Singleton (1:05:15)

That's awesome.

We have very similar intentions because I feel like tech does have this ability to really like enrich your life. But then on the other side, yeah, there's the algorithms that kind of get us all. So I can relate. Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing what you know. Hopefully we will not have to come back here in 20 years and talk about the next issue and you

Zack Yurick (1:05:36)

Yeah.

Siara Singleton (1:05:36)

know, things get better. But thank you so much, Zach. Nice to meet you.

Zack Yurick (1:05:39)

Thank you so

much. It's very nice to meet you too.

Siara Singleton (1:05:42)

Hey y'all, I hope you enjoyed the interview. Zach and I recorded this conversation on the morning of Friday, August 21st, 2026. Since then, some new news has come out regarding Snapchat's legal proceedings.

Zack was kind enough to leave us a note of summary along with his thoughts, which I'll read verbatim here.

On August 25, 2026, Pennsylvania Attorney General Dave Sunday filed a lawsuit against Snap Inc. in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, accusing the company of deceptive age ratings and addictive design features that endanger children.

The lawsuit asserts that Snap Inc. misrepresents the frequency of mature materials such as drug use, nudity, and sexual content to deceptively maintain a 13-plus app store rating. The platform relies on addictive design elements using features like snapstreaks and infinite scrolling to exploit teenagers' fear of missing out and drive compulsive, unhealthy screen time. And the app contains a number of severe safety risks,

Claiming that vanishing messages and the Find Friends tool directly enable cyberbullies and online predators to target minors without leaving a permanent record.

In response, Snap Inc. stated that the lawsuit fundamentally misrepresents its platform, noting that Snapchat opens directly to a camera rather than an endless content feed that was built for real connections among friends. However, this is exactly the problem. The core danger lies in how these features feed into one another. Opening the app directly to the camera encourages immediate impulsive sharing, while beauty filters like the face smoothing filter warp reality and can trigger severe body dysmorphia in vulnerable minors.

This

instant camera view, paired with the psychological pressure of snapstreaks, creates an addictive loop that pushes children to constantly exchange deeply intimate photos.

Because the app's Find Friends algorithm suggests contacts to these children, this highly intimate form of communication easily exposes them to stranger adults and online predators.

I am hopeful that this state lawsuit alongside private civil actions on behalf of harmed children will finally force lawmakers to strictly regulate Snapchat in Pennsylvania.