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The Continuum Continues: A Broad Look at Barriers to Internet Access and Use among American Adolescents and Adults

A November 2004 survey of parents and adolescents conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project data shows that 87% of American youth between the ages of 12 and 17 go online, and a slightly lower percentage, 68%, of American adults use the internet. The often ignored flip-side of these data points is that 13% of teens do not use the internet, and another 32% of adults are similarly offline.

This presentation will explore the use and the non-use of the internet by American youth and adults. We will examine where young people and adults access the internet—how many go online at home, at school, at work, at a friend's or relative's house, at a library or other public community location? Similar and related to the impact of location of internet access, this presentation will address differences seen between daily internet users and those who go online infrequently--less than 1 to 2 times a week—and explore the reasons that young people and adults give for not using the internet.

Recent Pew Internet data from a May 2005 survey of adults suggests that the continuum metaphor of internet access first put forth by the Project in 2003 is still operative—17% of non-internet using adults and 47% of non-using teenagers said that they did at some point use the internet but have since stopped. Internet access is not a binary on/off proposition, but is something that ebbs and flows over time. This ebb and flow also applies to frequency of internet use; 20% of online teens say they would like to go online more often than they do now, and more than a quarter of those young people cite difficulties with access as the reason they're not online more often. Other non-users have the means of access, but lack the desire--15% of adult non-internet users live in wired homes where others go online, and 47% of offline youth say they're not interested in going online.