

it's  
**complicated**

the social lives of  
networked teens

**danah boyd**

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For Peter Lyman (1940–2007), who took a chance on me and helped me find solid ground

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## preface

The year was 2006, and I was in northern California chatting with teenagers about their use of social media. There, I met Mike, a white fifteen-year-old who loved YouTube.<sup>1</sup> He was passionately describing the “Extreme Diet Coke and Mentos Experiments” video that had recently gained widespread attention, as viewers went to YouTube in droves to witness the geysers that could be produced when the diet soda and mint candy were combined. Various teens had taken to mixing Mentos and Diet Coke just to see what would happen, and Mike was among them. He was ecstatic to show me the homemade video he and his friends had made while experimenting with common food items. As he walked me through his many other YouTube videos, Mike explained that his school allowed him to borrow a video camera for school assignments. Students were actively encouraged to make videos or other media as part of group projects to display their classroom knowledge. He and his friends had taken to borrowing the camera on Fridays, making sure to tape their homework assignment before spending the rest of the weekend making more entertaining videos. None of the videos they made were of especially high quality, and while they shared them publicly on YouTube, only their friends watched them. Still, whenever they got an additional view—even if only because they forced a friend to watch the video—they got excited. As we were talking and laughing and exploring Mike’s online videos, Mike paused and turned to me with a serious look on his face. “Can you do me a favor?” he asked, “Can you talk to my mom? Can you tell her that I’m not doing anything wrong on the internet?” I didn’t immediately respond, and so he jumped in to clarify. “I

mean, she thinks that everything online is bad, and you seem to get it, and you're an adult. Will you talk to her?" I smiled and promised him that I would.

This book is just that: my attempt to describe and explain the networked lives of teens to the people who worry about them—parents, teachers, policy makers, journalists, sometimes even other teens. It is the product of an eight-year effort to explore various aspects of teens' engagement with social media and other networked technologies.

To get at teens' practices, I crisscrossed the United States from 2005 to 2012, talking with and observing teens from eighteen states and a wide array of socioeconomic and ethnic communities. I spent countless hours observing teens through the traces they left online via social network sites, blogs, and other genres of social media. I hung out with teens in physical spaces like schools, public parks, malls, churches, and fast food restaurants.

To dive deeper into particular issues, I conducted 166 formal, semi-structured interviews with teens during the period 2007–2010.<sup>2</sup> I interviewed teens in their homes, at school, and in various public settings. In addition, I talked with parents, teachers, librarians, youth ministers, and others who worked directly with youth. I became an expert on youth culture. In addition, my technical background and experience working with and for technology companies building social media tools gave me firsthand knowledge about how social media was designed, implemented, and introduced to the public. Together, these two strains of expertise allowed me to enter into broader policy conversations, serve on commissions focused on youth practices, and help influence public conversations about networked sociality.

As I began to get a feel for the passions and frustrations of teens and to speak to broader audiences, I recognized that teens' voices rarely shaped the public discourse surrounding their networked lives. So many people talk about youth engagement with social media, but very few of them are willing to take the time to listen to teens, to hear them, or to pay attention to what they have to say about their lives,

online and off. I wrote this book to address that gap. Throughout this book, I draw on the voices of teens I've interviewed as well as those I've observed or met more informally. At times, I also pull stories from the media or introduce adults' perspectives to help provide context or offer additional examples.

I wrote this book to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the teens that I encountered. Their voices shape this book just as their stories shaped my understanding of the role of social media in their lives. My hope is that this book will shed light on the complex and fascinating practices of contemporary American youth as they try to find themselves in a networked world.

As you read this book, my hope is that you will suspend your assumptions about youth in an effort to understand the social lives of networked teens. By and large, the kids are all right. But they want to be understood. This book is my attempt to do precisely that.

# introduction

One evening, in September 2010, I was in the stands at a high school football game in Nashville, Tennessee, experiencing a powerful sense of déjà vu. As a member of my high school's marching band in the mid-1990s, I had spent countless Friday nights in stands across central Pennsylvania, pretending to cheer on my school's football team so that I could hang out with my friends. The scene at the school in Nashville in 2010 could easily have taken place when I was in high school almost two decades earlier. It was an archetypical American night, and immediately legible to me. I couldn't help but smile at the irony, given that I was in Nashville to talk with teens about how technology had changed their lives. As I sat in the stands, I thought: the more things had changed, the more they seemed the same.

I recalled speaking to a teen named Stan whom I'd met in Iowa three years earlier. He had told me to stop looking for differences. "You'd actually be surprised how little things change. I'm guessing a lot of the drama is still the same, it's just the format is a little different. It's just changing the font and changing the background color really." He made references to technology to remind me that technology wasn't changing anything important.

Back in Nashville, the cheerleaders screamed, "Defense!" and waved their colorful pom-poms, while boys in tuxes and girls in formal gowns lined up on the track that circled the football field, signaling that halftime was approaching. This was a Homecoming game, and at halftime the Homecoming Court paraded onto the field in formal attire to be introduced to the audience before the announcer declared the King and Queen. The Court was made up of eight girls

and eight boys, half of whom were white and half of whom were black. I reflected on the lack of Asian or Hispanic representation in a town whose demographics were changing. The announcer introduced each member to the audience, focusing on their extracurricular activities, their participation in one of the local churches, and their dreams for the future.

Meanwhile, most of the student body was seated in the stands. They were decked out in the school colors, many even having painted their faces in support. But they were barely paying attention to what was happening on the field. Apart from a brief hush when the Homecoming Court was presented, they spent the bulk of the time facing one another, chatting, enjoying a rare chance to spend unstructured time together as friends and peers.

As in many schools I've visited over the years, friendships at this school in Nashville were largely defined by race, gender, sexuality, and grade level, and those networks were immediately visible based on whom students were talking to or sitting with. By and large, the students were cordoned off in their own section on the sides of the stands while parents and more "serious" fans occupied the seats in the center. Most of the students in the stands were white and divided by grade: the upperclassmen took the seats closest to the field, while the freshmen were pushed toward the back. Girls were rarely alone with boys, but when they were, they were holding hands. The teens who swarmed below and to the right of the stands represented a different part of the school. Unlike their peers in the stands, most of the students milling about below were black. Aside from the Homecoming Court, only one group was racially mixed, and they were recognizable mainly for their "artistic" attire—unnaturally colorful hair, piercings, and black clothing that I recognized from the racks of Hot Topic, a popular mall-based chain store that caters to goths, punks, and other subcultural groups.

Only two things confirmed that this was not 1994: the fashion and the cell phones. Gone were the 1980s-inspired bangs, perms, and excessive use of hair gel and hairspray that dominated my high school

well into the 1990s. And unlike 1994, cell phones were everywhere. As far as I could tell, every teen at the game that day in Nashville had one: iPhones, Blackberries, and other high-end smartphones seemed to be especially popular at this upper-middle-class school. Unsurprisingly, the phones in the hands of the white students were often more expensive or of more elite brands than those in the hands of the black students.

The pervasiveness of cell phones in the stands isn't that startling; over 80 percent of high school students in the United States had a cell phone in 2010.<sup>1</sup> What was surprising, at least to most adults, was how little the teens actually used them as phones. The teens I observed were not making calls. They whipped out their phones to take photos of the Homecoming Court, and many were texting frantically while trying to find one another in the crowd. Once they connected, the texting often stopped. On the few occasions when a phone did ring, the typical response was an exasperated "Mom!" or "Dad!" implying a parent calling to check in, which, given the teens' response to such calls, was clearly an unwanted interruption. And even though many teens are frequent texters, the teens were not directing most of their attention to their devices. When they did look at their phones, they were often sharing the screen with the person sitting next to them, reading or viewing something together.

The parents in the stands were paying much more attention to their devices. They were even more universally equipped with smartphones than their children, and those devices dominated their focus. I couldn't tell whether they were checking email or simply supplementing the football game with other content, being either bored or distracted. But many adults were staring into their devices intently, barely looking up when a touchdown was scored. And unlike the teens, they weren't sharing their devices with others or taking photos of the event.

Although many parents I've met lament their children's obsession with their phones, the teens in Nashville were treating their phones as no more than a glorified camera plus coordination device. The

reason was clear: their friends were right there with them. They didn't need anything else.

I had come to Nashville to better understand how social media and other technologies had changed teens' lives. I was fascinated with the new communication and information technologies that had emerged since I was in high school. I had spent my own teen years online, and I was among the first generation of teens who did so. But that was a different era; few of my friends in the early 1990s were interested in computers at all. And my own interest in the internet was related to my dissatisfaction with my local community. The internet presented me with a bigger world, a world populated by people who shared my idiosyncratic interests and were ready to discuss them at any time, day or night. I grew up in an era where going online—or "jacking in"—was an escape mechanism, and I desperately wanted to escape.

The teens I met are attracted to popular social media like Facebook and Twitter or mobile technologies like apps and text messaging for entirely different reasons. Unlike me and the other early adopters who avoided our local community by hanging out in chatrooms and bulletin boards, most teenagers now go online to connect to the people in their community. Their online participation is not eccentric; it is entirely normal, even expected.

The day after the football game in Nashville, I interviewed a girl who had attended the Homecoming game. We sat down and went through her Facebook page, where she showed me various photos from the night before. Facebook hadn't been on her mind during the game, but as soon as she got home, she uploaded her photos, tagged her friends, and started commenting on others' photos. The status updates I saw on her page were filled with references to conversations that took place at the game. She used Facebook to extend the pleasure she had in connecting with her classmates during the game. Although she couldn't physically hang out with her friends after the game ended, she used Facebook to stay connected after the stands had cleared.

Social media plays a crucial role in the lives of networked teens. Although the specific technologies change, they collectively provide teens with a space to hang out and connect with friends. Teens' mediated interactions sometimes complement or supplement their face-to-face encounters. In 2006, when MySpace was at the height of its popularity, eighteen-year-old Skyler told her mother that being on MySpace was utterly essential to her social life. She explained, "If you're not on MySpace, you don't exist." What Skyler meant is simply that social acceptance depends on the ability to socialize with one's peers at the "cool" place. Each cohort of teens has a different space that it decides is cool. It used to be the mall, but for the youth discussed in this book, social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are *à la* cool places. Inevitably, by the time this book is published, the next generation of teens will have inhabited a new set of apps and tools, making social network sites feel passé. The spaces may change, but the organizing principles aren't different.

Although some teens still congregate at malls and football games, the introduction of social media does alter the landscape. It enables youth to create a cool space without physically transporting themselves anywhere. And because of a variety of social and cultural factors, social media has become an important public space where teens can gather and socialize broadly with peers in an informal way. Teens are looking for a place of their own to make sense of the world beyond their bedrooms. Social media has enabled them to participate in and help create what I call *networked publics*.

In this book, I document how and why social media has become central to the lives of so many American teens and how they navigate the networked publics that are created through those technologies.<sup>2</sup> I also describe—and challenge—the anxieties that many American adults have about teens' engagement with social media. By illustrating teens' practices, habits, and the tensions between teens and adults, I attempt to provide critical insight into the networked lives of contemporary youth.



## What Is Social Media?

Over the past decade, social media has evolved from being an esoteric jumble of technologies to a set of sites and services that are at the heart of contemporary culture. Teens turn to a plethora of popular services to socialize, gossip, share information, and hang out. Although this book addresses a variety of networked technologies—including the internet broadly and mobile services like texting specifically—much of it focuses on a collection of services known as social media. I use the term *social media* to refer to the sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content. In addition to referring to various communication tools and platforms, social media also hints at a cultural mindset that emerged in the mid-2000s as part of the technical and business phenomenon referred to as “Web2.0.”<sup>3</sup>

The services known as social media are neither the first—nor the only—tools to support significant social interaction or enable teenagers to communicate and engage in meaningful online communities. Though less popular than they once were, tools like email, instant messaging, and online forums are still used by teens. But as a cultural phenomenon, social media has reshaped the information and communication ecosystem.

In the 1980s and 1990s, early internet adopters used services like email and instant messaging to chat with people they knew; they turned to public-facing services like chatrooms and bulletin boards when they wanted to connect with strangers. Although many who participated in early online communities became friends with people they met online, most early adopters entered these spaces without knowing the other people in the space. Online communities were organized by topic, with separate spaces for those interested in discussing Middle East politics or getting health advice or finding out how various programming languages worked.

Beginning around 2003, the increased popularity of blogging and the rise of social network sites reconfigured this topically oriented land-

scape. Although the most visible blogging services helped people connect based on shared interests, the vast majority of bloggers were blogging for, and reading blogs of, people they knew.<sup>4</sup> When early social network sites like Friendster and MySpace launched, they were designed to enable users to meet new people—and, notably, friends of friends—who might share their interests, tastes, or passions. Friendster, in particular, was designed as a matchmaking service. In other words, social network sites were designed for social networking. Yet what made these services so unexpectedly popular was that they also provided a platform for people to connect with their friends. Rather than focusing on the friends of friends who could be met through the service, many early adopters simply focused on socializing with their friends. At the height of its popularity, MySpace's tagline was “A Place for Friends,” and that's precisely what the service was for many of its users.

Social network sites changed the essence of online communities. Whereas early online community tools like Usenet and bulletin boards were organized around interests, even if people used them to engage with friends, blogs, like homepages, were organized around individuals. Links allowed people to highlight both their friends and those who shared their interests. Social network sites downplayed the importance of interests and made friendship the organizing tenant of the genre.

Early adopters had long embraced internet technologies to socialize with others, but in more mainstream culture, participating in online communities was often viewed as an esoteric practice for geeks and other social outcasts. By the mid-2000s, with the mainstreaming of internet access and the rise of social media—and especially MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter—sharing information and connecting to friends online became an integrated part of daily life for many people, and especially the teens who came of age during this period. Rather than being seen as a subcultural practice, participating in social media became normative.

Although teens have embraced countless tools for communicating with one another, their widespread engagement with social media

has been unprecedented. Teens who used Facebook or Instagram or Tumblr in 2013 weren't seen as peculiar. Nor were those who used Xanga, LiveJournal, or MySpace in the early to mid-2000s. At the height of their popularity, the best-known social media tools aren't viewed with disdain, nor is participation seen to be indicative of social tendencies. In fact, as I describe throughout this book, engagement with social media is simply an everyday part of life, akin to watching television and using the phone. This is a significant shift from my experiences growing up using early digital technologies.

Even though many of the tools and services that I reference throughout this book are now passé, the core activities I discuss—charting and socializing, engaging in self-expression, grappling with privacy, and sharing media and information—are here to stay. Although the specific sites and apps may be constantly changing, the practices that teens engage in as they participate in networked publics remain the same. New technologies and mobile apps change the landscape, but teens' interactions with social media through their phones extend similar practices and activities into geographically unbounded settings. The technical shifts that have taken place since I began this project—and in the time between me writing this book and you reading it—are important, but many of the arguments made in the following pages transcend particular technical moments, even if the specific examples used to illustrate those issues are locked in time.

### The Significance of Networked Publics

Teens are passionate about finding their place in society. What is different as a result of social media is that teens' perennial desire for social connection and autonomy is now being expressed in *networked publics*. Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.<sup>8</sup>

Although the term *public* has resonance in everyday language, the construct of a public—let alone publics—tends to be more academic in nature. What constitutes a public in this sense can vary. It can be an accessible space in which people can gather freely. Or, as political scientist Benedict Anderson describes, a public can be a collection of people who understand themselves to be part of an *imagined community*.<sup>6</sup> People are a part of multiple publics—bounded as audiences or by geography—and yet, publics often intersect and intertwine. Publics get tangled up in one another, challenging any effort to understand the boundaries and shape of any particular public. When US presidents give their State of the Union speeches, they may have written them with the American public in mind, but their speeches are now accessible around the globe. As a result, it's never quite clear who fits into the public imagined by a president.

Publics serve different purposes. They can be political in nature, or they can be constructed around shared identities and social practices. The concept of a public often invokes the notion of a state-controlled entity, but publics can also involve private actors, such as companies, or commercial spaces like malls. Because of the involvement of media in contemporary publics, publics are also interconnected to the notion of audience. All of these constructs blur and are contested by scholars. By invoking the term *publics*, I'm not trying to take a position within the debates so much as to make use of the wide array of different interwoven issues signaled by that term. Publics provide a space and a community for people to gather, connect, and help construct society as we understand it.

Networked publics are publics both in the spatial sense and in the sense of an imagined community. They are built on and through social media and other emergent technologies. As spaces, the networked publics that exist because of social media allow people to gather and connect, hang out, and joke around. Networked publics formed through technology serve much the same functions as publics like the mall or the park did for previous generations of teenagers. As social constructs, social media creates networked publics that allow people to see themselves as a

part of a broader community. Just as shared TV consumption once allowed teens to see themselves as connected through mass media, social media allows contemporary teens to envision themselves as part of a collectively imagined community.

Teens engage with networked publics for the same reasons they have always relished publics; they want to be a part of the broader world by connecting with other people and having the freedom of mobility. Likewise, many adults fear networked technologies for the same reasons that adults have long been wary of teen participation in public life and teen socialization in parks, malls, and other sites where youth congregate. If I have learned one thing from my research, it's this: social media services like Facebook and Twitter are providing teens with new opportunities to participate in public life, and this, more than anything else, is what concerns many anxious adults.

Although the underlying structure of physical spaces and the relationships that are enabled by them are broadly understood, both the architecture of networked spaces and the ways they allow people to connect are different. Even if teens are motivated to engage with networked publics to fulfill desires to socialize that predate the internet, networked technologies alter the social ecosystem and thus affect the social dynamics that unfold.

To understand what is new and what is not, it's important to understand how technology introduces new social possibilities and how these challenge assumptions people have about everyday interactions. The design and architecture of environments enable certain types of interaction to occur. Round tables with chairs make chatting with someone easier than classroom-style seating. Even though students can twist around and talk to the person behind them, a typical classroom is designed to encourage everyone to face the teacher. The particular properties or characteristics of an environment can be understood as *affordances* because they make possible—and, in some cases, are used to encourage—certain types of practices, even if they do not determine what practices will unfold.<sup>7</sup> Understanding the affordances of a particular technology or space is important because it sheds light on

what people can leverage or resist in achieving their goals. For example, the affordances of a thick window allow people to see each other without being able to hear each other. To communicate in spite of the window, they may pantomime, hold up signs with written messages, or break the glass. The window's affordances don't predict how people will communicate, but they do shape the situation nonetheless.

Because technology is involved, networked publics have different characteristics than traditional physical public spaces. Four affordances, in particular, shape many of the mediated environments that are created by social media. Although these affordances are not in and of themselves new, their relation to one another because of networked publics creates new opportunities and challenges. They are:

- persistence: the durability of online expressions and content;
- visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness;
- spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared; and
- searchability: the ability to find content.

Content shared through social media often sticks around because technologies are designed to enable *persistence*. The fact that content often persists has significant implications. Such content enables interactions to take place over time in an asynchronous fashion. Alice may write to Bob at midnight while Bob is sound asleep; but when Bob wakes up in the morning or comes back from summer camp three weeks later, that message will still be there waiting for him, even if Alice had forgotten about it. Persistence means that conversations conducted through social media are far from ephemeral; they endure. Persistence enables different kinds of interactions than the ephemerality of a park. Alice's message doesn't expire when Bob reads it, and Bob can keep that message for decades. What persistence also means, then, is that those using social media are often "on the record" to an unprecedented degree.

Through social media, people can easily share with broad audiences and access content from greater distances, which increases the

potential *visibility* of any particular message. More often than not, what people put up online using social media is widely accessible because most systems are designed such that sharing with broader or more public audiences is the default. Many popular systems require users to take active steps to limit the visibility of any particular piece of shared content. This is quite different from physical spaces, where people must make a concerted effort to make content visible to sizable audiences.<sup>8</sup> In networked publics, interactions are often public by default, private through effort.

Social media is often designed to help people spread information, whether by explicitly or implicitly encouraging the sharing of links, providing reblogging or favoriting tools that repost images or texts, or by making it easy to copy and paste content from one place to another. Thus, much of what people post online is easily *spreadable* with the click of a few keystrokes.<sup>9</sup> Some systems provide simple buttons to “forward,” “repost,” or “share” content to articulated or curated lists. Even when these tools aren’t built into the system, content can often be easily downloaded or duplicated and then forwarded along. The ease with which everyday people can share media online is unrivaled, which can be both powerful and problematic. Spreadability can be leveraged to rally people for a political cause or to spread rumors.

Last, since the rise of search engines, people’s communications are also often *searchable*. My mother would have loved to scream, “Find!” and see where my friends and I were hanging out and what we were talking about. Now, any inquisitive onlooker can query databases and uncover countless messages written by and about others. Even messages that were crafted to be publicly accessible were not necessarily posted with the thought that they would reappear through a search engine. Search engines make it easy to surface esoteric interactions. These tools are often designed to eliminate contextual cues, increasing the likelihood that searchers will take what they find out of context.

None of the capabilities enabled by social media are new. The letters my grandparents wrote during their courtship were persistent.

Messages printed in the school newspaper or written on bathroom walls have long been visible. Gossip and rumors have historically spread like wildfire through word of mouth. And although search engines certainly make inquiries more efficient, the practice of asking after others is not new, even if search engines mean that no one else knows. What is new is the way in which social media alters and amplifies social situations by offering technical features that people can use to engage in these well-established practices.

As people use these different tools, they help create new social dynamics. For example, teens “stalk” one another by searching for highly visible, persistent data about people they find interesting. “Drama” starts when teens increase the visibility of gossip by spreading it as fast as possible through networked publics. And teens seek attention by exploiting searchability, spreadability, and persistence to maximize the visibility of their garage band’s YouTube video. The particular practices that emerge as teens use the tools around them create the impression that teen sociality is radically different even though the underlying motivations and social processes have not changed that much.

Just because teens can and do manipulate social media to attract attention and increase visibility does not mean that they are equally experienced at doing so or that they automatically have the skills to navigate what unfolds. It simply means that teens are generally more comfortable with—and tend to be less skeptical of—social media than adults. They don’t try to analyze how things are different because of technology; they simply try to relate to a public world in which technology is a given. Because of their social position, what’s novel for teens is not the technology but the public life that it enables. Teens are desperate to have access to and make sense of public life; understanding the technologies that enable publics is just par for the course. Adults, in contrast, have more freedom to explore various public environments. They are more likely—and more equipped—to compare networked publics to other publics. As a result, they focus more on how networked publics seem radically different from other publics, such as those that unfold at the local bar or through church.

Because of their experience and stage in life, teens and adults are typically focused on different issues. Whereas teens are focused on what it means to be in public, adults are more focused on what it means to be networked.

Throughout this book, I return to these four affordances to discuss how engagement with networked publics affects everyday social practices. It's important to note, however, this is not how teenagers themselves would describe the shifts that are under way. More often than not, they are unaware of why the networked publics they inhabit are different than other publics or why adults find networked publics so peculiar. To teens, these technologies—and the properties that go with them—are just an obvious part of life in a networked era, whereas for many adults these affordances reveal changes that are deeply disconcerting. As I return to these issues throughout the book, I will juxtapose teens' perspectives alongside adults' anxieties to highlight what has changed and what has stayed the same.

### New Technologies, Old Hopes and Fears

Any new technology that captures widespread attention is likely to provoke serious hand wringing, if not full-blown panic. When the sewing machine was introduced, there were people who feared the implications that women moving their legs up and down would affect female sexuality.<sup>10</sup> The Walkman music player was viewed as an evil device that would encourage people to disappear into separate worlds, unable to communicate with one another.<sup>11</sup> Technologies are not the only cultural artifacts to prompt these so-called moral panics; new genres of media also cause fearful commentary. Those who created comic books, penny arcades, and rock-and-roll music have been seen as sinister figures bent on seducing children into becoming juvenile delinquents.<sup>12</sup> Novels were believed to threaten women's morals, a worry that Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* dramatizes brilliantly. Even Socrates is purported to have warned of the dangers of the alphabet and writing, citing implications for memory and the ability to convey truth.<sup>13</sup> These fears are now laughable, but when

these technologies or media genres first appeared, they were taken very seriously.

Even the most fleeting acquaintance with the history of information and communication technologies indicates that moral panics are episodic and should be taken with a grain of salt. So too with utopian visions, which prove just as unrealistic. A popular T-shirt designed by John Slabyk and sold on the website Threadless sums up the disillusionment with failed technological utopias:

they lied to us  
this was supposed to be the future  
where is my jetpack,  
where is my robotic companion,  
where is my dinner in pill form,  
where is my hydrogen fueled automobile,  
where is my nuclear-powered levitating house,  
where is my cure for this disease

Technologies are often heralded as the solution to major world problems. When those solutions fail to transpire, people are disillusioned. This can prompt a backlash, as people focus on the terrible things that may occur because of those same technologies.

A great deal of the fear and anxiety that surrounds young people's use of social media stems from misunderstanding or dashed hopes.<sup>14</sup> More often than not, what emerges out of people's confusion takes the form of utopian and dystopian rhetoric. This issue will reappear throughout the book. Sometimes, as in the case of sexual predators and other online safety issues, misunderstanding results in a moral panic. In other cases, such as the dystopian notion that teens are addicted to social media or the utopian idea that technology will solve inequality, the focus on technology simply obscures other dynamics at play.

Both extremes depend on a form of magical thinking scholars call *technological determinism*.<sup>15</sup> Utopian and dystopian views assume that technologies possess intrinsic powers that affect *all* people in *all* situations the same way. Utopian rhetoric assumes that when a particular

technology is broadly adopted it will transform society in magnificent ways, while dystopian visions focus on all of the terrible things that will happen because of the widespread adoption of a particular technology that ruins everything. These extreme rhetorics are equally unhelpful in understanding what actually happens when new technologies are broadly adopted. Reality is nuanced and messy, full of pros and cons. Living in a networked world is complicated.

### Kids Will Be Kids

If you listen to the voices of youth, the story you'll piece together reveals a hodgepodge of opportunities and challenges, changes and continuity. As with the football game in Nashville, many elements of American teen culture remain unchanged in the digital age. School looks remarkably familiar, and many of the same anxieties and hopes that shaped my experience are still recognizable today. Others are strikingly different, but what differs often has less to do with technology and more to do with increased consumerism, heightened competition for access to limited opportunities, and an intense amount of parental pressure, especially in wealthier communities.<sup>16</sup> All too often, it is easier to focus on the technology than on the broader systemic issues that are at play because technical changes are easier to see.

Nostalgia gets in the way of understanding the relation between teens and technology. Adults may idealize their childhoods and forget the trials and tribulations they faced. Many adults I meet assume that their own childhoods were better and richer, simpler and safer, than the digitally mediated ones contemporary youth experience. They associate the rise of digital technology with decline—social, intellectual, and moral. The research I present here suggests that the opposite is often true.

Many of the much-hyped concerns discussed because of technology are not new (for example, bullying) but rather may be misleading (for example, a decline in attention) or serve as distractions for real risks (for example, predators). Most myths are connected to real incidents or rooted in data that are blown out of proportion or are deliberately

exaggerated to spark fear. Media culture exaggerates this dynamic, magnifying anxieties and reinforcing fears. For adults to hear the voices of youth, they must let go of their nostalgia and suspend their fears. This is not easy.

Teens continue to occupy an awkward position between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence. They are struggling to carve out an identity that is not defined solely by family ties. They want to be recognized as someone other than son, daughter, sister, or brother. These struggles play themselves out in familiar ways, as teens fight for freedoms while not always being willing or able to accept responsibilities. Teens simultaneously love and despise, need and reject their parents and other adults in their lives. Meanwhile, many adults are simultaneously afraid of teens and afraid for them.

Teens' efforts to control their self-presentation—often by donning clothing or hairstyles their parents deem socially unacceptable or engaging in practices that their parents deem risky—are clearly related to their larger effort at self-fashioning and personal autonomy. By dressing like the twenty-somethings they see celebrated in popular culture, they signal their desire to be seen as independent young adults. Fashion choices are one of many ways of forging an identity that is cued less to family and more to friends.

Developing meaningful friendships is a key component of the coming of age process. Friends offer many things—advice, support, entertainment, and a connection that combats loneliness. And in doing so, they enable the transition to adulthood by providing a context beyond that of family and home. Though family is still important, many teens relish the opportunity to create relationships that are not simply given but chosen.

The importance of friends in social and moral development is well documented.<sup>17</sup> But the fears that surround teens' use of social media overlook this fundamental desire for social connection. All too often, parents project their values onto their children, failing to recognize that school is often not the most pressing concern for most teens. Many parents wonder: Why are my kids tethered to their cell phones

or perpetually texting with friends even when they are in the same room? Why do they seem compelled to check Facebook hundreds of times a day? Are they addicted to technology or simply wasting time? How will they get into college if they are constantly distracted? I encounter these questions from concerned adults whenever I give public lectures, and these attitudes figure prominently in parenting guides and in journalistic accounts of teens' engagement with social media.

Yet these questions seem far less urgent and difficult when we acknowledge teens' underlying social motivations. Most teens are not compelled by gadgetry as such—they are compelled by friendship. The gadgets are interesting to them primarily as a means to a social end. Furthermore, social interactions may be a distraction from school, but they are often not a distraction from learning. Keeping this basic social dynamic firmly in view makes networked teens suddenly much less worrisome and strange.

Consider, for example, the widespread concern over internet addiction. Are there teens who have an unhealthy relationship with technology? Certainly. But most of those who are "addicted" to their phones or computers are actually focused on staying connected to friends in a culture where getting together in person is highly constrained. Teens' preoccupation with their friends dovetails with their desire to enter the public spaces that are freely accessible to adults. The ability to access public spaces for sociable purposes is a critical component of the coming of age process, and yet many of the public spaces where adults gather—bars, clubs, and restaurants—are inaccessible to teens.

As teens transition from childhood, they try to understand how they fit into the larger world. They want to inhabit public spaces, but they also look to adults, including public figures, to understand what it means to be grown-up. They watch their parents and other adults in their communities for models of adulthood. But they also track celebrities like Kanye West and Kim Kardashian to imagine the freedoms they would have if they were famous. For better or worse, media narratives also help construct broader narratives for

how public life works. "Reality" TV shows like *Jersey Shore* signal the potential fun that can be had by young adults who don't need to appease parents and teachers.

Some teens may reject the messages of adulthood that they hear or see, but they still learn from all of the signals around them. As they start to envision themselves as young adults, they begin experimenting with the boundaries of various freedoms, pushing for access to cars or later curfews. Teens' determination to set their own agenda can be nerve-racking for some parents, particularly those who want to protect their children from every possible danger. Coming of age is rife with self-determination, risk taking, and tough decision-making.

Teens often want to be with friends on their own terms, without adult supervision, and in public. Paradoxically, the networked publics they inhabit allow them a measure of privacy and autonomy that is not possible at home where parents and siblings are often listening in. Recognizing this is important to understanding teens' relationship to social media. Although many adults think otherwise, teens' engagement with public life through social media is not a rejection of privacy. Teens may wish to enjoy the benefits of participating in public, but they also relish intimacy and the ability to have control over their social situation. Their ability to achieve privacy is often undermined by nosy adults—notably their parents and teachers—but teens go to great lengths to develop innovative strategies for managing privacy in networked publics.

Social media enables a type of youth-centric public space that is often otherwise inaccessible. But because that space is highly visible, it can often provoke concerns among adults who are watching teens as they try to find their way.

### A Place to Call Their Own

Sitting in a cafeteria in a small town in Iowa in 2007, I was talking with Heather, a white sixteen-year-old, when the topic of adult attitudes toward Facebook came up. Heather had recently heard that politicians were trying to prohibit teen access to social network sites,

and she was incensed. "I'm really mad about it. It's social networking. It really is a way to communicate, and if they ban that, it's really hard to communicate with other people you don't see that much." I asked her why she didn't just get together with her friends in person. The rant that followed made clear that I had touched a nerve.

I can't really go see people in person. I can barely hang out with my friends on the weekend, let alone people I don't talk to as often. I'm so busy. I've got lots of homework, I'm busy with track, I've got a job, and when I'm not working and doing homework I'm hanging out with the good friends that I have. But there's some people I've kind of lost contact with and I like keeping connected to them because they're still friends. I just haven't talked to them in a while. I have no means of doing that. If they go to a different school it's really hard and I don't exactly know where everyone lives, and I don't have everyone's cell phone numbers, and I don't have all of their AIM screen names either, so Facebook makes it a lot easier for me.

For Heather, social media is not only a tool; it is a social lifeline that enables her to stay connected to people she cares about but can not otherwise interact with in person. Without the various sites and services she uses, Heather—like many of her peers—believes that her social life would significantly shrink. She doesn't see Facebook as inherently useful, but it's where everyone she knows is hanging out. And it's the place to go when she doesn't know how to contact someone directly.

The social media tools that teens use are direct descendants of the hangouts and other public places in which teens have been congregating for decades. What the drive-in was to teens in the 1950s and the mall in the 1980s, Facebook, texting, Twitter, instant messaging, and other social media are to teens now. Teens flock to them knowing they can socialize with friends and become better acquainted with classmates and peers they don't know as well. They embrace social media for roughly the same reasons earlier generations of teens

attended sock hops, congregated in parking lots, colonized people's front stoops, or tied up the phone lines for hours on end. Teens want to gossip, flirt, complain, compare notes, share passions, emote, and joke around. They want to be able to talk among themselves—even if that means going online.

Heather's reliance on Facebook and other tools registers an important change in teen experience. This change is not rooted in social media but instead helps explain the popularity of digital technologies. Many American teens have limited geographic freedom, less free time, and more rules. In many communities across the United States, the era of being able to run around after school so long as you are home by dark is long over.<sup>18</sup> Many teens are stuck at home until they are old enough to drive themselves. For younger teens, getting together with friends after school depends on cooperative parents with flexible schedules who are willing or able to chauffeur and chaperone.

Socializing is also more homebound. Often, teens meet in each other's homes rather than public spaces. And no wonder: increasing regulation means that there aren't as many public spaces for teens to gather. The mall, once one of the main hubs for suburban teens, is much less accessible now than it once was.<sup>19</sup> Because malls are privately owned spaces, proprietors can prohibit anyone they wish, and many of them have prohibited groups of teenagers from entering. In addition, parents are less willing to allow their children to hang out in malls, out of fear of the strangers teens may encounter. Teens simply have far fewer places to be together in public than they once did.<sup>20</sup> And the success of social media must be understood partly in relation to this shrinking social landscape. Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace are not only new public spaces: they are in many cases the only "public" spaces in which teens can easily congregate with large groups of their peers. More significantly, teens can gather in them while still physically stuck at home.

Teens told me time and again that they would far rather meet up in person, but the hectic and heavily scheduled nature of their



day-to-day lives, their lack of physical mobility, and the fears of their parents have made such face-to-face interactions increasingly impossible. As Amy, a biracial sixteen-year-old in Seattle, succinctly put it: "My mom doesn't let me out of the house very often, so that's pretty much all I do, is sit on MySpace and talk to people and text and talk on the phone, cause my mom's always got some crazy reason to keep me in the house." Social media may seem like a peculiar place for teens to congregate, but for many teens, hanging out on Facebook or Twitter is their only opportunity to gather en masse with friends, acquaintances, classmates, and other teens. More often than not, their passion for social media stems from their desire to socialize.

Just because teens are comfortable using social media to hang out does not mean that they're fluent in or with technology. Many teens are not nearly as digitally adept as the often-used assumption that they are "digital natives" would suggest. The teens I met knew how to get to Google but had little understanding about how to construct a query to get quality information from the popular search engine. They knew how to use Facebook, but their understanding of the site's privacy settings did not mesh with the ways in which they configured their accounts. As sociologist Eszter Hargittai has quipped, many teens are more likely to be digital naives than digital natives.<sup>21</sup>

The term *digital native* is a lightning rod for the endless hopes and fears that many adults attach to this new generation. Media narratives often suggest that kids today—those who have grown up with digital technology—are equipped with marvelous new superpowers. Their multitasking skills supposedly astound adults almost as much as their three thousand text messages per month. Meanwhile, the same breathless media reports also warn the public that these kids are vulnerable to unprecedented new dangers: sexual predators, cyberbullying, and myriad forms of intellectual and moral decline, including internet addiction, shrinking attentions spans, decreased literacy, reckless oversharing, and so on. As with most fears, these anxieties are not without precedent even if they are often overblown and misconstrued. The key to understanding how youth navigate social media is to step away

from the headlines—both good and bad—and dive into the more nuanced realities of young people.

My experience hanging out with teenagers convinced me that the greatest challenges facing networked teens are far from new. Some challenges are rooted in this country's long history of racial and social inequality, but economic variability is increasingly noticeable. American teens continue to live and learn in radically uneven conditions. I visited schools with state-of-the-art facilities, highly credentialled and specialized faculty, and students hell-bent on going to Ivy League colleges. At the other extreme, I also visited run-down schools with metal detectors, a stream of "substitute" teachers standing in for full-time educators, and students who smoked marijuana during class. The explanations for these variations are complex and challenging, and the disparity is unlikely to be addressed in the near future.

Although almost all teens have access to technology at this point, their access varies tremendously. Some have high-end mobile phones with unlimited data plans, their own laptop, and wireless access at home. Others are constrained to basic phones with pay-per-text plans and access the internet only through the filtered lens of school or library computers. Once again, economic inequality plays a central role. But access is not the sole divide. Technical skills, media literacy, and even basic English literacy all shape how teens experience new technologies. Some teens are learning about technology from their parents while other teens are teaching their parents how to construct a search query or fill out a job application.

One of the great hopes for the internet was that it would serve as the great equalizer. My research into youth culture and social media—alongside findings of other researchers—has made it obvious that the color-blind and disembodied social world that the internet was supposed to make possible has not materialized. And this unfortunate reality—the reality of racial tensions and discrimination that long predates the rise of digital media—often seems to escape our public attention.

Meanwhile, we hear a lot about how the online spaces that teens frequent are sinister worlds populated by sexual predators or bullies. But we rarely if ever hear that many teenagers are scarred by the same experiences offline. Bullying, racism, sexual predation, slut shaming, and other insidious practices that occur online are extraordinarily important to address even if they're not new. Helping young people navigate public life safely should be of significant public concern. But it's critical to recognize that technology does not create these problems, even if it makes them more visible and even if news media relishes using technology as a hook to tell salacious stories about youth. The very sight of at-risk youth should haunt all of us, but little is achieved if we focus only on making what we see invisible.

The internet mirrors, magnifies, and makes more visible the good, bad, and ugly of everyday life. As teens embrace these tools and incorporate them into their daily practices, they show us how our broader social and cultural systems are affecting their lives. When teens are hurting offline, they reveal their hurt online. When teens' experiences are shaped by racism and misogyny, this becomes visible online. In making networked publics their own, teens bring with them the values and beliefs that shape their experiences. As a society, we need to use the visibility that we get from social media to understand how the social and cultural fault lines that organize American life affect young people. And we need to do so in order to intervene in ways that directly help youth who are suffering.

Ever since the internet entered everyday life—and particularly since the widespread adoption of social media—we have been bombarded with stories about how new technologies are destroying our social fabric. Amid a stream of scare stories, techno-utopians are touting the amazing benefits of online life while cyber-dystopians are describing how our brains are disintegrating because of our connection to machines. These polarizing views of technology push the discussion of youth's engagement with social media to an extreme binary: social media is good *or* social media is bad. These extremes—and the myths they perpetuate—obscure the reality of teen practices

and threaten to turn the generation gap into a gaping chasm. These myths distort the reality of teen life, sometimes by idealizing it, but more frequently by demonizing it.

### How to Read This Book

The chapters that follow are dedicated to different issues that underpin youth engagement with social media. Many are organized around concerns about youth practices that persist in American society. Each chapter offers a grounded way of looking at an issue. Although the chapters can be read independently, they are collectively organized to flow from individual and familial challenges to broader societal issues. A conclusion summarizes my arguments and offers a deeper analysis of what networked publics mean for contemporary youth.

As a researcher passionate about the health and well-being of young people, I wrote this book in an effort to create a nuanced portrait of everyday teen life in an era in which social media has become mainstream. The questions I ask are simple: What is and isn't new about life inflected by social media? What does social media add to the quality of teens' social lives, and what does it take away? And when we as a society don't like the outcomes of technology, what can we do to change the equation constructively, making sure that we take advantage of the features of social media while limiting potential abuse?

It is much easier to understand myths retrospectively than it is to dismantle them as they are being perpetuated, but this book aims to do the latter. That said, some of the most pervasive anxieties about social media have begun to subside in recent years, as adults have started participating in social media and, especially, Facebook. I am cautiously hopeful that adult engagement will calm some of the most anxious panics. And yet the tropes and stories that I use throughout the book tend to be resurrected with each new technology, while others endure in the face of quite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. As many adults have grown comfortable with Facebook, the

media's narratives switched to focusing on the scariness of mobile apps like Snapchat and Kik. The story remains the same, even if the site of panic has shifted.

Social media has affected the lives and practices of many people and will continue to play a significant role in shaping many aspects of American society. There are many who lament these developments or wax nostalgic about the pre-internet world. That said, I would be surprised to find anyone who still believes that the internet is going away. Along with planes, running water, electricity, and motorized transportation, the internet is now a fundamental fact of modern life. This does not mean that access to the internet is universal, and some people will always opt out.<sup>22</sup> Even in a country as wealthy as the United States, many lack access to sanitation, and some choose to live without electricity. Just because the internet—and social media—is pervasive in American society does not mean that everyone will have access, will want access, or will experience access in the same way.

Contemporary youth are growing up in a cultural setting in which many aspects of their lives will be mediated by technology and many of their experiences and opportunities will be shaped by their engagement with technology. Fear mongering does little to help youth develop the ability to productively engage with this reality. As a society, we pay a price for fear mongering and utopian visions that ignore more complex realities. In writing this book, I hope to help the public better understand what young people are doing when they engage with social media and why their attempts to make sense of the world around them should be commended.

This book is written with a broad audience in mind—scholars and students, parents and educators, journalists and librarians. Although many sections draw on academic ideas, I do not expect the reader to be familiar with the scholarly literature invoked. When necessary for understanding the argument, I provide background in the text. More often than not, I've provided numerous touchstones and references in endnotes and an extensive bibliography that can enable those who wish to go deeper or to understand the relevant debates to do so.

Throughout this book, I draw on qualitative and ethnographic material that I collected from 2003 to 2012—and interview data conducted from 2007 to 2010—to provide a descriptive portrait of the different issues that I discuss.<sup>23</sup> Given the context in which I'm writing and the data on which I'm drawing, most of the discussion is explicitly oriented around American teen culture, although some of my analysis may be relevant in other cultures and contexts.<sup>24</sup> I also take for granted, and rarely seek to challenge, the capitalist logic that underpins American society and the development of social media. Although I believe that these assumptions should be critiqued, this is outside the scope of this project. By accepting the cultural context in which youth are living, I seek to explain their practices in light of the society in which they are situated.

The networked technologies that were dominant when I began researching this book are different than those that were popular when I was finishing the manuscript. Even MySpace—once the dominant social network site among youth and referred to throughout this book—is barely a shadow of its former self in 2013. Quite probably, what's popular when you're reading this book is different still. As I write this, Facebook is losing its allure as new apps and services like Instagram, Tumblr, and Snapchat gain hold. Social media is a moving landscape; many of the services that I reference throughout this book may or may not survive. But the ability to navigate one's social relationships, communicate asynchronously, and search for information online is here to stay. Don't let my reference to outdated services distract you from the arguments in this book. The examples may feel antiquated, but the core principles and practices I'm trying to describe are likely to persist long after this book is published.

Not everyone has equal access to the internet, nor do we all experience it in the same way. But social media is actively shaping and being shaped by contemporary society, so it behooves us to move beyond punditry and scare tactics to understand what social media is and how it fits into the social lives of youth.

As a society, we often spend so much time worrying about young people that we fail to account for how our paternalism and protectionism hinders teens' ability to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged adults. Regardless of the stories in the media, most young people often find ways to push through the restrictions and develop a sense of who they are and how they want to engage in the world. I want to celebrate their creativity and endurance while also highlighting that their practices and experiences are not universal or uniformly positive.

This book is not a love letter to youth culture, although my research has convinced me that young people are more resilient than I initially believed. Rather, this book is an attempt to convince the adults that have power over the lives of youth—including parents and teachers, journalists and law enforcement officers, employers and military personnel—that what teens are doing as they engage in networked publics makes sense. At the same time, coming to terms with life in a networked era is not necessarily easy or obvious. Rather, it's complicated.

## 1 identity why do teens seem strange online?

In 2005, an Ivy League university was considering the application of a young black man from South Central Los Angeles. The applicant had written a phenomenal essay about how he wanted to walk away from the gangs in his community and attend the esteemed institution. The admissions officers were impressed: a student who overcomes such hurdles is exactly what they like seeing. In an effort to learn more about him, the committee members Googled him. They found his MySpace profile. It was filled with gang symbolism, crass language, and references to gang activities. They recoiled.

I heard this story when a representative from the admissions office contacted me. The representative opened the conversation with a simple question: Why would a student lie to an admissions committee when the committee could easily find the truth online? I asked for context and learned about the candidate. Stunned by the question, my initial response was filled with nervous laughter. I had hung out with and interviewed teens from South Central. I was always struck by the challenges they faced, given the gang dynamics in their neighborhood. Awkwardly, I offered an alternative interpretation: perhaps this young man is simply including gang signals on his MySpace profile as a survival technique.

Trying to step into that young man's shoes, I shared with the college admissions officer some of the dynamics that I had seen in Los

Angles. My hunch was that this teen was probably very conscious of the relationship between gangs and others in his hometown. Perhaps he felt as though he needed to position himself within the local context in a way that wouldn't make him a target. If he was anything like other teens I had met, perhaps he imagined the audience of his MySpace profile to be his classmates, family, and community—not the college admissions committee. Without knowing the teen, my guess was that he was genuine in his college essay. At the same time, I also suspected that he would never dare talk about his desire to go to a prestigious institution in his neighborhood because doing so would cause him to be ostracized socially, if not physically attacked. As British sociologist Paul Willis argued in the 1980s, when youth attempt to change their socioeconomic standing, they often risk alienating their home community.<sup>1</sup> This dynamic was often acutely present in the communities that I observed.

The admissions officer was startled by my analysis, and we had a long conversation about the challenges of self-representation in a networked era.<sup>2</sup> I'll never know if that teen was accepted into that prestigious school, but this encounter stayed with me as I watched other adults misinterpret teens' online self-expressions. I came to realize that, taken out of context, what teens appear to do and say on social media seems peculiar if not outright problematic.<sup>3</sup>

The intended audience matters, regardless of the actual audience. Unfortunately, adults sometimes believe that they understand what they see online without considering how teens imagined the context when they originally posted a particular photograph or comment. The ability to understand how context, audience, and identity intersect is one of the central challenges people face in learning how to navigate social media. And, for all of the mistakes that they can and do make, teens are often leading the way at figuring out how to navigate a networked world in which collapsed contexts and imagined audiences are par for the course.

## Taken Out of Context

In his 1985 book *No Sense of Place*, media scholar Joshua Meyrowitz describes the story of Stokely Carmichael, an American civil rights activist. In the 1960s, Carmichael regularly gave different talks to different audiences. He used a different style of speaking when he addressed white political leaders than when he addressed southern black congregations. When Carmichael started presenting his ideas on television and radio, he faced a difficult decision: which audience should he address? No matter which style of speaking he chose, he knew he'd alienate some. He was right. By using a rolling pastoral voice in broadcast media, Carmichael ingratiated himself with black activists while alienating white elites.

Meyrowitz argues that electronic media like radio and television easily collapse seemingly disconnected contexts. Public figures, journalists, and anyone in the limelight must regularly navigate disconnected social contexts simultaneously, balancing what they say with how their diverse audiences might interpret their actions. A context collapse occurs when people are forced to grapple simultaneously with otherwise unrelated social contexts that are rooted in different norms and seemingly demand different social responses. For example, some people might find it quite awkward to run into their former high school teacher while drinking with their friends at a bar. These context collapses happen much more frequently in networked publics.

The dynamics that Meyrowitz describes are no longer simply the domain of high-profile people who have access to broadcast media. When teens interact with social media, they must regularly contend with collapsed contexts and invisible audiences as a part of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Their teachers might read what they post online for their friends, and when their friends from school start debating their friends from summer camp, they might be excited that their friend groups are combining—or they might find it disconcerting. In order to stabilize the context in their own minds, teens do what others before them have done: just like journalists and politicians, teens imagine the audience they're trying to reach.<sup>5</sup> In speaking to an unknown or

invisible audience, it is impossible and unproductive to account for the full range of plausible interpretations. Instead, public speakers consistently imagine a specific subset of potential readers or viewers and focus on how those intended viewers are likely to respond to a particular statement. As a result, the imagined audience defines the social context. In choosing how to present themselves before disconnected and invisible audiences, people must attempt to resolve context collapses or actively define the context in which they're operating.

Teens often imagine their audience to be those that they've chosen to "friend" or "follow," regardless of who might actually see their profile. In theory, privacy settings allow teens to limit their expressions to the people they intend to reach by restricting who can see what. On MySpace and Twitter—where privacy settings are relatively simple—using settings to limit who can access what content can be quite doable. Yet, on Facebook, this has proven to be intricate and confusing, given the complex and constantly changing privacy settings on that site.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, many teens have good reasons for not limiting who can access their profile. Some teens want to be accessible to peers who share their interests. Others recognize that privacy settings do little to limit parents from snooping or stop friends from sharing juicy messages. Many teens complain about parents who look over their shoulders when they're on the computer or friends who copy and paste updates and forward them along.

To complicate matters, just because someone is a part of a teen's imagined audience doesn't mean that this person is actually reading what's posted. When social media sites offer streams of content—as is common on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—people often imagine their audience to be the people they're following. But these people may not be following them in return or see their posts amid the avalanche of shared content. As a result, regardless of how they use privacy settings, teens must grapple with who can see their profile, who actually does see it, and how those who do see it will interpret it.

Teens' mental model of their audience is often inaccurate, but not because teens are naive or stupid. When people are chatting and sharing photos with friends via social media, it's often hard to remember that viewers who aren't commenting might also be watching. This is not an issue unique to teens, although teens are often chastised for not accounting for adult onlookers. But just as it's easy to get caught up in a conversation at a dinner party and forget about the rest of the room, it's easy to get lost in the back-and-forth on Twitter. Social media introduces additional challenges, particularly because of the persistent and searchable nature of most of these technical systems. Tweets and status updates aren't just accessible to the audience who happens to be following the thread as it unfolds; they quickly become archived traces, accessible to viewers at a later time. These traces can be searched and are easily reposted and spread. Thus, the context collapses that teens face online rarely occur in the moment with conflicting onlookers responding simultaneously. They are much more likely to be experienced over time, as new audiences read the messages in a new light.

When teens face collapsing contexts in physical environments, their natural response is to become quiet. For example, if a group of teens are hanging out at the mall and a security guard or someone's mother approaches them, they will stop whatever conversation they are having, even if it's innocuous. While they may be comfortable having strangers overhear their exchange, the sudden appearance of someone with social authority changes the context entirely. Online, this becomes more difficult. As Summer, a white fifteen-year-old from Michigan, explains, switching contexts online is more challenging than doing so in the park because, in the park, "you can see when there's people around you and stuff like that. So you can like quickly change the subject." Online, there's no way to change the conversation, both because it's virtually impossible to know if someone is approaching and because the persistent nature of most social exchanges means that there's a record of what was previously said. Thus, when Summer's mother looks at her Facebook page, she gains

access to a plethora of interactions that took place over a long period of time and outside the social and temporal context in which they were produced. Summer can't simply switch topics with her friends at the sight of her mother approaching. The ability to easily switch contexts assumes an ephemeral social situation; this cannot be taken for granted in digital environments.

Because social media often brings together multiple social contexts, teens struggle to effectively manage social norms. Some expect their friends and family to understand and respect different social contexts and to know when something is not meant for them. And yet there are always people who fail to recognize when content isn't meant for them, even though it's publicly accessible. This is the problem that Hunter faces when he posts to Facebook.

Hunter is a geeky, black fourteen-year-old living in inner-city Washington, DC, who resembles a contemporary Steve Urkel, complete with ill-fitting clothes, taped-together glasses, and nerdy mannerisms. He lives in two discrete worlds. His cousins and sister are what he describes as "ghetto" while his friends at his magnet school are all academically minded "geeks." On Facebook, these two worlds collide, and he regularly struggles to navigate them simultaneously. He gets especially frustrated when his sister interrupts conversations with his friends.

When I'm talking to my friends on Facebook or I put up a status, something I hate is when people who I'm not addressing in my statuses comment on my statuses. In [my old school], people always used to call me nerdy and that I was the least black black person that they've ever met, some people say that, and I said on Facebook, "Should I take offense to the fact that somebody put the ringtone 'White and Nerdy' for me?" and it was a joke. I guess we were talking about it in school, and [my sister] comes out of nowhere, "Aw, baby bro," and I'm like, "No, don't say that, I wasn't talking to you."

When I asked Hunter how his sister or friends are supposed to know who is being talked to on specific Facebook updates, he replied,

I guess that is a point. Sometimes it probably is hard, but I think it's just the certain way that you talk. I will talk to my sister a different way than I'll talk to my friends at school or from my friends from my old school, and I might say, "Oh, well, I fell asleep in Miss K's class by accident," and they'll say, "Oh, yeah, Miss K is so boring," and [my sister's] like, "Oh, well, you shouldn't fall asleep. You should pay attention." I mean, I think you can figure out that I'm not talking to you if I'm talking about a certain teacher.

Hunter loves his sister, but he also finds her take on social etiquette infuriating. He wants to maintain a relationship with her and appreciates that she's on Facebook, although he also notes that it's hard because of her priorities, values, and decisions. He doesn't want to ostracize her on Facebook, but he's consistently annoyed by how often she tries to respond to messages from his friends without realizing that this violates an implicit code of conduct.

To make matters worse, Hunter's sister is not the only one from his home life who he feels speaks up out of turn. Hunter and his friends are really into the card game Pokémon and what he calls "old skool" video games like the Legend of Zelda. His cousins, in contrast, enjoy first-person shooters like Halo and think his choice of retro video games is "lame." Thus, whenever Hunter posts messages about playing with his friends, his cousins use this as an opportunity to mock him. Frustrated by his family members' inability to "get the hint," Hunter has resorted both to limiting what he says online and trying to use technical features provided by Facebook to create discrete lists and block certain people from certain posts. Having to take measures to prevent his family from seeing what he posts saddens him because he doesn't want to hide; he only wants his family to stop "embarrassing" him. Context matters to Hunter, not because he's ashamed of his tastes or wants to hide his passions, but because he wants to have control over a given social situation. He wants to post messages without having to articulate context; he wants his audience to understand

where he's coming from and respect what he sees as unspoken social conventions. Without a shared sense of context, hanging out online becomes burdensome.

The ability to understand and define social context is important. When teens are talking to their friends, they interact differently than when they're talking to their family or to their teachers. Television show plotlines leverage the power of collapsed contexts for entertainment purposes, but managing them in everyday life is often exhausting. It may be amusing to watch Kramer face embarrassment when he and George accidentally run into Kramer's mother on *Seinfeld*, but such social collisions are not nearly as entertaining when they occur without a laugh track.<sup>7</sup> Situations like this require significant monitoring and social negotiation, which, in turn, require both strategic and tactical decisions that turn the most mundane social situation into a high-maintenance affair. Most people are uncomfortable with the idea that their worlds might collide uncontrollably, and yet, social media makes this dynamic a regular occurrence. Much of what's at stake has to do with the nuanced ways in which people read social situations and present themselves accordingly.

### Identity Work in Networked Publics

In her 1995 book, *Life on the Screen*, psychologist Sherry Turkle began to map out the creation of a mediated future that resembled both the utopian and dystopian immersive worlds constructed in science fiction novels. Watching early adopters—especially children—embrace virtual worlds, she argued that the distinction between computers and humans was becoming increasingly blurred and that a new society was emerging as people escaped the limitations of their offline identities. Turkle was particularly fascinated by the playful identity work that early adopters engaged in online, and with a psychoanalyst's eye, she extensively considered both the therapeutic and the deceptive potential of mediated identity work.<sup>8</sup>

Turkle was critical of some people's attempts to use fictitious identities to harm others, but she also highlighted that much could be

gained from the process of self-reflection that was enabled when people had to act out or work through their identity in order to make themselves present in virtual worlds. Unlike face-to-face settings in which people took their bodies for granted, people who went online had to consciously create their digital presence. Media studies scholar Jenny Sundén describes this process as people typing themselves into being.<sup>9</sup> Although Turkle recognized that a person's identity was always tethered to his or her psyche, she left room for arguments that suggested that the internet could—and would—free people of the burdens of their “material”—or physically embodied—identities, enabling them to become a better version of themselves.

I wanted Turkle's vision for the future to be right. When I embraced the internet as a teenager in the mid-1990s, I was going online to escape the so-called real world. I felt ostracized and misunderstood at school, but online I could portray myself as the person that I wanted to be. I took on fictitious identities in an effort to figure out who I was. I wasn't alone. Part of what made chatting fun in those days was that it was impossible to know if others were all that they portrayed themselves to be. I knew that a self-declared wizard was probably not actually a wizard and that the guy who said he had found the cure to cancer most likely hadn't, but embodied characteristics like gender and race weren't always so clear.<sup>10</sup> At the time, this felt playful and freeing, and I bought into the fantasy that the internet could save us from tyranny and hypocrisy. Manifestos like John Perry Barlow's 1996 “Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” spoke to me. Barlow told the global leaders at the World Economic Forum that the new “home of the Mind” enabled “identities [that] have no bodies.” I was proud to be one of the children he spoke of who appeared “native” in the new civilization.

Twenty years later, the dynamics of identity portrayal online are quite different from how early internet proponents imagined them to be. Although gaming services and virtual worlds are popular among some groups of youth, there's a significant cultural difference between fictional role-playing sites and the more widely embraced



social media sites, which tend to encourage a more nonfiction-oriented atmosphere. Even though pseudonymity is quite common in these environments, the type of identity work taking place on social media sites like Facebook is very different from what Turkle initially imagined. Many teens today go online to socialize with friends they know from physical settings and to portray themselves in online contexts that are more tightly wedded to unmediated social communities. These practices, which encourage greater continuity between teens' online and offline worlds, were much less common when I was growing up.

This doesn't mean that identity work is uniform across all online activities. Most teens use a plethora of social media services as they navigate relationships and contexts. Their seemingly distinct practices on each platform might suggest that they are trying to be different people, but this would be a naive reading of the kinds of identity work taking place on and through social media. For example, a teen might use her given name on a video service like Skype while choosing a descriptive screen name on a photo app like Instagram.<sup>22</sup> And when choosing a login for a blogging site like Tumblr, she might choose a name that intentionally signals her involvement with a particular interest-based community.

Quite often, teens respond to what they perceive to be the norms of a particular service. So when a teen chooses to identify as "Jessica Smith" on Facebook and "littlemonster" on Twitter, she's not creating multiple identities in the psychological sense. She's choosing to represent herself in different ways on different sites with the expectation of different audiences and different norms. Sometimes these choices are conscious attempts by individuals seeking to control their self-presentation; more often, they are whimsical responses to sites' requirement to provide a login handle. Although some teens choose to use the same handle across multiple sites, other teens find that their favorite nickname is taken or feel as though they've outgrown their previous identity. Regardless of the reason, the outcome is a hodgepodge of online identities that leave plenty of room for

interpretation. And in doing so, teens both interpret and produce the social contexts in which they are inhabiting.

Context matters. While teens move between different social contexts—including mediated ones like those produced by networked publics and unmediated ones like those constructed at school—they manage social dynamics differently. How they interact and with whom they interact in the school lunchroom is different than at afterschool music lessons than via group text messaging services. For many of the teens I interviewed, Facebook was the primary place where friend groups collide. Other services—like Tumblr or Twitter—were more commonly used by teens who were carving out their place in interest-driven communities.<sup>23</sup> For example, there are entire communities of teens on Tumblr who connect out of a shared interest in fashion; collectively, they produce a rich fashion blogging community that has stunned the fashion industry. On Twitter, it's not uncommon to see teens gushing about the celebrities du jour with other fans. These examples illustrate how these particular platforms are used circa 2013; teens' approaches to different sites may have changed by the time you're reading this book, but managing context within a given site and through the use of multiple sites has been commonplace for well over a decade. What matters is not the particular social media site but the context in which it's situated within a particular group of youth. The sites of engagement come and go, are repurposed, and evolve over time. Some people assume that these ebbs and flows mean radical changes in youth culture, but often the underlying practices stay the same even as the context shifts what is rendered visible and significant.

The context of a particular site is not determined by the technical features of that site but, rather, by the interplay between teens and the site. In sociological parlance, the context of social media sites is socially constructed.<sup>24</sup> More practically, what this means is that teens turn to different sites because they hear that a particular site is good for a given practice. They connect to people they know, observe how those people are using the site, and then reinforce or challenge those

norms through their own practices. As a result, the norms of social media are shaped by network effects; peers influence one another about how to use a particular site and then help collectively to create the norms of that site.

Because teens' engagement with social media is tied to their broader peer groups, the norms that get reinforced online do not deviate much from the norms that exist in school. This does not mean that there aren't distinctions. For example, I met a teen girl who was obsessed with a popular boy band called One Direction even though her friends at school were not. She didn't bother talking about her crush on one of the band's members in the lunchroom because she knew her friends wouldn't find such a topic interesting. She didn't hide her passion for One Direction from her friends, but she didn't turn to them to discuss the band members' haircuts or their latest music video. Instead, she turned to Twitter, where she was able to gush about the band with other fans. She first turned to Twitter because the members of One Direction were using that platform to engage with their fans, but as she engaged with the broader fan community, she spent more time talking with other fans than replying to the musicians' tweets. Through this fan community, she began interacting on Tumblr and posting fan-oriented posts on Instagram. Her friends all knew about her obsession—and occasionally teased her for her celebrity crush—but they didn't follow her on Twitter because they weren't interested in that facet of her life. She wasn't hiding her interests, but she had created a separate context—and thus a separate digital persona—for talking with fellow fans. When she wanted to talk with her school friends, she turned to Facebook or text messaging. At the same time, the contexts were not wholly distinct. When she found out that one of her classmates was also a fellow fan, they started engaging on both Facebook and Twitter, talking about school on Facebook and One Direction on Twitter. And she even ended up Facebook friending a few fans she met through Twitter, which created a space for them to talk about a different range of topics.

This young fan is a typical savvy internet user, comfortable navigating her identity and interests in distinct social contexts based on her understanding of the norms and community practices. She moves between Facebook and Twitter seamlessly, understanding that they are different social contexts. She has a coherent understanding of who she is and is comfortable choosing how she presents herself in these different environments. She moves just as seamlessly between these mediated environments as she does between online and offline settings, not because she's cycling through identities—or creating a segmentation between the virtual and the real—but because she's switching social contexts and acting accordingly.

As teens move between different social environments—and interact with different groups of friends, interest groups, and classmates—they maneuver between different contexts that they have collectively built and socially constructed. Their sense of context is shaped—but not cleanly defined—by setting, time, and audience. Although navigating distinct social contexts is not new, technology makes it easy for young people to move quickly between different social settings, creating the impression that they are present in multiple places simultaneously. What unfolds is a complex dance as teens quickly shift between—and often blur—different social contexts.

The popularity of social media in recent years has produced a significant rise in nonfiction or so-called real names identity production, but it is also important to recognize that there continue to be environments where teens gather anonymously or don crafted identities to create a separation between the kinds of social contexts that are viable offline and those that can be imagined online. Most notably, multiplayer online games like World of Warcraft and StarCraft were quite popular among youth I encountered. It is within these spaces—along with virtual worlds like Second Life and Whyville—where teens can and do engage in much of the playful and productive identity work that early internet scholars initially mapped out.<sup>24</sup> The process of creating an avatar and selecting virtual characteristics requires tremendous reflection, and teens often take this seriously.

Although some teens do invest a great deal of time and thought into their avatars, other teens I met were no more invested in their gaming character than in their Twitter handle. Their choices had meaning and were valuable, but not something that they felt needed to be analyzed for significance. When I asked one teen boy why he had chosen to be a particular character in *World of Warcraft*, he looked at me with a scrunched face. I pressed on to ask if his choice had any particular meaning, and he responded with an eye roll, saying, "It's just a game!" before continuing on to talk about how he had a collection of characters with different skill sets that could be used depending on what he was trying to achieve in the game.

Choosing and designing an avatar is a central part of participation in immersive games and virtual worlds, but youth approach this practice in extraordinarily varied ways. Some teens purposefully construct their avatars in ways that they feel reflect their physical bodies; other teens choose characters based on skills or aesthetics. For some teens, being "in world" is discrete from their school environment, whereas others game with classmates. It may seem that the role-playing elements of these environments imply a significant separation between the virtual and the real; however, these often get blurred in fantasy game worlds as well.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside the identity work done within common social media sites and wildly popular gaming services, a subculture has emerged in which participants outright eschew recognizable identity altogether by proclaiming the virtues of anonymity. Nowhere is this more visible than in the community of individuals who participate in and contribute to the image-based bulletin board site 4chan. 4chan was initially created in 2003 by a fifteen-year-old named Chris Poole, known as "moot," so that he could share pornography and anime with other teens.<sup>16</sup> Often referred to as the underbelly of the internet, 4chan is an active source of internet cultural production as well as malicious prankster activity. It is the birthplace of popular memes such as lolcats: often entertaining, widely distributed pictures of cats portrayed with text captions written in Impact font using an internet dialect

referred to as lolSpeak.<sup>17</sup> 4chan is also where Anonymous—the "hacktivist" group mostly known for a series of well-publicized political actions—originated.<sup>18</sup> Although it's impossible to know much about the site's contributors, the content typically shared on the site reflects tastes and humor usually associated with teenage boys.

The reason it's hard to get a handle on who participates on 4chan is that most of the content produced on the site is shared anonymously. As I met teen boys who contributed to 4chan, I found that many of them relished the anonymous norms of the site. They felt that anonymity gave them a sense of freedom they didn't feel they could have on sites for which constructing an identity—pseudonymous or "real"—was more typical. Some admitted to using this freedom in problematic or destructive ways—recounting acts of ganging up on girls whom they deemed annoying or using a combination of wits and trickery to manipulate Facebook administrators into providing data. But more often than not, teens talked about wanting to have a space where they weren't constantly scrutinized by adults and peers. By becoming anonymous and being an invisible part of a crowd, these teens knew that they weren't building a reputation within the site. Yet even when they weren't being personally recognized, many relished seeing their posts get traction and attention within the site; this made them feel part of the community. Furthermore, extensive use of in-group language and shared references made it easy to identify other members of 4chan, thereby enabling another mechanism of status and community.<sup>19</sup>

As teens have embraced a plethora of social environments and helped co-create the norms that underpin them, a wide range of practices has emerged. Teens have grown sophisticated with how they manage comments and present themselves in order to be read by their intended audience. They don't always succeed, but their efforts are phenomenal.

### Crafting a Profile, Creating an Identity Performance

Chris was ecstatic when his sixteen-year-old daughter invited him to be her friend on MySpace during the height of the MySpace craze. He had decided not to require that she befriend him on social

network sites, so he saw her invitation as a signal of trust and love. He immediately accepted the friend request and logged in to look at her private profile. His heart sank. About halfway down the page, there was a panel with a question, "What Drug Are You?" followed by a picture of a white substance on a mirror with a rolled-up dollar bill; the text below said, "Cocaine." Trying not to panic, he approached his daughter quizzically. She responded with laughter, followed by a drawn-out, "Daaaaad." She explained that what he'd seen was a quiz. Quizzes were all the rage in her school, and this one was currently making its rounds. She explained that whenever there were quizzes, you could easily guess where the quiz was going and answer so that you could get the result you wanted. This did not give Chris any sense of relief, but he reserved judgment and hesitantly asked why she wanted to get cocaine as the result. She proceeded to explain that the kids who smoked marijuana at school were "lame," while those who took mushrooms were "crazy." And then she explained, "But your generation did a lot of cocaine and you came out OK!" Chris burst out laughing, humored by how she perceived him and his peers. He had grown up in a rural white Midwestern community where alcohol and teen pregnancy dominated. Indeed, Chris was only sixteen years older than his daughter. After high school, he had gotten involved in the music scene, but being a single father left little room for partying. Cocaine was not part of his youth at all. Chris then grew serious and asked if she was interested in cocaine; he felt relieved by her exasperated rejection of this idea, and they proceeded to have a long conversation about how an onlooker could easily take what seemed like a funny quiz out of context.

Many teens post information on social media that they think is funny or intended to give a particular impression to a narrow audience without considering how this same content might be read out of context. Much of what seems like inaccurate identity information is simply a misinterpretation of a particular act of self-presentation. This issue was particularly noticeable in early social media genres in which explicit identity information was required for participation.

Consider, for example, MySpace, which required a user to provide age, sex, location, and other fields to create a profile.

When I stumbled on Allie's MySpace profile, I learned from the demographic section that she is ninety-five years old, from Christmas Island, and makes \$250,000+ per year. While it is possible that she is nearly a centenarian and logging onto MySpace from a remote, sparsely populated island in the Indian Ocean while running her highly profitable company, this seems unlikely. A quick glance at the rest of Allie's profile reveals other information that suggests that she is more likely to be a teenage girl attending high school in New Jersey. Her photo album includes self-portraits, photographs of Allie with friends, and images of teens goofing around. The majority of her friends indicate that they're from New Jersey, and the high school she lists on her profile is also located in that state. The comments on her profile included messages about homework and parents. I don't know Allie, but I doubt that she is trying to deceive me with demographic outliers.

I met many teens who fabricated answers like name, location, age, and income to profile questions. They thought it was amusing to indicate their relationship status on Facebook as "It's Complicated" whether they were in a relationship or not. A casual viewer scanning Facebook might conclude that an extraordinary number of teens are in same-sex relationships because so many have chosen to list their best friend as the person that they are "In a Relationship" with. In the same vein, Facebook profiles suggest that the US census data must be inaccurate because, at least on Facebook, teens often have dozens of siblings; of course, a little bit of prying makes it clear that these, too, are close friends. These are but a few of the playful ways in which teens responded to social media sites' requests for information by providing inaccurate information that actually contains meaningful signals about friendship and sociality.

When I talked with teens, I learned that there were also numerous ways of repurposing social network site fields for entertainment and humor. Outside of wealthy communities, where talking about money is deemed gauche, I met countless teens who told MySpace that their

income was "\$250,000+." Choosing a birth year that made the age field depict "69" was also a common, if unsurprising, trend among teenage boys.<sup>20</sup> Searching for social media users in Afghanistan or Zimbabwe offers an additional window into teen life, as many teens select the top or bottom choice in the pull-down menu when they indicate their location. Facebook expected users to provide "real names," but many teens I met offered up only their first name, preferring to select a last name of a celebrity, fictional character, or friend. These were but a few of the ways that teens provided what appeared to be fictitious information on their profiles. These practices allowed them to feel control over their profiles, particularly given how often they told me that it was ridiculous for sites to demand this information.

One way of reading teens' profiles is to assume that they are lying. But marking oneself as rich or from a foreign land is not about deception; it's a simple way to provide entertaining signals to friends while ignoring a site's expectations.<sup>21</sup> Most teens aren't enacting an imagined identity in a virtual world. Instead, they're simply refusing to play by the rules of self-presentation as defined by these sites.<sup>22</sup> They see no reason to provide accurate information, in part because they know that most people who are reading what they post already know who they are. As Dominic, a white sixteen-year-old from Seattle, told me, he doesn't have to provide accurate information "because all my [social media] friends are actually my friends; they'll know if I'm joking around or not." Awareness of the social context helps shape what teens share and don't share. Many teens treat social media requests for information as a recommendation, not a requirement, because they view these sites purely as platforms for interacting with classmates and other people they know from other settings.

Why teens share what they do is neither arbitrary nor dictated by the social media sites where they hang out—nor by the norms that govern adults' use of those same sites. The youth-oriented social context in which teens share matters. Teens don't see social media as a virtual space in which they must choose to be themselves or create an alternate ego. They see social media as a place to gather with friends

while balancing privacy and safety with humor and image. When Los Angeles-based Chicano fifteen-year-old Mickey says, "It's not that I lie on [MySpace], but I don't put my real information," he's highlighting that his choice to provide false data allows him to control the social situation. He doesn't want to be easily searchable by his parents or teachers, nor does he want to be found by "creeps" who might be browsing the site looking for vulnerable teenagers. He wants to be in a space with friends, and so he provides just enough information that his friends can find him without increasing his visibility to adults.

Teens fabricate information because it's funny, because they believe that the site has no reason to ask, or because they believe that doing so will limit their visibility to people they don't want to find them. In doing so, they are seeking to control the networked social context.

When teens create profiles through social media, they are simultaneously navigating extraordinarily public environments and more intimate friendship spaces. Media scholars Paul Hodkinson and Sián Lincoln argue that constructing these profiles can be understood through the lens of "bedroom culture."<sup>23</sup> Just as many middle-class teens use different media artifacts—including photographs, posters, and tchotchkes—to personalize their bedrooms, teens often decorate their online self-presentations using a variety of media. Likewise, teens use their bedrooms to create a space for hanging out with friends and they turn to social media to do the same online. Yet because of the properties of social media, creating boundaries around these online spaces is far more difficult. Although teens complain about the impossibility of keeping siblings and parents out of their rooms, achieving privacy in social media is even harder. This, in turn, challenges teens' ability to meaningfully portray the nuances of who they are to different and conflicting audiences.

### Impression Management in a Networked Setting

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, sociologist Erving Goffman describes the social rituals involved in self-presentation as "impression management." He argues that the impressions we make

on others are a product of what is *given* and what is *given off*. In other words, what we convey to others is a matter of what we choose to share in order to make a good impression and also what we unintentionally reveal as a byproduct of who we are and how we react to others. The norms, cultural dynamics, and institutions where giving and giving off happen help define the broader context of how these performances are understood. When interpreting others' self-presentations, we read the explicit content that is conveyed in light of the implicit information that is given off and the context in which everything takes place. The tension between the explicit and implicit signals allows us to obtain much richer information about individuals' attempts to shape how they're perceived. Of course, our reactions to their attempts to impress us enable them to adjust what they give in an attempt to convey what they think is best.

Based on their understanding of the social situation—including the context and the audience—people make decisions about what to share in order to act appropriately for the situation and to be perceived in the best light. When young people are trying to get a sense of the context in which they're operating, they're doing so in order to navigate the social situation in front of them. They may want to be seen as cool among their peers, even if adults would deem their behavior inappropriate.<sup>24</sup> Teens may be trying to determine if someone they're attracted to is interested in them without embarrassing themselves. Or they may wish to be viewed as confident and happy, even when they're facing serious depression or anxiety. Whatever they're trying to convey, they must first get a grasp of the situation and the boundaries of the context. When contexts collapse or when information is taken out of context, teens can fail to make their intended impression.

Self-presentations are never constructed in a void. Goffman writes at length about the role individuals play in shaping their self-presentations, but he also highlights ways in which individuals are part of broader collectives that convey impressions about the whole group. In discussing the importance of "teams" for impression management, he points

out that people work together to shape impressions, often relying on shared familiarity to help define any given situation in a mutually agreeable manner. He also argues that, "any member of the team has the power to give the show away or to disrupt it by inappropriate conduct."<sup>25</sup> When teens create profiles online, they're both individuals and part of a collective. Their self-representation is constructed through what they explicitly provide, through what their friends share, and as a product of how other people respond to them. When Alice's friend Bob comments on her profile, he's affecting her self-presentation. Even the photo that Bob chooses as his primary photo affects Alice because it might be shown on Alice's profile when he leaves a comment.<sup>26</sup> Impression management online and off is not just an individual act; it's a social process.

Part of what makes impression management in a networked setting so tricky is that the contexts in which teens are operating are also networked. Contexts don't just collapse accidentally; they collapse because individuals have a different sense of where the boundaries exist and how their decisions affect others. In North Carolina, I briefly chatted with a black high school senior who was gunning for a soccer scholarship at a Division One school. When recruiters and coaches from different schools asked to be his friend on Facebook, he immediately said yes. He had always treated Facebook like a résumé, using the site to position himself as a thoughtful, compassionate, all-American young man. But he was often concerned about what his friends posted on Facebook, and for good reason.

A few days later, I was talking casually with Matthew, one of the soccer player's classmates with whom he was friends on Facebook. Unlike the all-American athlete persona his classmate had crafted, Matthew's profile was filled with crass comments and humor that could easily be misinterpreted. I asked Matthew, a white seventeen-year-old, about his decision to post these items on his profile with a particular eye to how they might get misinterpreted if read by a stranger. Matthew told me that he wasn't friends with anyone who didn't know him and wouldn't understand that he was joking around.

I pointed out that his privacy settings meant that his profile could be viewed by friends-of-friends. When he didn't get my point, I showed him that his classmate had chosen to connect with many coaches and other representatives from schools to which he had applied for admission. Matthew's stunned response was simple: "But why would he do that?" Matthew and his classmate had very different ideas of how to use Facebook and who their imagined audiences might be, but their online presence was interconnected because of the technical affordances of Facebook. They were each affecting the other's attempts at self-presentation, and their sharing and friending norms created unexpected conflicts.

Even when teens have a coherent sense of what they deem to be appropriate in a particular setting, their friends and peers do not necessarily share their sense of decorum and norms. Resolving the networked nature of social contexts is complicated. The "solution" that is most frequently offered is that people should not try to engage in context-dependent impression management. Indeed, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, is quoted as having said, "Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity."<sup>27</sup> Teens who try to manage context collapses by segregating information often suffer when that information crosses boundaries. This is particularly true when teens, like the young man from Los Angeles at the beginning of this chapter, are forced to contend with radically different social contexts that are not mutually resolvable. What makes this especially tricky for teens is that people who hold power over them often believe that they have the right to look, judge, and share, even when their interpretations may be constructed wholly out of context.

In 2010, the American Civil Liberties Union received a complaint from a student at a small, rural high school that sheds light on this issue. At a school assembly, in order to set an example, a campus police officer had shown a photo of one of the students holding a beer.<sup>28</sup> The picture was not on that girl's Facebook profile; it was posted by a friend of hers and tagged. The purpose of the assembly was to teach teenagers about privacy, but the students were outraged.

Because of the police officer's attempt to shame students into behaving by adult standards, the student exposed with a beer feared that she would not receive a local scholarship or might face other serious consequences. To complicate matters, she had not chosen to present herself in that light; her friend had done this for her. In choosing to upload and tag this photo, her friend undermined the self-image that the girl wished to present. Some may argue that this girl was at fault for being at a party holding a beer in the first place. She may indeed have been drinking the beer—72 percent of students in high school report having had alcohol at least once—but she may also just have been holding the beer for a friend or simply trying to fit in by appearing to drink.<sup>29</sup> This girl certainly did not think that her decision to attend that party would result in such public shaming, nor is it clear that the punishment fits the crime. In situations like this, teens are blamed for not thinking while adults assert the right to define the context in which young people interact. They take content out of context to interpret it through the lens of adults' values and feel as though they have the right to shame youth because that content was available in the first place. In doing so, they ignore teens' privacy while undermining their struggles to manage their identity.

One might reasonably argue that the girl holding the beer was lucky not to have been arrested, since alcohol consumption by minors is illegal. Yet it is important to note that the same shaming tactics that adults use to pressure teens to conform to adult standards are also used by both teens and adults to ostracize and punish youth whose identities, values, or experiences are not widely accepted. I met plenty of teens who wanted to keep secrets from their parents or teachers, but the teens who struggled the most with the challenges of collapsed contexts were those who were trying to make sense of their sexual identity or who otherwise saw themselves as outcasts in their community. Some, like Hunter—the boy from DC who was trying to navigate his "ghetto" family alongside his educationally minded friends—were simply frustrated and annoyed. Others, like teen girls

who are the subject of "slut shaming" were significantly embarrassed and emotionally distraught after photos taken in the context of an intimate relationship were widely shared to shame them by using their sexuality as a weapon. Still others, like the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teens I met from religious and conservative backgrounds, were outright scared of what would happen if the contexts in which they were trying to operate collapsed.

In Iowa, I ended up casually chatting with a teen girl who was working through her sexuality. She had found a community of other queer girls in a chatroom, and even though she believed that some of them weren't who they said they were, she found their anonymous advice to be helpful. They gave her pointers to useful websites about coming out, offered stories from their own experiences, and gave her the number of an LGBT-oriented hotline if she ran into any difficulty coming out to her conservative parents. Although she relished the support and validation these strangers gave her, she wasn't ready to come out yet, and she was petrified that her parents might come across her online chats. She was also concerned that some of her friends from school might find out and tell her parents. She had learned that her computer recorded her browser history in middle school when her parents had used her digital traces to punish her for visiting inappropriate sites. Thus, she carefully erased her history after each visit to the chatroom. She didn't understand how Facebook seemed to follow her around the web, but she was afraid that somehow the company would find out and post the sites she visited to her Facebook page. In an attempt to deal with this, she used Internet Explorer to visit the chatroom or anything that was LGBT-related while turning to the Chrome browser for maintaining her straight, school-friendly persona. But still, she was afraid that she'd mess up and collapse her different social contexts, accidentally coming out before she was ready. She wanted to maintain discrete contexts but found it extraordinarily difficult to do so. This tension comes up over and over again, particularly with youth who are struggling to make sense of who they are and how they fit into the broader world.<sup>30</sup>

As teens struggle to make sense of different social contexts and present themselves appropriately, one thing becomes clear: the internet has not evolved into an idyllic zone in which people are free from the limitations of the embodied world. Teens are struggling to make sense of who they are and how they fit into society in an environment in which contexts are networked and collapsed, audiences are invisible, and anything they say or do can easily be taken out of context. They are grappling with battles that adults face, but they are doing so while under constant surveillance and without a firm grasp of who they are. In short, they're navigating one heck of a cultural labyrinth.



## 2 privacy why do youth share so publicly?

Many teens feel as though they're in a no-win situation when it comes to sharing information online: damned if they publish their personal thoughts to public spaces, and damned if they create private space that parents can't see. Parent-teen battles about privacy have gone on for decades. Parents complain when teens demand privacy by asking their parents to stay out of their bedroom, to refrain from listening in on their phone conversations, and to let them socialize with their friends without being chaperoned. In the same breath, these same parents express frustration when teens wear ill-fitting clothes or skimpy outfits. They have long seen revealing clothing as an indicator of teens' rejection of privacy. In other words, common and longstanding teen practices have historically been sure signs of teens' unhealthy obsession with, or rejection of, privacy.

Social media has introduced a new dimension to the well-worn fights over private space and personal expression. Teens do not want their parents to view their online profiles or look over their shoulder when they're chatting with friends. Parents are no longer simply worried about what their children wear out of the house but what they photograph themselves wearing in their bedroom to post online. Interactions that were previously invisible to adults suddenly have traces, prompting parents to fret over conversations that adults deem inappropriate or when teens share "TMI" (too much information).

While my childhood included "Keep Out" bedroom signs and battles over leather miniskirts and visible bras, the rise of the internet has turned fights over privacy and exposure into headline news for an entire cohort of youth.

Teens often grow frustrated with adult assumptions that suggest that they are part of a generation that has eschewed privacy in order to participate in social media. In North Carolina, I asked "Waffles" about this issue, and he responded with exasperation. "Every teenager wants privacy. Every single last one of them, whether they tell you or not, wants privacy." Waffles is a geeky white seventeen-year-old teen who spends hours each day interacting with people through video games and engaging deeply in a wide variety of online communities. He balked at the idea that his participation in these networked publics signals that he doesn't care about privacy. "Just because teenagers use internet sites to connect to other people doesn't mean they don't care about their privacy. We don't tell everybody every single thing about our lives. . . . So to go ahead and say that teenagers don't like privacy is pretty ignorant and inconsiderate honestly, I believe, on the adults' part." Waffles articulated a sentiment that I usually saw expressed through an eye roll: teenagers, acutely aware of how many adults dismiss their engagement in social media, have little patience for adults' simplistic assumptions about teen privacy.<sup>1</sup>

Although teens grapple with managing their identity and navigating youth-centric communities while simultaneously maintaining spaces for intimacy, they do so under the spotlight of a media ecosystem designed to publicize every teen fad, moral panic, and new hyped technology. Each week, news stories lament the death of privacy, consistently referring to teen engagement with public social media services as proof of privacy's demise.<sup>2</sup> In her *New York Magazine* article describing people's willingness to express themselves publicly, Emily Nussbaum articulated a concern about youth that is widespread: "Kids today. They have no sense of shame. They have no sense of privacy. They are show-offs, fame whores, pornographic little loons who post their diaries, their phone numbers, their stupid poetry—for

God's sake, their dirty photos!—online.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the United States, I heard this sentiment expressed in less eloquent terms by parents, teachers, and religious officials who were horrified by what teens were willing to share. They often approached me, genuinely worried about their children's future and unable to understand why anyone who cared about themselves and their privacy would be willing to be actively engaged online.

The idea that teens share too much—and therefore don't care about privacy—is now so entrenched in public discourse that research showing that teens do desire privacy and work to get it is often ignored by the media.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of how many young people engage in privacy practices, adults reference teens' public expressions as decisive evidence of contemporary teen immodesty and indecency. Meanwhile, technology executives like Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg and Google chairman Eric Schmidt reinforce the notion that today's teens are different, arguing that social norms around privacy have changed in order to justify their own business decisions regarding user privacy. They cite youth's widespread engagement with social media as evidence that the era of privacy is over.<sup>5</sup> Journalists, parents, and technologists seem to believe that a willingness to share in public spaces—and, most certainly, any act of exhibitionism and publicity—is incompatible with a desire for personal privacy.

The teens that I met genuinely care about their privacy, but how they understand and enact it may not immediately resonate or appear logical to adults. When teens—and, for that matter, most adults—seek privacy, they do so in relation to those who hold power over them. Unlike privacy advocates and more politically conscious adults, teens aren't typically concerned with governments and corporations. Instead, they're trying to avoid surveillance from parents, teachers, and other immediate authority figures in their lives. They want the right to be ignored by the people who they see as being “in their business.” Teens are not particularly concerned about organizational actors; rather, they wish to avoid paternalistic adults who use safety and protection as an excuse to monitor their everyday sociality.

Teens' desire for privacy does not undermine their eagerness to participate in public. There's a big difference between being *in* public and *being* public. Teens want to gather in public environments to socialize, but they don't necessarily want every vocalized expression to be publicized. Yet, because being in a networked public—unlike gathering with friends in a public park—often makes interactions more visible to adults, mere participation in social media can blur these two dynamics. At first blush, the desire to be in public and have privacy seems like a contradiction. But understanding how teens conceptualize privacy and navigate social media is key to understanding what privacy means in a networked world, a world in which negotiating fuzzy boundaries is par for the course. Instead of signaling the end of privacy as we know it, teens' engagement with social media highlights the complex interplay between privacy and publicity in the networked world we all live in now.<sup>6</sup>

### Navigating Conflicting Norms

In 2006, seventeen-year-old Bly Lauritano-Werner wrote a piece for Youth Radio in which she explained what privacy meant to her.<sup>7</sup> She recorded the segment with her mother in order to highlight the generational disconnect that was at the heart of her frustration. The radio piece that aired on National Public Radio reveals a tension between Bly and her mother over the boundaries that underpin privacy. “My mom always uses the excuse about the Internet being ‘public’ when she defends herself. It’s not like I do anything to be ashamed of, but a girl needs her privacy. I do online journals so I can communicate with my friends, not so my mother could catch up on the latest gossip of my life.” When Bly interviews her mother during the segment, her mother claims that she has the right to look at what Bly posts. She argues that she should be able to look. “because I have a connection with you. I’m your mom, but also I just feel like it would be more interesting to me than it would be to someone who didn’t know you. . . . You publish it and it’s for general viewing therefore I feel I’m part of the general public, so I can view it.” Much to Bly’s

frustration, her mother believes that she has the right to look precisely because the content is accessible to a broad audience, even though she knows that Bly doesn't want her mother among that audience.

Although many adults believe that they have the right to consume any teen content that is functionally accessible, many teens disagree. For example, when I opened up the issue of teachers looking at students' Facebook profiles with African American fifteen-year-old Chantelle, she responded dismissively: "Why are they on my page? I wouldn't go to my teacher's page and look at their stuff, so why should they go on mine to look at my stuff?" She continued on to make it clear that she had nothing to hide while also reiterating the feeling that snooping teachers violated her sense of privacy. The issue for Chantelle—and many other teens—is more a matter of social norms and etiquette than technical access.

Erving Goffman—the sociologist described in the previous chapter for his analysis of self-presentation—also wrote about the importance of "civil inattention" in enabling people to respectfully negotiate others in public spaces.<sup>8</sup> For example, even when two people happen to be sitting across from each other on the subway, social norms dictate that they should not stare at each other or insert themselves into the other's conversations. Of course, people still do these things, but they also feel a social responsibility to avert their eyes and pretend that they cannot hear the conversation taking place.<sup>9</sup> What's at stake is not whether someone *can* listen in but whether one *should*. Etiquette and politeness operate as a social force that challenges what's functionally possible.

Although Bly and her mother do not find resolution in the three-minute radio segment, Bly accepts that there is nothing she can do to stop her mother from snooping. She concludes instead that journaling sites "are becoming lame" because parents are starting to create their own profiles and use these services to meet strangers, failing to recognize the hypocrisy in their advice about talking to strangers. Made in 2006, Bly's arguments are specific to the journaling site LiveJournal, but I heard these same sentiments repeated over the

years in reference to numerous other social media sites, especially Facebook. In 2012, when I asked teens who were early adopters of Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram why they preferred these services to Facebook, I heard a near-uniform response: "Because my parents don't know about it." The sites of practice change, but many teens get frustrated when adults "invade" teen-centric spaces, and so, in an attempt to achieve privacy, some move on to newer sites and apps to avoid parents and other adults.

Although Bly's desire to seek freedom from her mother's gaze prompted her to leave a service she once enjoyed, the increasing popularity of social media—and the challenges brought on by multiple audiences—are forcing other teens to reconsider how they achieve privacy in networked publics more generally. Some are perennially searching for adult-free zones, but this cat-and-mouse game gets tiresome, especially when parents quickly catch on to the "new" site. Much to many adults' surprise, teens aren't looking to hide; they just want privacy.<sup>10</sup> As a result, many teens are developing innovative solutions to achieve privacy in public. To get there, they must grapple with the tools that are available to them, the norms that shape social practices, and their own agency.

### Achieving Privacy by Controlling the Social Situation

Privacy is a complex concept without a clear definition.<sup>11</sup> Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis described privacy as "the right to be let alone," while legal scholar Ruth Gavison describes privacy as a measure of the access others have to you through information, attention, and physical proximity.<sup>12</sup> Taking a structuralist tactic, legal scholar Alan Westin argues that privacy is "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others."<sup>13</sup> These different—but related—definitions highlight control over access and visibility. Although the failure to reach consensus on a definition of privacy may be frustrating to some, legal scholar Daniel Solove argues that each approach to privacy reveals insight into how we manage privacy in everyday life.<sup>14</sup>

Public discourse around privacy often centers on hiding or opting out of public environments, whereas scholars and engineers often focus more on controlling the flow of information. These can both be helpful ways of thinking about privacy, but as philosopher Helen Nissenbaum astutely notes, privacy is always rooted in context.<sup>15</sup> Much of the scholarly conversation around privacy focuses on whether or not someone has—or has lost—privacy. Yet, for the teens that I interviewed, privacy isn't necessarily something that they have; rather it is something they are actively and continuously trying to achieve in spite of structural or social barriers that make it difficult to do so. Achieving privacy requires more than simply having the levers to control information, access, or visibility. Instead, achieving privacy requires the ability to control the social situation by navigating complex contextual cues, technical affordances, and social dynamics. Achieving privacy is an ongoing process because social situations are never static. Especially in networked publics, the persistent, searchable nature of interactions complicates any temporal boundaries. Comments written weeks ago can easily be fodder for current dramas, and it's often difficult to discern when a conversation starts and ends in an asynchronous texting channel.

Controlling a social situation in an effort to achieve privacy is neither easy nor obvious. Doing so requires power, knowledge, and skills. First, people must have a certain degree of agency or power within a social situation, which means that they must either have social status or take measures to effectively resist those who are more powerful within that situation. Second, people must have a reasonable understanding of the social situation and context in which they are operating. And third, people must have the skills to manage the social situation in order to both understand and affect how information flows and is interpreted. These prerequisites for achieving privacy can be overwhelming. Furthermore, they are often taken for granted by those questioning why youth don't do more to manage their privacy.

When teens try to achieve privacy in networked publics, they often struggle with these foundational elements. In social settings

where parents lurk over teens' shoulders under the guise of making sure their children are safe, teens often lack the agency necessary to control the social situation.<sup>16</sup> The dynamics of mediated social situations—including invisible audiences, collapsed contexts, and persistent content—further complicate things, making it incredibly difficult for teens to imagine the boundaries of these mediated social situations. Finally, it's hard to develop the skills to manage how information will flow within a social situation when the underlying affordances change regularly. For example, when sites like Facebook repeatedly alter their privacy settings, developing the necessary skills to manage how visible content should be becomes, if not next to impossible, then incredibly labor-intensive. Given all of this, teens cannot easily control the flow of information on social media. Some teens understand this intuitively; others struggle with this because popular rhetoric focuses so heavily on access and control. The most creative teens often respond to the limitations they face by experimenting with more innovative approaches to achieving privacy in order to control the social situation. This typically involves working around technical affordances, reclaiming agency, and using novel strategies to reconfigure the social situation.

### Public by Default, Private Through Effort

The default in most interpersonal conversations, even those that take place in public settings, is that interactions are private by default, public through effort. For example, when two people are chatting in a café, they can assume a certain level of privacy. Parts of the conversation may get recounted later, but unless someone within hearing range was surreptitiously recording the conversation, the conversation most likely remains somewhat private due to social norms around politeness and civil inattention. There are many examples of people violating this norm, including Linda Tripp's decision to record Monica Lewinsky's confession and paparazzi using long-range cameras to capture celebrities from afar.<sup>17</sup> However, these are seen as violations because most people do not assume that their conversation

will be publicized if they understand the social situation to be intimate.

In a mediated world, assumptions and norms about the visibility and spread of expressions must be questioned. Many of the most popular genres of social media are designed to encourage participants to spread information. On a site like Facebook, it is far easier to share with all friends than to manipulate the privacy settings to limit the visibility of a particular piece of content to a narrower audience. As a result, many participants make a different calculation than the one they would make in an unmediated situation. Rather than asking themselves if the information to be shared is significant enough to be broadly publicized, they question whether it is intimate enough to require special protection. In other words, when participating in networked publics, many participants embrace a widespread public-by-default, private-through-effort mentality.

Because of this public-by-default framework, most teens won't bother to limit the audience who can see what they consider to be mundane conversations on Facebook. Teens will regularly share things widely on Facebook simply because they see no reason to make the effort to make those pieces of content private. For example, teens will share "Happy Birthday" messages or bored notes where they ask others what they're doing openly because they don't see these particular interactions as having much significance. The sum of interactions that they have online appear to be much more public because teens don't go out of their way to make minutiae private.<sup>28</sup> Adults complain that teens are wasting their time publicizing trivia, whereas teens feel as though their audience can filter out anything that appears to be irrelevant.

This does not mean that teens never restrict the visibility of content. When they think something might be sensitive, they often switch to a different medium, turning to text messages or chat to communicate with smaller audiences directly. Of course, sometimes they also mess up, intentionally or unintentionally. They might post an inappropriate comment that they know will spark a fight because

they're trying to get attention or because they're lashing out. They might post a photo that they don't think will be particularly controversial given their imagined audience, only to have that photo cause drama or result in other unexpected trouble. Teens do think through the social cost to what they post, but they don't always get it right.

Teens are aware that technology has shifted sharing norms, but they see this more in terms of what's visible than as an underlying value change. In North Carolina, I met Alicia, a white seventeen-year-old who articulated how she felt technology had shaped information sharing.

I just think that [technology is] redefining what's acceptable for people to put out about themselves. I've grown up with technology so I don't know how it was before this boom of social networking. But it just seems like instead of spending all of our time talking to other individual people and sharing things that would seem private we just spend all of our time putting it in one module of communication where people can go and access it if they want to. It's just more convenient.

Alicia recognizes that the public-by-default dynamic creates a conflict around privacy, but she thinks that it's a red herring. "When [adults] see [our photo albums] or when they see conversations on Facebook wall to wall, they think that it's this huge breach of privacy. I just think it's different. . . . I think privacy is more just you choosing what you want to keep to yourself." Alicia is not giving up on privacy just because she chooses to share broadly. Instead, she believes that she can achieve privacy by choosing what not to share.

By focusing on what to keep private rather than what to publicize, teens often inadvertently play into another common rhetorical crutch—the notion that privacy is necessary only for those who have something to hide. Indeed, many teens consciously seek out privacy when they're trying to restrict access to a narrower audience either out of respect or out of fear. But as content becomes increasingly persistent, teens are also much more aware of the unintended consequences

of having data available that could easily be taken out of context at a later time.

In DC, I met an African American seventeen-year-old named Shamika who found that her peers loved to use old status updates and point to them in a new context in order to “start drama.” She found this infuriating because the posts that she wrote a month earlier were never intended as fodder for current arguments. To deal with this, Shamika took radical measures to delete content from the past. Each day, when she logged into Facebook, she’d read comments she received and then delete them. She’d scan through the comments she’d left on friends’ updates and photos and delete those. She systematically cleansed her Facebook presence in a practice known as “whitewalling” in which she made certain that the front of her Facebook page—originally called the “wall”—was blank, revealing the background color of white. When I remarked to Shamika that anyone could copy and paste that content and bring it back at a later date, she nodded knowingly before telling me that doing so would be “creepy.” In other words, by using technology to signal what was expected, she shifted the burden from being a matter of technological access to being about a violation of social norms.

Although persistence has become *de facto* on most major social media, new apps have begun to emerge that call this normative affordance into question. For example, in 2013, teens starting using Snapchat, a photo-sharing app in which images purportedly self-destruct after being viewed. Given the assumption that teens use such services only to share inappropriate content, journalists often referred to this application in the same breath as sexting or the sharing of inappropriate sexual images. But in casually asking teens about Snapchat, I found most were using the app to signal that an image wasn’t meant for posterity. They shared inside jokes, silly pictures, and images that were funny only in the moment. Rather than viewing photographs as an archival production, they saw the creation and sharing of these digital images as akin to an ephemeral gesture. And they used Snapchat to signal this expectation.

As discussed in the introduction, technical affordances and design defaults do influence how teens understand and use particular social media, but they don’t dictate practice. As teens encounter particular technologies, they make decisions based on what they’re trying to achieve. More often than not, in a technical ecosystem in which making content private is more difficult than sharing broadly, teens choose to share, even if doing so creates the impression that they have given up on privacy. It’s not that every teen is desperate for widespread attention; plenty simply see no reason to take the effort to minimize the visibility of their photos and conversations. As a result, interactions that would be ephemeral in an unmediated space are suddenly persistent, creating the impression that norms have radically changed even though they haven’t. Instead of going out of their way to achieve privacy by restricting the visibility of particular pieces of content, teens develop other strategies for achieving privacy in public.

### Social Steganography

Children love to experiment with encoding messages. From pig latin to invisible ink pens, children explore hidden messages when they’re imagining themselves as spies and messengers. As children grow up, they look for more sophisticated means of passing messages that elude the watchful eyes of adults. In watching teens navigate networked publics, I became enamored of how they were regularly encoding hidden meaning in publicly available messages. They were engaged in a practice that Alice Marwick and I called “social steganography,” or hiding messages in plain sight by leveraging shared knowledge and cues embedded in particular social contexts.

The practice of hiding in plain sight is not new. When ancient Greeks wanted to send a message over great distances, they couldn’t rely on privacy. Messengers could easily be captured and even encoded messages deciphered. The most secure way to send a private message was to make sure that no one knew that the message existed in the first place. Historical sources describe the extraordinary lengths

to which Greeks went, hiding messages within wax tablets or tattooing them on a slave's head and allowing the slave's hair to grow out before sending him or her out to meet the message's recipient.<sup>9</sup> Although these messages could be easily read by anyone who bothered to look, they became visible only if the viewer knew to look for them in the first place. Cryptographers describe this practice of hiding messages in plain sight as *steganography*.

Social steganography uses countless linguistic and cultural tools, including lyrics, in-jokes, and culturally specific references to encode messages that are functionally accessible but simultaneously meaningless. Some teens use pronouns while others refer to events, use nicknames, and employ predetermined code words to share gossip that lurking adults can't interpret. Many teens write in ways that will blend in and be invisible to or misinterpreted by adults. Whole conversations about school gossip, crushes, and annoying teachers go unnoticed as teens host conversations that are rendered meaningless to outside observers.

These practices are not new. Teens have long used whatever tools are around them to try to share information under the noses of their teachers and parents. At school, passing notes and putting notes in lockers are classic examples of how teens use paper, pen, and ingenuity to share information. Graffiti on bathroom walls may appear simply to be an act of vandalism, but these scrawled markings also convey messages. As new technologies have entered into teen life, it's not surprising that teens also use them in similarly cryptic ways to communicate with one another. Texting gossip during class serves much of the same purpose as passing a note, yet it doesn't require having to move a physical object, which reduces the likelihood of getting caught. But encoding messages guarantees only that if all else fails, the meaning will not become accessible, even if control over the information itself is unsuccessful.

When Carmen, a Latina seventeen-year-old living in Boston, broke up with her boyfriend, she "wasn't in the happiest state." She wanted her friends to know how she was feeling. Like many of her peers,

Carmen shared her emotions by using song lyrics. Thus, her first instinct was to post song lyrics from an "emo" or depressing song, but she was worried that her mother might interpret the lyric in the wrong way. This had happened before. Unfortunately, Carmen's mom regularly "overreacted" when Carmen posted something with significant emotional overtones. Thus, she wanted to find a song lyric that conveyed what she felt but didn't trigger her mom to think she was suicidal.

She was also attentive to the way in which her mother's presence on Facebook tended to disrupt the social dynamics among her friends. Carmen and her mom are close and, for the most part, Carmen loves having her mom as one of her friends on Facebook, but her mom's incessant desire to comment on Facebook tends to discourage responses from her friends. As Carmen told me, when her mother comments, "it scares everyone away. Everyone kind of disappears after the mom post." She wanted to make sure to post something that her friends would respond to, even if her mom jumped in to comment.

Carmen settled on posting lyrics from "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life." This song sounds happy but is sung during a scene in the Monty Python movie *Life of Brian* in which the main character is being crucified. Carmen knew that her immigrant Argentinean mother would not understand the British cultural reference, but she also knew her close friends would. Only a few weeks earlier, she and her geeky girlfriends had watched the film together at a sleepover and laughed at the peculiar juxtaposition of song lyric and scene. Her strategy was effective; her mother took the words at face value, immediately commenting on Facebook that it was great to see her so happy. Her friends didn't attempt to correct her mother's misinterpretation. Instead, they picked up their phones and texted Carmen to see if she was OK.

Part of what makes Carmen's message especially effective is that she regularly posts song lyrics to express all sorts of feelings. As a result, this song lyric blended into a collection of other song lyrics, quotes, and comments. She did not try to draw attention to the message itself

but knew that her close friends would know how to interpret what they saw. And they did. Her friends had the cultural knowledge about what references were being made to interpret and contextualize the message underneath the song lyric. Thus, she conveyed meaning to some while sharing only a song lyric with many more.

While many teens encode meaning as a strategy for navigating visibility, other teens leverage similar techniques to tease their classmates with secrets. For example, some teens use pronouns and song lyrics in ways that make it very clear to the onlooker that they are not “in the know.” In North Carolina, I was browsing Facebook with a white seventeen-year-old named Serena when we stumbled across a status update written by her classmate Kristy. Kristy’s update said, “I’m sick and tired of all of this,” and was already “Liked” by more than thirty people. I asked Serena what this meant, and she went into a long explanation about the dramas between Kristy and Cathy. Sure enough, over on Cathy’s profile was a status update that read, “She’s such a bitch,” which was also liked by dozens of people. As an outsider, I had no way of knowing that these two posts were related to each other, let alone what was referenced by the pronouns “this” and “she.” But Serena could fully interpret the drama that was unfolding; she knew the players, and she knew what the fight was about. She brought all of this knowledge to her interpretation of what she saw on Facebook, yet she also knew that many of her classmates and none of her teachers would know what was happening. Although outsiders were surely seeing these individual messages, few would dare ask.

When teenagers post encoded messages in a visible way, they are aware that people outside of their intended audience will be curious. Some will find the uninterpretable messages to be a frustrating marker of popularity, while others will see them as an enticing opportunity to learn more. Some will investigate, while others will ignore what they can’t understand. When I asked Jenna, a white seventeen-year-old from a different North Carolina school, how she felt about seeing encoded messages, she told me that it depended on who was writing the message.

If it’s someone that I want to know what they’re talking about, then I’ll try to investigate it. I’ll look at the wall, a conversation or something. But [sometimes] I don’t really care what so-and-so is doing. I have friends from when I went to Malaysia. They were all about Facebook. . . . And sometimes I hide them because whatever they’re talking about is confusing to me because I don’t know what they’re talking about or I get stuff from them that I don’t really want.

Many teens are happy to publicly perform their social dramas for their classmates and acquaintances, provided that only those in the know will actually understand what’s really going on and those who shouldn’t be involved are socially isolated from knowing what’s unfolding. These teens know that adults might be present, but they also feel that, if asked, they could create a convincing alternate interpretation of what was being discussed. Through such encoded language, teens can exclude people who are not part of the cycle of gossip at school, including parents, teachers, and peers outside their immediate social sphere.<sup>20</sup>

Over the decade that I observed teens’ social media practices, I watched encoding content become more common. In 2010–2011, teens started talking about subliminal tweeting, or “subtweeting,” to refer to the practice of encoding tweets to render them meaningless to clueless outsiders. More often than not, they employed this term when referencing various teen dramas that occurred between friends and classmates that required insider knowledge to decode. In other words, teens subtweet to talk behind someone else’s back. Although this is only one technique for encoding information, the rise of this term highlights how popular the practice has become.<sup>21</sup>

Encoding content, subtweeting, and otherwise engaging in social steganography offers one strategy for reclaiming agency in an effort to achieve privacy in networked publics. In doing so, teens recognize that limiting access to meaning can be a much more powerful tool for achieving privacy than trying to limit access to the content itself.



Although not all teenagers are carefully crafting content to be understood by a limited audience, many are exploring techniques like this to express themselves privately in situations in which they assume that others are watching.

### Living with Surveillance

In 2008, the *New York Times* published an article called "Text Generation Gap: U R 2 Old (JK)." The piece begins with an anecdote about a father shutting around his daughter and her friend. They are talking, and Dad interrupts to give his opinion; the girls roll their eyes. And then there is silence, while the girls start texting. When Dad comments to his daughter that she's being rude for texting on her phone rather than talking to her friend, the daughter replies: "But, Dad, we're texting each other. I don't want you to hear what I'm saying."<sup>22</sup>

Teens have many words for the kinds of everyday surveillance that they have grown accustomed to: lurking, listening in, hovering, and being "in my business." Many of the privacy strategies that teens implement are intended to counter the power dynamic that emerges when parents and other adults feel as though they have the right to watch and listen. They shift tools and encode content, use privacy settings, and demand privacy.<sup>23</sup> Some teens even go to extremes to challenge adults' surveillance.

In Washington, DC, my colleague Alice Marwick interviewed an eighteen-year-old black teen named Mikalah who had grown accustomed to ongoing surveillance by adults. Having been in and out of different foster care settings, she was used to having state agencies and her varying guardians regularly check in on her, online and offline. Frustrated by their attempts to access what she posted on Facebook, she decided to delete her account. When she went to do so, she was shown a message discouraging her from leaving Facebook. Pictures of her friends were portrayed, along with a note about how they would miss her on the site. Facebook also gave her a different option—she could simply deactivate her account. If she took this option, her profile would disappear, but she could login at any time and reactivate

her account, making her profile reappear. Doing so would allow her to preserve her account, including her content, friends, comments, and settings.

Presented with this option, Mikalah had an idea. She deactivated her account. The next day, she logged in and reactivated her account, chatted with friends, and caught up on the day's conversations. When she was done, she deactivated her account again. The next night, she repeated this same pattern. By repeatedly deactivating and reactivating her account, she turned Facebook into a real-time tool. Anyone who checked in on her when she was logged in would find her account, but if they searched for her during off hours, she was missing. From Mikalah's perspective, this was a privacy-achieving practice because she only logged in at night, whereas the adults she encountered seemed to log in only during the day. By repurposing the deactivation feature to meet her needs, Mikalah found a way to control the social situation to the best of her ability.

Mikalah's approach is extreme, but it highlights the measures that some teens take to achieve privacy in light of ongoing surveillance. Teens' experiences with surveillance vary tremendously. Those who are marginalized—typically because of their race or socioeconomic status—are much more likely to experience state surveillance than those who are privileged, but even privileged youth must contend with parental surveillance.<sup>24</sup>

Although not all parents and guardians are trying to control their children's every move, many believe that being a "good" parent means being all-knowing. I regularly heard parents say that being a responsible parent required them to violate their children's privacy, especially when the internet is involved. In an online forum, Christina, a mother from New York, explained her reasoning. "I do not believe teenagers 'need' privacy—not when it comes to the Internet. I track everything my kids do online. I search their bedrooms too. I'm the parent—I'm not their friend." When a teen responds to her post by arguing that parents should not look over their children's shoulders, Christina responds critically.

Annoying or not, I do it and will always do it. It's MY computer. I also log in and check their history, and track where they go, who they talk to . . . everything. I'm a mom. It is my responsibility to protect them. I wouldn't let them talk to strangers "irl" so why would I let them do it online without supervising? That's just foolish, imo. If my girls don't like my spying, they're free to not use the computer.

Christina's attitude is not universal, but it does reflect a style of "intensive" parenting that is quite common in the United States.<sup>33</sup> Legal scholars Gaia Bernstein and Zvi Triger have found that the norms around intensive parenting are increasingly part of public discourse and inscribed into law, making parents liable if they don't abide by the cultural logic of intensive parenting.<sup>36</sup> Thus, even when parents don't share Christina's attitudes, there is significant pressure for them to engage in acts of surveillance to be "good" parents. And given the digital traces that teens leave behind as a byproduct of their mediated conversations, many parents feel the need to track, read, and consume every interaction their children have in networked publics, even though doing so in an unmediated world is completely unrenable.

Christina may feel that she has the right to track her children's movements as long as they are in her house, but other parents make themselves all-knowing by being always present. In Michigan, Bianca, a white sixteen-year-old, told me that there is no such thing as privacy in her house because of her family dynamics. The problem isn't just that her parents are always around, but they seem to feel as though they have the right to be a part of any interaction that occurs within earshot. Bianca told me that it's impossible to have a conversation with her best friend in her house because "my family burrs in to everything." Not only do Bianca's parents listen in on her conversations—whether they occur on the phone, via instant messaging, or in the living room—but they even interrupt to ask for clarifications. Rolling her eyes in agreement, Bianca's best friend explained that it's

much better for them to hang out at her house because her mother gives the girls "space."

Parental nosiness is not new. In an era before cell phones, teens prized cordless phones precisely because they could be taken to a private space.<sup>37</sup> Even then, parents—and siblings—often used separate phones to listen in. Today, parental nosiness extends to kids' online encounters. In many households, the computer occupies a shared space—in part because parents are told that kids' safety depends on parental awareness of what their children are doing online.

Although most of the teens I interviewed did not mind the central location of the computer, quite a few complain about their parents' ongoing tendency to hover. In Massachusetts, Kat, a white fifteen-year-old, told me that she found her mother's behavior annoying. "When I'm talking to somebody online, I don't like when they stand over my shoulder, and I'll be like, 'Mom, can you not read over my shoulder?' Not that I'm saying something bad. It just feels weird. I don't like it." Kat isn't ashamed of what she's doing online—and she has even willingly given her mother her Facebook password—but she hates feeling watched. Some teens see privacy as a right, but many more see privacy as a matter of trust. Thus, when their parents choose to snoop or lurk or read their online posts, these teens see it as a signal of distrust. Teens like Kat get upset when their parents never leave them alone when they're online because they read this as a lack of confidence in their actions.

This issue of trust also emerges in relationship to passwords. Many teens are comfortable sharing their passwords with their parents "in case of an emergency" but expect that their parents will not use them to snoop. Christopher, a white fifteen-year-old from Alabama, told me that his parents had all of his passwords but that he expected them not to log in to his accounts unless there was a serious issue. He respected his parents' concern and desire to protect him, but in return, he expected them to trust him. Although he believed nothing in his accounts would upset his parents, he also said he would be angry if they logged in just to see what he was doing. Like many of his peers,

Christopher believes that there is a significant difference between having the ability to violate privacy and making the choice to do so.

Whether privacy is a "right" that children can or cannot have, or a privilege that teens must earn, adult surveillance shapes teens' understanding of—and experience with—privacy. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, philosopher Michel Foucault describes how surveillance operates as a mechanism of control. When inmates believe they are being watched, they conform to what they believe to be the norms of the prison and the expectations of their jailors. Surveillance is a mechanism by which powerful entities assert their power over less powerful individuals. When parents choose to hover, lurk, and track, they implicitly try to regulate teens' practices. Parents often engage in these acts out of love but fail to realize how surveillance is a form of oppression that limits teens' ability to make independent choices. Regardless of how they explicitly choose to respond to it, teens are configured by the surveillance that they experience. It shapes their understanding of the social context and undermines their agency, challenging their ability to control the social situation meaningfully. As a result, what teens do to achieve privacy often looks quite different than what most adults would expect as appropriate tactics. Teens assume that they are being watched, and so they try to find privacy within public settings rather than in opposition to publicness.

### Privacy as Process

Taylor is not one to share, and if she had her druthers, she wouldn't tell her friends much about what's happening in her life. She understands that her friends mean well, but the Boston-based white fifteen-year-old is a reserved person, and she doesn't like it when people are "in [her] business." To combat nagging questions from friends and classmates, she has started creating a "light version" of her life that she'll regularly share on Facebook just so that her friends don't pester her about what's actually happening. Much to her frustration, she finds that sharing at least a little bit affords her more privacy than sharing nothing at all.

She's not alone. Many public figures find that the appearance of unlimited sharing allows them to achieve privacy meaningfully. Heather Armstrong, a well-known blogger referred to by her nickname "Dooce," once remarked: "People I meet tell me, 'It's so weird I know everything about you.' No you don't! Ninety-five percent of my life is not blogged about."<sup>28</sup> Through the act of sharing what appears to be everything, bloggers like Armstrong appear to be vulnerable and open while still carving off a portion of their lives to keep truly private.

In a world in which posting updates is common, purposeful, and performative, sharing often allows teens to control a social situation more than simply opting out. It also guarantees that others can't define the social situation. Sitting in an afterschool program in Los Angeles, I casually asked a teen participant why she shared so many embarrassing photos of herself on her profile. She laughed and told me that it was a lot safer if she shared her photos and put them in context by what she wrote than if she did not because she knew that her friends also had embarrassing photos. They'd be happy to embarrass her if she let them. But by taking preemptive action and mocking herself by writing dismissive messages on photos that could be interpreted problematically, she undermined her friends' ability to define the situation differently. After explaining her logic, she continued on to explain how her apparent exhibitionism left plenty of room for people to not focus in on the things that were deeply intimate in her life.

In most cases where people share to maintain privacy, they do because they do not want someone to have power over them. Performative sharing may or may not be healthy. For example, I've met lesbian, gay, and transgendered teens who extensively share to appear straight so that people don't ask about their sexuality, and I've met abused teens who tell extravagant stories about their lives so that no one asks what's really happening at home. Issues emerge when teens start to deceive in order to keep the truth private. But by and large, when teens share to create a sense of privacy, they are simply asserting

agency in a social context in which their power is regularly undermined. The most common way that this unfolds is when teens systematically exclude certain information from what is otherwise a rich story. For example, plenty of teens tell their parents about what happened at school without telling them information that would reveal that they have a crush. On one hand, these teens are hiding, but on the other hand, they're sharing in order to hold onto a space for privacy.

Privacy is not a static construct. It is not an inherent property of any particular information or setting. It is a process by which people seek to have control over a social situation by managing impressions, information flows, and context. Cynics-often suggest that only people who have something to hide need privacy. But this argument is a distraction.<sup>29</sup> Privacy is valuable because it is critical for personal development. As teenagers are coming of age, they want to feel as though they matter. Privacy is especially important for those who are marginalized or lack privilege within society. Teenagers have not given up on privacy, even if their attempts to achieve it are often undermined by people who hold power over them. On the contrary, teens are consistently trying out new ways of achieving privacy by drawing on and modernizing strategies that disempowered people have long used.<sup>30</sup> Rather than finding privacy by controlling access to content, many teens are instead controlling access to meaning.

It's easy to think of privacy and publicity as opposing concepts, and a lot of technology is built on the assumption that you have to choose to be private or public. Yet in practice, both privacy and publicity are blurred. Rather than eschewing privacy when they encounter public spaces, many teens are looking for new ways to achieve privacy within networked publics. As such, when teens develop innovative strategies to achieve privacy, they often reclaim power by doing so. Privacy doesn't just depend on agency; being able to achieve privacy is an expression of agency.

## appendix: teen demographics

This appendix provides basic demographic information, interview dates, and social network site use of the teens who are addressed by name or pseudonym in the book. The teens listed here do not represent all 166 teens that I interviewed, nor do they represent all of the teens that I observed. This list is by no means comprehensive but should provide basic information to supplement what is presented in the text.

The information provided about each teen is based on what I know. To protect the confidentiality of teens, I provide only general geographic information. When teens live in or near one of the fifty most populous cities in the United States, I use the city name; otherwise, I use the state name. As much as possible, I use the language that teens used to describe their race, ethnicity, and/or religion. When demographic or cultural information is left unmarked, it's because I did not know and did not dare to guess. Socioeconomic status is left unmarked due to difficulty in consistently marking class across teens. I did not explicitly ask about sexuality, and so that, too, is left unmarked.

Interview date(s) and the dates of comments are given, as are the site(s) that each teen was using at the time of our encounter. Interviews that were conducted by my collaborator, Alice Marwick, are marked as such.

**Aaron (15, Texas):** white, male, ninth grade, Christian

Interview: March 14, 2007. Active on MySpace without parents' knowledge.

**Abigail (17, North Carolina):** white, female, twelfth grade, Christian

Interview: October 13, 2010. Active on Facebook; formerly used MySpace.

**Alicia (17, North Carolina):** white, female, twelfth grade, Christian

Interview: October 10, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter; formerly used MySpace.

**Allie (17, Indiana):** white, female, twelfth grade, Christian

MySpace comments: December 7, 2007. Active on MySpace.

Chantelle (15, Washington, DC): African American, female, tenth grade, Christian  
 Interview: November 6, 2010. Active on Facebook; formerly used MySpace.

Chloe (15, Atlanta): white, female, ninth grade, Christian  
 Interview: May 9, 2009. Active on Facebook.

Christopher (15, Alabama): white, male, between ninth and tenth grade, Christian  
 Interview: June 27, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to lack of interest.

Corinne (13, Massachusetts): female  
 Focus Group: November 15, 2007.

Craig Pelletier (17, California): male, twelfth grade  
 Blog: February 10, 2008. Active on Facebook and MySpace.

Dominic (16, Seattle): white, male, tenth grade  
 Interview: January 21, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.

Emily (16, Pennsylvania): white, female, tenth grade  
 Interview: May 5, 2007. Active on Xanga.

Fred (15, Texas): white, male, ninth grade  
 Interview: March 14, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to parental restrictions.

Heather (16, Iowa): white, female, tenth grade  
 Interview: April 21, 2007. Active on Facebook, MySpace, and Xanga.

Hunter (14, Washington, DC): African American, male, ninth grade  
 Interview: November 8, 2010. Active on Facebook.

James (17, Seattle): white with Native American roots, male, eleventh grade  
 Interview: January 20, 2007. Active on MySpace.

Jenna (17, North Carolina): white, female, twelfth grade, Christian  
 Interview: October 13, 2010. Active on Facebook; formerly used MySpace.

Jordan (15, Austin): biracial (Mexican and white), female, tenth grade, Catholic  
 Interview: March 14, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.

Kat (15, Massachusetts): white, female, ninth grade  
 Interview: June 20, 2007. Active on Facebook; formerly used MySpace.

Amy (16, Seattle): biracial black/white, female, tenth grade  
 Interview: January 20, 2007. Active on MySpace.

Ana-Garcia (15, Los Angeles): biracial Guatemalan/Pakistani, female, tenth grade, Muslim  
 Interview: March 5, 2007. Active on MySpace.

Anastasia (17, New York): female, twelfth grade  
 Comments via blog: August 11, 2007. Active primarily on Facebook, but also uses MySpace.

Andrew (17, Nashville): white, male, twelfth grade, Christian  
 Interview (by Alice): September 30, 2010. Active on 4chan; formerly used Facebook and Twitter.

Anindita (17, Los Angeles): Indian, female, twelfth grade  
 Interview: February 20, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.

Ashley (14, North Carolina): white, female, ninth grade, Christian  
 Interview (by Alice): October 13, 2010. Active on Facebook.

Bianca (16, Michigan): white, female, tenth grade  
 Interview: June 26, 2007. Active on Facebook.

Bly Lauritano-Werner (17, Maine): white, female, twelfth grade  
 Youth Radio Story: July 24, 2006. Active on Facebook and LiveJournal.

Brooke (15, Nebraska): white, female, ninth grade  
 Interview: April 17, 2007. Active on Facebook.

Cachi (18, Iowa): Puerto Rican, female, twelfth grade  
 Interview: April 18, 2007. Active on Facebook, MiGente, and MySpace.

Caleb (17, North Carolina): African American, male, twelfth grade, Christian  
 Interview (by Alice): October 12, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter; formerly used MySpace.

Carmen (17/18, Boston): Hispanic/Argentinean, female, twelfth grade, Catholic  
 Interview: July 21, 2010. Focus group: August 17, 2011. Active on Facebook and 4chan; formerly used Twitter and MySpace.

Catalina (15, Austin): white, female, tenth grade  
 Interview: March 14, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.

- Kath (17, Maryland): white, female, twelfth grade  
Conversation in Colorado: July 2008. Active on Facebook.
- Keke (16, Los Angeles): black, female, eleventh grade  
Interview: January 12, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Lila (18, Michigan): Asian/Vietnamese, female, between twelfth grade and college  
Interview: June 27, 2007. Active on Facebook.
- Lilly (16, Kansas): white, female, tenth grade  
Interview: April 16, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.
- Lolo (15, Los Angeles): Latina/Guatemalan, female, tenth grade  
Interview: January 23, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to pressure from ex-boyfriend.
- Manu (17, North Carolina): Indian, male, twelfth grade, Hindu  
Interview: October 12, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter.
- Matthew (17, North Carolina): white, male, twelfth grade, Christian  
Interview: October 10, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter; formerly used MySpace.
- Melanie (15, Kansas): white, female, tenth grade  
Interview: April 16, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.
- Mic (15, Los Angeles): Egyptian, male, tenth grade, Muslim  
Interview: January 22, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to parental restrictions.
- Mickey (15, Los Angeles): Mexican, male, tenth grade  
Interview: January 12, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Mikalah (18, Washington, DC): black, female, eleventh grade  
Interview (by Alice): November 7, 2010. Active on MySpace and Facebook.
- Mike (15, California): white, male, ninth grade  
Conversation: May 2006. Active on Facebook.
- Myra (15, Iowa): white, female, ninth grade, Christian  
Interview: April 22, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to parental restrictions.
- Natalie (15, Seattle): white, female, ninth grade, Christian  
Interview: January 20, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Nicholas (16, Kansas): white, male, tenth grade  
Interview: April 14, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.
- Sabrina (14, Texas): white, female, ninth grade  
Interview: March 15, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Samantha (18, Seattle): white, female, twelfth grade, Christian  
Interview: January 20, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Sasha (16, Michigan): white, female, tenth grade  
Interview: June 26, 2007. Not active on social network sites due to parental restrictions.
- Seong (17, Los Angeles): Asian/Korean, female, eleventh grade  
Interview: February 20, 2007. Active on Facebook, MySpace, Cyworld, and Xanga.
- Serena (16, North Carolina): white, female, eleventh grade, Christian/Lutheran  
Interview: October 14, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter; formerly used MySpace.
- Sharnika (17, Washington, DC): African American, female, eleventh grade, Christian  
Interview: November 7, 2010. Active on Facebook and Twitter; formerly used MySpace and Tumblr.
- Skylar (18, Colorado): white, female, twelfth grade  
Blog post: March 16, 2006. Active on MySpace.
- Stan (18, Iowa): white, male, twelfth grade  
Interview: April 18, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Summer (15, Michigan): white, female, between ninth and tenth grade, Catholic  
Interview: June 27, 2007. Active on MySpace.
- Sydnia (15, Washington, DC): tenth grade, black, female  
Interview: September 26, 2010. Active on MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Tara (16, Michigan): Asian/Vietnamese, female, between ninth and tenth grade  
Interview: June 27, 2007. Active on Facebook and MySpace.
- Taylor (15, Boston): white, female, tenth grade  
Interview 1: July 26, 2010. Additional conversations: spring 2012. Active on Facebook.

- Traviesa (15, Los Angeles): Hispanic, female, ninth grade  
 Interview: December 5, 2006. Active on MySpace.
- Trevor (17, North Carolina): white, male, twelfth grade, Christian  
 Interview: October 9, 2010. Active on Facebook.
- Vicki (15, Atlanta): white, female, ninth grade/homeschooled, Catholic  
 Interview: May 9, 2009. Active on MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Waffles (17, North Carolina): white, male, twelfth grade, Christian  
 Interview: October 9, 2010. Active on Facebook.
- Wolf (18, Iowa): white, male, twelfth grade  
 Interview: April 18, 2007. Active on MySpace.

## notes

### Preface

1. Most names used in this book are pseudonyms. Some pseudonyms are chosen by teens themselves; I chose other pseudonyms to be unique names that maintained cultural and temporal identifiers by using baby name websites that took into account birth year and ethnicity. When I'm quoting from public material, including blog posts and news media interviews, I use the name provided by the teen in that context. The names teens use online may not be their legal names, but I did not seek to verify either way.
2. The interviews and fieldwork conducted from 2010–2011 were done in collaboration with Alice Marwick. Most of these focused on privacy and bullying. I identify the interviews conducted by Alice both in the Appendix and within the text. To learn more about the teens that were interviewed for this book and the methodological approach that informs this book, see <http://www.danah.org/itscomplicated/>.

### Introduction

1. Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, and Purcell, "Teens and Mobile Phones."
2. This book draws on data collected in the United States and refers to cultural references that are particular to American culture. Although many of my arguments have resonance outside the United States, I make no attempt to speak to the cultural practices, norms, or attitudes rooted in other countries. Many scholars have examined young people's mediated practices in other cultural contexts, including Livingstone, *Children and the Internet*; Mesch and Talmud, *Wired Youth*; and Davies and Eynon, *Teenagers and Technology*. In addition, as the directors of the EU Kids Online Project, Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon have created a large network of researchers in Europe to examine children's online practices. They have produced numerous reports, journal articles, and scholarly manuscripts. To learn more, see <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/>.
3. To read more about how social media is situated within Web2.0 in light of the rise of social network sites, see Ellison and Boyd, "Sociality Through Social Network Sites." In this article, we argue that what makes "social media"



significant as a category is not the various technologies labeled as social media but, rather, the sociotechnical dynamics that unfold as millions of people embrace a variety of technologies available at a particular time and use them to collaborate, share, and socialize.

4. In the introduction to *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out*, Mimi Ito and colleagues (including myself) describe an important tension in online interactions between those that are “interest-driven” and those that are “friendship-driven.” Although we use this construct to help describe different youth practices, the same dynamic is at play in terms of how broader media have been adopted. Services like Facebook are primarily friendship-driven while the boards on 4chan are primarily interest-driven. Of course, some major social media services—like LiveJournal and Tumblr—have been adopted for both in ways that often create unique tensions within those sites.

5. Mimi Ito initially used the term *networked publics* in 2008 to “reference a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media” (Ito, “Introduction,” 2). Although I agree with her framing and believe that the broadness of what she offers has tremendous value, I am trying to add more precision in my usage. To do so, I draw on a broader notion of publics. In employing the concept of “publics,” I am purposefully referring to a long strain of scholarly debate and analysis. Much of what I’m nodding toward is rooted in, conversational with, or challenging of Jürgen Habermas’s historical analysis of a public sphere as a category of bourgeois society in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (see also Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*). In particular, I subscribe to Nancy Fraser’s argument in “Rethinking the Public Sphere” that publics are where identities are enacted, Michael Warner’s argument in *Publics and Counterpublics* that counterpublics enable marginalized individuals to create powerful communities in resistance to hegemonic publics, and Sonia Livingstone’s recognition in *Audiences and Publics* that publics emerge when audiences come together around shared understandings of the world. To better understand the academic roots of how I understand networked publics, see Boyd, “Social Network Sites as Networked Publics.”

6. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

7. The notion of an affordance was popularized by Donald Norman in his book *The Design of Everyday Things*; he used this term to highlight interaction possibilities that were made possible through specific design decisions. While this term has purchase in the field of human-computer interaction, it is regularly critiqued in critical disciplines because it is often used to give agency to the technological artifact without acknowledging the role of the user (see Oliver, “Problem with Affordance”). Although I am aware of the fraught history of this term, it is still a useful construct for addressing the design features with which people must contend.

8. For a discussion on how visibility brought about by new technologies changes the nature of our social and political worlds, see Thompson, “New Visibility.”

9. In their 2013 book *Spreadable Media*, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Josh Green discuss how new technologies can be used by people interested in spreading online content. They argue that this alters the dynamics of media distribution.

10. Coffin, “Consumption, and Images of Women’s Desires.”

11. Hosokawa, “Walkman Effect.”

12. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*.

13. In Phaedrus, Plato quotes Socrates as paraphrasing an Egyptian god. The relevant excerpts critiquing writing as a medium can be found at: <http://www.english.illinois.edu/~people-/faculty/debaron/482/482readings/phaedrus.html>.

14. More than a decade before I wrote this book, British media studies scholar David Buckingham wrote *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* to examine the fears and anxieties that adults had about the effects of media on young people. Many of the issues that he raised in the early days of youth engagement with the internet continue to plague popular discussions about technology and are at the center of the arguments made in this book at a time when new technologies are rehashing old arguments.

15. Science and technology scholars have written extensively about the problems with technological determinism. Langdon Winner makes the case in “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” In the past three decades, much scholarship has focused on how to think about the role of technology in relation to practice. One strain of thinking is referred to as “social constructivism.” For a literature review of this approach, see Leonardi, *Car Crashes Without Cars*, chap. 2.

16. To learn more about how various societal anxieties shape teens’ lives, see Levine, *Price of Privilege*; and Pope, *Doing School*.

17. For a discussion of how youth build friendships and turn to peers to create a social world that’s not just defined by parents, see Bukowski, Newcomb, and Harrop, *The Company They Keep*; Corsaro, *Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years*; Pahl, *On Friendship*.

18. In *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv describes how changes in societal norms and the rise of fear have resulted in children being disconnected from nature. His argument is that we must help children get access to nature in order for them to be healthy socially and physically. Although this resonates with me, I’ve found that teens are primarily using technology as a substitute, often because nature and unregulated space are so challenging for youth.

19. Lewis, “Community Through Exclusion and Illusion.”

20. For a historical overview of teens’ engagement with and adults’ attitudes toward publics, see Valentine, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*.

21. Hargittai, “Digital Na(t)ives?”

22. Laura Portwood-Stracer examines media refusal and intentional disengagement from social media in "Media Refusal and Conspicuous Non-Consumption."

23. Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology used by social scientists to understand and document cultural practices. Born out of anthropology—and embraced by many other disciplines—ethnographic work seeks to capture and explain the social meaning behind everyday activities. I do not detail my methodological practices in this book, but for those who are interested in my methods, see Boyd, "Making Sense of Teen Life." More details are also available on my website at <http://www.danah.org/itscomplicated/>. For those who want to learn more about doing ethnographic work with youth, see Best, *Representing Youth*.

24. Throughout this book, I use the term *Americans* when talking about cultural practices, values, peoples, and norms that are rooted in the United States. I recognize that this is contested and that some scholars prefer to reserve the term American for talking about contexts related to the Americas—including countries in North and South America. I choose to use American in the more narrow sense both because it is the language that my informants use and because there is no notion of United States-ian. When I refer to cultural practices from other countries in the Americas, I use such descriptors as Canadian, Mexican, and Argentinean.

## Chapter 1. Identity

1. Paul Willis examined the underlying social dynamics of UK class mobility in *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. These ideas were extended and reconsidered in light of an American context by Donna Gaines in *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids*.

2. Rebecca Raby refers to "the great gulf" between adults and adolescents as one of the challenges in truly understanding youth and youth cultural practice. Raby, "Across a Great Gulf?"

3. Marginalized youth are especially vulnerable to being misinterpreted and judged by adults who have no frame for understanding the context in which these teens operate. For example, in her book *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, Mary Gray argues that queer, rural teens need to resolve different conflicted identities when they're both queer and rural. Often, adults who don't experience both of these identities expect teens to focus on one. Rural straight adults believe that sexuality should go unmarked and undiscussed while queer urban adults believe that these youth simply need to leave their rural lives behind. Gray finds that many youth develop innovative ways of resolving conflicted audiences and norms, in spite of adults' assumptions.

4. For a detailed discussion of how context collapse works in networked publics, see Marwick and Boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately";

and Virak, "Impact of Context Collapse and Privacy on Social Network Site Disclosures."

5. For a deeper analysis on how "imagined audience" functions in social media, see Marwick and Boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately"; Litt, "Knock, Knock. Who's There?"; Brake, "Shaping the 'Me' in MySpace"; and Baron, "My Best Day."

6. Over the course of this study, Facebook's privacy settings have changed tremendously. This has complicated teens' understanding of how to navigate contexts on Facebook and in social media more generally. For a discussion of how Facebook's privacy settings have changed, see Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti, "Silent Listeners."

7. Kirschbaum and Kass, "The Switch."

8. Turkle, *Second Self*.

9. Sundén, *Material Virtualities*.

10. Although identity play was commonplace in early online communities, it was not without consequences. The issues of how deception played out during that period are well documented in Stone, *War of Desire and Technology*; and Dibbell, *My Tiny Life*.

11. The dynamics around "real names" and pseudonyms in social media are fraught. Many services, including Facebook and Google Plus, have demanded that users provide their "real name." Other services invite or welcome pseudonyms. For a discussion of the politics of real names in social media, see Hogan, "Pseudonyms and the Rise of the Real-Name Web."

12. In *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out*, Mimi Ito and coauthors (including myself) describe how mediated youth engagement can be understood through a cleavage between friendship-driven practices and those that are interest-driven. Although many youth move between friendship-driven and interest-driven worlds, they often interact with particular genres of media with specific intentions that are organized around one or the other of these approaches. I saw this division throughout my fieldwork.

13. As I mentioned briefly in the Introduction, I approach the study of technology's relation to social practices with a sociotechnical bent, drawing on a broad set of scholarly theories focused on how technology is socially constructed. These theories are often responding to a problematic but pervasive notion that technologies determine practices (a.k.a. "technological determinism"). My analytic approach is heavily influenced by a wide variety of social constructivists, especially the work of Weibe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch. For those who wish to learn more about this analytic approach, see Leonardi, *Car Crashes Without Cars*, chap. 2.

14. To learn more about how identity works in game settings and virtual worlds, see Taylor, *Play Between Worlds*; Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second*

Life; Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*; and Kendall, *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub*.

15. Beth Coleman takes up the issue of avatars blurring distinctions between the virtual and the real in *Hello Avatar: Rise of the Networked Generation*.
16. For a journalist's account of 4chan, see Brophy-Warren, "Modest Web Site Is Behind a Brevy of Memes." For more on 4chan as a site of ephemerality and anonymous community practices, see Bernstein et al., "4chan and /b/," and Knutilla, "User Unknown."
17. For an analysis of the linguistic and cultural practices underpinning lolcats, see Lefter, "I Can Has Thesis?"; and Miltner, "Srsly Phenomenal."
18. For a more in-depth look at Anonymous, see Coleman, "Our Weirdness Is Free"; and Stryker, "Epic Win for Anonymous."
19. In her work on trolls, Whitney Phillips details how participants are socialized into underground anonymous communities through shared language, practices, and in-jokes. See Phillips, "This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things."
20. The number 69 is often used in teen circles as a crass reference to simultaneous oral sex between two partners.
21. Judith Donath's work on the intersection of identity and deception in online spaces highlights that what appears as deceptive to the viewer may have more strategic signaling purposes. Some signals—such as the demographic information required of major social media sites—are easy to fake. Others, such as photographs with friends, are harder. To learn more, see Donath, "Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community"; and Donath, "Signals in Social Supernets."
22. The first social network sites—including Ryze, Friendster, and MySpace—were designed for networking purposes. (For a history of social network sites, see Boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites.") As such, these sites' features were created to help users accurately convey who they were to strangers. Users were expected to provide accurate information about their gender, location, tastes, birthday, relationship status, employment, income, etc., so that the site could help them find a date, make a friend, or build a professional relationship. It didn't take long for users to challenge this design intention in an effort to repurpose these sites. When Friendster's users started creating "fake" accounts, the company responded with outrage, shutting down "Fakerster" accounts and demanding that users use the site as it was intended. The practice of "configuring" users often results in backlash. (For a more detailed discussion of how this dynamic played out on Friendster, see Boyd, "None of This Is Real.") This outraged many early adopters, prompted a mass exodus to other social network sites, including MySpace. Unlike Friendster, MySpace welcomed users to fill out the identity information as they saw fit. In response, many who embraced MySpace—and especially teenagers—had a field day with their profiles.
23. In the 1970s, cultural theorists Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber described the practice of using media to create personal space as "bedroom

culture." Hodkinson and Lincoln are building off of that notion. Hodkinson and Lincoln, "Online Journals as Virtual Bedrooms?"; McRobbie and Garber, "Girls and Subcultures."

24. In *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption*, Murray Milner Jr. discusses the challenges that young people face as they try to navigate status games among their peers.
25. Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 82.
26. Joe Walther et al. discuss how people's practices on social media affect their contacts' impression management processes in "The Role of Friends' Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals' Facebook Profiles."
27. Kirkpatrick, *Facebook Effect*, 199.
28. One perspective of the incident can be found in: Misur, "Old Saybrook High School Makes Privacy Point."
- 29: Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, and Schulenberg, *Monitoring the Future*.
30. Teens who are navigating queer identities are often especially aware of the challenges involved in managing different social contexts. Many, but not all, struggle with what it means to be out online while choosing not to expose their sexuality within their physical community. These teens are often framed as being "closeted," but some are simply trying to figure out how to negotiate conflicting identities. In *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, Mary Gray shows how teens use a variety of strategies to address seemingly unresolvable identities of queerness and rurality.

## Chapter 2. Privacy

1. Although my data focuses exclusively on American youth, British teens have an almost identical perspective regarding social media and privacy. See Livingstone, "Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation."
2. For example, Kang, "Wich Quick Click, Teens Part with Online Privacy."
3. Nussbaum, "Say Everything."
4. Studies show that many youth are quite thoughtful about privacy issues. See, e.g., Boyd and Hargitai, "Facebook Privacy Settings"; Hoofnagle, King, Li, and Turow, "How Different Are Young Adults from Older Adults?"; and Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti, "Silent Listeners." This does not mean that they don't share online. Pew's research on teens and privacy reveals how teens navigate both sharing and privacy. See Madden et al., "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy."
5. Kirkpatrick, "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says the Age of Privacy Is Over"; Popkin, "Privacy Is Dead on Facebook"; Johnson, "Privacy No Longer a Social Norm"; Jenkins Jr., "Opinion: Google and the Search for the Future"; Smith, "Google CEO Eric Schmidt's Most Controversial Quotes About Privacy."
6. Leysia Palen and Paul Dourish argue that, contrary to the traditional model of privacy as social withdrawal, privacy (particularly in a networked

world) is actually the result of many concurrent tensions at work. Palen and Dourish, "Unpacking Privacy for a Networked World."

7. Lauritano-Werner, "Effort to Keep an Online Diary Private."
8. Goffman, *Relations in Public*.
9. The dominance of "civil inattention" is so entrenched that multiple mobile phone etiquette studies mention "forced eavesdropping," or being unable to escape others' ostensibly private conversations as a major inconvenience. See Ling, "Mobile Telephones and the Disturbance of the Public Sphere"; and Lipscomb, Totten, Cook, and Lesch, "Cellular Phone Etiquette Among College Students."
10. In reviewing the legal issues surrounding privacy on Facebook, James Gimmelmann describes a variety of reasons that people seek out privacy while using social media. Gimmelmann, "Saving Facebook."
11. The definitions of privacy are numerous. Helen Nissenbaum describes multiple definitions of privacy and groups them based on whether they are normative or descriptive; emphasize access vs. control; or emphasize promoting other values vs. protecting a private realm. Nissenbaum, *Privacy in Context*. From a different direction, Anita Allen defines three types of privacy: physical privacy, informational privacy, and proprietary. Allen, "Coercing Privacy."
12. Gavison, "Privacy and the Limits of the Law."
13. Westin, *Privacy and Freedom*, 7.
14. Solove, *Understanding Privacy*.
15. Nissenbaum, *Privacy in Context*.
16. Although teens may not functionally have agency or social power in relation to their parents, they certainly try valiantly to circumvent surveillance by authority figures. For a review of some techniques teens use, see Marwick, Diaz, and Palfrey, "Youth, Privacy and Reputation."
17. For the larger cultural impact of celebrity scandals on privacy norms, see Thompson, "Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private Life."
18. Natalya N. Bazarova argues that the seemingly mundane messages that are the stock and trade of social media interaction are actually essential for relational maintenance within these media. Bazarova, "Public Intimacy: History of Steganography."
19. Petricolas, Anderson, and Kuhn, "Information Hiding"; R. Anderson, "History of Steganography."
20. Nathan Jurgenson and P. J. Rey refer to this practice as the "fan dance" of status updates. Jurgenson and Rey, "Comment on Sarah Ford's 'Reconceptualization of Privacy and Publicity.'"
21. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 58 percent of teens cloak their messages either through inside jokes or other obscure references, with older teens (62 percent) engaging in this practice more often than younger teens (46 percent). See Madden et al., "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy."
22. Holson, "Text Generation Gap."

23. For a discussion of different privacy practices to manage privacy and publicness, see Lampinen, "Practices of Balancing Privacy and Publicness in Social Network Services."

24. Privacy is, in many ways, a socioeconomic issue. When the state provides social services, intensive scrutiny and surveillance are often normative. Teens who grow up in households in which parents receive welfare or in which child services are involved are accustomed to invasions of privacy. For a discussion of the socioeconomic issues of privacy, see Gilman, "Class Differential in Privacy Law." Likewise, data suggests that black youth take many more measures to obscure their identity and provide fake online information. See Madden et al., "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy."

25. To read more about how different intensive parenting styles intersect with technology, see Nelson, *Parenting Out of Control*; and Clark, *Parent App*.

26: Bernstein and Triger, "Over-Parenting."

27. See Haddon, "Phone in the Home."

28. Heather Armstrong quoted in Rosenberg, *Say Everything*, 265.

29. For a full deconstruction of the "nothing to hide" argument, see Solove, "I've Got Nothing to Hide."

30. Political dissidents, in particular, have long used strategies to hide in public. This is exemplified in contemporary China, where government censors restrict the kinds of speech people can use and the topics they can discuss. Because of the nature of the Chinese language, citizens often use words that sound similar to their intended word as a way of routing around the censors. For example, the Chinese word for "river crab" sounds a lot like the word for "harmony" or "harmonize," which refers to the government's policy of getting activists to conform. Images are often used instead of text to make it harder for censors to understand what is happening algorithmically. These are just two of the tactics Chinese activists use to counter attempts to control them. An Xiao Mina, an American artist of Chinese descent, has blogged about these practices in "A Curated History of the Grass Mud Horse Song" and "Social Media Street Art."

### Chapter 3. Addiction

1. Hafner, "To Deal with Obsession, Some Defriend Facebook."

2. In 2013, the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that two-thirds of American adults have taken a break from Facebook—or a "Facebook vacation"—because they didn't have time, were bored with the site, found the content unappealing, or grew tired of the gossip and drama. Notably, 8 percent of adults surveyed suggested that they were previously spending too much time on the site and needed to take a break. See Rainie, Smith, and Duggan, "Coming and Going on Facebook." Although it's not clear how common this is among teenagers, many of the teens that I met have similar concerns. Similarly, in her work on media refusal, Laura Portwood-Stacer found that many people

intentionally opt-out of social media. Often, those who decide to quit employ addition as their frame for describing their decision. See Portwood-Stacer, "Media Refusal and Conspicuous Non-Consumption."

3. C. Stewart, "Obsessed with the Internet"; Fackler, "In Korea, a Boot Camp Cure for Web Obsession."

4. Some psychologists and communication scholars have addressed the issue of TV addiction through the lens of "media effects." This subdiscipline is fraught. For a review on the history of moral panics related to media effects research, see Livingstone, "On the Continuing Problems of Media Effects Research."

5. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*.

6. For an account of how gambling machines are designed to enhance flow, see Schüll, *Addiction by Design*. For a discussion of how video games leverage the state of flow, see Cowley, Charles, Black, and Hickey, "Toward an Understanding of Flow in Video Games." For a discussion of the connection between flow and addiction, see Chou and Ting, "Role of Flow Experience in Cyber-Game Addiction."

7. Early in my fieldwork, I asked teenagers whether they ever used a computer that wasn't connected to the internet. One girl furrowed her brow and asked me what would be the point of such a device. A teen boy explained that his home computer collected dust when his mother forgot to pay the internet bill. The public rhetoric suggests that the problem is the technological artifact, but many teens make it very clear that they have no particular interest in the physical device. They're only interested in the opportunities to be social.

8. For an early reference to "addicted to the bottle," see Pittis, *Dr. Radcliffe's Life and Letters*, 31.

9. Zieger, "Terms to Describe Addiction in the Nineteenth Century."

10. Quoted in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "addiction."

11. World Health Organization, Expert Committee on Drugs Liable to Produce Addiction, *Report on the Second Session, Geneva, 9-14 January 1950*. [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/trs/WHO\\_TRS\\_21.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/trs/WHO_TRS_21.pdf).

12. Federwisch, "Internet Addiction?" Like Goldman, the American Medical Association (AMA) is often hesitant to label new compulsions as addictions. In 2007, the AMA declined to label "video game addiction" as a disorder even though many rallied for it to be declared one. Psych Central News Editor, "Video Games No Addiction for Now."

13. For example, Jerald J. Block's editorial for the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, titled "Issues for DSM-V: Internet Addiction," cites a variety of studies, primarily in South Korea.

14. The American Library Association maintains a list of books most frequently challenged or banned by schools. In the 1990s, *Go Ask Alice* was listed as number 25 on the list of top 100 books to be banned. American Library Association, "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books: 1990-1999."

15. Gross, "Dad Pays Daughter \$200 to Quit Facebook."

16. Lorens, "Tommy Jordan, Dad Who Shot Daughter's Laptop, Says 'He'd Do It Again'; Jordan, 'Facebook Parenting.'"

17. For an analysis of how physical mobility has changed over multiple generations, see Bird, *Natural Thinking*. For a deeper discussion on the decline of children's access to public spaces and nature, see Valentine, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*; and Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*.

18. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, violent crime against youth declined 77 percent from 1994 to 2010. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/vcay94t0pr.cfm>.

19. For a scholarly discussion of how children have lost access to public spaces, see Valentine, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*. For a more popular discussion, see Skenezy, *Free-Range Kids*.

20. Ruefle and Reynolds, "Curfew and Delinquency in Major American Cities."

21. Lyall, "What's the Buzz?"

22. National Center for Safe Routes to School, "How Children Get to School."

23. Mahoney, Larson, and Eccles, *Organized Activities as Contexts of Development*.

24. Pinker, "Mind over Mass Media."

25. Hall, *Adolescence*.

26. For an overview on the Progressive Era, see Pestrino and Arto, *American Progressivism*.

27. For an account of how teenagers were shaped by the various shifts in American policies resulting from Hall's work and adjacent movements, see Hine, *Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*.

28. For an exploration of how the boundaries of various life stages are socially and normatively constructed, see Crawford, *Adult Themes*.

29. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) is a popular scholarly articulation of the fear that American society has become disconnected. In response, Eric Klinenberg's *Going Solo* (2012) highlights how shifts in household configuration and the rise in people choosing to live alone isn't simply a rejection of sociality, but a byproduct of increasingly social work spaces.

#### Chapter 4. Danger

1. For examples of media coverage of online predators, see Williams, "MySpace, Facebook Attract Online Predators"; and Poulsen, "MySpace Predator Caught by Code."

2. In the 1990s, before internet usage was mainstream among youth, there was considerable news coverage about the dangers of online sexual predators. See, e.g., Elmer-DeWitt, "Online Erotica."

3. In *The Culture of Fears*, sociologist Barry Glassner provides a detailed account of how American society uses fear to regulate everyday practices. He points out that people are terrible at assessing risk; many fears are connected, not to risk, but to how the media shapes the public's perception of key issues. Eszter Hargittai and I examine the pervasiveness of parental concerns and fears regarding online safety issues in "Connected and Concerned."
4. Some early news reports about the dangers of the internet for youth include: Rovner, "Molesting Children by Computer"; Wetzstein, "Anti-Porn Group Targets On-Line Activities"; and Lennox, "E-mail."
5. One account of how sexual curiosity led to compulsive participation in cybersex is detailed in Kelleher, "With Teens and Internet Sex, Curiosity Can Become Compulsion."
6. Valentine, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*.
7. Jahn, "National Youth Rights Association—Analysis of U.S. Curfew Laws"; Favro, "City Mayors."
8. Males and Macallair, "Analysis of Curfew Enforcement and Juvenile Crimes in California."
9. Quoted in Valentine, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*, 91.
10. *Ibid.*, 27.
11. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. For further information on moral panics, see Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*; and Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*.
12. Jack, *Woman Reader*.
13. For an in-depth exploration on the moral panic surrounding comic books (including the 1954 Senate Subcommittee Hearings into Juvenile Delinquency), see Hadju, *Ten-Cent Plague*.
14. John Springhall details the intersection of teens' media practices and moral panics in *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*.
15. Finkelhor, "Internet, Youth Safety and the Problem of 'Juvenoa.'"
16. For a discussion of the moral panics surrounding girls' online practices, see Cassell and Cramer, "High Tech or High Risk."
17. For an analysis of the MySpace moral panic, see Marwick, "To Catch a Predator?"
18. Amy Adler critiques the show and presents a more detailed overview of its role in American society in "To Catch a Predator."
19. Henry Jenkins and I wrote a critique of the Deleting Online Predators Act on May 26, 2006, for MIT Talk Tech: <http://www.danah.org/papers/MySpaceDOPA.html>.
20. In 2007, the attorneys general commissioned an Internet Safety Technical Task Force that was codirected by John Palfrey, Dena Sacco, and myself. As part of that task force, we were asked to consider technical solutions—including age verification technologies—to combat sexual predators. We chose to analyze

existing research and technical interventions and came to the conclusion that age verification would not actually help children who are sexually exploited because the media-driven image of the sexual predator was misleading. Our final report, "Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies," can be found online at: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/istff/>.

21. Lessig, *Code*.
22. In her study of girls' websites, Susannah Stern described a category of "self-conscious site authors" who are aware of (and concerned about) the fact that any information they put online could be used to harm them. Stern, "Expression on Web Home Pages."
23. Boyd and Hargittai, "Connected and Concerned."
24. The dynamics of "anxious parenting" are analyzed in Nelson, *Parenting Out of Control*; Stearns, *Anxious Parents*; and Furedi, *Paranoid Parenting*.
25. See Hammel-Zabin, *Conversations with a Pedophile*.
26. For an analysis of how legal policy builds on anxious parenting, see Bernstein and Triger, "Over-Parenting."
27. Snyder and Sickmund, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*; Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak, "Internet and Family and Acquaintance Sexual Abuse"; Finkelhor and Ormrod, "Kidnaping of Juveniles."
28. Finkelhor and Ormrod, "Kidnaping of Juveniles."
29. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, "CyberTipline: Annual Report Totals"; Calpin, "Child Maltreatment"; Finkelhor and Jones, "Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment, 2006."
30. According to Howard N. Snyder, *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement* (2000), 84 percent of sexual abuse committed against children under twelve and 71 percent of sexual abuse committed against children age twelve to seventeen are committed in a residence, either the victim's or the perpetrator's. For other data on the trends in sexual abuse, see Jones, Mitchell, and Finkelhor, "Trends in Youth Internet Victimization"; and Shakeshaft, "Educator Sexual Misconduct."
31. Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Wolak, "Online Victimization."
32. Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor, "Online Victimization of Youth."
33. Ybarra, Espelage, and Mitchell, "Co-Occurrence of Internet Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Solicitation Victimization and Perpetration"; Wolak, Finkelhor, and Mitchell, "Is Talking Online to Unknown People Always Risky?"
34. Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Ybarra, "Online 'Predators' and Their Victims"; Finkelhor, *Childhood Victimization*; Mitchell, Wolak, and Finkelhor, "Are Blogs Putting Youth at Risk?"; Ybarra and Mitchell, "Prevalence and Frequency of Internet Harassment Instigation."
35. Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak, "Internet and Family and Acquaintance Sexual Abuse."

36. For an in-depth exploration of the tricky nature of adolescent sexual consent and the law, see Hasinoff, "Information, Consent, and Control."

37. Erdely, "Kiki Kannibal."

38. Sexual assault or rape among teens who are in a dating relationship ranges from 3 percent to 23 percent of all females and 2 percent to 4 percent of all males. For more information, see Bergman, "Dating Violence Among High School Students"; Canterbury, Grossman, and Lloyd, "Drinking Behaviors and Lifetime Incidence of Date Rape"; Davis, Peck, and Stormont, "Acquaintance Rape and the High School Student"; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, "Locating a History of Some Canadian Women Abuse"; and Vicary, Klingaman, and Hankness, "Risk Factors Associated with Date Rape."

39. Age-discrepant marriages are more frequently associated with non-US populations, lower socioeconomic status, lower educational levels, and certain religions. Although such relationships are common in certain parts of the world, they are often taboo in the United States. For a review of these dynamics, see Berardo, Appel, and Berardo, "Age Dissimilar Marriages."

40. "Mothers Think Teens Were Lured Away by MySpace.com Suitors."

41. Jenkins, "Congressional Testimony on Media Violence."

42. Gaines, *Teenage Wasteland*.

43. The original video can be viewed on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOHXGNx-E7E>.

44. Wells and Mitchell, "How Do High-Risk Youth Use the Internet?"

45. Wolak, Finkelhor, and Mitchell, "Is Talking Online to Unknown People Always Risky?"; Wells and Mitchell, "How Do High-Risk Youth Use the Internet?"

## Chapter 5. Bullying

1. The ideas in this chapter—and much of the data—would not have been possible without help from my collaborator Alice Marwick. For two years, we interviewed teens and worked out numerous ideas about networked youth culture together. The ideas about drama in this chapter are the product of deep collaboration. To read more about our ideas on teen conflict, see Marwick and boyd, "The Drama!"

2. A literature review produced by the Harvard Berkman Center for the Kinder and Braver World Project found that, although the rates of bullying ranged tremendously depending on how one defined bullying, the bulk of studies suggest that anywhere from 20 percent to 35 percent of youth are bullied offline, a rate that is much higher than the typical online rate. Levy et al., "Bullying in a Networked Era." Studies that compare online and offline bullying consistently show that youth report that bullying happens more frequently and with greater emotional duress at school. See, e.g., Ybarra, Mitchell, and Espelage, "Comparisons of Bully and Unwanted Sexual Experiences."

3. One of the most publicized cases of bullying appearing to prompt teen suicide was that of Phoebe Prince, a fifteen-year-old from Massachusetts, who purportedly killed herself after being tormented by classmates. In response, local prosecutors charged six teenagers with a variety of violations, including statutory rape. Emily Bazelon investigated this case and found that the public narrative obfuscated the serious mental health issues that Prince was experiencing while blaming a group of teens who felt as though they were on the receiving end of Phoebe's abuse. Her excellent documentation and analysis can be found in a three-part series published in *Slate*, "What Really Happened to Phoebe Prince?" She also did a deeper analysis of this case and other teen bullying suicides in her book, *Sticks and Stones*.

4. For a review of the anti-bullying legislation that has been proposed or implemented, see Sacco et al., "Overview of State Anti-Bullying Legislation and Other Related Laws."

5. Based on his research, Dan Olweus created the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), which is now used by many educators. In his scholarly writing, Olweus has described bullying with a variety of words, but the three components listed are generally associated with him and generally used by those implementing OBPP.

6. Ybarra, Mitchell, and Espelage, "Comparisons of Bully and Unwanted Sexual Experiences."

7. Victims of bullying may experience a wide variety of academic, emotional, and social problems, including lower grades, truancy, social anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts/behavior, mental health issues, hostility, and delinquency. Perpetrators of bullying behavior are also subject to a series of negative outcomes, including problems in romantic relationships, suicidal thoughts, mental health issues, and drug and alcohol abuse. Many perpetrators are also often victims in other contexts. For a broad literature review on bullying, see Levy et al., "Bullying in a Networked Era." For an empirically grounded analysis of how these dynamics unfold, see Espelage and Swearer, *Bullying in North American Schools*. For a scholarly overview of how technology intersects with other aspects of bullying, see Hinduja and Patchin, *School Climate 2.0*.

8. In their review of Zero Tolerance policies, the American Psychological Association found that not only do highly punitive bullying policies fail to create a better learning environment for students but disruptive students who were removed from school environments as a result of these policies were often exposed to more risk. Skiba et al., "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?"

9. Alice Marwick and I document our analysis in great detail in "The Drama!"

10. For an in-depth examination of how heteronormative and homophobic discourses construct adolescent American masculinity, see Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag*.

11. Englander, "Digital Self-Harm."
12. Milnet, *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*, 25.
13. Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts*.
14. Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*.
15. For an overview of the "Star Wars Kid," see the Wikipedia entry: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star\\_Wars\\_Kid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars_Kid).
16. In *Spreadable Media*, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Josh Green describe the productive value of spreading online content to help create meaning and value in a networked culture. The same practices that they describe can be used to reinforce cultural values and norms at the expense of individuals.
17. The notion of celebrity refers to multiple things. In the colloquial sense, it refers to a famous person (e.g., Lady Gaga is a celebrity). It can also refer to a cultural phenomenon, as in celebrity culture. For scholars, celebrity can be viewed as a process by which people turn into a commodity. To learn more about how celebrity is theorized and conceptualized, see Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*; and David, *Celebrity Culture Reader*.
18. Alice Marwick and I discuss how Twitter is used to enable the practice of celebrity in "To See and Be Seen."
19. Nancy Baym discusses how musicians use technology to engage directly with their fans in "Fans or Friends?"
20. In *Toxic Fame*, Joey Berlin interviews hundreds of celebrities about their experiences with fame. This collection offers a fascinating perspective on the struggles that celebrities face.
21. Terri Senft provides a valuable analysis of microcelebrity and the politics of celebrity in a digital world in *Camgirls*.
22. Wasserman, "How Rebecca Black Became a YouTube Sensation."
23. Rebecca Black discussed her experience with fame on *Primetime Live*: *Celebrity Secrets* in a special episode called "Underage and Famous" on August 10, 2011. For a written description, see Canning, "Rebecca Black."
24. The cultivation of resilience and empathy within teens is seen as key to addressing everyday obstacles, including bullying. See Goldstein and Brooks, *Handbook of Resilience in Children*; Polanin, Espelage, and Pigott, "Meta-Analysis of School-Based Bullying Prevention Programs' Effects."
25. Many of the best programs rely on social emotional learning (SEL) to help people develop the necessary skills to cope with violence, bullying, and other forms of conflict. SEL programs focus on helping people develop empathy and resilience to maintain healthy relationships.

## Chapter 6. Inequality

1. The rhetoric used by the US media to suggest that social media could democratize the world took a more magnificent form in January 2011. As citizens throughout the Middle East began challenging authoritarian regimes, the

media described the uprisings of the Arab Spring as being a product of social media. The news media began extolling social media as being the source of the various Middle East revolutions. This narrative has been widely critiqued, but it reveals prevalent notions of how technology can do cultural work to eradicate inequalities and injustices.

2. In *Digitizing Race*, Lisa Nakamura has pointed out that many technological discourses, particularly those involving the digital divide, have envisioned or positioned users of color as technologically limited and/or uninvolved.
3. Briggs and Maverick quoted in Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 160-161.
4. For a discussion of whiteness and photography, see Dyer, "Lighting for Whiteness."
5. Sinclair, "Kinect Has Problems Recognizing Dark-Skinned Users?"
6. Zax, "Siri, Why Can't You Understand Me?"
7. Kendall, "Meaning and Identity in 'Cyberspace'"; Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, "Race in Cyberspace."
8. Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, "Race in Cyberspace," 4-5.
9. Ethan Zuckerman talks extensively about the "imaginary cosmopolitanism" and the fallacy of social media as an inherently democratizing force in *ReWire*. Although his focus is global in scope, the same issues he highlights internationally also play out domestically. And the challenges that he highlights in describing how adults negotiate differences are also true of teenagers.
10. Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion*; Droni, *Global E-litism*.
11. Steiner, "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog."
12. Christopherson, "The Positive and Negative Implications of Anonymity in Internet Social Interactions."
13. The "omgblackpeople" blog was originally hosted on Tumblr, but as of 2013, it is no longer available. The content was reposted on: <http://omgblackpeople.wordpress.com/>. For a blog post covering the racist tweets surrounding the BET awards, see <http://www.blackweb20.com/2009/06/29/bet-awards-dominate-twitter-causes-racist-backlash/#UVB-flyvms8>.
14. Smith, "Twitter Update 2011."
15. Saraceno, "Swiss Soccer Player Banned from Olympics for Racist Tweet."
16. For an analysis of racism online, see Daniels, *Cyber Racism*; and Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game."
17. For a write-up of racist commentary following the casting of *The Hunger Games*, see D. Stewart, "Racist Hunger Games Fans Are Very Disappointed."
18. CoEd Staff, "Alexandra Wallace."
19. Mandell, "Alexandra Wallace, UCLA Student."
20. At times, self-appointed norm protectors seek to regulate online decorum by engaging in digital vigilantism. See Phillips and Milner, "Internet's Vigilante Shame Army"; and Norton, "Anonymous 101."
21. Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts*.



22. The tendency for people to downplay racism by talking about how they have friends of different races is so common that it is a frame through which people look at cross-race connections. In the 2012 book *Some of My Best Friends Are Black*, Tanner Colby describes the challenges of racial integration in the United States through four different case studies. In a more comedic treatment of the same issue, comedian Baratunde Thurston dedicates an entire chapter in *How to Be Black* to "how to be the black friend." He offers entertaining advice to black readers on how they can make white people feel comfortable by taking concrete steps to be a "good" black friend.

23. For a discussion of homophily, including how American society is divided along racial and ethnic lines, see McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, "Birds of a Feather."

24. See Lin, "Inequality in Social Capital."

25. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*.

26. For a more detailed analysis of the division that emerged in the 2006-2007 school year between Facebook and MySpace, see Boyd, "White Flight in Networked Publics?" Craig Watkins also documents the racialized tension between these sites in his work on youth and social media. Watkins, *The Young and the Digital*.

27. As Siân Lincoln points out in *Youth Culture and Private Space*, teenagers use whatever platform their friends use, even if they personally prefer other platforms.

28. Black and African American individuals are overrepresented on Twitter compared to their participation online more generally. Scholars have begun analyzing a practice known colloquially as "Black Twitter," referring both to the significant presence of black users as well as how practices and norms in Twitter appear to differ across race lines. See Brock, "From the Blackhand Side"; and Florini, "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin'."

29. Clinton, "Internet Freedom."

30. Scholars and government agencies have pointed out that technology uptake is often dependent on contextual relevance. When it comes to information and communication technologies, people are often more likely to appreciate their value when they see others use them in beneficial ways. If people's personal networks aren't using particular technologies, they often see no reason to use them. See Haddon, "Social Exclusion and Information and Communication Technologies"; and Federal Communications Commission, *National Broadband Plan*.

31. Hargittai, "Digital Reproduction of Inequality."

32. For a sampling of relevant studies on social networks, see Fischer, *To Dwell Among Friends*; Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties"; Lin, *Social Capital*; and Wellman, *Networks in the Global Village*.

33. In *Invisible Users*, Jenna Burrell makes the issues of structural inequality especially visible in her study of Ghanaian youth. Although these youth have

access to information technologies, the social networks in which they operate—and the norms that exist in their home communities—complicate their ability to connect successfully and meaningfully with more powerful users.

34. Webster, *Theories of the Information Society*; Webster, "Information and Urban Change"; Garnham, *Information Society Theory as Ideology*.

## Chapter 7. Literacy

1. Walz and Brownsberger, "(Real) Virtual Education."

2. Ellen Helsper and Rebecca Eynon have argued, in "Digital Natives," that not only is it misguided to assume that there is a digital knowledge gap between educators and students but it is entirely possible for adults to "become digital natives" through a combination of skill acquisition and interaction with ICT.

3. Barlow, "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace."

4. The origin of the concept of "digital natives" is murky. At the same time that John Perry Barlow was penning his manifesto, Doug Rushkoff published *Playing the Future: What We Can Learn from Digital Kids*. While promoting this book, Rushkoff regularly spoke of youth as digital natives. For example, Rushkoff is quoted by Elizabeth Weil in a *Fast Company* article entitled "The Future Is Younger than You Think" as having said, "Kids are natives in a place where most adults are immigrants." Rushkoff and Barlow each told me that he was inspired by the other.

5. Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants."

6. Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants: Origins of the Term."

7. In their report on "Connected Learning," Mimi Ito and coauthors describe how different constituencies should come together to enable new forms of learning through and with technology. This report provides concrete steps that educators can take.

8. Media literacy is a contentious topic. Scholars, policymakers, and educators have long contested its definition, parameters, and pedagogy. Those disputes and discussions will likely continue as the nature of the internet morphs and evolves. For a more in-depth exploration of the debates surrounding media literacy and media literacy education, see Aufderheide, *Media Literacy*; Livingstone, "Media Literacy"; and Hobbs, "Seven Great Debates."

9. The history of media literacy education started in the United Kingdom in 1930s when F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson published what is considered to be the first instruction manual for teaching about the mass media in schools, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*. See Buckingham, "Media Education in the UK."

10. In the United States, the media literacy movement started in the 1960s and was spearheaded by John Gullkin, who advocated for media education in school curricula. See Moody, "John Gullkin."

11. Age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status are all determining factors in whether youth have the opportunity to develop digital literacy skills. For example, children from higher income households are more likely to have access to the latest technology, which means that they will have more opportunity to figure out how to use it, not only from trial-and-error exploration, but from the instruction of their parents and siblings. Furthermore, these children are more likely to have been taught to search for information, as well as to qualify and evaluate it. See Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper, *Internet Literacy Among Children and Young People*; and Hargittai, "Digital Reproduction of Inequality."
12. In his article on "Copy and Paste Literacy," Dan Perkel notes that even though teenagers may know how to engage in "networked discourse" from a social perspective, they still developed technical sensibilities in order to update their MySpace profiles.
13. For a critical examination of how Google—both the company and the search engine—work, see Vaidhyanathan, *Googolization of Everything*.
14. In *Spam*, Finn Brunton details how spammers react to Google's attempt to stop search engine optimizers by developing complex algorithms to manipulate the system. This creates an ongoing battle between the company and those who seek to profit from having their material at the top of the results pages.
15. In "The Relevance of Algorithms," Tarleton Gillespie details the ways in which algorithms have political power.
16. In "The Curious Connection Between Apps for Gay Men and Sex Offenders," Mike Ananny describes the unintended link produced by the algorithm underpinning Android's recommendation system. When Ananny tried to download Grindr, a gay dating site, he was encouraged to also consider downloading a sex offender search site. He wrote this essay to question how such a link was algorithmically produced. Unfortunately, Google did not respond. Instead, the company simply changed the algorithm.
17. Gasser, Cortesi, Malik, and Lee, "From Credibility to Information Quality."
18. Giles, "Special Report."
19. Although educators often dismiss Wikipedia over issues of credibility, they also tend to downplay the educational value of using the service. In "Writing, Citing, and Participatory Media," Andrea Forte and Amy Bruckman found that engaging with wikis was a learning-rich experience for high school students that contributed to both writing and information assessment skills.
20. Texas's undue influence on the US textbook market is discussed in Collins, "How Texas Inflicts Bad Textbooks on Us." For examples of how Texan Christianity shapes textbooks, see Birnbaum, "Historians Speak Out Against Proposed Texas Textbook Changes."
21. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List\\_of\\_hoaxes\\_on\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_hoaxes_on_Wikipedia).

22. The potential of social media and other recent technologies for helping address issues in information flow and curation—including crowd-sourcing, classification, and cooperation—has been the topic of numerous books in recent years. See Weinberger, *Everything Is Miscellaneous*; Shirkov-Cognitive Surplus; and Benkler, *Penguin and Leviathan*.

23. Jenkins, "Reconsidering Digital Immigrants."

24. The first official use of the term *digital divide* appeared in a report by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The NTIA defined the digital divide as the gap between those who had access to a computer and the internet and those who didn't. See NTIA, *Falling Through the Net*.

25. Compaine, *Digital Divide*.

26. Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion*.

27. NTIA, *Falling Through the Net*.

28. For an overview of digital inequality and the various scholarly strands, see Hargittai, "Digital Reproduction of Inequality"; Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansburg, *Virtual Inequality*; and Selwyn, "Reconsidering Political and Popular Understandings."

29. Federal Communications Commission, *National Broadband Plan*. See also Eszter Hargittai's work on skill, e.g., DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, and Shafer, "Digital Inequality"; and Hargittai, "Second-Level Digital Divide."

30. Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion*.

31. Lenhart et al., "Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites."

32. The politics surrounding access for youth are far from straightforward. Christian Sandvig notes, in "Unexpected Outcomes in Digital Divide Policy," that when given unstructured access, young people prefer to play games and use chat, activities that are not considered to be the types of "beneficial" engagement that policymakers had in mind.

33. Jenkins et al., *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*.

34. The ability to access the internet without restriction is described by Eszter Hargittai as "autonomy of use." Autonomy of use has a significant impact on the depth of engagement and type of benefit that can be gained from internet use. Youth who rely on public sources of access, such as schools or libraries, often face major obstacles that impede their usage and impact, including physical distance, opening hours, and equipment quality and availability. See Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives?"

35. Eszter Hargittai's work on the topic of skills can be found at: <http://webuse.org/pubs/>. Two relevant publications are Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives?"; and Hargittai and Hinnant, "Digital Inequality."

36. Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives?"

37. Crawford and Robinson, "Beyond Generations and New Media."

38. Epstein, Nisbet, and Gillespie, "Who's Responsible for the Digital Divide?"

39. Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital*; Palfrey and Gasser, "Reclaiming an Awkward Term."

40. Gasser and Palfrey's nuanced description of digital natives comes from their answer to the question, "Are all youth digital natives?" on their project site: <http://www.digitalnative.org/#about>. They provide a similar explanation in the opening of their book *Born Digital*.

41. Prensky, "Digital Wisdom and Homo Sapiens Digital."

42. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* by Mimi Ito et al. provides a more detailed framework for understanding how young people's online activities can lead to tremendous learning opportunities. Many youth approach social media and other technologies as spaces to hang out with their friends, but some start messing around with different technical and media elements—such as those who started learning how to code by exploring ways of creating intricate MySpace pages. When teens become passionate about something, they may turn to social media to geek out, building online communities and drilling down in specialized interests. This book provides a framework for thinking about the various forms of informal learning that can emerge when youth are given the freedom to explore networked settings.

#### Chapter 8. Searching for a Public of Their Own

1. For an examination of how shopping malls serve as publics, see Matthews, Taylor, Percy-Smith, and Limb, "Unacceptable Flaneur."

2. Two books provide fantastic analyses of the consumer culture that American children inhabit and how it inflects every aspect of their engagement with school, media, and society more generally: Seiter, *Sold Separately*; and Schoor, *Born to Buy*.

3. For a broader critique of the commercial side of social media and the privatization of public spaces online, see Scholz, "Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0"; and Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*.

4. My collaborator, Alice Marwick, and I build off of this case study and detail the dynamics of Twitter and public culture in "Tweeting Teens Can Handle Public Life."

5. Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*; Finders, "Queens and Teen Zines"; Bayerl, "Mags, Zines, and gURLs."

6. In *The Anarchist in the Library*, Siva Vaidhyanathan shows how new technologies erase institutional boundaries, which in turn challenge the political organization of society. Not only are people using new technologies to engage in political acts, but the very architecture of networked publics—and the affordances that underpin them—create new socio-technical configurations that alter the political landscape. In *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells points out that those who control the networks—both technical and social—are often those with the most power.

7. According to Youth and Participatory Politics Survey Project, 41 percent of young people have engaged in at least one act of participatory politics, defined by the project as "interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern." Cohen et al., "New Media and Youth Political Action."

8. Jodi Dean argues that the environments that I'm describing as networked publics cannot serve as political public spheres because of the commercial underpinnings of these systems. Although I respect her argument, I do think that much political work does take place in and through these systems, even if they themselves are not the kinds of ideal publics that enable the public sphere to form. Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere."

9. In *Smart Mobs*, Howard Rheingold describes how activists in the Philippines used technology to spread information and come together politically. As protests were breaking out in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, people turned to social media for information and to coordinate political resistance. See Tufekci and Wilson, "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protests."

10. In *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Philip Howard discusses how democracy is supported by having a high percentage of the population online, even if they are not directly engaged with political activities. In a paper for the Digital Media and Learning initiative, Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jin Lee, and Jessica Timpany Fezell demonstrated that engagement with nonpolitical online participatory cultures can act as a gateway for behavior that is considered to be more explicitly civic and/or political: volunteering, community problem-solving, protests, and political expression. Kahne, Lee, and Timpany Fezell, "Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood."

11. Khokha, "Text Messages, MySpace Roots of Student Protests."

12. Cho and Gorman, "Massive Student Walkout Spreads Across Southland."

13. Leavey, "Los Angeles Students Walk Out in Immigration Reform Protests."

14. For background information on Anonymous, see Coleman, "Our Weirdest Is Free"; Norton, "Anonymous too"; and Greenberg, "WikiLeaks Supporters Aim Cyberattacks at PayPal."

15. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*.

16. For an in-depth examination of internet memes and the sociopolitical use of memes for humor and cultural commentary, see Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*.

17. For an explanation of the Hitler Downfall meme, including other examples, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/downfall-hitler-reacts>.

18. In his book on the history of the telephone, *America Calling*, Claude Fisher shows how the fears and anxieties discussed throughout this book also played out at the time in which the telephone was first being deployed.

19. Vint Cerf quoted in Ward, "What the Net Did Next."

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