

A young man with dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie over a black and white striped polo shirt and a patterned vest, is looking down at a smartphone he is holding with both hands. He is standing against a light-colored, textured wall.

To Share or Not to Share:

How Teens Make Privacy Decisions about Photos on Social Media



This report can be downloaded from: <http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy>

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To Share or Not to Share: How teens make privacy decisions about photos on social media

Executive Summary

This report is based on interviews that were conducted with eighteen youth between the ages of 13 and 16 in the fall of 2016. Each of the participants had selected photos that they had taken in the previous two weeks to discuss and identify those which they had been comfortable sharing with a wide audience; those they had wanted only to share with close friends or family, and those they did not want to share with anyone. The interviews were structured around a discussion of these photos and the factors that went into deciding how and with whom they would be shared, with the aim of illuminating how the participants conceived of privacy in the context of photos, as well as what steps (if any) they took to protect their privacy. (A more thorough explanation of the process can be found in the Methodology section.)

Context

One of the biggest influences on the participants' decisions about sharing was the context in which photos were taken.

The most common context was to perform for “people”: These photos were shared to contribute to online identities that were crafted to meet the expectations of audiences for the different platforms and accounts in which the participants were active. The knowledge that their photos would be judged by these various audiences forced participants into a narrow range of acceptable expression that was strongly influenced by media imagery, social norms, and by the aesthetic of each particular platform.

“The Rules”

Participants' decisions about how, and how widely, to share photos were part of a curation strategy aimed at establishing – and defending – their online identities. An important aspect of this strategy was how they chose subjects for, composed, and in some cases altered their photos before sharing them. These decisions illuminate a fairly consistent set of rules that participants followed for sharing photos. Some of these rules were specific to a single platform, while others applied more globally.

Be social. Although only a small number of our participants used photo-sharing platforms to socialize, almost all of them posted photos on social media to “look social.”

Look good. This applied to both individuals in the photo and to the photos themselves, which were (if they were shared widely, such as on public Instagram accounts) expected to be of “professional” quality. Faces were a particular area of concern and some participants made a practice of covering their faces or only sharing photos in which their faces did not appear at all to avoid the potential criticism that comes with sharing a photo of one’s face.

Look candid, but don’t be candid. Participants spoke of the need to look good in photos that others took of them, not just their own photos, and expressed a need to be camera-ready and a desire to limit the spread of photos in which they were not ready or “paying attention.” However, they also had a distaste for photos that seemed to be too posed or staged. One participant compared participating in social media to Picture Day at school in terms of presenting an image that is rooted in reality but is nevertheless an idealized version of oneself.

Be personal, but not revealing. Similarly, there was an expectation that photos have some emotional connection or meaning to both the person who shared them and the recipient, rather than being “random” and irrelevant. The term “random,” though, also applied to photos that were seen as inappropriately personal for the audience, showing a competing directive not to expose the “messy” details of one’s life. These details include almost any hint of sexuality, controversial topics or even media tastes not deemed to be sufficiently mainstream. This strongly suggests the current ways that young people police their privacy have restricted the potential of social media to support free expression. Instead, social media has become a homogenous space where it is important to establish a ‘positive’ online identity without actually revealing much of oneself.

Be consistent. Public Instagram accounts, in particular, were expected to have a consistent “theme” or look, that might be based on a particular topic or colour palette. Some participants spoke of wanting to avoid inadvertently creating a theme by sharing too many similar photos.

Don’t post anything compromising. Though the participants were most motivated by the immediate (or imagined) reaction of their peers, they also believed that their photos might be seen in the future by institutional audiences such as schools, governments, potential employers or law enforcement. Though they were generally more concerned with preventing these future audiences from seeing photos that might cast them in a negative light, some participants were conscious of creating a positive impression as well.

Privacy Strategies

Participants engaged in a number of different strategies to manage their privacy. Though a small number of photos were kept entirely private, most of the participants’ efforts were aimed at controlling who saw particular photos and preventing them from being spread to unintended audiences.

Selecting audiences. A small number of topics were seen as not appropriate to share because they were seen as “private” (as opposed to not being shared out of fear of a negative

reaction from the audience.) Photos containing family members were the most commonly cited example in this category, though some participants included close friends as well.

Selecting platforms. The main tool that participants used to ensure that only desired audiences saw particular photos was selecting which platform and account to post them on. The two platforms mentioned most often, by a very large margin, were Snapchat and Instagram, and there was a consistent difference in how they were used: Snapchat was seen as a more casual platform for sharing with close friends, compared to Instagram which was seen as the main platform for building your public persona and therefore required more careful and “professional” curation. These interviews, however, suggest that the participants are not only *choosing* different platforms to manage their privacy and publicity: they are also, consciously or not, being influenced by the structure of those platforms. Snapchat, where photos are temporary by default, creates an expectation of being casual and “fun”, while Instagram’s persistent feed promotes the careful maintenance of a public-facing profile.

Selecting accounts. Besides selecting different platforms for different purposes, some participants created multiple accounts to limit which audiences see which content. One frequently cited example was the “spam” account, an Instagram account on which it was considered acceptable to “spam” your friends by sharing more, and less “professional”, photos than was expected on the main account. These alternate accounts were typically only visible to close friends, compared to the main accounts which were generally open to everyone even tangentially connected to the participant socially.

Limiting screenshots. Snapchat’s ability to notify users if a screenshot of their photo is taken was mentioned by several participants as one of the most valuable features of the platform. However, it was prized less as a technical tool than as an implicit social signal that a photo should not be spread beyond the initial audience.

Negotiating consent. More than half of the students in MediaSmarts’ 2014 *Young Canadians in a Wired World* survey expected their peers to ask before posting a photo of them, and to a certain extent the participants in this study seem to share that attitude: they were, for instance, significantly less likely to share photos if they had people in them at all, relative to photos of objects, nature scenes, etc. When participants actively sought consent before posting photos of friends, the question was generally not “Should I share it?” but “Which one should I share?”, with the emphasis on selecting a photo in which everyone looks good according to the standards of the platform. More often, though, they acted based on whether they thought the people in a photo would consent to its being shared, which was determined largely by the “rules” elaborated above.

Deleting photos. Surprisingly, given participants’ clear understanding of the potential permanence of online photos, they were less likely to object or expect to be asked to consent to photos before they were sent than to employ what might be called ‘retroactive consent’, asking peers to delete specific photos that they don’t want shared. As with sharing photos, how they asked someone to delete a photo depended on the context and on one’s relationship with them, but in general participants were reluctant to directly request that a

photo be removed, instead using several strategies to hint or communicate their desire indirectly.

Fair Information Practices and the Information Economy

Participants' concerns about privacy, reputation and consent are nearly all focused on managing how they are seen by "people" online. While they have a strong preference for using particular platforms to manage their online image and interactions, there is little evidence that they see the platforms as corporate *entities*, rather than simple tools. Almost none of the participants had a clear idea of what the corporations that owned the platforms they use did with their photos or, indeed, showed an awareness of these platforms as corporate spaces at all.

Where they do have concerns, they are much the same as those they have about their photos being seen by peers, with the assumption that corporations will treat them the same way that their peers do and that the same strategies will protect them in both cases. This has important implications for how youth conceptualize privacy, because the regulatory model depends on users consciously consenting to the use of their personal information by the corporations they do business with. So far as these teens are concerned, though, they are neither being asked for consent nor giving it, nor do they equate agreeing with a platform's terms and conditions with giving consent to the collection and use of their photos. Instead, they imagine a model of consent that is much closer to that which they expect from their peers: that corporations will respect the wishes they communicate by their choices of platform (for instance, they expect Snapchat not to save any of their photos, since in their minds they've sent a clear signal that the photos should be temporary by choosing that platform); that consent be sensitive to context, so that corporations should not use photos for purposes other than those participants had in mind when posting them; and that they be able to give or withhold consent each time they share something, rather than giving blanket consent when joining the platform.

Another frequently cited reason why teens don't feel they have given consent to corporations' collecting and accessing their photos was the fact that, in most cases, they had either not read or not understood the platforms' privacy policies and terms of service. Participants generally felt that they were unable to give *meaningful* consent because the documents were too long and difficult to read.

Participants also felt they were not able to give genuine consent because they had no power to negotiate with the platforms, instead having to 'take it or leave it' in a situation where 'leaving it' would mean opting out of social participation. Another barrier to genuine consent is that almost none of the participants had any understanding of the ways in which they were participating in the information economy when they used the platforms. When asked why either Snapchat or Instagram might retain copies of users' photos, many of the participants were unable to think of any reason.

Perhaps as a consequence of their feeling unable to meaningfully consent, the participants generally did not have any sense of themselves as having privacy rights either. Indeed, almost none were aware of any of the rights they hold under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*'s fair information principles or could imagine making use of them in any way.

As a result of this lack of empowerment, while these teens have a variety of strategies for managing their online identities in the eyes of their imagined audiences, when it comes to corporate access to their data they have only one: hoping that the sheer number of photos will provide them with privacy by obscurity. This tactic is less about taking any action than reconciling themselves to their helplessness relative to the corporate owners of the platforms they use. Because participants' main concern regarding corporate access is with the idea of individual photos being seen by unwanted audiences, rather than the photos being saved or used in aggregate, several participants described a hybrid strategy of keeping their photos anodyne while trusting in the safety of privacy by obscurity, leading to a further chilling effect on free expression.



Introduction

The success of Snapchat, and similar apps that let young people selectively share photos in a way where they are perceived as not being “out there” forever, has shown that youth do make decisions based in part on privacy concerns. What we don’t yet know is how they make those decisions, and how we might encourage them to consider data privacy as well as reputational privacy.

Building on MediaSmarts' findings on youth and privacy from our *Young Canadians in a Wired World* research (Steeves, 2012, 2014), this qualitative research project examines the reasoning that youth, ages 13 to 16, apply when they decide to share photos of themselves and/or other people electronically. Specifically, we explore if and how their decisions to post photos are rooted in a desire to manage their reputation (i.e. reputational privacy) and whether or not they actively consent to the disclosure of their personal information as it’s understood in the context of the existing regulatory framework (i.e. data privacy). To fully explore the latter, we also mapped what they know about data protection principles and solicited any experiences they have had interacting with corporations to exercise their rights under existing fair information practices (e.g. access to information, deletion of personal information). We focused on young people’s practices around the sharing of photographs in particular, for two reasons: first, photos have been found to be a key way that young people represent themselves in networked spaces (Steeves, 2015a); and second, photos of young people by definition contain personal information and as such fall under the regulatory regime.

Our research questions were:

1. How do young people make decisions about privacy when they electronically share photographs of themselves and/or other people?
2. How familiar are young people with their rights under fair information practices, and what are their experiences with asserting these rights?

Exploring young people’s understanding of their information rights is key, because the regulatory model to protect young people’s online privacy assumes that young people will choose not to post information that they want to keep private (Steeves, 2015b). Because of this assumption, privacy education initiatives typically focus on telling young people not to post personal information. However, as our *Young Canadians in a Wired World* research has demonstrated, young people do not define privacy as non-disclosure, but instead seek to negotiate an appropriate level of privacy from peers and family members by articulating a set of social norms that govern who may look at what (Steeves, 2013, Walgrave, Ponnet, Vanderhoven, Haers & Segaeert, 2016). As soon as young people post their information online, though, the regulatory model assumes that they have abandoned a privacy interest in it, and allows the corporation that owns the platform to collect and use the information

for commercial purposes.

Moreover, the fact that young people continue to post information on corporate-owned sites should not be interpreted to mean that young people are comfortable with the current regulatory model or do not care about privacy from corporations. Eighty-three percent of the students we surveyed in 2013, for example, agreed with the statement that social media corporations should not be allowed to see (let alone collect and use) what young people post on those sites, and 95 percent said the same of marketers (Steeves, 2014). Qualitative work also suggests that many young people are leery of corporations, seeing them as “creepy” and manipulative (Micheti, Burkell & Steeves, 2010; Steeves, 2012).

To design better policies and practices, we need a clearer understanding of how young people make decisions about disclosure and non-disclosure. This will enable us to develop new rules that respect privacy as it is conceived of and practiced by young people in their everyday lives, and to shape educational initiatives that are responsive to their needs. This study is a first step in that direction.

“ Interviewer: If you could use one, two, maybe three things, what would you say are the most important things you think about when you’re deciding to share a photo?

(Andrew male, 14): Quality, like the angle and stuff. What other people will think. And I guess what my family would think.

Context

“ Everything I say on social media is either to show something about myself to other people or it's to make somebody's day. (Suyin, female, 15)

For the young people in our study, sharing photos is not an event but a routine part of teen life. Photos can serve purely internal and instrumental purposes – our participants use them to remember the details of school assignments, supplement class notes, check in with parents, and get the word out on everything from snow days to waffle fries but their deeper engagement with photos reflects the fact that these photos are not static objects used to record a particular moment in time, but dynamic tools used to build a number of online identities, positioned within consistent social media “themes” that present themselves in different ways to different audiences.

Meeting Internal Needs

“ I just took it to make me feel better when I'm feeling sad. Just taking a picture of the sunset... so before I sleep I see how pretty the world is. (Kaya, female, 14)

A small number of the photos in the study fulfilled purely internal needs for the participant: to document an experience, to capture an emotion, or simply to give the participant a more objective view of him or herself. Participants spoke of photographing their dogs, their artwork, or a particularly successful hair braid, for example. These photos are typically not shared with anyone else: when Julie (female, 14) says “I was trying to see what my hair looks like to other people because when I look at a mirror, I see the opposite of what other people see,” she could just as easily be talking about a photo printed by a Polaroid camera.

Meeting Practical Needs

Our participants also shared photos for purely practical purposes. These photos, which were usually shared with a single recipient, are simply part of the mundane interactions that make up a typical day. Examples range from a photo sent by Hanna (female, 15) “showing [her mother] that I made a hole in my shirt” to the photo of waffle fries sent by Courtney (female, 16):



I got that [image] from one of my friends who screenshot it off a website and then sent it to me because there's waffle fries at McDonald's now. So she was like, "Do they have that at the one near our house?" So then I sent it to my friend who works at McDonald's and asked her.

It is the very routine nature of these practices, though, that makes them of interest from a privacy perspective, because this growing catchment of the minutiae of teen's lives is being shared across diverse commercial platforms. As such, young people are often unknowingly contributing more and more data to the information marketplace. As well, this variety of uses can bypass privacy protections that have been put in place by other entities or individuals. When students use platforms provided by their schools, for instance, the board or district may have negotiated a contract that limits data collection by the provider, but when students use their own devices – such as using their phones to send themselves or their peers a picture of a chalkboard with the day's homework assignment – they fall under standard terms of service.

Connecting with Friends



That's what social media is about as well. Not just, like, circle of friends and whatnot, but popularity as well. That's why so many people use it because everyone goes on social media. (Sean, male, 14)

Far more often, though, photos are shared for social reasons. Participating in the social world was identified by several participants as the primary reason for sharing photos – or, more precisely, as the main reason for *not* not sharing them: as Courtney said when asked whether it would be possible not to use Instagram, "you're really disconnected from a lot of your friends in school and stuff like that." Because opting out of social media is often presented as opting out of socializing in general, many of our participants did not see it as a possibility.

However, in spite of the high number of participants who reported that social media was an essential part of "socializing" only a few posted photos as a way to actually socialize. This kind of social interaction was also limited to friends known only online and absent offline friends with whom they wished to keep in touch. These interactions most closely resembled the conventional wisdom that positions social networking as a way to keep in touch with friends and strengthen social ties. Participants who shared photos with friends they only knew online had typically come to know these friends by posting on interest-based pages. Hannah, for example, reported that, "I do have a fan page of my favorite artists that I love and all of these teenagers also have fan pages of the artists that we love and we find things in common. We just start talking daily or you make friends on the Internet." For some, this

kind of interaction was particularly rewarding because they were free to express their interests without worrying about being judged negatively. Araya (female, 16) felt this strongly, as she was certain that her classmates did not share her interest in manga (Japanese comics); accordingly, she felt a close bond with her online friends on manga pages because they would not judge her for her interest in it. As we'll see below, fear of being judged by audiences is a powerful influence on the participants' decisions around sharing photos, so it may be that having a selected, sympathetic audience allows those who share photos with online-only friends to engage in a way that is less of a performance and more genuinely social.

Another form of social interaction that takes place primarily online is with friends who are, temporarily or permanently, no longer part of participants' offline lives: as Araya says, "to share some stuff with people who might not be able to be there to see it." These photos may be shared either with a single person, such as Jessica's long-distance friend – "We send each other a lot of pictures of ourselves just because I haven't seen him since like two Januarys ago, so photos and FaceTime are basically the only way we can see how the other is doing" – or with a small group, as with Andrew's friend who "this summer went to Italy – I guess he's like thinking of his close friends. Like, how he misses them when he's in Italy." In either case, the photos are shared to bolster or maintain friendships and social connections.

Documenting Shared Memories

The desire to document is fairly common, but photos of this sort are usually not shared widely. While some photos are sent to a single friend in order to share an experience that the receiver may have missed, they are more commonly sent to those friends who were there and are in the photo. As Amelia (female, 14) reported, she shared one photo with her closest friends because "[the photo] was just me and my friends, and it was twin day at school, and we all wore the same sweater." Sharing the photo not only created a record of the experience but reinforced the social connection by essentially re-playing it in social media form: "I just posted it because we were having fun and it was funny."

In a smaller number of cases the photo serves to continue the experience as well. As Hannah related:

“ I hit my head really hard while I was volunteering and I had a bruise on my forehead the next morning, and this is me just telling my friends that I have a bruise now... [I sent it to] just the ones that were there to witness me hitting my head.

As that quote suggests, photos of this type are generally shared with only those who were actually present for the original experience as a keepsake: Amira (female, 16), describing a

photo of a visit to a restaurant with friends, says “I just shared it with the two friends I was with... If I wasn’t with them, I wouldn’t send it. I think it’s nice to keep them for when you look back and you can see great times you have.”



Performing for “People”

“Everybody says that social media is connect with friends and whatnot, and to a certain extent, sure. But, when everybody goes on it, I feel like they’re always thinking the same thing: gotta look good.
(Margaret, female, 15)

Although only a small number of our participants used photo-sharing platforms to socialize, almost all of them posted photos on social media to “look social.” In the words of Nico (male, 13), “You don’t want to have an Instagram page with just photos of you. You also want to have, like, photos of your friends to show people that you have friends.” When photos depicting social connection were shared with larger audiences it was more often as a public marker of social connection and display of sociality, as with Amelia’s photo of herself and a friend: “I thought that it was a cool picture to look at, and show that ‘I’m friends with [her]’... it just shows that [she] is my friend and we hung out together.”

While few of the participants described their decisions in terms of privacy, many, such as Araya, spoke of the tension between wanting to share photos for personal and social reasons and the need to consciously craft and manage their images to perform for an imagined audience: “You want to be able to post stuff that you like, just because it feels good and to share with them. It feels nice to share with them, but you also want to have a professional image, so it’s kind of hard to maintain both of those at the same time.” The search for a professional standard was associated with the need to make a good impression on the viewer of the photo:

“You want to post to impress people, and with Instagram, you don’t even think about your own self, you can’t just think, oh, what will people think, will they like this photo? You kind of stop thinking about your own needs. (Pavlina, female, 14)

In most cases, the need to impress won out over their own needs; even when they posted photos that were more motivated by their personal desires they tended to describe them in contrast to the more typical act of performing for the audience, as Suyin did: “That [photo] is a more personal version because it is my thoughts that are in there and not just something that I am passionate about. It’s more a part of what I actually am rather than what I present myself to be.” While they are acutely aware of the audience for their photos, it’s difficult for these teens to articulate exactly who’s looking – which is not surprising given that their public accounts may have hundreds of followers. However, they are aware that whatever they post will be judged – sometimes harshly – by others. As Nico related,

“People will judge you... Eight hundred people would see that ugly photo of you and they would probably judge you.”

The “people” looking at and judging photos may include classmates, friends of friends, or people who share the same interests, or may simply reflect their perception of the collective judgment of their peers. Friends are considered less “risky”, primarily because friendship groups tend to replicate the same “image” in the photos they post: in Margaret’s words, “Usually I just post photos if I think they look nice, and usually if I think they look nice then my friends will too, because we all sort of think similarly.” Living in this kind of fishbowl means that you always need to be vigilant, especially with photos of yourself:

“ I used to feel more comfortable when I was younger with posting selfies. When I first got Instagram, which was in Grade 6, I didn’t care what people thought, and I used to post whatever I wanted, but then the older you get, the more you feel judged by people, and under pressure by what you want to post to impress them. (Pavlina)

Though young people are keenly aware of their audience, appealing too openly to that audience is seen as inappropriate. For example, sharing photos with self-deprecating captions, in the hope that their friends will contradict them, is described by Araya as “cringey” because of its direct appeal to the audience as “a way to kind of verify yourself and make sure you’re accepted by everybody.”

Peer Review

This fine line between appropriate and inappropriate ways of seeking peer approval forces teens into a highly restricted range of expression. Several participants described using a strategy of “peer review” to ensure that their photos did not stray from this narrow path: as Sarah (female, 16) says “I normally send it to a few of my friends first and ask them if they like it”. Sometimes, as in Sarah’s case, the peer reviewers bring particular skills – “some of my friends are artsy and like actual good [professional] photos and they’ll say the composition is bad or something” – but more often they act as a low-risk surrogate for the broader audience’s judgment.

Often the peer reviewers will be asked not to select *whether* to post a photo or not, but to pick *which* of a series of photos should be posted:

“ I thought that I looked really pretty in it, and... I asked a lot of my friends ‘I’m not sure, should I post this one?’ And I think I gave them two other pictures to choose from... So I think pretty much everyone chose this one. And I like this one the best too. (Amelia)

‘Likes’

While this type of informal peer review happens before photos are posted, the platforms themselves also formalize the importance of the audience’s reaction in the form of ‘likes.’ While participants were divided on whether or not likes were significant – Suyin describes them as having been important “when Instagram literally was a popularity contest... two, three years ago” – several also said that they take down public photos that don’t earn enough of them. According to Lauren (female, 14), “if you get less than 150 in a day, you’d just take it down.” On the other hand, Pavlina discounted the value of ‘likes’ because “close friends always like your pics”; accordingly, she concluded that “I need to get over a hundred likes every time I post a photo.”

Likes were also being used as a guide in making sure that particular subjects don’t predominate in a participant’s feed, as when Sean says “I like to post pictures of my dog, but... I don’t want my account to be a dog account only. So when I post a picture of my dog I usually tend to go to the one with the least amount of ‘likes’ and delete it.”

“ Most people post photos to make it look good. The photo should look good, or your life should look good, or you should look good. (Margaret)

The Rules

Whether formal or informal, real or imagined, the audience’s judgment is based on a powerful and consistent set of rules, and teens will frequently take several photos of a participant or event in order to pick the one that follow those rules most closely. One of the most important of these rules is that whether it features the sender or not, photos should reflect well on the sender – but because one of the qualities they are expected to display is not caring too openly about what people think, they may paradoxically put a great deal of time and effort into curating their photo stream so that peers will “feel that you’re a well-rounded person... You’re not just glued to your phone all the time.” (Amira) There is a powerful push and pull between being expected to perform for the audience – as Pavlina put it, “at my age, everybody cares about popularity, so you kind of want everybody to go, like, ‘Whoa’” – and the risk of standing out by trying too hard or being too different from your peers, as Margaret said: “I... don’t want to just post a photo and have people think,

like, “Ohh, she clearly just wants someone to, like, see her photo and be like, oh, yeah, you look gr-r-reat.”

Picture Day

While participants were often reluctant to share photos that drew attention to themselves, or even photos of themselves at all – Julie chose not to post any pictures of herself on Instagram because “I just don’t think it’s that interesting” – they were highly conscious of themselves as objects of scrutiny. Tremendous importance is placed on being camera-ready so that you’ll look good when someone else takes your picture: Amelia chose to share one photo only with close friends because “I was in my pajamas... and I had a facemask on... and my hair was probably pretty oily,” while Lauren described a photo she wouldn’t want to share as one “when I’m not paying attention to the camera.” Their awareness of being seen and judged by a potential audience means that even when they’re not physically in public, being on-camera is equivalent to “going out.” Amira describes a bad photo as one where she’s “just sitting at home with a messy bun and pajamas ‘cause... you don’t look presentable... and I’d rather look presentable when I go out than not.” Several participants, such as Suyin, were conscious of the tension between this performance and their ‘real’ selves:

“ It’s not necessarily true to what I am, but I guess in some ways it is because that’s how I look on Picture Day. The one thing that you see on Picture Day is the one that everybody has in their photo album and you can’t really change how they see that one, right? So that’s the kind of picture that that would be. (Suyin)

This was, perhaps, the nearest that participants came to expressing the ‘traditional’ view of privacy as a clear line between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ as there was (with a few very narrow exceptions) a clear imperative to not allow *anyone* to view the “messy” details of oneself and one’s life. At the same time, though, there is a pressure not to seem *too* conscious of having your photo taken. While the participants were clear that they didn’t appreciate truly candid photos of them being shared, there was a sense that photos ought to *look* candid: for example, Margaret chose not to share a photo of herself drinking a milkshake because “while I do think it’s a nice photo, it’s really clear that it’s not candid. I was, like, ‘Okay, you stand there, take a photo of me, and I’ll look at my milkshake and try and look nice.’” As with being social, how you present yourself is more important than – and frequently at odds with – how you actually *are*.

“ When you have your face on social media, there’s always minimum one person that’s always saying something about your face... Maybe “What’s up with that expression” or something like that. They’d find something to say, that’s for sure, maybe about my clothes or I really don’t know. They’d definitely find something to say. (Kaya)

Given the pressure to consistently present a “Picture Day” version of yourself, it’s not surprising that teens’ faces are a source and a subject of significant stress. What may be surprising is that one of the few examples of photos that were posed or selected to highlight *desirable* facial features was shared by one of the male participants, Nico:

“ I don’t know if you know about this thing called a ‘jawline’... In photos, for guys especially it’s better if you take a photo with that light just to show people that you have a jawline, and you don’t see it very much, but it was a good photo ‘cause it showed a jawline really well.

Cropping and Covering

This should not, though, be taken to mean that the female participants were not concerned with how their faces would be perceived. Rather, many of them respond to this pressure by sharing only photos in which their faces are entirely flawless – Amira chose not to post a photo where “I like the way everything else looks but the corner of where my hair looks messy.” Several participants said that photos of their faces were appropriate for close friends, but not a wider audience. Sarah is typical of this attitude: “I don’t ever post photos of my face on the actual account. I just do it on the Instagram stories and a lot of the people that just watch the stories are people that I know.” Some choose to crop or cover their faces: even among close friends, for example, Courtney only sends “selfies from down below their chin.” Others, like Araya, make a virtue of necessity by covering their faces:

“ I used to share lots of pictures and then I only started taking pictures when I was like wearing like a wig or a mask or stuff. I think that looks cute for whatever weird reason. I just would post those because it also kind of conceals my face.

For a few, like Kaya, faces are entirely off-limits:



I'm kind of scared of sending my face on media 'cause I'm just scared of the bad effects it can have... I've seen what happens on social media and I just don't want it to happen to me.

As Kaya's quotes above show, teens are reluctant to post photos of their faces because it opens them to *personal* criticism in a way that less personal subjects do not. A nasty comment about a photo of your face does not reflect on a choice you made, or how well you took the photo, or your taste in restaurants or cosmetics: it reflects on *you*. In some ways, though, the distinction is a false one. Given the need to perform before an undefinable audience with constantly shifting standards, *any* photo might wind up reflecting badly on you. As Hannah says, "As long as my face isn't in the picture I don't really mind if it's being shared, because there's no proof that I took that picture."

Birthday Photos

One type of photo that initially seems to sidestep the rules is the birthday "shout out," which involves sending the birthday boy or girl a photo of themselves. As Julie says, even those who prefer to keep their faces off social media make an exception for birthdays: "One of my friends posted a picture of me for my birthday on Instagram and I think that was the only picture of me." A birthday shout out may be a simple photo or something more elaborate, such as a picture carefully chosen to reflect the history of a friendship or, in Jessica's case, a photo collage. What is consistent, though, is that the photo be unexpected. As Sarah says, "normally for birthday posts you don't tell the person exactly what photo you're going to post, because you want it to be a surprise." Because of this, the normal "rules" of what makes a good photo are somewhat in abeyance: speaking of birthday photos she's received, Margaret says "I've had some pretty interesting ones. Mostly weird photos that I took on people's phones, ugly selfies and stuff like that." Even here, though, there are limits, perhaps because while birthday photos serve as a marker of intimacy – as Dan (male, 15) puts it, "generally people post pictures for birthdays if you're pretty close with the person" – it is a *public* one, typically distributed more widely to the general school community as a way of saying the friend is special and valued. As a result, while birthday shout outs may seem to have a wider acceptable range, they also are subject to two contradictory pressures, in this case the expectation to be a 'good sport' about having a "goofy" photo of yourself posted on your timeline and the need to curate your online image. As Margaret describes, it's easy for the sender to misjudge the line between those two imperatives:

“ I once posted a photo of my friend on her birthday... and it was not flattering. She had taken my phone and took a bunch of selfies, so I was like, “Oh, this one is funny, I’ll post it.” But then she asked me to take it down, so I did. After that, I was always like, “Okay, gotta ask first. Not everybody is okay with this.”

One of the difficulties in drawing the line around a birthday photo reflects the fact that what would otherwise be a private photo (in the sense that it is either kept on a smart phone or shared only with a few friends through a more ephemeral medium like Snapchat) is actually distributed to a wider public (usually the school community) as a way of signalling friendship. However, the public nature of the shout out comes with inherent risks of being judged badly. Accordingly, several participants describe strategies they or their friends have used to walk the line between the expectation to post an unusual photo as a birthday shout out and the desire to help the friend maintain their online presence. Jessica refers to a friend who posted a photo of “me making a funny face. My friend posted it on my birthday. I was like ‘take it down!’ And she’s like ‘Okay’. And she did a drawing of me instead,” while Sarah explains how she seeks her friends’ consent while preserving the surprise: “One of my friends, she’s super particular about whatever photo, so for her birthday I had described the photo, but not actually sent it to her, to make sure that she liked it.”

Professional Standards

“ For each picture you post on your regular account, you have to take time with that picture, you know? Make yourself look nice, make the surroundings like nice. That’s why we used the lighting, to make yourself look nice... You gotta make the moment by taking all this time and to make sure the picture is precise, you know, you look nice, the surroundings like nice, everything looks fine so that when you click that button to take the picture and then you upload it people like the picture. Because this is why you spent so much time on a picture, for the ‘likes’ and whatnot, right? (Sean)

Participants also talked about the need to comply with the “professional” standards of the photography and image making they see in media. As Pavlina put it, “If it looks really pretty, people will think of it as a professional photo, so I’ll most likely gain a lot of ‘likes’.” Margaret defined this more specifically as “Lighting. Quality of the picture, because... if it looks grainy and weird, then the photo isn’t a good photo, and it won’t look nice with the rest of my photos.” While some participants attribute this to their close peers’ interest in photography – as Sarah says, “Some people, especially in my grade, they’re really big into photography, so they take photos with professional cameras and so even edit it on

Photoshop and then send it to their phone and then post it on Instagram” – the attitude that their pictures should reflect professional standards is almost universal. A more likely cause is the fact that teens now share the same media ecosystem with models, actors, musicians, and celebrities (some of whose fame is based on their participation in social media), all of whom have a large footprint in the more public social media, like Instagram and Twitter. Teens are accordingly encouraged to judge themselves, and their photos, by the standards imposed by these corporate media texts. Not surprisingly, several participants said you need to “edit the picture to make it... a little bit more interesting for people to look at,” in many cases using filters provided by the platform to “enhance your features, make your eyes look brighter or your skin look brighter.” (Sarah) As well as being provided by the platform, these filters themselves are often created for commercial purposes, such as the filters used by Suyin that were created to advertise the films *Fabulous Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *50 Shades of Grey*. These overlaps between the personal and corporate worlds of social media complicate the act of “being public”, as teens are not only catering to their peers, though they may themselves think of it that way, but to the corporate platforms they use and the wider media ecosystem.

Don't Make Waves

“ I feel like in this day and age, whatever joke or anything that you make on social media could be twisted around really, really easily, whether that was your intention or not, and so I prefer to keep to myself my views on things, unless it's just like within a private group of friends... where we do all agree on the same thing. (Suyin)

The narrow road teens are forced to walk on social media is also reflected in the range of subjects that is considered appropriate to post. Aside from generally ‘looking good’ and capturing the right level of rehearsed spontaneity, youth are careful not to share (or allow others to share) photos that are too personal, or characterize them in unwanted ways. Lauren refers to both fears when she says she wouldn’t share a photo of herself “in a bathing suit... because it’s kind of revealing.”

Even when posting photos in which they and their friends do not appear – a category which includes more than a third of the photos in the study – participants are powerfully influenced by what they think their audience expects. Once again, there is a tension between wanting to get their peers’ attention by posting a high-quality photo – as Pavlina says, “A lot of people my age want to have that perfect photo where everybody is like, ‘Wow, this is gold’” – and wanting to avoid being *too* different. Kaya, explaining how her photo-sharing habits have changed as she’s gotten older, says “I was more careful about what I took pictures of and not like weird things. I was careful of not to take [pictures of] anything weird.”

Moreover, controversy is studiously avoided: “Politics, religion, sexuality, race – those are the things that I won’t do on social media,” in Suyin’s words. This strongly suggests the current ways that young people police their privacy have restricted the potential of social media to support free expression. Instead, social media has become a homogenous space where it is important to ‘look social’ without actually revealing much of oneself.

Random Photos

The homogeneity of the space is underlined by the universal desire to avoid posting anything that suggested they had an interest in unusual or unpopular things such as a particular band or Japanese anime, as well as photos considered too mundane, or “random”: “like any other picture,” as Amira says; for Lauren, “kind of irrelevant to [the audience]”; or in Amelia’s words “not worthy enough to me.” For some participants, such as Sophia (female, 14), the prohibition on random pictures means they “don’t just randomly take a photo” at all, while for others a photo that is meaningful to a small group may be considered random and not appropriate to share with the larger audience: as Nico says, “it’s something that you don’t normally do, just posting random photos of your friends on your feed... You do more a photo like this for friends,” because “it might offend people or something like that.”

In addition, participants were as concerned with not wanting others to share random photos of them as they were of the photos they themselves shared; in this case “random” can be seen as an antonym of “paying attention” and being camera-ready, whose importance was explored above. Andrew, for example, objected to a friend’s habit of taking “random photos of me when I’m, like, on my phone... [when] I’m playing a game or something. He just takes a random photo of me when I’m not even paying attention.”

Although our participants were careful not to post photos of their everyday lives, they all sought to create and share photos that communicated a sense of authenticity. Interestingly, this was a constructed authenticity; things that were personally meaningful to them were typically kept on a smart phone away from the public eye. However, they shared an expectation that public photos are ones that are emotionally resonant for the “people” out there who will see them: as Sean says, “It’s gotta be, you know, ‘the moment.’” Again, though, the commercial nature of the space not only defined the subjects that are appropriate to share publicly, but also determined the participant’s relationship with the subject. For example, shots of popular consumer products were universally considered a safe subject, as were photos of food and landscapes. But our participants also felt pressure to depict even these anodyne topics as being personally significant: “I can’t just post a picture of a water bottle and say ‘It’s just the water bottle post,’” as Sean puts it: “You have to say ‘This water bottle inspires me.’” With such a narrow permissible range of expression, it’s not surprising that certain subjects quickly go from meaningful to cliché:



Sometimes when there is a sunset, everyone goes outside and everyone takes a picture, and if you go through stories, everyone's stories is the same sunset. (Amelia)

Although Amelia described this phenomenon as “kind of annoying,” she did not expect to regret posting “yet another sunset picture.” Given the limited number of subjects that align with the visual expectations of the space, unoriginality may be irritating but is not enough of a drawback to prevent participants from posting safe images such as sunsets.

At the same time, there is an expectation that not everyone at an event post the same photo. Pavlina describes an occasion “when I went shopping with my friends, and we went to Lush, and I took a picture of the bag. I wouldn't mind sharing it, but my friend posted it, so I was like, I don't need to post it as well.” Who gets to post the photo is theoretically decided on a first-come, first-serve basis, but in practice is often the result of a negotiation. Sarah describes how, following a humorous episode, her friend “was like, ‘No, you can't post that. I'm posting it’” because “whenever you're posting the same photo you want to be the first to post it so that everyone will see it first and then like it because if you post it the second time then less people will probably like the photo if they see the same thing.” This introduces an element of competition, where shared private moments become the stuff of which online public success is made. Because of this, it can be difficult to erect boundaries around private activities. Andrew said that he and his friends chose not to take photos at all “if we were having fun or busy,” giving up the possibly more visually interesting photo of the activity itself for a photo taken “of the building as we're driving away... [when] I'm kind of bored again... just to show that I was there.”

Theme

A further complication of the public and persistent quality of some social networks is that photos are not judged only individually, but also in aggregate. Part of the pressure to not be random is the expectation that one's public profile have a consistent “theme”, and individual photos are seen as part of the project of building a theme. In Amira's words, “I like to make sure my pictures look good because I want my Instagram theme to look nice.” The reverse, of course, is also true: “my photos have to look good as a whole, but they also have to look good alone” (Margaret). Like “paying attention,” the idea of theme can also be seen in opposition to that of being random. Pavlina contrasts the two concepts when she says that “people don't post random photos of their friends on their account... [because] it doesn't match their feed.”

In Sarah's words, “Having a nice feed or theme on Instagram is a big deal for some people, and it makes you look artsy and cool,” while Amelia explains the term as meaning “where it looks good with your profile, and all your pictures kind of match the same colours, and have

the same filter and stuff.” Themes, as Margaret says, are an area where teens most consciously take their cues from the broader media ecosystem: “A lot of my favourite Instagram accounts have a good colour theme. And I really like looking at them, and it looks nice, and when I look at my feed, I don’t want it to look all ugly and mismatched, because then I get all like, ‘Ooh, what if it’s ugly, what if people go and look at it and are like, it doesn’t look nice?’” Like filtered or edited photos, themes often involve a significant degree of artifice – Pavlina describes “some people [who] have a black and white theme going on with their feed” – but, as with the participants of individual photos, themes are expected to display a personal dimension as well: “it has to have something to do with them.” The professional standards described above are often elements of a theme, as well; Amira describes hers as “wearing dark colours and then dark lighting would be my theme... And then, like, having really clear pictures, not like blurry or anything.” Just as individual photos are expected to be original while also conforming to a strict standard in terms of subject and appearance, a theme has to be consistent but not repetitive: for Amelia, “I just find that boring... if you go and look at someone’s profile and it’s just all the same kind of pictures,” while Nico says “you don’t want to post a photo of food every single night. People are going to be like stop, don’t even try to look at it. It’s too repetitive.” Teens are also careful not to let certain subjects predominate, to avoid unintentionally giving their feed the wrong “brand”, as when Sean says “I’m not going to have five pictures of my dog posted exactly like one after the other... I don’t want my account to be like a dog account only.”

Future Audiences

Though they are most conscious of how their photos will be seen by “people” in the short term, teens are also conscious of the fact that they may be seen by different audiences in the future. Unlike the current audience’s dynamic and frequently contradictory standards, though, concerns about future audiences are simple and straightforward. Our participants want to avoid “something that’s going to come back and haunt me later when I’m trying to get a job or something... Anything too racy, I guess... Or anything with... illegal stuff of some sort... [that] might be a red flag for employers.” (Margaret) This future audience is largely imagined as institutional: businesses, as in Margaret’s quote; schools (“when you apply to universities and stuff,” Suyin says, “they want to make sure the school’s image is good, and they want to make sure that your profile and stuff are clean”); and government (Sean: “my neighbour’s beer was kind of there [in the photo] so I kinda tried to cut that out because... the government has access to stuff and I don’t want them to see with me with alcohol.”) This contrasts with the current concern about how they will be viewed by “people”, although even with this audience there is a strong institutional influence given the pressure they feel to conform to the standards of visibility set by commercial media. However, as Sean’s quote illustrates, while our participants feel it is possible to control who sees their photos now – by selecting a smaller circle of friends on Snapchat or keeping private memories on their phones – they assume that anything they post might be seen by

these institutional future audiences. Though they are generally more concerned with preventing these future audiences from seeing photos that might cast them in a negative light, some participants were conscious of creating a positive impression as well. As with what they chose not to share, though, their conception of a positive image was much simpler with regards to the future than the present audience: as Kaya said, “I make sure it’s good things that I post on social media and not things that could prevent me from having a good future.”

Another future audience, which participants imagined in a much more complex way, was their own future selves. This was often given as a reason for deleting photos from your feed, as Suyin explains:

“ My view of this world is constantly changing and so my perspective of this now is not what it’s going to be later. But putting something on social media, it’s been literally like scarred into our head that it will follow you forever, so I don’t really want to have, like, this brought back to me when it’s later on [and] I don’t necessarily agree with what I did in it... so I would tend to keep those things to myself rather than sharing it around.

In this sense, they are exercising a “right to forget” by purging photos that may constrain them in the future.

For several participants, this concern

Strangers

A frequent worry about young people using social media is that they will be in contact with strangers. The good news coming out of this data is that, in line with our earlier research, the youth we spoke to had little or no interest in interacting with strangers. However, it’s important to note that not all people they don’t know offline are considered to be “strangers.”

Most of the participants were concerned that their photos not be seen by strangers or “random people”, and that these not be able to contact them. Lauren, describing the experience that led her to limit her Snapchat to friends-only, says “When I first got it, it was on everyone and I got these Snapchats from, like, random people. It would just be their face and it would creep me out.” Nico recounted a similar experience: “I had it on public for my first year that I had Instagram and then I changed it to private because there were some people that were kind of weird that were starting to follow [me]. So I would block them and then I changed to private, and most people have it on private now just for that reason.”

However, people who do not fit the stereotypical image of a “stranger” are generally allowed access to public accounts. Dan describes his follower list by saying “there’s definitely quite a lot of people I’ve never like had a conversation with or met. And most of the people like are mutual friends or like friend’s friends or people I’ve heard out there. ... Unless it’s some old man I don’t know, but generally people who request to follow me are kids my age.” As well as age, Pavlina draws the line based on geography: “I feel that [if] people from other schools in Ottawa follow me on it, it’s fine, but I don’t have a stranger from another country following me on it.” Here Sophia describes her process for deciding which side of the line a potential contact is on: “I just follow people who are in my classes, and then if someone wants to follow me, and I recognize them, and I know they go to my school, I accept it.... I don’t even talk to half my followers, but I still know who they are.”

As well, a shared interest can be sufficient to remove someone from the “stranger” category. Sarah distinguishes between Instagram, which she uses to communicate with “everyone I know from school,” and Tumblr, which is where she interacts with “people from different countries and stuff” who share her taste in music. Similarly, Hannah uses a “fan page of like my favorite artists that I love” to make contact with online acquaintances, after which “we just start talking daily or, you know, you make friends on the Internet.” Though these contacts would fit the strict definition of “stranger,” the shared interest keeps them from being “random” and puts them in a third category, which Araya describes as “my online friends – friends that I have online, but I don’t know in person.”

about curating their photos was rooted in what they saw as their ignorance of the “rules” when they were younger. Their ability to look back and “see” their younger selves made them particularly aware that “when you’re in your youth and you’re changing very rapidly and your interests change and so on. You might want to change how you appear to people several times over, so keeping it there for a lot of years is not very nice to look back on, and it’s also kinda hard to move forward from that if they’re still up there” (Araya). There is, of course, also the risk that these rules will change with time, making even safe subjects like mainstream commercial products no longer appropriate. Andrew, for instance, who did not want audiences to know that he watches anime, was willing to share “a normal TV show, like all my friends watch too,” but was also aware that if “in five years... that TV show’s really uncool and old and no one even knows about it... I probably would regret [posting] that.”

Privacy Strategies



Say you post like a picture that you find funny but others are like “Oh wow, she/he looks really, really ugly in that picture” or whatnot. And then you’ll know if people screenshot it so it’ll be like “Oh my acquaintance who is a guy screenshotted this. I’m going to go find him and then make him delete,” right? And you can bring your circle of friends with you that you made on social media, right? And go and tell him “Hey, delete that.” That’s why Snapchat is so great. It notifies you.
(Sean)

Selecting Audiences



Friends don’t judge you– well, maybe they do a bit, but not that much, I guess. (Pavlina)

As noted above, the teens we interviewed see participation in social media as a more or less mandatory part of their social lives. As a result, rather than weighing the risks of participating – or of consenting to the platforms’ terms of service – they employed strategies either to *mitigate* those risks or simply to convince themselves that they were not at risk. As detailed above, teens are very conscious of the ways in which the photos they post can affect how they are seen by others, whether it is their actual peers or the larger imagined audience of “people” online. Given that, it’s not surprising that most of the efforts they make to mitigate these risks are aimed at selecting and limiting which audiences will see which photos or feeds.

On the other hand, participants made very little use of the privacy tools offered by most social networks. Some, such as Amira, were not even aware that their preferred platforms had privacy tools, while others, such as Dan, imagined them in highly simplified terms:



On Instagram there’s just a button like if you want to be public or private and I just picked private. And then honestly, that’s pretty much it... I like it simple; I can’t really think what other options there would be.

Moreover, when participants used privacy tools or settings it was often in response to parental concerns. Sophia relates that “my parents wanted me to make it private, and so I just went into settings, and there was a little option that said make your account private, or something like that.” Few of the participants reported using a platform’s technical tools to select the audience for a photo in a way that was more specific than differentiating between

“friends” and “public.” Instead of relying on technical tools, our participants judged certain content to be “too personal” to be shared widely. At the most private level, they were very protective of their families and closest friendships because these are considered too personal to share. Pavlina describes a typical scenario in which she chose to keep a photo private (usually by storing the photo on a phone or an iPod):

“ My sister wanted to have a sleepover for a long time... and we were messing around with the camera roll, and we took a bunch of photos, funny photos and stuff, but I wouldn't share those photos with anyone, because I feel like family photos are supposed to stay close to the heart and stuff.

Several different participants concurred that, “family pictures and stuff, it's kinda like private. Like, not everyone needs to see” (Lauren). This was also one of the few contexts in which any of them said they were motivated by fear of physical danger, rather than harm to their reputation: Kaya chose not to share photos of her family because “I really like my family, I don't want anyone following me. I mean there's so many dangers in this world,” while Pavlina tied this concern to the fear of bragging discussed above:

“ In my culture, we have this thing, where when people envy you, they can give you an evil eye. It's bad for you and could get people sick and stuff.... So sometimes when I have family photos I feel scared of posting them because I care about my family and I don't want them to feel envied by other people.

For some, like Araya, this prohibition extends even to non-human members of the household:

“ For some reason, I'd feel uncomfortable sending [a photo of a pet] to anybody as if it was, like, a picture of my family... I mean, for a guinea pig, it's not as important, but I don't know. I can't really explain it well. Kind of the same thing as you would send a picture of your mom or brother.

This suggests that teens are concerned not just with protecting the individuals in the photos but also with preserving a private space for themselves. As Pavlina noted, “Posting memories like this is sharing with the whole world your private [life], and I feel like... I should still have a bit of privacy, in my life.”

This desire to maintain a private space was also given as a reason for not sharing photos of close friends, or only sharing them with those who are within that space. In Lauren's words, “I didn't want to share that picture just 'cause it was just me and two of my really

good friends... Like, we wanted to keep it between ourselves,” while Andrew says “If it’s just like a cat or a TV screen, then I could share it with everyone... but if it’s my friend I won’t share it with anyone. I’ll only share it with, like, people that know them or something.” This, too, is conceptualized by some participants in terms of maintaining a boundary between those who are close to you and those who are not: “I don’t feel like everybody should know you in a way that your close friends know you, because there is a reason why they’re your friends and not the other people.” (Suyin)

“ I don’t think I would post a picture of myself on Instagram... I’d like to keep those pictures to myself and to the people who I’d like to share them with. (Jessica)

Selecting Platforms

Aside from keeping photos entirely private, the main tool that teens use to ensure that only desired audiences see particular photos is selecting which platform and account to post them on. The two platforms mentioned most often, by a very large margin, were Snapchat and Instagram, and there was a consistent difference in how they were used. Snapchat was seen as a more casual platform for sharing with close friends, compared to Instagram which “is a kind of place where you want to be taken seriously,” and seen as the main platform for building your public persona:

“ Instagram, it’s just people looking at your pictures. That’s why it’s got to look nice because you never know, someone could take a screenshot and try and mock you or whatnot, and you’ll never know about it, right? ... That’s why you gotta put all this time to making the picture look nice, ‘cause you don’t want people to screenshot all your bad pictures and give you a bad reputation. (Sean)

Pavlina identifies Instagram as the platform where emotional stakes are higher as well, saying “When people post on Instagram... I feel like it’s mainly to wow people who they like. If it’s a girl then she wants to wow a guy, and if it’s a guy, he wants to wow a girl kind of thing.” Similarly, Amira says “Instagram is where you post the parts where, like, you look good or you’re having a good time... I only post it where I’m having a good time or the part of my life where I only show what’s happening that’s good. I wouldn’t post something where I’m like crying or something.”

By comparison, Snapchat is seen as “not a serious platform.” (Sean) Compared to Instagram posts, which are less regular and more curated, Snapchat is a form of visual communication that is used to relieve boredom, to point out things in the immediate environment, share goofy photos of friends together, play with filters and make jokes. Sean

compares the two, saying “Snapchat is more ‘casual’ than Instagram... because Snapchat what you usually see is like not so much like nice fancy pictures. It’s more like your friends just hanging out being themselves.” As a result, as Nico describes, teens’ posting habits are very different on the two sites: “only one percent [of my photos] are put on Instagram, but most of them are just sent on Snapchat to a couple of people.”

However, Snapchat is not as relaxed an environment as it first appears. Participants had equally strong ideas of what’s inappropriate on it as on Instagram:

“ I personally find it really annoying when people post selfies on Snapchat, because that’s what I personally think Instagram is for. I think Snapchat is more for funny stories, or pictures of you and your friends, not just a selfie of you. I don’t really care about selfies being sent to me, but when you put it on your story, then I just find that kind of irritating. Because I want to see the funny stuff you do with your friends, instead of a picture of you I could see on Instagram or anywhere else. (Amelia)

Where Instagram is about conforming to a polished, “professional” image for a broad imagined audience, Snapchat is about performing spontaneity for a smaller but equally critical one. This demonstrates that teens are not only *choosing* different platforms to manage their privacy and publicity: they are also, consciously or not, being influenced by the structure of those platforms. Snapchat, where photos are temporary by default, creates an expectation of being casual and “fun”, while Instagram’s persistent feed promotes the careful cultivation of a public-facing profile.

“ I used to not post a lot, because I have a lot of followers on my Instagram account, so I started to think, that’s not good enough for them to see, so then I made a second account, and I pulled all my normal Instagram users, and said private after that. And I had people that are close with me on that account, and I posted whatever, and then on my main account I posted what I felt comfortable sharing with a lot of people. (Pavlina)

Selecting Accounts

Besides selecting different platforms for different purposes, participants frequently create multiple accounts to limit which audiences see which content. As Pavlina’s quote above illustrates, this is frequently in response to the perceived need to only post photos that are “good enough” for the broader audience. This distinction between public and private accounts is part of Snapchat’s architecture, where regular photos disappear after a short period of time (typically sixty seconds) but those posted to the “Story” persist for 24 hours.

Amelia describes how she approaches the two differently: “For the most part, I don’t really mind what I look like in front of my friends. Now, if I were to put that on my story, I’d try to look a little bit better.” This strategy was more often applied to Instagram, though, where they created entirely separate private and public accounts. Since, as we’ve seen, the expectation on Instagram is to post a small number of highly curated photos, each of which is explicitly judged in terms of the number of ‘likes’ it receives, a second account that deviates from this is termed a “spam account”:

“ Spam accounts are usually the second account. So you have your main account with all the good pictures, you know, the ones that get like 500 ‘likes’, and then you’ll have the spam account which is just for posting pictures for fun, kind of like Snapchat... Those pictures most of the time is what they’re doing. Say they go to like Skyzone and it’s going to be like a photo of them jumping. And then, five minutes later it’ll be a photo of them, like, jumping again. (Sean)

However, some teens create joint spam accounts which actually serve as private social *spaces*, like Suyin and her friends:

“ I do have a spam account with my friend because she asked me so I was like, “Yeah, okay, why not.” Basically we just post daily stuff about our lives there, but it’s not public so it’s only shared within our small group of friends. So it’s more free. But the other one [her public account] I think you can get a pretty good grasp of what kind of person I am... the people who see the more public postings understand me in a way that the people who see the private postings don’t.

Limiting Screenshots

The reason for Snapchat’s being seen as more “casual” is almost certainly because on it, as noted above, “pictures delete themselves after 24 hours, so if you post something, embarrassing, funny kind of thing, it’s gone.” (Sean) Again, though, these teens place little faith in this as a technical tool: they are aware that it is possible for people who see Snapchat photos to make permanent copies of them, but don’t see this as a drawback because when screenshots are taken “it notifies you... That’s why you don’t have to be serious on it because everything is under control, whereas on Instagram you’re never notified about, screenshots. Like, under control is kind of the difference here, right?” For Sean, the term “under control” does not refer to the fact that the platform will delete the photo, but the fact that “you’ll know if people screenshot it so it’ll be like, ‘Oh my, acquaintance screenshotted this. I’m going to go find him and then make him delete [it]’, right? And you can bring your circle of friends with you that you made on social media,

right? And go and... tell him ‘Hey, delete that’.” In other words, Snapchat provides more control not because of its technical capabilities, but because it sends a social signal that images are not to be screenshotted, and allows you to mobilize your friends to enforce social norms. This may explain why none of the participants mentioned sending disappearing photos on Instagram, which does provide this as an option. While the result would technically be the same, it would not send the same implicit signal that the photo is not to be copied: as Courtney puts it, “It’s considered rude to take a screenshot of somebody’s Snapchat... because you sent them that picture like for however many seconds and they’re not really respecting that.”

In most cases, participants’ attitudes towards privacy violations such as taking screenshots were similar to Courtney’s in appealing to social norms. Pavlina’s response was typical: “People don’t really do that [screenshot photos]. I’d be, like, shocked. I’d think they were mad at me and want to get revenge on me in some way; I’d be really confused as to what’s going on.”

Negotiating Consent

Though the signal sent by using Snapchat is clear, things get muddier when we turn to other social norms around sharing photos – particularly the question of whether to seek someone’s consent before posting a photo of them. More than half of the students in our 2014 *Young Canadians in a Wired World* survey expected their peers to ask before posting a photo of them, and to a certain extent the participants in this study seem to share that attitude: they were, for instance, significantly less likely to share photos if they had people in them at all, relative to photos of objects, nature scenes, etc. (See Appendix C for more detail.)

When teens do actively seek consent before posting photos of friends, the question is generally not “Should I share it?” but “*Which one* should I share?” As Lauren says of photos of her friends, “I make sure to ask them and I try to use the best one that everyone looks good in.” Seeking consent, then, is less about helping friends protect their privacy than participating in the curation of their online identity. In the few cases where teens say they make a habit of seeking out explicit consent it’s often presented as something done in response to a lesson learned, rather than a social norm, as Margaret concluded after her friend objected to the birthday photo that she had posted: “...I was like, oh, this one is funny, I’ll post it. But then she asked me to take it down, so I did. But then, yeah, after that, I was always like, okay, gotta ask first. Not everybody is okay with this.”

There is a strong sense that photos belong as much to the person in them as to the person who took them, as Amelia’s quote illustrates: “I just felt that it was her right to let me know whether she wanted me to post it or not. Because if she didn’t want me to post it, and I just posted it, I don’t think that’s very fair to her because it is a picture of her.” This can be a

complicated process when it comes to group photos. Amelia describes the process for deciding whether or not to share a photo of her volleyball team: “First I ask – especially in a picture like this, with short shorts like that, I ask my friends, because I don’t want anyone to feel uncomfortable with it, like, ‘Oh my gosh, I look really bad in that picture, don’t post it.’... So this one took me a little bit longer, but I knew I was fine with it, and then my team was fine with it, so I posted it.” Even when consent is explicitly sought, though, these teens don’t so much ask their friends as give them an opportunity to object. Amira explains not sharing a photo by saying “I didn’t share because my friend in the corner right there, she didn’t like the way she looked in it so she [said] don’t post it.”

The feeling that participants have ownership rights to photos they’re in is tied to the idea that every publicly-shared photo of you is a component of your online identity. Suyin states this most explicitly when speaking of a photo of a friend she chose not to post: “She’s not looking her best exactly; she looks pristine at school every single day, no joke, so that’s not how she wants other people to see her, clearly so I didn’t want to disrupt her image... I didn’t want to disrupt what she was trying to make as [her] personal best to be.” In particular, it is primarily the presence of participants’ faces that give them ownership rights, as Kaya says: “It’s their face and if you were on social media or something and you saw their face on it that wouldn’t be good because I mean, they didn’t know you took a picture of them. Why is their face on that picture?” – though as Amelia’s quote above shows, it could be any element that might not fit in with their public identity, such as a photo that might be seen as inappropriately sexual.

More often, though, the notion of actively seeking someone’s consent is more of an ideal than a reality, one that illustrates an ethic of *imagining* whether someone would consent, based partly on accepted social norms and partly the participant’s history with that particular person. Sarah, for example, says of one photo, “That’s my friend and a guy and they are performing a song and I guess... I would have to ask their permission to post it.... but I’m sure they would be comfortable with sharing it.”

In general, the decision of whether to share a photo or not is based solely on the taker’s intuition of whether or not the participant would consent. Lauren describes a more typical process, where the person who wishes to share the photo will make their own decision, based in part on their assumptions about the participants’ wishes: speaking of a photo of a hockey game, she says, “For a picture like that, I don’t think too many people would mind.” Margaret describes her thinking as “I’ll look to see if I look good [and] if whoever else is in the photo looks good too, because I don’t want to post a photo and have them feel uncomfortable with it.” Again, though, this becomes more complicated in group photos, where it is often followed by a discussion among the taker and the participants some time after the photo is taken. Here the burden is on the participants to object if they don’t want the photo shared: “Sometimes in the group chat they’ll just say ‘I’m going to post it’... and

they won't really ask. But if someone like doesn't want in it we'll just say please don't." (Lauren)

The context in which a photo is taken often influences whether participants' consent is explicitly sought or simply assumed. As Nico explains, "It depends on the photo and the circumstances. We basically took this photo so that we could share it and that was one of the reasons we took it, so I don't think anyone would have opposed. That's why I didn't even ask them if I should put it on the main because I knew that no one would have a problem with it, or else they wouldn't be in the photo or they would say, 'Oh I don't want to share this with anyone.' But if it's a photo that you just kind of take... you should probably ask the person that's in the photo."

Another important context is the platform on which the photo is shared, though this in itself is complicated: Nico suggests that expectations of consent are lower on Snapchat than on Instagram, saying "It's something that you don't normally do, just posting random photos of your friends on your feed... You do more a photo like this for friends." But Suyin, like others, suggests that the particular value of Snapchat is to send a clear but implicit signal that the photo is *not* to be shared beyond the initial audience, when she says that "Snapchat deletes things for a reason and that's why we send those things through Snapchat. It's pretty much, like, 'We don't want you to screenshot that.'"

This desire to send a message without saying it 'out loud' carries over to teens' expectations of whether others will seek consent before sharing photos of them, as well. Julie, trying to communicate to her friends her desire to not be photographed at all, essentially resorts to mime – "If someone's taking a picture I'll duck or go around behind them just so I'm not in it... I think most people know that I don't like being in pictures so they don't try anymore." The scenario Andrew describes, though, shows the limits of relying on social norms:

“ Andrew: [My friend] sometimes takes random photos of me when I'm on my phone... like when I'm not even paying attention... I kind of minded at first, but I got over it.

Interviewer: Did you get over it or did you get used to it?

Andrew: I got used to it.

Interviewer: Would you prefer it if he asked permission before he posted that?

Andrew: Ah, yeah. But I probably would have said no, so.

In this situation, his friend's blatant ignoring of established social norms – taking “random” photos of him, taken when he's “not even paying attention” – makes him feel unable to object to those photos being shared.

Deleting Photos

Surprisingly, given teens' clear understanding of the potential permanence of online photos, participants were less likely to object or expect to be asked to consent to photos before they were sent than to employ what might be called 'retroactive consent', asking peers to delete specific photos that they don't want shared. They apply this strategy to photos of themselves – as Lauren says, "If I didn't like the picture for whatever reason, I'd probably ask her to delete it" – and likewise expect their peers to register objections after the photo has been made public: as Dan says, "It actually happened with one of my other friends that I posted a picture for just a few days ago. He hated the picture and I took it down." While asking to have an unflattering photo removed might seem like 'closing the barn door after the horse has gone,' it makes more sense when we recall that the concern is not, except in extreme cases, with the impact of an individual photo, but with the overall image presented by one's feed. So long as it is quickly taken down, a photo that doesn't fit with that image will quickly be forgotten, buried by the flood of new content. As Sarah puts it, "A day after I didn't care because it's so far down people's feeds already."

As with sharing photos, how one asks someone to delete a photo depends on the context and on one's relationship with them. As Suyin says, "The [friends] I was super comfortable with... I did

Selfies

Despite the common position that selfies are the *sine qua non* of photo-based social networking, selfies made up fewer than one in ten of the photos shared by our subjects. Because a selfie generally includes one's face (though some, such as Courtney, stretch the definition to include "selfies from below [the] chin") they are a prime arena for the anxieties about faces. Unlike the universal concern about one's face, though, there is no single attitude towards selfies among the participants. Some, such as Margaret, claim never to take selfies; while others, like Jessica, have only shared a very small number. Others share them only with very restricted audiences, such as Suyin who says: "I don't post selfies really often to the general public." This is partly because selfies are seen as "a very personal thing" (Jessica) and because "you look better when it's not a selfie than with a selfie [because] the camera's less good of a quality as a selfie camera" (Nico). According to Margaret, posting selfies "seems too much like a cry for attention... and I feel like there's just something weird and embarrassing about, like, going to your room to take some selfies." By shining a figurative spotlight on yourself, a selfie is also seen as opening yourself to criticism: Jessica explains her reluctance to post them because "I don't want to have the risk of people like having weird things to say."

The fear of seeming like you're trying to draw unearned attention influences the subjects that are seen as appropriate for selfies as well. One event that consistently justifies a selfie is having braces removed: Jessica explains that "the only time I did post a selfie of myself is when I got my braces off and I got a lot of really nice comments saying like 'oh, you look beautiful' and like 'you look great without your braces' and stuff like 'good for you'." As with other photos, each selfie is also viewed in the context of the user's feed. Sean explains his reason for not sharing a particular selfie by saying "I already have pictures of myself and there's no need for more."

Many teens said that they had shared selfies more often when they were younger. Araya speculates that thirteen-year-olds "probably just got their phones and they're like, 'oh yeah, selfies'" – perhaps suggesting that selfies are perceived as a sign of immaturity. This may explain why early selfies are often a point of regret – Araya regrets "all of them, every single one". However, selfies are sometimes viewed nostalgically as well, as a memory of the time before they were as conscious of, and as bound by, 'the rules'. Pavlina suggests this, saying "I used to feel more comfortable when I was younger with posting selfies, when I first got Instagram, which was in Grade 6. I didn't care what people thought, and I used to post whatever I wanted."

confront them about it... But the people that I was getting to know better... I was just like ‘Okay, whatever.’” Even with friends, though, there is a fairly strong prohibition against explicitly asking someone to delete a photo, which might be seen as hostile. Araya, imagining how she would respond to an unwanted photo being shared, says

“I’d probably message my friend and like, ‘Hey, you didn’t ask my consent before you sent this’ and stuff, but kind of like a joking tone,” while Hannah, like Julie above, resorts to nonverbal means to get her point across: “I even photo-shopped myself out of the picture and sent it back to that person hoping they would take down the [photo] that I’m in.” Suyin, even when dealing with “super comfortable” friends, describes a process of gently nudging them towards offering to delete the photo without coming out and asking them directly:

“ It was like a friendly chat. I was like, “Oh, I saw that you saw my picture,” and they’re like “Oh,” and I was like “Oh yeah, why?” Then they were just like “If you don’t want it then delete,” so like I got them to offer me to delete the picture... rather than telling them.



Fair Information Practices and the Information Economy

As noted above, participants' concerns about privacy, reputation and consent are nearly all focused on managing how they are seen by "people" online. While they have, as we've seen, a strong preference for using particular platforms to manage their online image and interactions, there is little evidence that they see the platforms as corporate *entities*, rather than simple tools. This suggests that effective privacy education must begin with not just digital literacy but key principles of *media* literacy, as youth are unaware both of the commercial considerations of the platforms they use and the way in which those considerations, and the technical considerations of those platforms, influence how and how much they share.

A good illustration of this is the phenomenon of "streaks." These are noteworthy for being one of the few online-only forms of interaction referred to by participants, and for being entirely an artifact of the technical considerations of the platform – in this case, Snapchat.

“ Streaks is basically where you send a picture daily to someone that you constantly Snapchatted for the last three days. And then you get, like, a fire emoji beside their name so you keep on Snapchatting them to get our streak higher. (Amira)

From Snapchat's perspective, the purpose of streaks is fairly obvious: a form of positive reinforcement to encourage users to keep interacting and posting content. Among the participants in our study, though, streaks emerged as a form of gamified social interaction largely separate from other photos. Though they do share a use as a marker of intimacy – as Julie puts it, "I guess it's a way to be like 'Hey, you're important to me. I'm going to take time out of my day to send you a picture'" – the way in which Snapchat has constructed the interaction quickly gives streaks a life of their own: Julie adds, "Once you get it high enough there's a little bit of pressure to sort of keep it going." The teens we interviewed often maintain multiple streaks at a time that each reach dozens or even hundreds of interactions, and several referred to streaks as a reason to send a photo rather than just a by-product: Suyin explains sending the photo of herself with the Harry Potter filter, discussed above, by saying "I had to do my streaks."

Because of the pressure to keep up multiple streaks, streak photos are often sent to a larger audience than Snapchat photos typically are, one photo to all streak participants – as Suyin puts it "I don't do individual streaks because I don't feel like tapping 45 times". As a result, streaks are the one area where "I could do random. I'd even take a picture of the sky or something," as Suyin says; Lauren describes her attitude to streaks as "every morning or night I'll just send like one picture to all my streaks just to make sure they stay. And like

sometimes it would be of me or my dog, or just my wall or something.” In a few cases, such as Andrew’s, streak photos may have no content at all except for the social signal: “Most of my streaks, I actually just put a black screen and say streaks just to keep it going.” Lauren, meanwhile, explains that the typical timing of streak photos is the reason behind not posting a picture of yourself: “Usually when I send streaks it’s either, like, in the morning or at night, and usually I haven’t like gotten ready and stuff, so I don’t look as nice.”

More often, though, the reason for sending “random” streak photos goes back to curating one’s image: several participants spoke of wanting to send streak photos that contributed to your online image when possible – Nico explains a streak photo of himself at a movie theatre by saying “I needed to take a photo for my streaks anyways because I noticed [I hadn’t sent one yet], and I could have just put a photo of the floor, but I [wanted to] show that I’m with friends, you know watching a movie, having a good time.”

As the phenomenon of streaks illustrates, while teens may occasionally contravene or subvert the social norms that regulate how they participate in social media, they rarely do so with any understanding of how social networks are constructed by the corporations that own them to influence those norms – or, indeed, any awareness that these platforms are corporate spaces at all. Almost none of the participants had a clear idea of what the corporations that owned the platforms they use did with their photos. Sophia was typical in saying “I never really think about that. I just post whatever I post,” while Julie said “I don’t think I’ve ever really thought about that.” However, when informed that corporations do have access to their photos, they reacted with greater concern: as Kaya said, “I really do not know [why corporations keep photos] ‘cause what could they do with your picture? Why do they have it? What could they do with it? It doesn’t make sense to have it if they don’t even know you... I don’t really want them to have my picture. I mean what would they do with it? It’s actually scary.”

Where they do have concerns, they are much the same as those they have about their photos being seen by peers, with the assumption that the same strategies will protect them in both cases. As Dan put it, “the pictures I’m posting I’m not really worried so much about.” Amira more explicitly equated peer and corporate audiences: “If Instagram sees it, I don’t care. If my friends see it, I don’t care.” This has important implications for how youth conceptualize privacy, because the regulatory model depends on users consciously consenting to the use of their personal information by the corporations they do business with. So far as these teens are concerned, though, they are neither being asked for consent nor giving it: Amira, when asked if she’d ever consented to Snapchat or Instagram keeping and using her photos, bluntly said “They don’t ask.”

As that quote suggests, youth do not equate agreeing with a platform’s terms and conditions with giving consent to the collection and use of their photos. Araya lays out the distinction between ‘agreeing’ and ‘consenting’ when she says “I’m using the app, but I

never gave written or verbal consent that they can like use it [my photo]. I mean, I know they have it in the terms and conditions, but just the fact that I didn't personally, like, give them my consent kind of makes me feel uncomfortable." Just as the subjects of photos are imagined to have ownership rights relative to those that took them, so too are those who share photos imagined to own them when interacting with the platform: as Hannah says, "I don't think that the corporation should save the picture... I don't think they should repost your picture without asking for your permission."

Instead, they imagine a model of consent that is much closer to that which they expect from their peers. To begin with, they expect that corporations will, like their friends, respect the wishes they communicate by their choices of platform. In Pavlina's opinion, "I don't even think that they should have access to the photo. They made the social media and everything, but having access to people's photos is just too much. Especially if it's a private account, they obviously made it private so random people don't see, and then Instagram is doing exactly what the owner of the account didn't want." Consent is also imagined as being sensitive to context, as it is in relation to peers: as Amelia puts it, if the corporation uses a photo she posted for a use she hadn't previously agreed to, "that's not fair to me, because they told me something and then they didn't go along with it, or they changed it." They also expect to be able to give or withhold consent each time they share something, rather than giving blanket consent when joining the platform. As Kaya says:

“ I don't remember ever having a message popping up saying, "We're going to keep your pictures and it's going to stay with us." I've never had a message like that, 'cause if it did, I'd say... "No thank you."

Indeed, some of the participants imagine consenting to a corporation's use of their photos exclusively in these terms. Suyin, asked to give an example of consenting to a corporation having access to a photo, recalls "I took a good picture that Apple was like 'Oh, can we have this?' And I authorized that one. But overall, not really," while Amelia responded "I've never been asked... Is it in the terms and conditions? Because I pressed 'Agree' to that, so..."

Another frequently cited reason why teens don't feel they have given consent to corporations' collecting and accessing their photos was the fact that, in most cases, they had either not read or not understood the platforms' privacy policies and terms of service. Sarah's attitude is fairly typical: "When we sign up you're supposed to read the terms and conditions, but no one really does." While one could certainly argue that it is their responsibility to understand the terms of use before they agree to them, the participants generally felt that they were unable to give *meaningful* consent because the documents were too long and difficult to read: as Jessica said of Instagram's terms of service, "I would go back and read it now that you mention it, but I probably just read, like, the first few sentences and the last few, 'cause often they're really unnecessarily long and I'm like, 'Well,

what’s the worst that could happen?”

These teens also feel that they’re not able to give genuine consent because they have no power to negotiate with the platforms. As Amelia puts it, “You must follow these guidelines, and if you don’t, then there’s consequences. So, there’s no negotiation, or anything like that, you have to agree, and if you don’t, then you can’t use it.” Kaya expressed similar feelings of helplessness: “I’m one person and I can’t just tell them to stop. It wouldn’t really make sense. They’d probably just ignore me.” As we’ve seen, though, not using the platforms is not an option: in Nico’s words, “If you wouldn’t agree, then you just don’t get Instagram. And then all your friends have it, so ... if you want Instagram, there’s no other choice but to agree.”

Another barrier to genuine consent is that almost none of the participants had any understanding of the ways in which they were participating in the information economy when they used the platforms. When asked why either Snapchat or Instagram might retain copies of users’ photos, many of the participants were unable to think of any reason: “There’s not really much you can do with [my photos] other than look at them,” in Jessica’s words. When they did think of corporations having access to their photos, it was usually by imagining it being done on an individual basis, by an individual, rather than analysis of aggregated data: as Margaret put it, “I figure they probably won’t choose my photos, so I’m probably okay.” (This attitude is explored in further detail below.) Those that were able to suggest corporate purposes mostly named ones that were generally accurate but focused almost exclusively on administrative, rather than commercial, functions, such as internal record-keeping – “a census for their database of users” (Amira); to ensure that rules and guidelines are being followed; and to provide access to government or law enforcement if they need it.

Only one participant accurately suggested a reason that related to how the corporation made money:

“ Whenever I go on the Internet or e-mail, because my phone is connected to my Mac laptop I get advertisements of things that I’ve been researching recently. So I’m assuming that they use that data and that they try to sell me things and things like that. (Suyin)

Perhaps as a consequence of their feeling unable to meaningfully consent, the participants generally did not have any sense of themselves as having privacy rights either. Indeed, almost none were aware of any of the rights they hold under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*’s fair information principles or could imagine making use of them in any way, such as asking a platform to remove a misattributed tag (under the Accuracy principle) or making a complaint to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (Compliance). Though a number felt that “there should be some way to

decide that you want to delete a picture completely," (Courtney) their opinions on this – as well as on how long corporations held onto their data, which ranged from “maybe 24 to 48 hours” (Sophia) to “forever” (Julie) – were held in absence of any knowledge of the principle that “personal information shall be retained only as long as necessary.”

As a result of this lack of empowerment, while teens have a variety of strategies for managing their online identities in the eyes of their imagined audiences, when it comes to corporate access to their data they have only one. This tactic of privacy by obscurity is less about taking any action than reconciling themselves to their helplessness relative to the corporate owners of the platforms they use: “Instagram has, like, over 100,000,000 users. They have a lot of people and if they have a picture of the face of everyone, I feel like the more pictures of people you have the less important it is.” (Hannah) This idea of safety in numbers – Amira says she’s not concerned about Instagram keeping her photos because “a lot of other people’s pictures are kept in it too” – is a way of allaying even their worst fears: Sean imagines that even in a scenario where someone would “ninja their way up to my bedroom window and like take a picture of me like naked” he would be unlikely to come to harm because “There’s probably so many in the database of Snapchat that if worse came to worse, I’d just try and forget about it because you know, there’s probably hundreds of naked photos in those databanks and whatnot, right?”

As these quotes suggest, teens’ main concern regarding corporate access is with the idea of individual photos being seen by unwanted audiences, rather than the photos being saved or used in aggregate. As a result, several participants described a hybrid strategy of keeping their photos anodyne while trusting in the safety of the haystack: as Jessica explains “My photos are very insignificant compared to the rest of the population of the world. And yes, people could access it, but even so, they wouldn’t be able to be used for blackmail or tracing where I live or whatever.” Despite their hope of hiding in the crowd, though, it’s clear that teens are uncomfortable about unwanted access of their photos by corporations – or any unintended audiences. As Amira puts it, “I highly doubt they’d pick a random girl from Ottawa’s pictures to like stare at ‘cause I don’t think that’s something that’ll happen. I hope not.”

Appendix A: Methodology

This report is based on the findings of interviews that were conducted in 2016 with 18 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16 in a city in Ontario, Canada. The purpose of the interviews was to explore how young people make decisions about the privacy of the photographs they share on networked platforms. To help facilitate the discussion during the interview, participants kept a photo diary of the photographs they shared over a seven-day period prior to the interview.

The interview discussion guide, photo diary, consent documents, recruitment text and method of analysis were approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ottawa and the Ottawa Public Library. Recruitment posters that contained contact information were placed on bulletin boards at clubs and libraries across the city. Interested participants were asked to email or call the principal researcher, Valerie Steeves, for further information about the study. To participate in the study, participants had to use interactive networked media such as social networking, texting, and/or photo-sharing apps as a regular part of their social activities, and be between the ages of 13 and 16. Those young people who fit the recruitment requirements were asked to attend an information session to learn more about the study and receive instructions on what they would be required to do.

Sample

Twenty-one participants attended the information session and 18 participants completed both the photo diary and the individual interview. Nine of the participants were aged 13 or 14, and nine were aged 15 or 16. Four of the participants self-identified as male, and 14 self-identified as female. The ethnicity of the participants varied, and six of the participants self-identified as Greek-Canadian, Lebanese-Canadian, East Asian-Canadian, Pakistani-Canadian, Ethiopian-Canadian and German-Canadian, respectively. The remainder identified as Canadian. Two of the participants were bilingual Francophone youth.

Table 1: Participants by pseudonym, age and gender

Pseudonym	Age & Gender
Dan	Male, 15
Pavlina	Female, 14
Amira	Female, 16
Suyin	Female, 15
Amelia	Female, 14
Lauren	Female, 14
Sophia	Female, 14
Nico	Male, 13
Sean	Male, 14
Kaya	Female, 14
Margaret	Female, 15
Hannah	Female, 15
Julie	Female, 14
Araya	Female, 16
Sarah	Female, 16
Andrew	Male, 14
Courtney	Female, 16
Jessica	Female, 15

Administration of Photo Diary and Interview

The participants completed a password-protected digital diary for a minimum of seven days over a 14-day period, including at least five weekdays and two weekend days. Each daily diary entry included up to three photographs that the participant either took herself/himself or had received electronically from another person. Copies of the photos were uploaded into the diary. The participants categorized each photo as either a photo s/he feels comfortable sharing with lots of people, a photo s/he feels comfortable sharing with a few people, or a photo s/he does not feel comfortable sharing with anyone. If the participant did not feel comfortable uploading a copy of any photo into their diary, they were asked to provide a written description of the photo as an alternative. All of the participants chose to upload copies instead of written descriptions.

The content of the diaries was collected for content analysis; however, the primary purpose of the diaries was to elicit more detailed discussion in the interview portion of the research.

Following the completion of the digital diary, participants attended a 60- to 90-minute individual interview. During the interview, the researcher(s) discussed the participant's practices and preferences around photo-sharing in general. Then, each of the photos in the respective diaries was examined and discussed. The purpose was to explore the cognitive, socio-cultural, situational and emotional processes the participant used to make the decision to share or not share the particular photo with others. More specifically, we explored the social context in which the photo was taken, how the participant felt about the photo, the intended audience, the expected reactions from that audience, any risks/benefits that the participant identified, any regret or potential regrets the participant might have from sharing, whether/how the participant took the feelings of others into consideration when making the decision to share or not share, and the participant's choice of and experiences with the technical device and platform s/he used (including any technical strategies to protect the privacy of the photo). Finally, we explored the participant's awareness of, and experiences with, his/her informational rights, i.e. the 10 fair information practices that are set out in the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

Appendix B: Content Analysis

Types of Photos

Using an inductive content analysis approach, photographs were categorized according to content and 19 different types of photographs were identified (see Table 2). In general, the photographs with people were more common than photographs that did not include people: over half of the photographs (147, or 61.3%) included at least one person.

Table 2: Photograph Types

Category	Count	Percent
<i>Photos Including People</i>	147	61.3
Individual Posed Shot	25	10.4
Group Posed Shot	25	10.4
Candid Shots	17	7.1
Individual, Filtered or Modified	16	6.7
Individual with Text Comment	14	5.8
Action (e.g., sports)	14	5.8
Body Part	12	5.0
Individual, part of a larger scene	10	4.2
People 'goofing around'	7	2.9
Group, Filtered	7	2.9
<i>Photographs Without People</i>	93	38.8
Food	18	7.5
Landscape	18	7.5
Jokes	18	7.5
Objects	15	6.3
Animals	12	5.0
Objects, Commented	5	2.1
Remember	3	1.3
Political	3	1.3
Other	1	.4

Sharing

Over half (123, or 51.2%) of the photographs were ones that participants indicated they would be willing to share freely. For 91 photographs (37.9%), participants indicated that they would share but with restrictions, and 26 photographs (10.8%) were photographs that participants indicated they would be unwilling to share. There were no associations between willingness to share and gender ($X^2_{(2)}=.509$, n.s.) or age ($X^2_{(6)}=.262$, n.s.).

There was a strong association between the presence of people in the photograph and willingness to share ($X^2_{(2)}=24.2$, $p<.001$): participants indicated a greater willingness to share photographs that did not include people (69% would be shared freely, 19% shared with restrictions, 12% not shared) compared to those that did include at least one person (40% would be shared freely, 48% shared with restrictions, and 10% not shared).