

Quinnipiac University M.S. in Interactive Communications Masters Project

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Sharing the Social Media Scene

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August 10, 2010

**ABSTRACT** - It is no secret that social media has changed the way the world communicates. This is only a glimpse of its power to change. The connections that have been created through the networks of the world wide web are having a much greater impact on communications than anyone could have predicted. These influences are changing how young people learn, grow and interact with the world around them. It is vital that young generations are given direction to weave their way through the often tangled web of social media. It is just as vital that this is done thoughtfully. Social media have a vast amount of positive potential for young people. Adults work to understand how youth are using social media tools. It is the purpose of this paper to thoughtfully advise adults on how to guide young people's use of social media. In short, parents and educators must form a foundation of knowledge around social media in order to teach and advise effectively.

In the 1950s and 60s media consumption meant simply watching television or reading the newspaper. Today people consume media in limitless diverse ways. Young people today are consuming media in ways that are much more powerful and vastly different from how they did forty, thirty or even twenty years ago. The older media outlets such as television and newspapers operated in a structure that broadcasts from one person to many. These are the kinds of channels today's baby boomers and older generations grew up surrounded by. These older channels are worlds different than today's social media technologies. Media such as television and newspapers act as one-way communication channels. Today's new and social media allows users to interact in many types of two-way communication. Adults who learned from and consumed news through the more static outlets may be struggling to understand how today's young people are using social media. The introduction of the internet and social media outlets has changed how a great deal of media is consumed by not just young people, but the world. It is time for adults, specifically parents and educators, learn about these tools and how young people are employing them in their daily lives. Young people are using social media tools through the internet and mobile phones to learn, interact and grow socially. They are developing and picking up social and technological skill sets through these social media outlets. These skills are necessary for them being active participants in today's society.<sup>1</sup> For this reason it is vital that adults work to understand how and why this is happening. They must take an active and engaged role in learning how these tools can be used most effectively. The evolution and adoption of electronic communications in the last decade have confirmed these new and social media technologies

are here to stay. Constant connection is now a way of life for millions. Young people are living and growing in a new media environment. In order to parent and teach effectively adults must work to understand, and engage in social media.

The internet has made itself a vital fixture in the lives of millions. Its adoption has become more widespread in recent years. 93% of people ages 12 – 17 go online. This is compared to 81% of people 30 – 49, 70% of people 50 – 64 and 38% of people over 65.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that the internet has widely adopted by diverse range of generations. It is how these generations think about and use internet technologies that shows a divide. Adults must remember that teens and young people do not think about the internet in the same way they do. The implications of internet use are different for the two groups. Adults must work to understand how teens are using new technologies in order to parent and teach effectively in these areas.

Online social media technologies have made themselves fundamental communication tools in the lives of the majority of today's young people. Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project defines this group as those ages 18-29.<sup>3</sup> This group includes generations Y and Z. They are known by various other names, including Millennials and Digital Natives.<sup>4</sup> Teens are those age 12-17. This group is also discussed extensively in this paper as a group affected by social media technologies. These generations appreciate social media technologies in ways similar to how baby boomers appreciated getting their licenses and anything representing independence. Generation X includes those born between 1965 and 1976. This group uses the internet in ways similar to baby boomers. The two older generations look to the internet primarily for email, banking and shopping. They use the internet as tool for research.<sup>5</sup> Adults must realize the way they picture the internet is shaped by how they experience it. Young people visit Facebook for extended periods of time while adults head online to pay bills or shop. These two online activities have diverse implications in the lives of different generations. Adults must prepare themselves to answer questions on many new internet technologies that extend beyond banking and shopping. They must do so

in order to have positive and honest conversations about social media. This will include how to define it, as well as what it means for their family and classrooms settings.

Young people and teens often look to the technology provided by the internet for entertainment and communication. Young people and teens find independence in the use of social and new media tools. Social media technologies allow teens and young people feelings of freedom and autonomy that is not present in classroom and other adult mediated settings.<sup>6</sup> They use mobile phones, online social networks and the internet to grow and interact. Social media has made itself a way of life for them. Adults must begin to try and relate their experiences as young people to how today's youth are using, learning from and growing with social media. If adults can relate to the importance and abundance of these experiences they will be able to have a greater impact and take a active role in how their students and children learn and grow.

Although there has been significant coverage of social media in the mass media recently, few people have or understand a solid definition of it. For our purposes, we will explore two potential definitions. At the same time we should keep in mind the evolution of social media uses will continue. However, the foundations from which social and new media have come have stayed relatively constant. Understanding these foundations will help parents and teachers begin to understand how and why young people are using social media tools. If they can begin to understand the reasons for adoption, adults will be able to help guide young people to the safest and more valuable adoption of social media. The evolution of social media will challenge parents and educators to continually work keep current on the latest changes. Browsing headlines from solid sources such as the New York Times, The Associated Press and other tenured journalistic sources can yield many articles on the latest social media players, how the tools are changing and much more. These headlines change on a weekly basis and will help keep parents or teachers educated on what to look and listen for at home and in the classroom. These things can help parents and educators get in the conversation on social media in the lives of teens and young people.

Social media technologies have evolved with the adoption and integration of the internet. The sites and technologies that have been built through the world wide web have lead to a wide spread connections. These allow humans to build on that fundamental need for connection and socialization. This need for connection is second only to survival and safety needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A study by Harry Harlow showed that infant rhesus monkeys indeed needed food, but their need for social contact was just as important as food. Their social contact was equally important to food for healthy growth and development.<sup>7</sup> The need for connection and socialization are vital to health and growth. Social media is built around allowing users to share and make connections with others through a shared interest. Social media sites were formed around very simple concepts: sharing, connecting and feeling a part of something. There is no secret to how social media work. They exist to connect people. These are all things that humans feel a fundamental need for. This explains their unprecedented adoption. Internet communications professional Clay Shirky puts it simply, "Internet, mobile phones and the applications built on top of them have changed the way groups of people come together, share things and get things done."<sup>8</sup> Shirky articulates clearly how the addition of new and social media tools is changing basic functions of life. Social media are helping fill human needs for connection and socialization.

Another solid definition of social media flows out of one for social network sites. It comes from danah boyd, an expert in new and social media. boyd has followed social media and networking sites for some time. She states: "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."<sup>9</sup>

These definitions represent how parents and educators should identify social media. They illustrate that they are simple. Although boyd wrote hers exclusively for social network sites, it well defines a many other social media outlets. Specifically, boyd's definition makes sense

for social networking sites, photo sharing sites, video sharing sites or other similar outlets. Shirky explains in simple and clear terms that social and new media technologies are changing fundamental ways of life. He is able to articulate a big picture of what technologies are impacting how people interact in society. Shirky gives a quick and precise idea of what is affecting whom and how. These two definitions form a solid foundation for how to identify social and new media technologies.

Social and new media come in many forms. They are often misconstrued as strictly social networking sites. In reality social and new media incorporate many interactive activities. Social media genres include, but are not limited to; social networking sites, social bookmarking, photo and video sharing, blogs and microblogs and affinity groups. Social networking sites have been defined by boyd above. Photo and video sharing sites allow users to upload, download and view content generated by other users. Blogging allows users to share in text and photos form through online journals. These sites usually allow writers to accept comments from readers. Microblogs allow users to share blog posts in much shorter form. An affinity group is a group of people, for our purpose, online, that share based on some common interest. Each of these genres of social media connects users based on some shared quality. What these users share can be anything from an interest to geographic region to a mutual friend. These genres reinforce that social media are first and foremost about sharing and connecting.

The major providers of social media sites are often changing. Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Wordpress and Twitter are currently some of today's most popular social media sites. These have not only changed how people stay in touch. These technologies have changed the consumption of news and entertainment. However, looking back through the 13 years since 1997 when the first form of social networking site, SixDegrees was built, dozens upon dozens of social network and media sites have jockeyed for a piece of the social media pie.<sup>10</sup>

Facebook is today one of the popular and longest lasting social networking sites. Facebook began on a small, private scale in early 2004 on the campus of Harvard University.<sup>11</sup> Since then its uses have evolved extensively. Facebook has constantly made changes to allow user to share and interact more. This evolution included the addition of photos, events, wall posts and status updates to name a few.<sup>12</sup> Today Facebook.com has nearly 500 million users and claims nearly \$20 billion in market value.<sup>13</sup> In December 2009 alone Facebook reported 206.9 million unique visitors making it the number one social networking site globally. 67% of all social media users visited the site during that month. Time spent on Facebook has also been on the rise. Users are now spending nearly six hours per month on the site.<sup>14</sup> These statistics make Facebook a clear social media big shot.

Twitter is a popular microblogging site. It allows user to post update in 140 characters or less. It has boasted many record-breaking numbers. In that same one year period from December 2008 to 2009, its unique visitors increased 570%, from 2.7 million to 18.1 million.<sup>15</sup> YouTube, a video sharing site and Flickr, a photo sharing site have a fair amount of tenure and will likely remain at the forefront of social media use.

Myspace is a social networking site similar to Facebook founded in 2003. It has been the subject of social media research. Myspace's use has declined in many ways in recent years including number of visits and time spent on site.<sup>16</sup> While these numbers have declined in recent years, the site is expected to continue to be a player for teens. danah boyd argues that Facebook and Myspace are still on par with one another. However, they are attracting a very different user base. She explains, "Teens who use Myspace can't communicate with those on Facebook and vice-versa. So if you don't participate, you're written out of the story."<sup>17</sup> There are two different groups of teens using the two sites. While there is overlap, there is also a clear division. Both sites still need to be considered powerful during the current evolution of social media. As can be seen with Myspace's evolving user base, the demographics of the people using these social media sites and how they use them will continue to evolve and change in coming years.

It is important for adults to know these named social media players in order to participate in educated conversations around how teens and young people are employing these new tools. While teens may spend great amounts of time on these kinds of sites, they do not always realize how to best use them. The implication of posting in a user-generated content arena is often not something teens are thinking about. It is important for parents and educators to be able to help youth navigate social media and its meanings in order for them benefit from using these tools. A child born in 2010 will ask about Facebook and Myspace someday. Parents need to have a planned response. In order to build this they must educate themselves on the good, the bad and the ugly of social media use.

Planning for social media use in a deliberate way will help parents have a solid foundation to navigate the issues that might arise in its use. Just as parents and educators build the sex talk into homes and classrooms they must build a social media policy. This policy can include recommendations for use, guidelines, rules, dangers and benefits. Social media is not something parents and educators can honestly hope to ban. Teens and young people will visit these sites no matter what. Educating teens and young people on how they can be hurt by, as well benefit from, the technologies is a solid start. From there, as with sex, parents and educators should plan to deal with issues as they arise. The sex talk example also reminds us that kids don't ask how to have sex. They won't ask how to use social media either. Adults can only give them advice on how to stay safe in doing so.

In the year from December 2008 to December 2009 the time spent on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook went up 82%. Today social networking and blogs account for the greatest amount on time spent online.<sup>18</sup> The use of these kinds of social network and microblogging sites is skyrocketing. It is changing how people interact, make plans and get their daily news. The adoption of these new and social media is happening at an unprecedented rate. Historically media outlets have been adopted over a matter of several years. It took the radio 38 years to reach 50 million users and the television 13 years. The

internet was a mere 4 years, while Facebook acquired 200 millions users in less than a year. Other new media like ipod applications had 1 billion downloads in only 9 months.<sup>19</sup> The numbers clearly show these tools are being more fully integrated into the lives of millions. Adults need to realize that a large portion of these people are their students and children. If they aren't already, they should begin an open dialogue about new and social media tools and how to best use them. The power of these technologies should not be taken lightly. Parents should talk about how to best employ social media services in the most effect ways in order to keep young people on the right track in using them.

There is clearly widespread adoption of social and new media services. How these tools are used varies by generation. 75% of adults purchase goods online compared to only 48% of teens. Older generations have begun to further adopt internet technologies. The ways in which they adopt these technologies are different from their younger counterparts. 73% of teens use social networking sites, compared with 47% of adults.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately both groups have a fair understanding of the benefits to monitoring personal information online. The amount of information social and new media collect about its users is immense. This issue is one that young people and adults tend to agree on. 60% of adults and 66% of teens restrict the amount of personal information they share online. Only 6% of teens use their full names in profiles.<sup>21</sup> While the two groups often agree on this issue, this is not the case for many others. As was mentioned earlier the two choose to spend time taking part in different online activities. Adults must work with young people to prepare a plan for how to deal with the many issues that can arise from social media use in order to ensure their safety. When a teen asks about getting a Facebook page parents should be prepared to have a conversation about what this means. The implications, both positive and negative, that can arise from using new and social media tools should be addressed. Adults should prepare teens and young people as they enter the world of social media in order to help them grow in positive and healthy ways.

Statistics around social media show that it is being embraced on an expanding scale. Yet the adoption rates vary greatly based on certain demographics. Susan Herring explains the two different worlds, the one which baby boomers grew up in versus what today's young people are growing up in. She states that young people are using the new and social media technologies in many of the same ways older generations used the technologies of their time. Today's teens and young people use mobile phones to text message when baby boomers used landline phones to send messages with spoken conversation. Young people today blog, microblog and make status updates on things baby boomers chose to confide to handwritten diaries. The grooming young people do to online social networking profiles mirrors how baby boomers dressed up to be seen at dances and local events. Young people have downloadable movies and endless shopping at their finger tips via the web. Baby Boomers had movie theaters and malls.<sup>22</sup>

Herring gives a valid and purposeful comparison of growing up with social media versus growing up a baby boomer. This comparison is one that allows us to get a clear picture of how teens and young people view social media technologies. They don't see social media as new technology. Herring continues by explaining that technology should be defined as something new, novel and challenging.<sup>23</sup> For teens and young people social media is none of the above. The implications of the expanded adoption of social media in teens and young people are unknown. Young people do not see their use of social media as adoption or change. Social media is a way of life for young people. Using cell phones and social networking sites is not new to them. They use these things without realizing they are filling their needs for communication and socialization. Herring concludes by pointing out that we should look more to the young people and less to the technologies. There should be more consideration for their communicative needs which are being expressed through these social media.<sup>24</sup> It is less about the technology and more about how it is filling a need for young generations. Parents and educators should explore social media technologies in order to understand how they are filling this need.

Social and new media have proven they can change the way the world communicates. Young people will grow to understand the internet and social media in ways which cannot be predicted. How people use social networking sites will continue to build relationships in both the personal and professional world. It will change how plans are made and how families interact. Parents will text teens. Teens will make plans via text and Facebook message. Interactivity will frame how people live. It is impossible to say what kinds of sites will and services will be most prominent in the future or to what extent they will have altered communication. Social media is changing lives so drastically that “71% of experts agree that by 2020 innovative forms of online cooperation will result in significantly more efficient and responsive governments, businesses, non-profits, and other mainstream institutions.”<sup>25</sup> It is certain that adults and young people alike must try to understand to how best employ social media in their lives as they work to build a better tomorrow.

Teens and young people are using social media technologies constantly. Social media have slowly become fixtures in their lives. Having grown up using them they often they don't even realize how much they are relying on them. After being asked to give them up for only 24 hours, 200 students from the University of Maryland admitted they felt the lack of connection to media. The study impacted the students so much that when they reported back on their experiences the 200 students blogged a total of 110,000 words, enough to populate a 400 page novel. Their experiences included stories of strong feelings around the lack of personal connection to family and friends. They felt a great loss in their connection via text messages, instant messaging and Facebook. Students were also accustomed to the constant flow of news and information coming from social media outlets. They were forced to turn to radio and newspapers to consume news they usually find through social media tools.<sup>26</sup> Young people and teens use social media tools in many diverse ways to communicate as well as consume news and information. Parents and educators should be aware of these diverse uses in order to fully address the issues that can arise when using, abusing and being restricted from social media use.

Teens' communication patterns lend well to their adoption of social media. During the teenage years young people work, and often struggle to define themselves. They build their identity. Today this happens simultaneously in different ways in physical and digital worlds. Young generations are able to take more time experimenting with the evolution and reinvention of identities through social media.<sup>27</sup> Through social network profiles on sites like Facebook and Myspace they are able to experiment with building, grooming and destroying digital identities. This group is able to make mistakes they can learn from in social and new media outlets. Teens and young people today grow in an environment where they are able to express their identities in a variety of ways. They are able to blog about their lives and receive feedback on these virtual diaries. They are able to express themselves by share videos and photos on sites like Youtube and Flickr. At the end of the day young people have more choices when it comes to modifying and finding their identities.<sup>28</sup> Older generations were not able to take advantage of learning in an environment that can so easily be created and destroyed. There are certainly advantages and disadvantages to this ability, nonetheless, it is changing the way teens learn about and build personal and social identity. The vast amount of connection allowed through social and new media increases the possibility of greater explorations of self for teens and young people.<sup>29</sup>

Social networking sites, chat rooms and affinity groups allow young people to share and grow in new ways. Teens and young people share status updates through social networking sites like Myspace and Facebook. These updates involve happenings in their social life, how their relationships are going and much more. An extended network of friends is able to view and respond to these updates. Young people are able to keep in touch with friends without having direct communication. Social media are integrated into how young generations hang out.<sup>30</sup> A sense of connection and knowledge of what others are doing is provided constantly to teens and young people through social media tools.

Living a life of constant connection is enabled on the highest level with the adoption and use of mobile phones. 75% of teens and 93% of adults now own cell phones.<sup>31</sup> The addition of texting has changed how much teens rely on and use these technologies. The technology behind texting and mobile phone use allows for detailed statistical feedback about who is using it and for what. This data illustrates the most prominent generational gap in new and social technology use. From January to December 2008 those ages 13-17 sent an average of 1,742 text messages per month. This same age group made only 231 mobile phone calls during that month. Their older counterparts those ages 35-44 sent only 236 text messages and made 223 calls. An even older group, those ages 45-54, sent only 128 messages and made 193 calls.<sup>32</sup> This data shows a clear difference in how young people and adults think about and use new media technologies. Adults text and call about the same amount each month. Teens send 654% more texts than phone calls. It is important for adults to take an active role in how teens and young people use social media and mobile phones due to the sheer amount of time they are spending with these technologies. For example, let's say it takes an average of seven seconds to send a text message. This would mean teens are spending 203 minutes a month texting. That is almost an hour a week. This added to amount of time (six hours) young people are spending on Facebook alone accounts to equal more than nine hours a month. Parents and educators should look to this data and appreciate the importance of the implementation of new and social media guidelines in classrooms and at home.

Teens and young people are living these changes in the classroom, family time and the social scene. Today a teen can go to school, break up with a boyfriend/girlfriend via text and come home to have that information all over social networking sites. Without having told anyone their entire online social network can be chatting about the breakup. The gossip that one day occurred in classrooms or over landlines is now happening constantly online. The issues that arise for teens through social media closely collate with those happening in their physical lives. They are still flirting, hanging out and gossiping. Research is making it clear that their online social groups often mirror their preexisting physical social networks.<sup>33</sup>

While many adults are concerned that young people maybe connecting to strangers through online social networking sites this is not usually the case. Some youth take time to explore niche groups with which they share interests. However this interest driven online social networking is not the norm.<sup>34</sup> The majority of young people use social media to extend their current social circles. They use them to navigate their relationships, friendships and affinity groups such as religious and local activities.<sup>35</sup> Adults must understand that most often teens are not looking to new and social media tools to meet new people. Studies in the U.S. show that teens use social media primarily to interact with people they already know or are loosely connected to. They use these tools turn acquaintances into friendships. In doing so they are avoiding what can be an initial awkward face-to-face communication.<sup>36</sup> Social media make it easier for teens and young people to initiate the growth from acquaintance to friendships. Sharing through social networking sites reinforces trust within groups of friends.<sup>37</sup> It is allowing young generations to begin and maintain more friendships than ever before.

While 73% of young people using the internet take part in social networking sites, 62% say they use new and social media tools to get their news.<sup>38</sup> Young people are able to maintain a constant flow of news through their social and new media outlet of choice. They can learn and grow a great deal from the internet and their relationships through social and new media. However, in order to benefit most from social media technologies teens need guidance around the use of new technologies. Adults have a great deal more life experience which they can use to advise teens even in the new world of communications. Teens may have a better grasp of social media technologies than adults. It is still the job of parents and educators to help give advice on their implications. Young people are exposed to many technologies which, when abused, can be damaging to development. One area to explore here is how social media technologies have affected a long-standing tradition for teens. This tradition is gossip. While gossip has been a mainstay in the lives of teens since the very beginning, new technologies are changing how it happens and its impact. Gossip today is more permanent and widespread. New and social media technologies are making things once spoken in hallways of high school permanent records. Not only is gossip online more

permanent than in the past, it is much easier to share. The ability to communicate with millions of people simultaneously makes gossip on the web a very dangerous thing. It is gossip of the old on steroids.<sup>39</sup> This makes it more important for adults to educate young people on what gossip is, how it works and how to avoid it. Gossip is of course here to stay. It the job of parents and educators to work to educate and advise on how gossip is magnified by social media.

In 2007 more than one third of teens online said they have been the targets of cyberbullying. This includes a “range of annoying and potentially menacing online activities; threatening messages; having their private emails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumors about them spread online.”<sup>40</sup> In 2010, it is likely these numbers increased parallel to the amount of time teens and young are spending online and with new and social media tools. Many forms of cyberbullying can include gossiping. The two combine to create what can be a lethal to the lives of teens and young people. This is where parents and educators can use experience from their teen years to help advise young people. While they are interacting in a new environment, many of the issues are the same. Adults should be present and active in social media in order to help young people prepare solutions that will work in this new environment.

Sexting is another risk to consider when teens and young people integrate new and social media tools into their lives. Sexting is defined as the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photos through mobile phones.<sup>41</sup> The adoption of mobile phones has given young people a false sense of privacy. 15% of teens ages 12-17 admit to having received a sexually explicit text message.<sup>42</sup> These statistics show that adults must remain a mainstay in how young people use new technologies. While young people know *how* to use new technologies they need to know the implications of this use. Teens are not thinking about what will happen after they send a text message. They aren't planning ahead. Mobile phones should remain in names of parent/guardians. Monitoring the amount of time spent on the phone along with

the number of texts messages sent is a must. These new technologies make lives easier for many. They will continue to be adopted on a growing scale. Adults must educate themselves and young people on where the dangers lie.

At this point I want to touch on what this all means for these young people as they venture into their adult lives. How will teens' use of social and new media change global communication in 10 years? How will this change how teens communicate as adults in intimate settings? These kinds of questions are on the minds of parents, educators and millions of others around the world. Unfortunately, the answers are still very unclear. As boyd says, "At the end of the day, today's teens are not that much different than yesterday's teens as a result of technology."<sup>43</sup> Research will continue to explore how social and new media will change the lives of young people in their adulthood. Today it is clear young people are still more interested in friends than schoolwork, they still gossip, flirt and hang out.<sup>44</sup> Today these acts are occurring more prominently online than in physical interactions. Social and new media are making it easier for teens and young people to communicate and they are doing so on a higher level than ever before. It is certain research is on going to more clearly pin point how new and social media is changing lives as people age immersed in it. Adults and educators must monitor the behavior of teens and young people as they grow using these new technologies.

Adults should not ignore the changes young people are facing in how they communicate. First and foremost it is important for adults to work to appreciate new and social media tools. The definition of appreciation is to understand the nature or meaning or quality or magnitude of something, recognize with gratitude or to be grateful for. They should do so because of the amount of time and energy young people put into these technologies. They hang out, communicate and explore identities through social media. In order to parent and teach effectively adults should know how young people are using social media technologies to grow. A recent advertisement for Coleman camping gear made a clear tie from today's

online social networks to those of the past. Comparing times around the campfire to the foundations of social networking sites. This ad<sup>45</sup> well articulates how older generations interacted in ways different from today's youth. Neither of my parents use social network sites. However they saw this ad and felt an immediate connection to those times. The ways they interacted around those campfires is similar to what happens on social networking and social media sites. Users reminisce on one another's walls, comments about needing to get together more are passed around endlessly. Campfires and social networking sites often exist to connect people. The two really do have a common ground. Adults should be present in conversations about social media because it is part of young peoples' communication development.

Working with social media can mean a number of things for adults. It can be anything from reading about them, actually taking part in them or talking to young people about how they use them. If adults can come to hold some form of appreciation for the power of these tools they will be able to more effectively advise on them. It is my hope that by reading to this point adults can see that the statistics alone are reason enough to appreciate new and social media. Their power in changing how young people communicate is reason enough for adults to join the conversation.

Many adults are struggling to understand how and why young people are using new and social media to such a great extent. Technology plays a very different role in growth and development today than it ever has before. Schools must begin to add curriculum around social and new media. Education on the power in these media is vital. Some educators have begun to accept the importance of new and social media technology. It was the norm in recent years to block all social and new media sites in schools. However, some have realized these free tools can expand students' potential to grow professionally.<sup>46</sup> Education Week magazine recently highlighted this phenomenon. The piece revealed stories of how educators are bringing social networking sites into the classroom. This shows that educators are making steps to more fully integrate social and new media tools into the classroom.

Educators are beginning to appreciate the power of new and social media tools. This must continue.

Social and new media integration into classrooms is a huge step. Educators need to also consider how they talk about and educate teens and young people on these tools. It is not enough to simply bring the tools into the classrooms. Just as students are taught about gossip, bullying and how to write a 5-paragraph essay, they must be taught how to appropriately use social and new media tools. They must be taught about the enduring nature of all the information they post. From the moment a child is born today they have a digital record of their birth. As they grow photos of them are added to Facebook and Flickr without their consent. By the time a person today is of college age a multitude of things are posted online about her that she may never have seen before. Teaching young people about the kind of power all users have in user-generated content forums is important. Teens and young people will want to know why and how photos of them got online. An explanation of how these media exist and grow will be needed. Seeing photos and stories about you that you never knew existed can be scary. Explaining what it means is something educators and parents should be prepared to do. Parents will have varied acceptance rates for their kids social media use. It's comparable to parenting around rated R or PG13 movies. There will always be that kid who isn't allowed to see them. It is also true that kids will likely go home and ask his or her parents why others can watch these movies. This will be the case for those young people who are or not allowed to use social media technologies. This is why it is important for parents and educators to have a clear plan for and reasoning behind how they advise young people on social media.

As social media age, the number of those familiar with its technology will grow. This is likely to change the way the world consumes media and communicates as a global community. Allowing teens and young people expanded access to new and social media technologies is vital. Doing so will allow adults to become familiar with many new technologies. Data shows that if a parent allows their teen to text, 80% of these adults will text.<sup>47</sup> If the kids

are there the parents should be too. It may be hard for parents and educators to decide how to set boundaries around social and new media use. Numerous parents and educators feel they need to be very strict about what sites young people are permitted to visit for entertainment and communication. Some parents begin by looking at the computer and internet as a valuable assets to education today.<sup>48</sup> If adults contemplate the things young people can learn to benefit their health, education and relationships through new and social media they will confirm its place in their lives. This combined with a review of the risks can help parents and educators begin to build a policy about how they will allow its use.

These technologies are changing how young people fill their communicative needs. Parents must themselves take time to learn what sites serve what purposes when used correctly. If they use the sites they are likely to engage in experiences that will allow them to more fully understand and appreciate the tools.<sup>49</sup> There is an assortment of information available online to guide parents and educators in making decisions about social and new media use. danah boyd offers another great bit of advice on the topic, she encourages parents and educators to remember that just because young people usually pick up technologies quicker than their older counterparts it does not mean they will understand them better.<sup>50</sup> If adults use technologies they are more likely to actually think about how they work and what they mean. Young people simply use them. They take them for granted and rarely consider more than that.<sup>51</sup> Adults who employ new and social media technologies in their lives are better prepared to advise young people around them.

Young people will continue to more fully incorporate social media use into their lives. It will change the way they interact with the world around them. Here's the good news: there is little evidence that teens and young people do not care about privacy.<sup>52</sup> They have used new and social media enough to understand it is a powerful tool with many diverse implications for privacy of personal information. Teens and young people across social media have more strict privacy settings than adults. 39% of adults never restrict access to photos posted online, compared to only 21% of teens.<sup>53</sup>

This is a call for adults to join the conversation. Prepare for that conversation. Don't shy away from social and new media. It is not a fad or a hoax. It is a really powerful tool that is changing how young people are learning and growing. Parents and educators have a responsibility to advise young people about social and new media. They have a responsibility to work at appreciating why teens and young people are adopting these new technologies on such a considerable scale. Much of what is taught at home and in the classroom translates to the web. When using social and new media be smart, be safe, think before you speak, treat others as you would like to be treated. Remember it is simple. But as is the case with so many other issues, teens will need guidance from adults in how to use social media. Adults have life experiences they can share about how to navigate the waters of adolescents, whether they are digital or physical.

Teens will not stop using these technologies. Adults must get in the conversation. Learn, teach, listen. Help young people benefit from the amazing technologies they are lucky to be growing up with.

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