

READING

Creating Ourselves Online and in “Real Life”

In 2012, the Pew Research Center surveyed young people to learn about how they represented themselves online. The following are excerpts from interviews Pew conducted with teenagers.

1. Female (age 14): “OK, so I do post a good amount of pictures, I think. Sometimes it's a very stressful thing when it comes to your profile picture. Because one should be better than the last, but it's so hard. So . . . I will message [my friends] a ton of pictures. And be like which one should I make my profile? And then they'll help me out. And that kind of takes the pressure off me. And it's like a very big thing.”
2. Female (age 14): “I think I wouldn't [become Facebook friends with my teachers]. Just because I'm such a different person online. I'm more free. And obviously, I care about certain things, but I'm going to post what I want. I wouldn't necessarily post anything bad that I wouldn't want them to see, but it would just be different. And I feel like in the classroom, I'm more professional [at] school. I'm not going to scream across the room oh my God, I want to dance! Or stuff like that. So I feel if they saw my Facebook they would think differently of me. And that would probably be kind of uncomfortable. So I probably would not be friends with them.”
3. Male (age 18): “Yeah, I go to church and all, so I don't want to post certain things because I don't want the preacher looking at my Facebook. Because I go to church with her. So then if she sees me, yeah, baby, and yeah. I feel like it does affect the way you use social [media]. You have that respect for something or for a group that you're into or anything, like . . . yourself, because maybe that's who you are, but at the same time, you love that group and you never want to disrespect them. So at that point, I feel like it does affect you. Sometimes affecting you doesn't always mean negatively. It can sometime[s] be positively, you know?”
4. Male (age 18): “Yeah, I have some teachers who have connections that you might want to use in the future, so I feel like you always have an image to uphold. Whether I'm a person that likes to have fun and go crazy and go all out, but I don't let people see that side of me because maybe it changes the judgment on me. So you post what you want people to think of you, basically.”

5. Female (age 16): "I deleted it [my Facebook account] when I was 15, because I think it [Facebook] was just too much for me with all the gossip and all the cliques and how it was so important to be—have so many friends—I was just like it's too stressful to have a Facebook, if that's what it has to take to stay in contact with just a little people. It was just too strong, so I just deleted it. And I've been great ever since."

6. Female (age 16): "And our SRO [School Resource Officer], he has information. He can see anything that we do, basically, because he's part of the police department. And so he's talked to my friends and I before. And he was like, anything you do, I can pull up. So if y'all tweet about a party, while you're there, just don't be surprised when it gets busted."¹

¹ Mary Madden and Amanda Lenhart, "What teens said about social media, privacy, and online identity," Pew Research Center, May 21, 2013, available at Pew Research Center website.