Dating: it's complicated

How social media complicates today's teenage relationships

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For many, the first day of high school feels like a completely new chapter of life. You are no longer considered a child, but instead a young adult. The dances, sports, and clubs leave this four year period as an unforgettable experience for students. With the excitement of trying new things, along with the comfort of familiar faces, school quickly becomes a routine for the next 10 months of the year.

Through the beautiful traditions created over time, there have also been detrimental changes specifically over the past couple years in regards to school, one being the exposure to scary behavior in local communities.

Recently it was reported that a 22 year old boy was enrolled in a local high school, White Bear Lake, under fraudulent documentation. It was a shock to many who had known the boy as a senior on the school football team, blending in with the rest of the student body.

Not only did girls at White Bear report having contact with him through social media, but students at Minnehaha also claim to have known him.

"I had known this boy since the summer I entered high school," said a junior girl. "I never would have guessed that he would have faked his identity. It is actually really scary."

Social media is a nuance that has changed the entire realm of relationships over the past decade. It has become incredibly easy to find people over platforms in the past years, especially being in high school where many have an Instagram handle or a SnapChat account.

You do not need to be a detective to find out where an individual attends school or who their mutual friends are. It is unsettling to many how easy it has become to access anyone online and furthermore how fast information circulates.

It seems to be that this easy access and fast communication has widened the gap of stalking behavior and unhealthy relationship patterns.

Many high school girls at Minnehaha have accounted for their interactions with guys over social media with one specific agenda: building relationships. Numerous girls have reported that a boy has added them on SnapChat or followed them on Instagram after a school sports game.

These boys were not mutual friends, but instead strangers who noted jersey numbers of players or jotted down names from the announcer in hopes of a direct connection with someone.

"There have been multiple instances where people I don't know have added me or followed me on social media trying to contact me," said an anonymous basketball player. "Some of these people have been older than me".

Being discovered by older men through this outlet is a new conception that students did not need to worry about as much in the past. Even if a boy was able to find out your name or phone number after a game it is likely that calling a girl would go on a home phone as opposed to directly contacting the player.



Ways to stay safe

"It is important that if someone is trying to connect with you in an inappropriate way you tell your parents or someone who you can trust," said the anonymous basketball player. "You can also just block them".

There are other safety precautions that are essential to take when creating a profile on social media.

These include ensuring that your account is set to private, meaning that you must accept the requests of people who wish to follow you. This ensures that strangers will not be able to access your content or directly message you.

Another important factor is not to have your location on for everyone. This is common, especially on the app Snapchat, where users have the option to share their map with other users.

In order to eliminate the chance of stalking behavior, make sure that your location settings are only turned on for close friends or no one, for that matter.

Another step you could take in order to ensure safety is to not include any personal information (what school you attend, grade levels, or country you live in) in a bio.

Healthy relationships at small schools

Aside from this tactic of trying to spark a relationship, students at Minnehaha note that it can be hard to date someone in such a small school overall.

"Things spread around so fast even if you only tell one person," said junior Joffrey Wilson. "I think it is because our school is so small".

Although it may seem like gossip affects relationships making them seem out of reach, there are ways to avoid the outside noise and focus on maintaining healthy patterns.

Junior Maddie Bowering talks about her healthy relationship experience within the small school modeling good ways to go about interacting with others.

"I think not being on social media a ton is good when in a relationship," said Bowering. "Not everyone knows every single little thing that is going on and it feels more intimate"

Bowering has been dating her boyfriend since freshman year and has found it easy to maintain a healthy relationship even in the era of social media. It seems that not having access to these platforms makes it easier to maintain relationships.

"I think the main way to keep a healthy relationship is to honestly just talk to each other about everything and not be afraid to say what you think or believe in," Bowering said. "Communication, whether it's deep or just talking about your day, is a good way to grow together".

It is important to note that communication does not only mean through social media. It is crucial to talk to each other in person and stay out of drama that comes with posts and follows.

"My biggest advice for someone who wants a long term relationship is to first spend time outside school together, even if it's just for a little bit, and then is to know that you don't have to have every single thing in common with each other," said Bowering. "I think it's more fun to do something the other person really likes and is passionate about because then you get to try new things and you get to celebrate with each other."

Even though social media has impacted relationships in somewhat of a negative way it is important to know how to treat others with kindness and spread positivity.

VOICES in the halls

How do you think social media platforms affect high-school relationships?

