

"Can I have your snap?"

This is how the typical relationship of the 21st century starts. I am careful not to say friendship or romantic pairing, because usually, nothing happens after you share social media usernames. After your handles are shared, they become just another person in the void of hundreds of other stories that cluster your contact list. You may never talk to them ever again. This is what this young generation has been reduced to.

According to the Pew Research Center "Fully 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online "almost constantly."" Because of this, educational institutions have had to implement rules on phone usage. It can be hard to grab hold of the attention of a seventh grade reading math class if she would rather watch Justin Bieber's live stream on Instagram.

I am in a unique position. I remember a before and an after social media took hold of our society.

It's time for family dinner and the nightly news special is on. The news reporter is explaining something about a "social media site." How a company called Instagram sold itself to the social media power Facebook for a billion dollars. "A billion dollars is a hefty sum," my mother comments. "Yeah," my aunt adds, "How big can the app get?" I remember some of my fellow seventh graders buzzing through the halls that day about the special place where they could post pictures and use filters. Nothing else is like that. The next day, I download the Instagram app.

Older individuals often tell people my age, "Back in my day, we had to go to each other's houses to spend time with each other. Now all you young people do is play on your cell phones." I know most people from older generations are counting their lucky stars because they don't have as much anxiety regarding social situations compared to Millennials and Gen Z. They know how to look someone in the eye and ask someone to dance and can answer the telephone. They look down on us like we are all caught up in the vanity of the person who stares back at us through our selfies. But the truth is, vanity has only changed its form.

I used to run around my neighborhood, knocking on doors, asking peers if they wanted to play. I used to call my best friends on landlines and hope they would answer the phone instead of their fathers. I went to school where teachers scolded us for chewing gum or having our hoods up during class instead of worrying about iPhones being out during lessons and headphones tucked in our ears to drown the lesson out.

But everything changed during the middle of middle school. At the time it just seemed like turning the corner from childhood into becoming a pre-teen. Everything was more clique-ish. We felt more pressure to fit in. "Did you get that new Playstation game? Do you have a Vera Bradley backpack?" When winter time comes around, "Are you wearing Ugg boots?" All of that was normal. Then came: "Do you have an ipod? Let's iMessage. After dinner we can FaceTime."

Next came the fights. The subtexts. Instead of having a conversation with a friend as to why they offended you, your communication could be limited to the press of a "block" button. Then came the creation of hate accounts created by anonymous users, posting trashy comments about a particular person. No one knows what to do besides hope it doesn't happen to them next.

"I just wish all of my friends liked each other," I explain to my friend Lily over facetime. "I like your friends, Vera." She protests. "You don't like Ashley," I protest. "Ashley blocked me over the summer for no reason. I don't know how why, all I did was like the picture of you two together." I pause. I know Lily is right.

It's not all bad, I promise you. In my case it wasn't. Through creating my Instagram in 2012, during the seventh grade, I discovered music. I discovered style (Pop-punk culture is a riot, but didn't we all go through a scene phase?). There was community online. I spent hours upon hours video chatting my best friends. We laughed until our stomachs ached.

It's eighth grade and my friends and I have just finished performing our dance show. Afterwards, everyone takes photos with their friends. A lone, popular, severe announces, "Selfie!" Immediately a flock of friends swarms around her, each girl pushing their faces close to make sure they get in frame. All are sporting the infamous "duck face." Because if there isn't a picture during an event or hang out, it didn't happen. And if you aren't in the picture, you weren't there.

It was just different. Different in a way that seems unreal. Facebook and MySpace existed before my time, but they weren't as intimate. Weren't as unique as Instagram. As Twitter. As Tumblr. As Snapchat. According to USA Today, many users find Instagram more personable and trustworthy than Facebook. Instagram's numbers have risen while many other social media's users have remained stagnant such as LinkedIn and Pinterest. Around 35 percent of American adults use Instagram. For me, for us, social media became our lives. None of us could have possibly seen it coming. We were sharing our lives for the world to see, but in reality, it was a few of our peers. It was a place for laughs, for funny pictures of cats (we didn't have videos on Instagram back in my day) for "Just Girly Things" to be shared between tweens.



I'm thirteen years old, scrolling through Instagram through the days where filters form a thin layer over the insecurities that are being attempted to cover up. I hit the explore page and I see lyrics written in cursive on a blue background. "But I guess that I can live without you but without you I'll be miserable at best." I instantly become drawn to the words. I check the comments and discover that the song is by a band named Mayday Parade. Years later, my friends and I go to a signing that Mayday Parade has held at a local mall. We finally get to meet the people who have been singing in our ears and who have brought us together.

The internet has divides; it provides teens with a place to hide. Facebook is a place for adolescents to share scholarly accomplishments with their parents, friends and family. Teenagers may receive congratulations for making the Honor Roll from Aunt Tina and Uncle Paul on Facebook, while they're flooding their personal Instagram with rampant thoughts of depression and anxiety.

Now our pastime is filled with scrolling through pictures of other people. People too perfect to possibly exist fill our timelines, encompassing the screen with beauty, too edited to be true, but still achieving its purpose: to fill its beholder with envy and lust. Just years before, when we celebrated our pictures reaching 11 likes, we now scowl if our selfies don't reach 100 before the first hour. Using apps like Facetune, we erase away our blemishes and pray for positive comments. We hope it's enough to please the person we want to start talking too. Maybe, if we're really lucky, that special person will slide through in our DM's and tell us that we have a nice butt, or pair of boobs, or set of abs, or whatever body part is trending during that month.

A friend goes to the hospital because of damage to her organs. Trying to satisfy unrealistic expectations is the primary cause. She overworked herself, using the compulsive behavior of exercise to motivate the obsession over body image. That obsession fueled by the hate she has received her whole life for being overweight. People applaud her for losing weight—and oh, so quick—but they don't see the countless hours she spends in the gym instead of going out with her friends. They don't see the meals missed. They don't see the permanent strain that she has placed on her liver.

Now when friends reach out to her, she is afraid to respond. Using social media as an outlet, she shares her innermost thoughts on a personal Instagram that friends fail to comment on. She sees the same things that I see when I glance at my phone. Workout regimens, tips on how to cut calories, before and after photos, peopling smiling through their hunger. Our society pushed her too hard.

This isn't just a problem for Gen Z and Millennials. Pew Research Center has measured an increase of 7% in social media use from 2005 to 2015 in adults of all ages. Two thirds of adults are on some form of social media. Parents display their children's accomplishments on Facebook for their neighbors to see and be jealous of. During elections, adults go on rants about their political beliefs. Even President Trump heavily utilized Twitter for his presidential campaign.

It's mostly the middle aged men on Twitter sparking the fights. Once I saw a common guy bickering with a licensed Gynecologist regarding the correct usage of the word "vulva." The man insisted that the correct terminology was "vagina," even after the gynecologist tweeted him back a diagram explaining the differences. On the internet, a doctor is on the same playing field as the average person. Education status doesn't seem to matter anymore if you have a platform of followers to back you up.

It is hard not to succumb to the urges. The socially obsessive culture is threaded in the world around us. Twitter is a great place to learn about important news such as hate crimes and protests that popular media tends to ignore, but there are also the depressing stories and the closed minded bickerers that come along with the platform. I find myself quickly scrolling past offensive jokes on Instagram, wondering why I am spending my time mindlessly observing the positively skewed versions of lives of people that I haven't spoken a word to in years.

It is easy to live in the present and not remember the past. Snapchat holds thousands of memories from the past year, and it's easy to access those pictures from your phone instead of digging through the few Kodak images your mom keeps in the basement from when you were six. I have to be mindful of my interactions, to remind myself that I can call someone on the phone every once in a while instead of relying on the monotonous tone of texts and emojis, to take a selfie without a filter to acknowledge what I actually look like.

So now, what is our relationship going to end up like? Are you going to start a streak with me? Am I going to receive a blank picture with the words "good morning streaks" written on it every day at 7am on your way to school, the same plain figure sent to the other 120 people in your contact list? Will you respond if I send you a pic, asking how your day was, personalized with your name so you know it's only being sent to you? Or will you only care about increasing the number "75" next to my name?

Or, if you aren't a streaks person, will you make the first move? Will you send a picture of your face with a caption "Wassup," or will you send a picture of your dorm room wall? Should I wait the socially acceptable amount of time before I respond with a chat message, or should I come on strong, responding a minute after, when I actually receive the notification.

Maybe this doesn't make sense to some of my readers. It will make complete sense to others. But this? This is just a glimpse into the world of the young adult. Of the child that is born into the world knowing only this. This is what they must keep up with. Getting enough likes on the picture of their boyfriend as they share a one month anniversary. Otherwise, their love isn't real.

To be plain and simple. None of it makes sense. Nothing ever does when you're in the midst of a social media flux where lies and the truth are indistinguishable.

Anyways, add me on snap :)

