

Introduction: Social Media and Ourselves is produced by Diana Daly of the University of Arizona School of Information.

Diana Daly: Digital memory. It's perfect. Thanks to technology, we remember so much more than we used to, and that's good. Or is it?

Audio Clip 1: Things you post on the internet are there forever.

Audio Clip 2: These pictures from when we were younger on Instagram-

Audio Clip 3: This very Instagram account that I'd forgotten the password to.

Diana Daly: These younger, less evolved, glimpses of people get slapped up onto our screens years later.

Audio Clip 4: -looked really bad. I'm like embarrassed.

Audio Clip 5: I was mortified that they would go and tell somebody that.

Audio Clip 6: We'll forever have embarrassing videos of me on the internet.

Audio Clip 7: When I saw the picture, all the memories came back.

Dr. Schonberger: You will remember.

Diana Daly: Welcome back to Social Media and Ourselves, where we listen to humans' recorded experiences with social media at the center of their lives. Nearly 200 college students have called or emailed their stories, as of today. One of the themes I've heard a lot about is timelessness, the theme of today's episode. These are young people who've grown up using social networking sites. Instagram was around when they were in middle school or even elementary school. Think about that. You're growing up, moving beyond the outfits and the habits that were part of your identity when you were a child or a tween, but it's all still on there. And sometimes it rears its literally ugly head.

Student 1: My story is when I was in high school, my best friend had these pictures from when we were younger. When we were younger, I had my hair dyed several different colors in elementary school. For my birthday, he posted a picture of us together on Instagram. Everyone, all my friends, saw it in high school, and everyone at the high school saw it, and it was really embarrassing.

Student 2: When I was around sixth grade, I had an Instagram account, that I'd forgotten the password to. So, I ended up never using it again until I went to a new school. It was put on public, so everyone could see it. Pretty embarrassing, because I was young and really didn't know what I was posting at the time. There was a

lot of selfies and other personal photos that I didn't want people seeing. And people found out that I had it.

Seamus: When I was in middle school, my friend was the creator of an Instagram account based around lacrosse stringing and basically anything related to the sport. I joined in, and we posted videos and pictures about lacrosse and sold sticks to make a small profit. At this time, I thought this was super cool, and I was really proud of this. But, looking back at it, I realized that I sounded like a nervous seven-year-old girl. I made \$25 and will forever have embarrassing videos of me on the internet.

Diana Daly: That last student who spoke was Seamus. He said we could use his name, and when he said how proud he was of that video, well, who wouldn't be proud of that in elementary school or middle school?

Diana Daly: I was proud of things at that age, too, like these MC Hammer pants I had. They were black and white striped, and they flared up from these tiny ankles up to these enormously wide legs, so that the crotch swung down below the knees. Around that time, also, there was this blazer, I think it was inspired by Miami Vice. It had these jaunty shoulders, and I thought I looked so hot in it, but it was so ugly, my older sister actually hid it from me in this basement closet.

Diana Daly: Oxford professor Viktor Mayer-Schönberger writes that digital memory is like snapshots taken over our lifetimes, super imposed over each other, but without the perspective of time. People think digital memory is perfect, but it's actually very selective and flawed, precisely because it is presented as being perfect and comprehensive.

Diana Daly: Childhood is a time of allowance. A time for the people who love you to indulge you, to laugh affectionately at your mistakes, because they have these long, intimate memories of you. But something different happens when these younger, less evolved glimpses of people get slapped up onto our screens years later. There's none of that loving context that time provides. Our evolution is missing from that array.

Diana Daly: The nature of social media, its persistent and sometimes permanent nature, is that everyone has lots of less evolved versions of themselves now, hanging around mugging for stupid selfies and wearing terrible hair and Don Johnson blazers.

Diana Daly: Imagine it like a little brother or a sister, but it's a younger you, liable to pop up online anywhere, at any time. On Instagram, there's no basement or closet for posts or photos to be hidden and forgotten. And there's no sympathy for the more naive selves we all were before being who we are now. Growing up requires a lot of focus, and managing these social media reproductions adds to that load.

- Student 1: I didn't want a lot of people to see that picture of me when I really didn't enjoy how I looked at the time when I was younger. And once everyone saw it, they all kind of made fun of me a little bit until I finally got them to take down the picture.
- Student 2: So when my friends did find this account and started sending me photos, I was mortified. Luckily, I got out of that situation because it was just my friend. I pulled them to the side, and told them not to send it to anyone.
- Student 1: Looking back at this, makes me truly understand the fear that people try to express when they tell you that the things you post on the internet are there forever.
- Diana Daly: In these recordings, we can hear that young people work hard to manage their identities on social media. And they can be much smarter than older generations with it. For example, in using Snapchat, which doesn't store as much information as other platforms older folks use, like Facebook. But there's still so much out there to curate. It's a lot of work that makes it hard for anyone doing it to focus on the present.
- Diana Daly: I want to go back to Viktor Mayer-Schönberger. His 2011 book was called Delete-The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age. He argues that forgetting is important, and we've outsourced remembering to technologies, but not forgetting. Forgetting helps us remain present, so we only carry with us the information and emotions that we need to move forward, and even those don't stay totally intact. We reshape our memories into forms that serve us. Here's Schönberger at the Keble London Lecture in 2012.
- Dr. Schonberger: Through our capacity to forget, we rid ourselves of excess memory. What has long been past fades in our mind. Thus, we pay our tribute to time and depreciate what is no longer relevant to our present.
- Dr. Schonberger: But because forgetting is so built into us, we humans never had to develop the cognitive capacity to deliberately forget and to depreciate our memories and to make them fade. If I tell you something, and then I say, "You must forget this now," you will remember.
- Diana Daly: What he says is funny because it's ironic. But with today's technologies in play, it's also an imbalance in our tech-augmented memory systems. Our human organisms don't have control over our memory, really, neither the remembering nor the forgetting. We've adopted helpers for the remembering in Instagram, Facebook, Google, Apple, and many, many other unseen collectors of our data. We have no helpers in the forgetting, though.
- Diana Daly: So when technology-aided memories bubble up to our view from our contacts or from algorithms, our own systems of memory can get hijacked. We can't unsee those things, and we can't stop the memories from kicking back in. We

cannot deliberately forget, which is a problem when you need to forget, when it's not serving you to remember in the same way.

- Diana Daly: We have one more student's story that, more than any of the others, shows how important it is to forget and to reshape our memories so we can live with them.
- Student 3: My mom is an activist, and she likes to post on social media a lot, specifically Facebook. She likes to post about me and my sister and, of course, a lot of other friends. Let me just say...
- Diana Daly: What the student says next is that he was a survivor of a mass shooting last year... at school.
- Student 3: A month after that, we had a walkout for it. For the walkout, I made a green sign, and I wore a shirt that said, "Make art, not war." On the day of the walkout, my mom took a picture of me, with me holding the sign in front of me. A few weeks ago, she decided to post it on Facebook. When I saw the picture, all the memories came back. At this point, I've left it all behind me, I've moved on, I'm still moving on.
- Student 3: But just when I saw it, it sort of just sent me back. So, I asked my mom to take it off and, of course, she understood where I was coming from. So, she took it off Facebook. I'm really lucky that it was my mom who posted it, because I realize that it's really hard to control what gets posted on social media when it's not you who's posting it.
- Student 1: That was my story on social media. Now it's done, and I'm not embarrassed by it anymore.
- Audio clip 8: That's my story. It could have gotten much worse. Thank you for listening.
- Seamus: And now I ask myself, as a 19 year old, "Was this worth the \$25?"
- Audio Clip: Where we going?
- Audio Clip: Lacrosse.
- Diana's Sister: MC Hammer pants?
- Diana Daly: Yeah.
- Diana's Sister: My memory is so fuzzy. I remember there was a famous person named MC Hammer, and that's about it.
- Diana Daly: All right, and then how about my blazer?

Diana's Sister: I think I remember you in a blazer that you used to wear a lot.

Diana Daly: Yes. Do you remember having feelings about the blazer?

Diana's Sister: I don't remember having feelings about the blazer. I can try and think about what my feelings are now, but in my memories, then maybe that's a form of remembering.

Diana Daly: Sure. Like, why do you think you would have hidden it from me?

Diana's Sister: I can remember at that age, I can probably imagine I was, hyper aware of anything that I thought wasn't cool being connected to me.

Diana Daly: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. I mean, but it's interesting because it was me that was wearing it.

Diana's Sister: Yeah, but you were my sister.

Big MC: Can't touch this. Can't touch this. Can't touch this. Can't touch this. My-my-my-my music gets me so hard, makes me say, "Oh my Lord, thank you for blessing me with a mind to rhyme and two hype feet." It feels good, when you know you're down, a super dope homeboy from the Oaktown. I'm known as such, and this is a beat you can't touch. I told you, homeboy, yeah, that's how we're living, and you know. Look at my eyes, man.

Diana Daly: This episode of Social Media and Ourselves was produced by me, Diana Daly. Warm thanks to the students who shared their stories, to the musicians who made their work available, including David Szesztay, Podington Bear, Chad Crouch, Kai Engel, and Big MC, to Dr. Viktor Mayer-Schonberger, and to my sister. You were so right about that outfit. Thank you for caring.