

YOU FOLLOW YOUR KID'S INSTAGRAM, BUT WHAT ABOUT THEIR FINSTA?

CREDIT KAVITA VARMA-WHITE (today.com)

Teenagers know the kiss of death to any popular digital trend is when adults start using it.

Just look at Facebook, which became uncool the minute teens started getting friend requests from mom, dad and great aunt Jean.

When asked what social platforms they most use, in a study of nearly 1,500 middle and high school students, 62 percent of teens said they use Instagram while 58 percent use Snapchat. (Texting was most popular, used by 98 percent of the teens surveyed.) Facebook usage was merely 7 percent, says social media coach Laura Tierney, founder of The Social Institute, which conducted the study in September. Tierney likens Facebook to "the mall on a Friday night. If your parents show up, you won't go near it."

As more parents follow their kids to the mall of Instagram, it seems likely it's the next social media app teens will dump. Funny thing is, they kind of already have.

While we've been hearting their perfectly filtered selfies on Instagram, teens have been busy populating their alternate, fake Instagram, or "Finsta," with content that ranges from utterly silly to unapologetically rebellious to unabashedly real. These accounts usually are associated with

a clever pseudonym and bio line, different than their real Instagram (what they refer to as "Rinsta"). The accounts are locked, or set to private, so that audiences are more exclusive, usually a niche group of friends. Some teens have multiple

free and sweatpants). For all, it's a side they *don't* want certain entities — including colleges, sororities, future employers — to see.

Ultimately, using Finsta is a way for teens to manage their own personal PR campaign. And they are pretty savvy at it. They can control the picture-perfect profile they show on real Instagram while sharing their "this-is-the-real-me" personality on Finsta.



Finstas, a way to connect with different friend groups. My 18-year-old daughter, a college freshman, has used Instagram for years but doesn't have a Finsta. (I had to ask, since I didn't know.) I discovered the world of Finsta, however, after noticing my daughter's friend used her Finsta name in a comment. I went to her page to find not only a different profile picture but a cheeky bio line, a mea culpa that says it all: "Sorry mom." (Instagram bios are public, even if the accounts are private.)

The obvious reason teens have a Finsta is to get away from prying parents. And while their usage of it varies, it's clear they use it to show a different side of themselves. For some, it's a side where mischievous or illegal behavior (think expletives and red Solo cups) is center stage. For some, it's the silly side they only want close friends to see. For some, it's a more vulnerable side (think makeup-

Allison Fannin, a mom of three from Lubbock, Texas, follows her 18-year-old daughter Skylar's Finsta. A freshman in college, Skylar started her Finsta her final year of high school. Compared to her regular Instagram, which has more than 1,900 followers, her Finsta, with the username "Whyler," has less than 50. "It was a place to show her funny, less serious side," says Fannin. "She was very active in her school, and said, 'I don't want everyone to see how goofy I can be.'" With college sorority rush on the horizon, Skylar suspended her Finsta account last spring, her mom said. "She heard that as soon as they get your name, they start scouting you out. So she temporarily suspended it on her own."

Thirteen-year-old Gabby Walker of Flower Mound, Texas, says her Finsta is "lame" compared to some of her friends, because she

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FROM MARTINE...

I hope this finds you well and FINALLY enjoying some sunshine! What a long, long winter we've had. I hope that each of you can take the time to come gather on Monday for lunch and discussion. Let's hear what you've done this year; suggestions, recommendations,

things that's went well and things that didn't. This is such a hectic time of year that enjoying lunch, conversation and support may be just what you need! I hope to see all of you there at noon!



FINSTA (CONT....)

doesn't post a lot and when she does, it's just selfies with goofy poses and silly faces. Her real Instagram account, which she's had since she was 10, is where she posts pictures of her hanging out with friends, her dog Beluga, and snaps from her volleyball matches. (The official age requirement for Instagram is 13.) Her mom, Melissa Walker, originally thought Finsta meant "fun Instagram." Walker says her daughter, an aspiring college athlete, is already very aware that college coaches will look at her social media. A 17-year-old senior, Katrina Vogel of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was recently in her school's homecoming court, has a part-time job, and is knee-deep in the college admissions process. She has a Finsta, as do her close friends, who she follows and allows to follow her. Her rule of thumb for what to post on Finsta: "I only really post what I know will not come back and bite me."

In explaining the difference between how she uses her Rinsta and Finsta, Katrina

says her real Instagram — which has about 1,300 followers, more than 4 times her Finsta following — is like a business card. "If I meet someone once, on normal Instagram I will follow them right away. But I'd never give my Finsta the first time I meet them. They might see a funny picture and think, 'This girl is crazy.'"

Katrina's mom, Kelly Vogel, knows her daughter has a Finsta. (When asked how many followers Katrina has on Finsta, Vogel looked it up and responded via text: "Wow! 282 on Finsta. Very selective I see!") With three kids, Vogel says "it's exhausting to keep up with their social media." But she doesn't worry about it because she knows Katrina is "a careful poster," Vogel says. "She knows it will affect everything she's worked tirelessly for."

Tierney, founder of the Durham, North Carolina-based The Social Institute, which helps teens, parents and schools navigate social media, says the Finsta trend definitely skews toward girls because of their need for peer approval, though boys use it too. "I think girls are

much more likely to want that approval and camaraderie with their BFFs. Finstas allow that," Tierney says.

Tierney likens Finsta to bygone days when kids would write notes to friends at school, then put them in a shoe box and hide it under the bed so parents couldn't find them. "Now all of that is technology," she says. "Kids are doing it to create an account your parents cannot Google and easily find you. Finstas are no different than hiding those notes from our parents." So are there dangers to having a Finsta account? Tierney doesn't think so, as long as teens are thoughtful about what they are sharing. When she speaks to teens about posting on social media, Tierney tells them to imagine they are at a national sports press conference. They are LeBron James speaking into the microphone to reporters and TV cameras that are recording everything they say. "Everything you say is like clicking send on your phone to post on Finsta. You are talking into that microphone and everyone is listening."