

# Hey, kids — colleges see your social-media profile

By [Naomi Schaefer Riley](#)

January 18, 2016 | 9:29pm

“None of the capabilities enabled by social media are new,” insists Danah Boyd in her book “It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens.”

Boyd, who wants us all to calm down about teens’ use of Facebook, Twitter and the like, notes that if you wanted to spread rumors about someone else before our modern age, it was pretty easy to do: “Messages printed in the school newspaper or written on bathroom walls have long been visible.”

Well, yes, to certain people. But there’s a big difference between having your secrets exposed to high school classmates and having them exposed to, say, college admissions officers.

And that’s exactly what’s happening. According to a survey by Kaplan Test Prep released last week, 40 percent of admissions officers report checking applicants’ social media when they’re weighing decisions about who should get an acceptance letter. That’s four times the percentage who checked in 2008.

About a third of these admissions officials say they’ve Googled an applicant to learn more about them. And those are only the ones who admit it.

Perhaps this seems perfectly natural. After all, who among us hasn’t met someone new — a date, a co-worker, a friend — and decided to find out a little more about them online?

What’s amazing is that college admissions officers already have an entire dossier on their applicants. Not only do they know GPAs and lists of extracurricular activities, but in many cases they have access to extensive financial records and personal family details.

So why do they also need to check out teens' social-media pages?

Sometimes they're looking to merely verify the information a student has submitted — whether it's awards received or information about a disciplinary or criminal record. Sometimes they're visiting social-media pages at a student's invitation.

Indeed, 42 percent of admissions officers say that students have asked them to come look at evidence of a special talent through their Facebook page or something similar.

Finally, there's what Kaplan refers to as "admissions sabotage," in which admissions officers "say they occasionally get anonymous tips about prospective students pointing them towards inappropriate behavior. They'll sometimes dig online to see if it has merit."

No admissions officer is "digging in" to find whether the graffiti on bathroom walls has merit.

It turns out that it's not just applicants for professional positions who have to worry about the inappropriate pictures friends have posted to their Facebook pages. It's also 15-year-olds.

Sadly, despite the warnings of parents and teachers, many kids pay no attention. When Boyd asked one student about the possibility of teachers looking at her Facebook page, the girl responded: "Why are they on my page? I wouldn't go to my teacher's page and look at their stuff, so why should they go online to look at my stuff?"

Suddenly, the generation of over-sharers doesn't like it when people start peeking over their shoulders.

Like so many other aspects of modern life, social media has changed the college admissions process.

But social media and college admissions have really created a perfect storm here. The admissions process — particularly the essay portion of the

applications — has become more and more geared toward sharing the most personal details of one's life: the struggles you've had to overcome, the abuse you've suffered.

The essays ask students, who generally don't know much about the world, to expound at length about their worldviews. Since college has become a four-year exercise in navel gazing, the kids might as well get off to the right start.

And what better way to do that than through social media? As Howard Gardner and Katie Davis point out in their book, "The App Generation," about "30-40% of ordinary conversation consists of people talking about themselves, whereas around 80 percent of social media updates are self-focused."

The authors say they don't know "which direction the arrow of causality points," that is, "Does Internet use cause narcissism, or do narcissistic people use the Internet in distinctive ways?"

One thing seems certain, though. Spending more time on social media is not doing anything to diminish the belief among teenagers that the world revolves around them. And the college admissions process is only encouraging them further.

While high school students may have the impression that they'll be rewarded with acceptance to the Ivy League for sharing more, the truth is that it may come back to haunt them.