



# THIS ACCOUNT IS PRIVATE

Recent trends in creating private Instagram accounts cause cyberbullying issues

BY HANNAH LEE, SHAYON MORADI AND CHETANA RAMAIYER

She made the private Instagram account at the end of her sophomore year. At first, her private account was a place for her to post photos that did not make the cut for her public account. But that soon changed after she was targeted on someone else's private Instagram. To maintain her anonymity, we will refer to her as Kelsey.

"I could see the comments people were saying [about me], and every time a new comment came up it would just hurt even more," Kelsey said.

He made the private Instagram account during winter break of his junior year. At first, the account was a place for him to post funny pictures of his friends. But that soon changed after he made the post that targeted Kelsey. To maintain his anonymity, we will refer to him as Bradley.

"I'm a mean person," Bradley said. "[Privates are popular because] people can throw shade like that. People don't have any regrets because usually the other person doesn't find out."

Many other students like Kelsey and Bradley have private Instagram accounts. Commonly known as a "finsta," a private Instagram is a secondary account where students can post photos that they do not

want to show on their public account, which typically has more followers. In a survey of 433 students, 39 percent said that they have a private Instagram account.

Student advocate Richard Prinz explains that with privacy comes a sense of power that could be abused at times.

"There's not that much that's private anymore," Prinz said. "Sometimes people think 'Oh I'd think it was funny,' but they're not really taking the perspective of the other person."

And that's exactly what happened to

Kelsey. She was sitting in her living room in the middle of a heated argument with someone over text. As a mutual friend of the two, Bradley decided to post about the argument. Kelsey continued to go back and forth in the argument, when she was sent a screenshot of Bradley's post by another friend. For purposes of anonymity, we will not describe the post in detail.

"The picture wasn't as bad. I know the effect wouldn't have been as bad as it was if it was just the photo, but the caption was a bit extreme. I regret it," Bradley said. "I lost a good friend in the process."

Kelsey had seen these types of posts before, but never thought she would be

the target of one of them. Immediately turning off her phone, she left her house, telling her parents that she was going out for a walk. She found a place to sit down in a secluded area and once again turned on her phone, now flooded with notifications.

"It wasn't a very long post, but I kept looking at it. Maybe I thought something would change about [it]," Kelsey said.

According to Instagram's website, the company wants "to foster a positive, diverse community." They intend to "remove content that targets private individuals to degrade or shame them."

Kelsey did not feel justified reporting the post, so it stayed up and was only taken down the next day by the owner of the account. By that point, many people had already seen the post. The following week at school, Kelsey had to face many of her peers who commented on the post.

"It sticks in your head, and you're [constantly] reminded of [the post]," Kelsey said. "It makes you feel very anxious and because you've seen that [people] can post these things about you, you don't know what else could happen."

Kelsey described how most of the things that people commented expressed amusement towards Bradley's post.

"I feel like a lot of shade these days goes around disguised [with humor]," Kelsey said. "What about the people involved who are hurt? How can you just laugh at that?"

Assistant principal Nico Flores gave a

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ANONYMOUS SOURCE

# COUNT IS DATE



ILLUSTRATIONS | SARA ENTEZAR AND MICHELLE WONG

presentation titled “The Power of Words” in the beginning of the school year following several incidents related to cyberbullying last year. He explained that social media gives students the courage to say unkind things about their peers. Prinz, however, described how the presentation was not effective for some students.

“It’s funny how you talk about the ‘Power of Words,’ but still, things go on,” Prinz said. “Some students commented [on it] and it sounded like they didn’t tune into that assembly. They just made fun of it. It takes time.”

Flores acknowledged that the presentation might have not reached everyone present. However, he believes that presentations like these are beneficial to the student body.

“I think it would be naive of me to think that one 45-minute

presentation on cyberbullying would instantly change the the entire [student body], so I think it’s our job to continue to have these conversations,” Flores said. “I think we’re headed in the right direction to help support everyone in our community.”

Although the specific uses for each

person vary, private Instagrams allow students to post pictures while avoiding the pressure to display more polished aspects of their lives according to Tsai.

“I [can] post [a lot of] extra pictures that won’t spam people’s news feeds,” senior Juliane Tsai said. “The freedom of [a private account] is just fun. You also have freedom on your main account, but you

just don’t want to be that one person that posts 40 million thousand photos a day.”

In contrast to main Instagram accounts, private Instagrams are typically used to display content to only their friends, allowing students to post more personal aspects of their lives.

Tsai first made her private Instagram account to document her life in a more lighthearted manner, as opposed to her public Instagram which she uses to

document bigger events such as vacations and outings with her friends. While many students only let their close friends follow their private accounts, Tsai is not selective about who is able to follow her account as she feels that both of her accounts reflect the same personality. In addition, Tsai has

never made posts targeting specific people.

“I post funny videos that I have and sometimes I even post covers,” Tsai said. “I also post birthday posts and concert videos and sunsets and photos of what I like, like cream cheese bagels.”

While the uses of private Instagrams vary, Kelsey describes how the privacy of these secondary Instagrams allows cyberbullying to take place. With the popularity of social media platforms, cyberbullying has significantly increased in the last decade. According to the the Cyberbullying Research Center, which has collected data from over than 20,000 middle and high school students since 2002, cyberbullying has increased by 20 percent in the last 10 years.

After a while, Kelsey recovered from the incident and continues to use her private Instagram, although she is much more conscious of what she posts. While Bradley continues to follow other accounts that target specific people, he does not post anything with intentions to bully others.

“I’ve posted less now because I just feel like, even though it is a private account, [my posts] will be scrutinized, mostly by myself,” Bradley said. “[Private posts are] not really meant for the person to view it, so they can just keep on living their lives. It’s really [messed] up, but you know, it’s high school.”<sup>1</sup>

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STUDENT ADVOCATE  
RICHARD PRINZ