TEENAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TIKTOK AND ARTMAKING:

IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY ART PEDAGOGY

by

SARAH LIVANT

(Under the Direction of Christina Hanawalt)

ABSTRACT

This applied project investigates teenagers' relationships to and perceptions of content creation on social media, specifically the short-form video app TikTok, in relation to teenagers' perceptions of artmaking in school and at home to gain a better understanding of the relationship between online content creation and school-based artmaking. New understandings are applied to suggested pedagogical strategies which may be implemented within secondary art classrooms to more fully engage teens' desire for creative making.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

One afternoon about seven years ago, I was standing on the corner in lower Manhattan, out on an errand for my arts nonprofit job, trying to figure out where the hole was in the sole of my cheap Payless flat. I was on the phone with a dear friend of mine, Phi, who was in Baltimore completing a master's degree and certification to be a teacher. "I just don't think I could stand being a teacher," I said into my phone, repeating what I'd always said since I was young enough for adults to regularly ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up. "I don't want to teach all the boring traditional art stuff I'd be required to teach. Like, what if I want to teach about how Vine[2] is art?"

"You *can* teach about Vine," Phi said. "You'd just need to make sure your curriculum is relevant, that's all."

This moment changed my entire understanding of how education works, what education is for, and whether I could be a teacher. I *could* be a teacher, and I *could* teach about what I felt was missing in "regular" art education: the inclusion of and participation in the culture of explosive creativity of online short form video spaces.

Over the next several years, as Vine died (Roettgers, 2016) and TikTok rose to fill the vacuum, I was accepted into an excellent Master of Art Education program, completed coursework and field placements, earned my certification, and all the while this idea stayed with me. I wondered why there was such a disconnect between the pedagogical practices of secondary

[2] An early short form video platform.

art education and the massively productive outpouring of creative content being produced and consumed by teenagers on social media. This lingering question became a significant pedagogical lens for me, through which, in part, I developed my learning and practice as an art educator. Play and playful learning was another such lens, relating to my firm belief that play is vital to cultivating the creativity and determination needed to make art of any kind. I held that social media, at its best, is a place of playful creativity, discovery, and growth, and I wondered why play seemed to disappear in secondary art education.

I began this research in the spring of 2021 with a literature review. I was determined to gain a fundamental working knowledge of the then current theoretical and practical attitudes towards play and social media in the field of art education, and to identify gaps in research regarding these topics. Because I was, and still am, primarily interested in secondary art education, and because the ghost of Vine haunts me in the form of TikTok, I put special focus on these topics as related to teenagers and TikTok use. Chapter 2 of this paper is an expanded and updated version of that review.

I did my student teaching placements in Spring 2022. I was infinitely lucky to be placed at a high school where my mentor teachers were supportive of my research and permitted me to carry out my study during my brief eight weeks with them, which I did. This high school, a rural public school in Georgia, had about 1600 students enrolled. The student body was about 15% Hispanic, 8% Black, 3% Asian, 4% mixed/other races, and 70% White (*U.S. News High School Rankings*, 2022), with only about 10% of students eligible for free lunch (*Common Core of Data*, 2023). The building itself was new, having been opened just the semester before I was placed there. The school felt calm and airy to me, even during the chaos of morning arrivals, class changes, and afternoon dismissals. The art rooms were bright, uncluttered, and clean—even the

ceramics room was practically spotless. The art students took daily responsibility in maintaining the tidiness of their classrooms. I was consistently impressed by the maturity and diligence of the students I worked with during my placement and my research.

The plan was to analyze the data over summer and graduate in early Fall 2022 before I began my first teaching job. For a variety of reasons, that did not happen. The crushing challenges of being a first-year teacher left little if any time to make progress on this research. In the summer of 2023, after teaching high school art for two semesters, I returned to this project a changed person. I felt like a stranger looking at someone else's research, though I recognized the writing as my own. My focus on play in education had diminished significantly. My understanding of TikTok on a personal level had fundamentally shifted. In this report, one will find evidence of my "old" and "new" viewpoints intermingled. I have worked to harmonize the two outlooks as much as possible.

Owned by the Beijing-based technology company ByteDance, "TikTok is a mobile app that allows users to make and share short videos" (Nam, 2020) including the options to "duet" or "stitch" other users' videos, with users aged 16-24 making up about 60% of the total user base, which includes more than 150 million American users (McDonald & Soo, 2023). TechCrunch reports, "U.S. kids and teens [in 2021] spent an average of 99 minutes per day on TikTok" (Perez, 2022). The app uses an algorithm[3] to feed the users videos based on previously watched, liked, or searched-for videos, and through this, users "are invited to engage with thousands of other users globally" (Nam, 2020, p. 104). The Algorithm is unique to each user. It creates a personalized feed of videos for the "For You" page which users see as soon as the app opens.

[3] Hereinafter, TikTok's algorithm will be referred to as the Algorithm. TikTok describes the Algorithm as a "recommendation system that delivers suggested videos personalized for each user" ("What is the 'For You' feed?," 2023) but is considered by the user base to be suspiciously unclear in how it works.

Even TikTok itself recommends “curating” a “personalized For You feed” by interacting more with content a user finds interesting so the Algorithm may learn about a user’s “content tastes” (*How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou*, 2020).

I do want to be clear: I am a *heavy* TikTok user, currently averaging about three hours a day in the app, according to my iPhone’s Screen Time report. I joined TikTok in November 2018, about three months after the app became available in the U.S. (Liao & Shu, 2020) and have been a daily user since. Before joining TikTok, I had been an avid consumer of Vine videos. I am fascinated by the development of creative expression and culture surrounding short form video as a medium and as a social space, and the complex interplay between the users and the monumental mysterious Algorithm. I find the Algorithm to be a distinct aspect of what makes TikTok research so difficult—each user’s feed is tailored to their preferences as determined by a closely guarded content curation formula. If I were to scroll through my TikTok For You Page as any student scrolled through theirs, the chance that we would see the same videos, or even the same type of content, is nil. In my opinion, ascertaining what any given demographic regularly sees requires direct access to that demographic. Therefore, I felt it was important to conduct interviews with teenage TikTok users directly, knowing it would be impossible to be sure I could identify content that would be shown to a teenager without asking a teenager to show me the content they see themselves.

I have a keen interest in the development of colloquial language (spoken, written, and visual) within communities and subcommunities on TikTok. I give great weight to the extraordinary and singular artform that is the social-media-based short form video. It is no surprise to me that I have brought this fascination into my personal practice as an artist and my professional practice as an educator.

Beyond my personal interest, there is a disconnect between secondary art education pedagogy and teens' lively and creative use of social media. The field of art education is beginning to accept digital mediums as valuable tools for artmaking. However, the relationship between the online cultures around content production on social media and teens' experiences learning art in the classroom has yet to be examined in depth. These interconnected, often playful social media spaces are ideal for teenagers to explore their voice as an individual and to take first steps into communities of their choice as an independent person. I suspect this explains, in part, why teenagers are drawn to social media platforms like the short-form video app TikTok. The field of art education must recognize the powerful potential of social media spaces to be sites of explosive creativity, discovery, and growth.

In this study, I ask: How do high schoolers perceive content creation on TikTok in relation to the art they make in art class, and how can understanding that perception impact high school art pedagogy in relation to fostering play and creativity in classroom artmaking?

First, I review the literature related to play and to social media in the field of art education to ascertain and explore how the field of art education has previously engaged with these topics, and if these topics have been previously investigated in tandem. Next, I discuss the methods by which I conducted a survey and interviews with teenagers at Madder County High School about their perceptions of content creation on social media, primarily TikTok, to understand their relationships to their creative content production. This I compare to the teenagers' perceptions of artmaking in school to examine the relationship, if any, between online content creation and school-based artmaking. Finally, I apply these new understandings to art education pedagogy to inform suggested strategies intended to create joyful classroom environments more likely to foster the energetic creation present in social media spaces like

TikTok. I explore how to bridge the gap between the creativity teenagers employ in their online lives and the fine arts skills taught in secondary art classes. I gain a deeper understanding of how, as an educator, to support students in bringing their whole creative selves to my classroom, and if this might be possible through a greater understanding of teenage TikTok use.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Here, I gather, categorize, and examine scholarly writing on the topics of play and social media as related to art education to evaluate the current theoretical and practical attitudes towards these topics, and to identify gaps in the current research related to these topics. The majority of this review was conducted in Spring 2021, with revisions conducted in Spring 2023. In 2021, my focus was to immerse myself in the literature to gain a broad view of the field and draw interdisciplinary connections where possible. In 2023, my focus was to update my initial findings with papers released after Spring 2021.

When developing my research questions for this literature review, I structured my inquiry to allow myself flexibility for discovery and connection while maintaining focus on my overall research goals. I needed to deepen my understanding of how social media, specifically TikTok, is used in art education, how play is used in art education, and most importantly, whether any research directly related to these topics had been done. As such, in this review, I investigate the following questions:

RQ1: How has social media, specifically the short video sharing platform TikTok, been investigated, critiqued, or otherwise discussed in relation to art education in recent scholarly research?

RQ2: In what ways is play currently utilized in the art classroom for high schoolers, and is social media involved in any significant manner?

RQ3: What research has been performed to examine the intersections of teenagers creating content for social media platforms outside of school and playful art education in school?

I will first discuss the significance and methods of this literature review, followed by a discussion of relevant studies gathered during my search. Finally, I will consider the implications and discuss my findings, including new research conducted between 2021 and 2023.

Significance

The major significance of this project is to me as a new teacher, student, and researcher. In 2021, I regarded this literature review as an essential aspect of my learning and development as I pursued a degree in art education and worked towards becoming a classroom teacher. Not only would conducting the review immerse me in prominent concepts and ideas in the field, but I would also be gaining experience in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data related to art education, which would help to establish my own foundation for any academic research processes I might undertake in the future. Beyond application for research, I was also aware that I would be developing data collection and evaluation skills necessary for classroom teachers. At present, I am teaching high school art and use the skills I learned through conducting this review to develop assessments for my students, create evaluations for myself, and gather and reflect on complex data necessary to improve my active teaching practice.

Methods

Initially, I established a spreadsheet to capture keywords and search results as I began the literature review. See Appendix A, Figure 1 for my final spreadsheet.

I generated 11 keywords in this round of searching:

1. TikTok
2. Art education

3. Social media
4. New media
5. Internet
6. New literacy
7. Education
8. Play
9. Content creation
10. Content creator
11. Gameplay

During subsequent searches, I added 4 other keywords:

1. Art(s)
2. Art games
3. Digital
4. Third space

Additionally, I created a research concept map, seen in Appendix A, Figure 2, which allowed me to better visualize my motivations and goals for performing the literature review.

The first round of references were selected by personal judgement, chosen from keyword search results. I considered the title of the article, the position of the article in the search results when sorted for relevance, and the number of times a given keyword appeared in the text of the article. I sorted the references into categories and types, and evaluated relevance based on the intersection of the keywords “TikTok” and “art education.” Among the references I had gathered at this point, 30.9% originated from art education journals. Only 1% of the references were focused on TikTok as a primary topic (as opposed to a passing mention within an otherwise unrelated article). There were no articles that mentioned TikTok AND Art Education.

I began the evaluation process by rating articles using this rough rating system:

- 5 Stars: Extremely relevant, directly related to at least one of my research questions
- 4 Stars: Relevant, somewhat related to at least one of my research questions
- 3 Stars: Probably helpful, tangentially related to research questions

- 2 Stars: Interesting potentially helpful content, barely related to my research questions
- 1 Star: Unhelpful and in no way related to my research questions

I decided to eliminate all references published before 2014, leaving me with a period of about seven years. For time considerations, I removed any books and theses. I also removed a book section written in German with no readily available English translation. I removed any references already rated 2 stars or below.

I assigned a weighted point value to each topic between zero and five based on my personal perception of the given topic's relevance to my research questions. See Appendix A, Table 1 for all topics with weighted point values. Once this was complete, I had two values assigned to each reference in my pool: a point value and a star rating. This way, I was able to consider the relevance of each article more closely, since the star rating was based on a quick evaluation at the beginning of the process, and the point value was based on a closer evaluation made when I was much more familiar with each reference and my own overall goals. I removed anything with a point value of zero no matter what the star rating was. I removed references with a point value of 1 with any star rating with the exception of a single 5 star rated article I felt was important despite not containing many of my keywords. I decided that video games, which are often included in play research, for the purposes of this review do not qualify as social media if they cannot be played online or collaboratively. Alternatively, I decided video games do qualify as social media if they can be played online and there is concrete evidence of communities of interest (fandom) generating content or fanwork and interacting outside of the platform of the game. This included games such as Minecraft, World of Warcraft, or Animal Crossing. I removed references about video games that did not qualify as social media under my new classification. I also removed any references about playing games that did not mention social

media, any articles about TikTok that did not seem relevant to education, and any references about play that did not mention social media at least once.

I distilled my research questions into simple topic phrases, which I assigned to each reference, as follows:

- R1: Social Media + Art Ed
- R2: Play + Art Ed (+ Social Media?)
- R3: Teens/Secondary

If a reference did not fall well within one of these categories, I eliminated it. Of the 21 references in my pool at that time, eleven applied to R1, seven applied to R2, and two applied to R3. I did retain one article that applied to none of the three, but I felt it was important and decided to keep it anyway. I removed one last reference after reading it and deciding it was less relevant than I had initially hoped. I moved forward with reading, annotating, and synthesizing these final articles. I submitted this literature review to my research seminar professor in 2021 and received wonderfully constructive feedback, which I planned to incorporate when adding the review to my applied project. But in 2023, a full two years of not being able to keep up with the literature for a variety of reasons later, I knew I needed to conduct another round of searches.

My initial search in 2023 aimed to discover if any articles were published about TikTok in either of the prominent art education journals *Art Education* and *Studies in Art Education*. As of Spring 2023, only two articles (by authors Shin et al. (2023) and Trafí-Prats (2021)) include the word “TikTok,” only once, and only in passing.

I continued my search, restricting the results to articles published between 2020 and 2023. I used only the broad keywords of “TikTok,” “Art Education,” “Art,” and “Education” in various combinations, allowing myself to evaluate articles rapidly before deciding whether to

include them. I identified 36 potentially relevant articles. I read the abstract of each and completed a sorting process much like my original starring system, separating the 36 articles into these casually named categories:

- Yes Helpful
- Maybe Helpful
- No Helpful but Cool
- No Helpful

Finally, I proceeded to read, annotate, and incorporate the eight articles in my Yes Helpful category in my original findings. Even with the new additions, I was not that surprised to find not much needed to change in my original discussion and conclusions.

Discussion

In 2021, I began with play. Olivia Gude writes, "playing, a necessary component of any creative process, is the first (and foundational) principle of the possibilities that can emerge from a quality art curriculum" (2010, p. 34). However, play is often viewed as vital only during early childhood education (Saifer, 2010). In my experience, play is vigilantly and relentlessly stripped from the curriculum as students grow, leaving high school devoid of all but the rare mock debate in Social Studies or the occasional read aloud in English Language Arts. My motivations for researching play as an art educator originally came from this heartbreaking experience. I wondered why teenagers, who are navigating a period of colossal change and growth in their development, are deprived of time and space to play as they learn? What could I do, as an art educator, to bring play into my classroom for secondary students? In my first year of teaching, my determination to incorporate play crumbled under the need to maintain a "positive learning environment" as dictated by administration and school-wide discipline policies. I found myself

heartbroken again and again as I became the authority stripping play out of my high school art curriculum, attempting to enforce required "expectations" which were at odds with behavior I viewed as necessary for creative artistic production. By the end of the year, I had become so frustrated and dejected with my attempts to "maintain order" and also "teach art" that I sometimes allowed students to play, despite the resulting negative disruptions to the learning environment. However, I observed that when students abandoned my assigned classwork, most of them turned to their phones.

Today's teenagers easily flow between digital and physical spaces, and they spend significant portions of their lives on social media (Stahl & Literat, 2022). I define social media as any online platform where users can interact to form community. Social media fascinates me. I too live portions of my life online (though not to the degree of contemporary teenagers) and have been drawn to investigate social media due to a desire to understand some of the digital places where my students and I spend our lives.

I will not be engaging in the debate as to whether social media is "good" or "bad." Social media is a tool that we, as people, are still beginning to learn to use. In the context of this literature review, within the larger context of my applied project research, I am interested in how this tool is being used for education in and out of schools.

Social media is "a vital space for youth expression and sociality" (boyd, 2014 and Way & Malvini Redden, 2017 as cited in Literat (2021, p. 1)). Within art education, I see social media as a potentially valuable site for playful learning, self-expression, identity creation, and meaning making. New and different ideas have never been more available to those who want to find them. Today's teenagers are using their social media constantly, spending "up to eight hours on their devices each day" (GlobalWebIndex, 2020 as cited in Stahl and Literat (2022, p. 4)). And why

would they not? Teenagers use social media to learn, grow, create, and develop community (Olsen, 2016; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021; Vickery, 2020). My goal as an educator is to guide teens to the understanding that the playful work they do on social media can be valuable, and the creative energy they put into their lives on social media can be valuable too.

I believe the combination of play and social media is significant to art education because social media is a "living" space, where the content created is often playful and collaborative, made for and with a community of peers acting as audience and participant. The word "content" and the context of social media sadly disconnects the work from what it truly is: art. This belief anchors and lends personal significance to the research questions that guided my literature review.

Research Question 1: How has social media, specifically the short video sharing platform TikTok, been investigated, critiqued, or otherwise discussed in relation to art education in recent scholarly research?

In short, the answer is "very little." As of Spring 2023, only two articles out of the whole combined body of research in the two journals *Art Education* and *Studies in Art Education* use the word "TikTok." The word appeared just once each, in passing (Shin et al., 2023; Trafí-Prats, 2021). In fact, of the references selected for this review, only five concentrated directly on TikTok use in youth and are therefore worth discussing in more depth here.

TikTok Use in Youth

Using a combination of hashtags and sound clips related to school shootings in the U.S. and applying a critical framework of the playful mediated body, Vickery (2020) explored TikTok as a memetic text in investigating a sample of 200 TikTok videos. This study found that teens utilized TikTok to understand and process the trauma of U.S. school shootings. Vickery (2020)

showed that by using playful parodies, playful critiques, and playful coping, the act of teens making meme[4] videos on TikTok "affords young people opportunities for collective sense-making via playful peer identifications" (p. 4). This article provides valuable insight into the connection between play, creative meaning-making, and teen TikTok use.

Similarly, through a large-scale thematic analysis of 1,930 TikTok videos, Literat (2021) analyzed the experiences of teenagers in the COVID-19 pandemic and how they shared on TikTok their experiences of emergency remote education. This study showed teenagers' "attempts to make meaning out of the present situation" as they make and consume videos that portray the online learning situation as overwhelming, express a desire for support and understanding, and engage in peer-to-peer education (Literat, 2021). This is another example of young people, primarily teenagers, collectively finding meaning in trauma through TikTok.

In yet another example of mass meaning-making, Stahl and Literat (2022) used a qualitative thematic analysis of 1,918 videos and comments on those videos to investigate how Generation Z (Gen Z), those born between 1997 and 2012, are creating generational identity through social media participation. The study found that teenagers are using TikTok to engage in "collective expression and belonging" in addition to seeking entertainment, information, and mental health support (p. 18). Stahl and Literat (2022) established the critical point that it is crucial for educators to recognize the personhood of young people, which "involves seeing and hearing them through their own preferred modes of self-expression, which TikTok seamlessly facilitates" (p. 19). Yet, they maintained TikTok is understudied for how prominent it is with the youth of today.

[4] "Memes are the closest thing to a native cultural form the Internet has" (Marwick, 2013) and embody a great range of creativity and function online; as Marwick writes, "some memes are just trendy pictures or videos that get passed around verbatim, others encourage a type of iteration, imitation, parody, and satire that can spawn literally thousands of variants. Memes, then, can become raw material for creativity" (2013).

Nam's (2020) smaller, yet still significant, qualitative ethnographic study took place in a Midwest elementary classroom, focused on the experience of two students encountering racism in their everyday use of TikTok. Nam (2020) used a critical media literacy framework to relate the experience of two students, Riley and Adalyn, to demonstrate the need for critical media literacy education in classrooms. While this study focused on elementary students, and not secondary, I believe it is important to note students as young as elementary age are engaging in TikTok and encountering the multi-layered societal contexts in which they must confront issues such as racism. Nam (2020) noted these students were uncomfortable bringing these experiences up to their teacher, as the topics were "often easily dismissed at school as an inappropriate conversation" (p. 110).

Lastly, Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) surveyed 247 young adults, including both users and non-users of TikTok, to understand motivations, experiences, and perceptions related to TikTok. The authors used qualitative conventional content analysis procedures and the MAIN (Modality, Agency, Interactivity, and Navigability) model to identify these uses and gratifications for young adults in the United States:

- Realism
- Coolness
- Agency-enhancement
- Community building
- Bandwagon
- Interactivity
- Browsing/variety seeking
- Play/fun gratifications

While this study included only young adults aged 18 to 25, 96% of whom had completed high school (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p. 5), the findings of this study are relevant to high school youth aged 14 to 18 as well. Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) found that young people use TikTok for community-building and bandwaggoning, which echoes Stahl and Literat's findings that teenagers use TikTok to engage in "collective expression and belonging" (2022, p. 18). Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) additionally found young adults use TikTok for realism and interactivity, which aligns with Literat's findings that teenagers seek out others who are experiencing similar events and making content that is relatable to them (2021). Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) state young adults use TikTok for play/fun gratifications just as teenagers in Vickery's study made and sought out memes on TikTok to play and have fun with peers around topics that were otherwise traumatic (2020). Considering this evidence, it follows that the eight uses and gratifications of TikTok for young adults also generally apply to teenagers.

These five studies show teens use TikTok often playfully, to find community in making meaning out of shared or relatable life experiences, and to join in the co-creation of identity with peers. Youth utilize a broad cultural knowledge in that they must be aware of social and cultural trends and must confront complex cultural issues not just in creating TikTok content, but in consuming it as well. The case for teaching critical media literacy, with a focus on digital/online media, is strong, as youth of all ages are engaging with social media to make meaning in their lives. It is disappointing to me to find only one published[5] art education research article about

[5] In August 2022, the thesis of Chloe C. Morrell was released on SFA ScholarWorks. Morrell's thesis, *TikTok as Art: Visual Culture Art Education in an Afterschool Art Program*, investigated the perceptions and uses of TikTok as art within an underserved population of 9- to 13-year-old members of an after-school Boys and Girls Club program in Texas. Her study utilizes visual culture art education pedagogies in developing a unit in which students discuss TikTok videos as art and then make their own videos based on individual interests. Morell's unit facilitated discussions among her students about racism, accreditation and representation, internet safety, and how TikTok can be a tool for artmaking.

TikTok, because the five studies I have described here have shown TikTok serves as a place for youth to meet their emotional needs, form identities, build community, and play with each other. Are those not foundational skills for art making?

Other Social Media Use in Youth

For this part of the review, I selected studies that included the platforms Tumblr, DeviantArt, Twitter (rebranded as "X" as of July 2023), Minecraft, Twitch.TV, YouTube, and Instagram (Hofsess et al., 2018; Jones, 2015; Lemon, 2019; Overby & Jones, 2015; Pfeiffer et al., 2020; Pires et al., 2019; Smith, 2020; Trafí-Prats, 2021). Within these studies, social media is explored as a site for social and artistic collaboration (Overby & Jones, 2015; Smith, 2020; Trafí-Prats, 2021), a site of peer-to-peer education and community-making (Jones, 2015; Pires et al., 2019), a tool for making learning visible (Lemon, 2019), and, fascinatingly, as a source of iconography to use as provocation within a curriculum (Hofsess et al., 2018). Apart from one, these studies focused on image- or text-based social media sites within an art education setting. In comparison, the studies related to the video-based platforms Twitch.TV and YouTube are positioned in a general education context. Additionally, only the studies of Jones (2015) and Pires et al. (2019) focused on teenagers. The study of Overby and Jones (2015) includes teenagers within a participant population of a larger age range. The other studies focus on university students, elementary aged students, or do not include the ages of the participants.

While most of the detailed information was not relevant to my inquiry, these studies show further evidence that teens use social media for educative purposes, and often learn from or

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While I am overjoyed to see Morell's remarkable research on the intersection of TikTok and art education, I chose not to include her thesis in my literature review. I made this choice because her approach—using TikTok as a direct artmaking tool in the classroom—is one I deliberately decided to avoid. I hope to instead recognize TikTok as a source of incredible creative play for teens and investigate how this recognition/understanding might specifically impact secondary art education pedagogical practices without necessarily requiring TikTok to be used as an artmaking tool in the classroom.

teach peers in their online communities. It is disappointing that art education research seems to neglect primarily video-based platforms, as seen with the lack of research about TikTok. I must also note that the studies involving university student preservice teachers (Hofsess et al., 2018; Lemon, 2019) investigated social media as a tool to teach educators and did not include strategies for those preservice teachers to apply their understanding of social media in their future practices.

Social Media "In General" and Youth

Other research discussed social media without examining a specific platform. Three of these studies focused on or included teenagers in the participant groups (LaJevic & Long, 2019; Manifold, 2021; Olson, 2016), one focused on tweens (Wohlwend, 2017), one included adult artists and teachers (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018), and one did not specify an age group (Han, 2019). Though all but one of these studies is within an art education context, the investigated topics are broad, including artmaking with social media (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018; LaJevic & Long, 2019), narratives and digital visual culture (Manifold, 2021; Olson, 2016), and the need for critical media literacy (Han, 2019; Wohlwend, 2017). This wide breadth of topics indicates an interest in researching "social media" in relation to art education, but "social media" may be too broad a topic. Social media moves quickly, and user culture varies wildly across online spaces and communities. It may be beneficial to choose future research directions based on the specific platforms used by the community of interest in the intended study. Yet, the studies included here emphasize the need for critical media literacy in schools, provide more evidence that teenagers utilize social media for community-making and playful creative expression, and show that social media is a significant aspect of teenage life.

Clearly, there is a deficiency of research on social media in art education, let us now take up my next question: what about play?

Research Question 2: In what ways is play currently utilized in the art classroom for high schoolers, and is social media involved in any significant manner?

Within the articles selected for this review, little research was found relating directly to play in secondary education. Vickery's (2020) study is the only one found that discusses teenagers, play, and social media. Wohlwend (2017) discusses tweens' playful use of social media in relation to a popular toy brand. Two studies include playful teaching of university student preservice teachers (Han, 2015; Patton et al., 2020), and two include adult teachers and artists (Hamlin & Fusaro, 2018; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). These studies showed play is an important aspect of online content creation for teens and tweens (Vickery, 2020; Wohlwend, 2017), and that play is a valuable aspect of learning whether play is built into the curriculum structure or facilitates active learning in the classroom (Hamlin & Fusaro, 2018; Han, 2015; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2020). Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) show young adults achieve the gratification of fun/play through TikTok use, which indicates play is a gratification sought by young people as part of their leisure activities and socialization. Gude's Spiral Curriculum views play as "a necessary component of any creative process" and places play first among the "Principles of Possibility" which lists components required for a "comprehensive art education experience" (2010, p. 35). However, among the articles selected for this review, only Gude's 2010 study directly addressed the connection between play and art education via curriculum and did not include social media in any capacity. This brings me to my third and final research question.

Research Question 3: What research has been performed to examine the intersections of teenagers creating content for social media platforms outside of school and playful art education in school?

No studies were found that examined the intersections of teenagers creating content for social media outside of school and playful art education in schools. Manifold's study (2021) comes closest, exploring the intersections of art education and teens' content creation within online communities, but neglects to meaningfully investigate the impacts of play in these intersections. Vickery's (2020) study explores teens' playful use of social media outside of the classroom for the collective processing of trauma inflicted by school shootings in the United States. Overby and Jones (2015) did not focus clearly on teenagers or play in the art classroom, though both topics are mentioned. Olson (2016) discussed teenagers and visual culture, but not play. Leung et al. (2020) discussed the use of video production in playful art education but focused on elementary school students and did not mention social media. While these studies do not definitively relate creative social media use and playful art education, the conclusion can be drawn that teens value social media as a place for creative expression and community, and they use social media to find or make spaces for playful creative expression. It is clear there is a lack of research exploring the intersection of teenagers' use of social media outside of school and playful art education in school.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review shows evidence that teens use TikTok and other social media for deeply significant aspects of their lives, including play, leisure, socializing, identity creation, self-expression, and community meaning making. Yet, little art education research has been conducted focused on social media spaces, with an especially noticeable lack of research into

video-based social media such as TikTok. Furthermore, despite literature indicating teenagers do seek out play and playful creative activities on their own, this review yielded little recent evidence of play incorporated intentionally in high school classrooms.

I am convinced that further research into the intersection of social media and play in the high school art classroom is relevant to the field of art education and is needed at this time. This conviction forms the basis for the applied project study I designed to identify connections between play and creation/participation on TikTok by investigating student perceptions of school art classes and social media. I designed this study over the course of an action research class in the fall of 2021 with the knowledge that, in the following semester, I would engage in student teaching placements as part of my certification and graduation requirements. Feeling fully frantic, I decided to attempt to conduct my applied project research during my eight week long secondary student teaching placement.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODS

Data Collection

I planned two data collection methods—first, a voluntary, anonymous survey to gather data about social media use (Appendix B), and second, 30- to 45-minute interviews (Appendix C) with five to ten students to further investigate teenage perceptions of artmaking in school and of TikTok use. Due to the timing of IRB approval, the survey and interview processes began simultaneously. Data collection began after approval by the Institutional Review Board of Sterling IRB on February 4, 2022, Protocol Number PROJECT00004842. The approved Informed Consent form may be found in Appendix D.

I administered the survey during two consecutive days, in Art 1/2/3/4, Ceramics 1, and Photography classes at the beginning of each class period. I included a QR code on the smartboard which directed participants to an anonymous Social Media Use survey hosted on the online survey platform SurveyMonkey. I made it clear through a verbal explanation at the beginning of class that students had the choice in completing the survey. This choice did not affect their grades, and there would be no indication if a specific individual student participated. No student names or other identifying information were gathered by the survey. After I administered the survey to all classes over the planned two-day period, I downloaded the data to local storage and reviewed to ensure anonymity of respondents. I then deleted the survey results from SurveyMonkey and stored them on UGA servers for further review.

For the interviews, I structured the discussion to begin with "icebreaker" questions about art class, and then divided the remaining questions in three groups concerning TikTok. The "icebreaker" questions were designed to ease both me and the participant into the interview by chatting about our common ground: art class. Additionally, these questions asked participants to describe, in their own words, their artistic practice in and outside of school. No definition for "art" was provided, which allowed participants to give answers based on their own understanding of what "art" meant to them in the context of art class. The "icebreaker" section also included a question about inventing an art assignment to do in class, which could be later compared to a similar question about TikTok trends asked later in the interview.

The first group of questions concerned with TikTok use sought to understand how the participants reported their TikTok use in their own words and how they explained their motivations behind using TikTok. Furthermore, this question group sought to identify what aspects of the TikTok experience they utilized, such as posting their own videos, making comments, and/or watching videos. This data would allow me to learn if the participants aligned TikTok use with their artistic practice and would allow me to compare their motivations for TikTok use to their school/home artmaking.

The next group of questions addressed content the participants consumed on TikTok, seeking to understand not just what the participants watched but how they described it. I hoped to see if students talked about finding art on TikTok or accessing knowledge about art on TikTok after having discussed school art and art class earlier in the interview. This data allowed me to compare the content they encountered or sought out in art class with the content they sought out on TikTok, in addition to comparing the social aspects of their TikTok use to the social aspects of in-class or at-home artmaking. This question group also allowed me to "place" the participants

within my understanding of the larger TikTok über-culture, which was advantageous to me in interpreting the discussion effectively.

The last group of questions focused on the participants' participation in the TikTok milieu, looking at their perceptions of how they presented themselves on TikTok and the actions they took in that space. This data allowed for a comparison of the perception the participants had of themselves as artists from the "icebreaker" section to their perception of themselves as social media participants/consumers.

To secure interview participants, I approached students individually or in small groups during class and inquired if they would like to participate in a voluntary interview with me about TikTok and art class. My selection criteria were that participants must be self-identified TikTok users and students at Madder County High School, also known as Madder. Participants must not have parents or close family members employed by UGA, as I had been informed this could be a potential conflict of interest. With each student or student group I approached, I informally explained that I was performing the research for my master's degree program, and I answered any questions the student(s) posed at that time. If a student was interested, I provided an informed consent letter and discussed it with them. Students under 18 were provided with a consent letter requiring a guardian signature as well. This turned out to be a limitation, as three interested students forgot to get the parent signature in time to participate in the interviews. Despite enthusiastic interest from seven students, and tentative interest from a few more, I was only able to schedule and complete an interview with four who returned a signed consent letter and scheduled an interview.

The interviews took place during the school day in a small room within the main classroom. The door was propped open during the interviews and one of my mentor teachers was

present in the main classroom. The interview was recorded only via audio, and only on a digital audio recorder. The interview questions were delivered conversationally to create a more comfortable dialogue for the student participant. At no point in the recorded interview did I ask the participant to state their name, TikTok username, or school aloud. I offered students the chance to send me some of their favorite TikToks by messaging a TikTok account I set up purely for this study: @researcher.sarah. That account was not used for any purpose other than serving as an inbox for the participants to send videos at their discretion. No students sent videos due to an error on my part—they could not message me unless I followed their accounts, and I chose not to follow their accounts for ethical and safety reasons. I did not realize this mistake until well after the interviews were completed and I no longer had access to the participants. The recordings for each interview were stored locally until they were reviewed to ensure the anonymity of participants. The recordings were then backed up and stored on UGA servers.

For the purposes of this study, and in conducting these interviews, my personal experience as a long time TikTok user may be termed "preunderstanding" (Coghlan, 2007) as this experience within the context of one of my areas of focus guided my decisions as a researcher, including the development of my survey and interview questions. When administering the survey and conducting interviews, I used terminology specific to TikTok and demonstrated knowledge of current trends, memes, and subcultures to signal to the participants that I was, in fact, also a TikTok user. I deliberately chose to do so, instead of hiding my extensive TikTok use from my participants, because when participants see the researcher as an "insider," they are "seemingly far more prepared to share private knowledge with one whom they see as personally and equally involved in their world" (Smetherham, 1978, p. 100). Additionally, utilizing my knowledge and understanding of TikTok as a user allowed me to

identify what was "storyworthy" (Chase, 2008) during the interviews, and guided my understanding as a researcher as to what was storyworthy—necessary to convey for a complete understanding—in the collected data.

However, Coghlan (2007) cautions that preunderstanding may pose a disadvantage as well, noting:

> when [researchers] are interviewing, they may assume too much and so not probe as much as if they were outsiders or ignorant of the situation. They may think they know the answer and not expose their current thinking to alternative re-framing" (pp. 296-297).

I believe I did at certain points fail to probe as deeply as would have been beneficial to my research, and now must rely more heavily than I might otherwise like on my firsthand experiences to build a narrative from my gathered data. It behooves me to note that while I am a TikTok user, I am not currently a high schooler enrolled in an art class at a rural Georgia high school. My experiences as a high schooler are vastly, deeply different than those of contemporary high schoolers. In my high school years in the early 2000s, social media was not right at our fingertips—the first iPhone was not released until 2007 (Cohen, 2007), a year after I graduated. I recall that most of my peers did not have cell phones at all. We passed handwritten and intricately folded paper notes in class. My friends and I did not experience a global pandemic disrupting our lives and education. Having leveraged my preunderstanding of high school students based on my outdated experiences to develop my survey and interview questions, I realize now that I lacked a complete and nuanced view of contemporary high school students' experiences and motivations overall and in choosing to enroll in Fine Arts classes. I did not properly build this facet of inquiry into my study and, as such, I find I have a weaker understanding of what high school students consider to be "Art."

Data Coding

I read through the transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the content of each conversation and then developed codes representing themes I felt were most present overall. The codes were as follows:

- Choice/Personal Preferences
- TikTok Use
- Socializing
- Interesting (*to note things of interest to me but seemingly not relevant to the research*)

I used these codes to condense the interviews from transcripts into a more narrative representation of the discussion, pulling in the students' own words whenever possible. Finally, I engaged in another round of coding, but this time, using my condensed interview texts. I used a color-coding system to identify opinions and perceptions of the participants related both to school art making and using TikTok. The terms of this system are shown below:

- Talking about School Art
  - Defining "Art"
  - Socializing in class/at home
  - Making in class/at home
  - Relaxing in class/at home
- Using TikTok
  - Habits of use
  - Entertainment/escape/relaxation
  - Humor/comedy
  - Socializing

- Learning/knowledge

I generated the codes for the interviews through my sustained interaction with the transcripts. I was guided by my understanding of the current literature and my best judgement.

While drafting the following Results and Discussion section, I engaged in another round of coding to assist me in more clearly understand teen perceptions of TikTok. Using my condensed, color-coded transcripts, I identified two major areas of discussion about TikTok: Being on TikTok and Making on TikTok. I then returned to the original transcripts and separated each into sections related to the following categories:

- Being
  - Time Spent
  - Identity
  - Social Atmosphere
  - Motivation
  - Content Sought
- Making
  - Content Made
  - IRL[6] vs. Online
  - Motivation/Goals
  - Learning

With this final organizational and interpretational strategy completed, I felt ready to discuss the results of the study.

[6] IRL – an internet abbreviation meaning "in real life," used to discern reality from online contexts.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Introductions

Before I begin discussion of the results of this study, I will introduce the students who participated in the interviews. To ensure their anonymity, I have given each participant a nickname: Cerulean, Vermilion, Saffron, and Celadon. Aside from the appropriate pronouns indicating the gender of the student, what classes they were taking, and my own general impression of them as individuals, no other identifying information was retained. If the students mentioned the names of any of their peers or family members, those individuals were given nicknames as well.

Cerulean was enrolled in two art classes, Art 2 and Ceramics. He was soft spoken and sat with a small group of much rowdier boys. He was diligent and focused on his classwork, unless he was working on his own drawings in class instead.

Vermilion was enrolled in Art 1 and Ceramics and often commented on her unique social position as a senior taking beginner level classes. She was funny and energetic, contributing easily to the boisterousness of her peers in class. Moreover, she was thoughtful and mature, and often spent time helping and encouraging her friends in their work.

Saffron was enrolled in Ceramics 3/4 and Photography. She was confident, creative, and dedicated to her work, especially in Ceramics. She was part of a close group of friends taking advanced Ceramics classes and was a near-constant presence in the Madder ceramics room.

Celadon was also a part of that group of ceramics friends and was enrolled only in Ceramics 3/4. She was gregarious and kind, and was industrious in her ceramics work. At the end of my student teaching placement, and after my interviews had concluded, Celadon surprised me with a mug she had made for me as a goodbye gift.

Please note that in quotes from the interview, I have called myself "Ms. L" because the students knew me as Ms. L and were speaking to me as Ms. L. When conducting the interviews, I presented myself as teacher Ms. L (not regular person/grad student Sarah) because the interviews took place during school hours. Thus, I was still responsible for their wellbeing as an educator working with a student at school. Additionally, I have lightly edited interview quotes to remove filler words and ensure clarity while taking care to preserve each student's individual style of expression and speech patterns as much as possible.

Teens Making Art

I began my interviews with questions about school and art classes. My aim was to allow both the student and I to get comfortable talking with each other while being recorded, and to establish a context for the scope of the interview. I introduced the first section of the interview by explaining it would set a "baseline" for our conversations about TikTok. However, this section of the conversation would also allow me to listen to how each student talked about "art" with me, their student art teacher, having not defined art in any way other than bringing it up in the context of their art classes at school.

I asked the participants to tell me about the art they made in school and at home. All four were motivated art students, with three of the four taking more than one Fine Arts class. Each participant had some form of personal artistic practice as well. Cerulean loved drawing and maintained an art Instagram where he posted his digital pieces. Vermilion kept a sketchbook at

home but called herself “really bad at finishing pieces” and confided in me that her best pieces got done at school. Saffron taught herself watercolor during the peak of the pandemic, and previously had worked with acrylic paint at home. She kept more than one personal sketchbook at home and called the process of planning and experimenting with new pieces “really exciting.”

Celadon, notably, created makeup looks. She recognized her departure from the typical art forms taught in school, saying, “depends on what you wanna call art” and then continuing, “makeup is my art form at home.” This showed me a difference between Celadon and the other participants. When I asked the other three to tell me about art they made, without defining “art” at all, each replied with a form of art taught in school: drawing or painting. Celadon departed the unspoken ‘art class’ context I had established when she declared makeup to be her personal artistic practice. I probed further to see if I could learn more about Celadon’s ideas about art in a school environment:

Ms. L: If you had the opportunity to bring what you mentioned, makeup as art, into a school environment, would you want to take that opportunity?

Celadon: Oh, one hundred percent. I think all schools should have a cosmetology program 'cause so many people wanna go into hair and makeup and stuff, but we don't have that class. That's why I think photography is a great opening class that we've had at this school because like, a lot of people wanna go into being a photographer. They make good money. Like, it's a good solid career. And I think the Fine Arts Department is sometimes underestimated with how far people can go with it. …
And so many people are passionate about hair, and I feel like if we had that starter course at our high school class, that a lot of people would benefit from it. And that's not even just for fine arts, like, I do believe there is more classes that we should have that take a bigger step into people's careers in the future.

Celadon was a driven, tenacious student, and in her final semester of high school. It is not surprising to me that her focus on career pervaded our conversation and her thoughts about fine arts. In comparison, Cerulean also wanted a career in the arts, but his focus was on drawing, a form of art that easily fit within the academic Fine Arts environment in school. He was also

younger, just finishing his second year of high school, and less practically minded than Celadon when considering his coursework and personal practice. Vermilion and Saffron were also seniors, but neither mentioned going into art as a career—they both discussed their personal art as a hobby related to the art they made in art classes at school.

To discover more about the participants' motivations for taking art classes, I asked them to name their favorite part of art class. At the time of the interviews, I had an unquestioned and unrecognized bias of my own—my favorite part of art class in high school was the making. I was a dedicated art student, taking multiple classes and treating classwork seriously. I loved being able to bring my focus to bear on the piece I was making in class, so my favorite part of class was independent working time. I expected the answers from the participants would be similar to mine, or at least connected to some part of a typical daily art class structure. Instead, they surprised me when all four of these current students, when asked "what's your favorite part of art class," recognized socializing as *part of art class*:

Cerulean: Sometimes just being with friends. But, like, it's gonna be boring if you don't have nobody there.

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Vermilion: I mean, I wouldn't really say people because even if I didn't have friends in the art class, it's just kind of convenient that I do. I mean, I guess more of this class, ceramics, it's helpful to have friends because Emerald that I sit with, she's giving me multiple ideas of things I could do. My favorite theme is the creative, oh, what's it called? Creative independence to do whatever you want. There's just small guidelines that I have to follow. That's probably my favorite.

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Saffron: Mmm, I like the social aspect. I think art is more something that you interpret differently, so it's hard to judge, but I like that you can also bounce off of other people and be, like, "Do you like this one better, or like this one?"

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Celadon: My teacher, Ms. Simonds. (*laughs*)

> And I also like all my friends in here, and how we can bond over doing the same thing. Like, not obviously the same thing, but I get to hype them up, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that looks so good." Or they'll be like, "Wow, it's crazy that you centered five pounds of clay," and stuff like that. I like the motivation that other people and my friends in this class give each other, and to me and to them, you know, it's a very friendly environment.

Each of them, in describing their favorite part of art class, specifically mentioned interacting with friends. Even Vermilion, who first said having friends in class was just convenient, conceded that friends helped her with generating ideas. Of course, I fondly remember socializing with friends during art class, but looking back, I remember the socializing being secondary to the in-class learning for us. We were in class to make art, that was the *point*, and it was just a neat bonus that we could hang out at the same time. The educator in me was a bit taken aback at the time—"You're not in class to socialize!" being a mantra chanted by innumerable teachers, including myself at the beginning of my first year of in-service teaching at Carmine Lake High School, which began the fall after this study took place. However, as I settled into my role as a new teacher that fall and began finding my feet, I discovered how mistaken I had been to consider socializing separate from the other parts of art class. Though I was not actively conducting research for this applied project during my first year of teaching, I still carefully observed my students, gathering observational data to inform my practice. I made this observation early on: more art got made if I encouraged socializing during working time. It became apparent to me that my students at Carmine Lake and the students in my study at Madder clearly considered socializing to be an undeniable part of art class, and thus, of artmaking.

If socializing was integral to artmaking, with whom did the participants share their art? I asked each student if they shared their school art or home art with anyone. Cerulean said he kept an art account where he mostly posted his digital drawings. Based on the interactions I observed him engage in during class, he seemed happy to show his friends what he was drawing on his

iPad or in his class sketchbooks. Vermilion shared her art with her “overly supportive” parents and did not mention showing anything to her friends. She shared that she felt her mom did not understand the technical aspects of her drawings and did not always recognize the effort she put into each piece. When I asked if Vermilion posted her work online to share with others, she answered:

> **Vermilion:** I just get kind of self-conscious, because there are a lot of people online that know more than I do, and that could critique it. And sometimes I'm like, ‘Yes, I need criticism, please help me.’ And then other times, I'm like, ‘You know what? I'm not gonna sign myself up for criticism that I don't want. I think my piece is good. I don't care about what everyone else says.’ So I tend to just keep it to myself.

I posed the question a bit differently to Saffron. First, I asked who gets to see the ceramic pieces she makes in class. She named a friend who is in Ceramics with her and laughed. Then she said, “Just my friends. My mom.” I followed up:

> **Ms. L:** Do you share your personal paintings that you do at home with anybody?
> **Saffron:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms. L:** So, like, same kinda circle-
> **Saffron:** Yeah, same thing.
> **Ms. L:** -they get to see school art and home art?
> **Saffron:** Yeah. If I like it, I'll be like, "Mom, look at this!" Like, "Look what I did!" And she's like, "That's mine now, thanks."

Celadon beat me to my own question and volunteered that the students in the Ceramics 3/4 classes had an active group chat to exchange ideas, resources, and pieces with each other. I played catch up:

> **Ms. L:** Outside of school, do you share the work you make in class, even outside of the group chat?
> **Celadon:** Yeah. My boyfriend and his family love my ceramic work. One of the first things I ever threw on the wheel was a tiny little dish, and I gave it to my boyfriend's mom, and she keeps stuff in her office in it, like paper clips and stuff. And then one of them I have, I keep thumbtacks in, one of the first things I threw in the wheel. And currently I just made a plate with my friend's dog on it, [that friend] isn't in any art classes, so.
> **Ms. L:** Oh, that's so nice!

Celadon: So I do share my stuff, yes.
Ms. L: Do you share any of your stuff online or just in person, as gifts?
Celadon: Yeah, in person. I don't really post my clay work online. I did just recently record a video of me trimming though, so maybe that might end up somewhere in hopes to go viral. (laughs)

I found each student's answer aligned with what I understood of their personality. Saffron and Vermilion were somewhat demure in discussing both their school art and their personal art. It made sense to me that they would be selective in how and with whom they shared it. Celadon, ever outgoing, showed no hesitation in giving her work as gifts to friends and family. Cerulean was looking to make friends and strengthen new friendships, and so shared his art online and would show off his work in class when asked by his friends. In their own ways, each of the participants sought to share their art, whether school art or personal art, with people in their lives.

I observed the students in my first year of teaching at Carmine Lake High School with this in mind as well. The major difference between the participants in this study and my Carmine Lake students was the level of commitment to the art they made in class. Many of my Carmine Lake students were just trying to get their required Fine Arts credit out of the way and considered my class an inconvenience at best. I understood and acknowledged their feelings, of course. Still, I was secretly a little heartbroken every time a student told me to throw their work in the trash instead of wanting to take it home. On the rare occasion when a student wanted to keep their work, I listened carefully to find out why. Usually, they wanted to show it to someone. Whether for a parent at home, or for a friend outside of class, most of the artwork that left my room was being taken to be displayed.

I am not confused by this as an artist. What is art without an audience? Obviously, each of the participants in my study as well as my Carmine Lake students would have wanted to share the work they were proud of with people in their lives. But as an educator, I had questions. What

made an art piece worthy of sharing? For my most reluctant students, what made a school art piece worth taking across the boundary from classroom to the real world?

This initial discussion of art at school and at home served to generate language describing how high school art students today perceived artmaking in the context of school. The discussion created a baseline to compare to the subsequent discussions about TikTok. While our discussions were too short to fully tease out a fully developed lexicon/discourse, the language each participant used to speak about their classroom art experiences was familiar to me as a lifelong art student and new art educator. The ways I, a 30-something student art teacher, and they, teenage high school art students, discussed making art in a school context were very similar. Not much of our conversations strayed outside traditionally taught forms of art like drawing, painting, or sculpture. However, it was with great interest that I noticed in the first part of our discussions together, and in my experiences across my first year of teaching, students' perception of socializing as a part of art class ran counter to my initial perception of socializing as separate from learning. As such, creation of their artwork had an integral social function as well, whether during making time in class, or afterwards, in the display of their work to their chosen audience.

Teens Using Social Media

Before I sought out interview participants, and to understand the general social media use of the population I was student teaching, I conducted a short Social Media Use Survey. This survey was intended to give me a broader view into the typical habits of social media use of Madder Fine Art students before focusing in on TikTok specifically via the far more selective interviews. Because I was primarily student teaching Photography and Art classes, the majority of respondents to the Social Media Use Survey were enrolled in Photography, followed by Art 1 and Art 2/3/4 (Appendix E, Figure 1). Out of 64 total respondents, 18 were enrolled in more than

one art class at the time of the survey, with most of those 18 students being enrolled in Ceramics plus another class (either Photography or an Art). There were no responses from the small IB Art class, who knew me least well.

Respondents were prompted to select the social media platforms they use on this list:

- Instagram
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Discord
- Tumblr
- Kik
- Other(s)

About 80% of students reported using three social media platforms: Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (Appendix E, Figure 2). The Fine Arts department at Madder had an Instagram account run by Mrs. Simonds, and I wondered if that choice was made because the students used Instagram most, or if the students used Instagram most because Mrs. Simonds ran the Madder Fine Arts social media account on Instagram. The "Other(s)" platforms mentioned were Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and Twitch.TV. I was surprised YouTube was mentioned so rarely, especially compared to Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, but short form video is seen by young adults as more convenient than YouTube (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), and I speculate that some students might not consider YouTube to be social media.

Over half of the respondents reported spending more than three hours daily on social media, with 19 students reporting they spend over six hours daily on social media. Only one student reported using social media for an hour or less daily, and two did not answer the question

(Appendix E, Figure 3). In comparison with my respondents: as of this writing, I average about five hours a day spent on social media, with a daily average per app of about three and a half hours on TikTok, about two hours on X (née Twitter), and about one hour on YouTube. I also use Tumblr occasionally and maintain a very rarely used Instagram account.

About half of the respondents reported posting "Pictures I take/make" on social media, which I believe is because two of the top three most-used media platforms among respondents are picture-based (Instagram and Snapchat) (Appendix E, Figure 4). Just over 30% of respondents said they do not restrict their audience and anyone online can see their posts. The remaining respondents either do not post online or make use of privacy settings to restrict their audience (Appendix E, Figure 5).

When asked what kind of social media content was their favorite, 45 out of 64 respondents chose some kind of entertainment with responses including "funny videos," "comedy," "memes," and "funny things." 15 respondents said they liked art content of some type, answering "photography," "fan made artwork," "art posts," "art inspiration," and "art." I believe this art-loving subgroup might be overrepresented here if compared to the preferences of the general body of Madder students because, out of 64 respondents, only 28 were in an introductory level art class while the others were in advanced art classes. This specific group of respondents may be more in tune with or desirous of art in their social media feeds than an average not-art-enrolled student.

Interestingly, two students indicated a preference for content related to a specific identity, specifying "Black creators," "gothic," and "LGBTQ+." Ten indicated a preference for a hobby or activity that involves socializing in some way, with answers including "cars," "makeup," "fashion," and "food." Eight students indicated a desire to interact with fandom, which

inherently includes community of some kind ("fan content," "fan made artwork," "imagine stories," and "anime"). These results indicate that in addition to entertainment, students use social media for community seeking, identity building, satisfying desire to participate in interest-based groups, and fulfilling interest in a creative community.

Respondents described what they would make if they could make a viral video and I sorted the short answers into five main categories:

- Art
- Entertainment
- Learning/Knowing
- Social
- None[7]

Within these categories, I identified 31 subcategories (Appendix E, List 1). The Art category includes subcategories such as makeup, singing, dancing (alone or with friends), personal art or art in general, cosplay, and animations. The range of types of creative expressions in the Art category led me to question if these students viewed social media as a place to *put* or *show* art, or if they saw social media platforms as a place or tool to *make* art.

Responses within the Entertainment category most often included the word "funny," followed in frequency by "dumb" and "stupid." The specific suggestions of content in this category were broad, but typically began with phrases like "something funny, like…" or "a funny video about…" Most responses describing their ideas for a viral video were focused on

[7]This category contained blank answers, answers of "none" or "I don't know," and answers too vague to be interpreted.

comedy in some way, reflecting a desire to make what most respondents considered to be their favorite social media content to consume.

Only three responses fell into the Learning/Knowledge category: “I would create a Video [sic] on people’s culture,” “The process of making something,” and “It would be about history.” These responses, while few, indicate some interest in sharing knowledge with others online.

The Social category included a broad spectrum of responses, but focused on membership in a certain community, responding, “a clip of me streaming a game I like” (streaming community) and “me spreading positivity and healing” (lifestyle community). Some respondents wanted to share their opinions, replying “either something talking about like political issues or one of my personal interests,” “Spreading my opinion on things,” and “speaking up for what’s right.” Several hoped to make a viral video with friends or family, stating, “me doing dumb stuff with my friends,” “me and my friends doing a dance,” “something with my family,” and “just hanging out with friends.” A few respondents were extremely specific with their ideas: “egging the white house,” “my families [sic] cars,” and “something with my girlfriend as she wants to be a social media influencer.” Though these responses may seem broad in topic, I identified all of them to be within the Social category because they all demonstrate the desire to either display membership in a group or share opinions/identity to seek out community via virality.

Art was the most common category with 21 responses, followed by Social with 19, and then by Entertainment with 10. Art and Social overlapped in three responses. While this survey data did show high school art students desire consuming and/or making creative content, most of the content mentioned within their answers is created separately from social media. It could be argued posting art online would be considered a secondary action; for example, teens making choreographed dance videos might view the dance as the creative product, while the filming and

posting of the dance is only the vehicle to share the product with their intended audience. Alternatively, teens may view the video of the dance to be the process made visible, and the interaction of their audience within the social media space with that process may be their completed product. The data in this survey is not granular or deep enough to draw a clear conclusion on this topic. For the purposes of this research, the act of recording and posting creative production online is in itself a creative act.

This is clear: art students at Madder used an average of three social media platforms for an average of three to six or more hours a day. These students hoped to see entertaining, creative content, and only about 19% of them did not post on social media themselves. When imagining what content they would like to make go viral, 63% of them described something requiring creative making or involving socializing. A further 16% wanted to make something entertaining for others. As such, I concluded that art students at Madder perceive social media as a space to consume and make creative content, as a space to engage in interest-based communities, and a place to be entertained and entertain in return.

Teens Using TikTok

The Social Media Use survey addressed social media broadly with a larger group of art students. For a more thorough investigation of teenage perceptions of the social media platform TikTok, specifically, I return now to my interviews with the participants Cerulean, Vermilion, Saffron, and Celadon.

I knew each student used TikTok, as I had not only asked them directly to confirm if they were users when inviting them to interview with me, but had also observed each, at various points, looking at TikTok during class.

Being on TikTok

To get a better understanding of the participants' habits of use, I asked them when they usually go on TikTok. Cerulean reported using TikTok "a lot" throughout the day because he takes small breaks to "just watch a little bit." Vermilion said she tries to avoid going on social media at school but will go on TikTok if she has "nothing else to do." Saffron gave a similar answer, saying she will open the app if she is on her phone, "not doing anything," and feeling bored, though she watches less at school if she does not have her headphones. Celadon explained she checks her notifications as soon as she wakes up and then continues to use the app throughout the day.

> **Celadon:** If I'm not doing any work in class, I'm on TikTok. When I get home, I lay on TikTok for a good 30 minutes before I do anything else, or eat, or anything 'cause it's just kind of like a decompress and sit down for 30 minutes to an hour, like, just sitting on your phone, same thing I used to do on Instagram. When TikTok became a platform for comedy, and a place kind of like Vine—[that's] basically what it is, just longer [videos]. It's just a good, like, 'I'm gonna sit here and watch this for a while,' it's interesting. So, definitely all the time throughout the day.

The participants reported they are using TikTok to fill time, entertain themselves, and in Cerulean's case, engage in some self-care. This was consistent with the average social media use of the Madder art students I surveyed, which indicated the four participants are a reasonable (though small) representative sample of the art-enrolled student body.

Each student gave me a resounding "no" when asked if they believed they act, speak, or write differently when they are on TikTok. Cerulean clarified he might use text talk (typing shortened versions of words) but does not change the way he would speak in real life. Celadon said she sometimes acts more confident in her videos than she feels, but clarifies, "I just talk like myself, I'm like, oh my gosh, that was so funny! Yeah, just myself." I found Vermilion's answer to be especially interesting:

Vermilion: Not really, because I mean, like I said, I could count on one hand how many really close friends I have that really know me well. So they know my sense of humor, especially my best friend, Cinnabar. Most of the TikToks I save or I send to people, it's usually her. And I think of a person's humor, and I'm like, she would find this funny, I'm gonna save it. [I] try not to like act differently around certain groups of people, or any groups of people, because I think presenting yourself that way is harmful. And it's like putting on a mask around certain people, and it can be harmful. And I think that it plays into like, a fake personality. And it just, I don't want to present myself that way.

She showed a significant concern regarding how her sense of humor might be interpreted by those who do not know her. Yet, she considered "putting on a mask around certain people" to be potentially harmful, which led her to restrict her TikTok interactions to only those who know her and her sense of humor well. All four participants endeavored to present their authentic selves when existing in the online space of TikTok.

Additionally, each student participated in TikTok at a different level of engagement. Saffron was the least engaged on TikTok, as she did not make videos:

Ms. L: Do you make TikTok videos?
Saffron: I do not.
Ms. L: No worries. I also don't.
Saffron: (*laughs*)
Ms. L: Why would you say you're not attracted to making videos, that you just wanna look?
Saffron: I'm kind of, like, a self-conscious and anxiety-filled person, so, I don't really, I don't really know even what I would do. So I don't find anything interesting enough to really share with people, I guess.
Ms. L: You don't wanna, like, hop on a trend?
Saffron: No. (*laughs*) I'd rather not.

Saffron stated that her feelings of self-consciousness and anxiety make her feel concerned about creating something "interesting enough" to be worthy of putting online. When I asked Saffron if she wanted to "hop on a trend," the question has a slightly different meaning than "do you make TikTok videos." Hopping on a trend could be described without nuance as making essentially the same video as everyone else by either using the same sounds, the same choreography, the same

joke format, etc.: participating in a meme. When I asked if Saffron hops on trends, I was asking if she would be interested in making videos where she would not need to come up with an all-new idea, and instead could just use an already existing formula.

Her feelings of self-consciousness and anxiety also influenced her commenting habits, as she wrote comments only rarely.

Saffron: Mmm, very rarely. I like comments. Sometimes, I don't usually comment myself, but I like to go through and look at what other people have said. I'm like, "Oh my God, I thought about that, too!" Or like, "That was my first thought, too!"

Ms. L: When you do leave comments, in the rare instance that you do, do you find yourself commenting more on friends' videos or, like, strangers' videos?

Saffron: Usually just strangers.

Ms. L: Mm-hmm. So if you're talking about a friend's video, you're more likely to text them?

Saffron: Yeah. Yeah, probably.

Ms. L: You're like, "I saw you!" (*laughs*)

Saffron: Yeah!

Saffron's statement "I like comments" means she utilizes a "like" button to add a heart to a comment that is visible to other users. On many social media platforms, including TikTok, users are able to use likes to indicate they enjoy or agree with a given piece of content (Dedić & Stanier, 2017). Saffron used likes on TikTok to express agreement or connection with a particular comment or idea. In my own experience, comments are as integral to the TikTok experience as the videos are since the comment section is where a major portion of the "social" aspect of this social media app happens. While Saffron put little of her creative output online, she was still contributing content to TikTok and participating in the social environment of TikTok by leaving likes on comments she agrees with or enjoys.

Cerulean had made a few meme TikToks that he explained were “just a funny, like, some random thing that I just saw and I just copied it from Instagram” but has not made videos since. His TikTok participation mostly happened in the form of comments:

Ms. L: Even if you don't make videos, do you post comments?
Cerulean: Yes, yeah. I do. It's just mostly funny, like, adding to the joke or stuff.
Ms. L: Do you just make a comment on the video, or do you sometimes reply to other people's comments?
Cerulean: When they say something, yeah, like, when they say, like... I just add stuff to the joke, mostly. Like, if they say something, I'll just [say] something back about what they were talking about, yeah.
Ms. L: Do you ever get in back-and-forths with people?
Cerulean: Once, but I forgot what it was about, but it was once.
Ms. L: So, it's mostly you post a comment and that's pretty much it.
Cerulean: I don't know, it's just, I post a comment and I would go to sleep, and I wake up and it's, like, just a bunch of other comments at the bottom, yeah.

Cerulean referred to a TikTok cultural custom I have noticed in my own browsing. He said, “I just add stuff to the joke,” referring to the common practice writing a comment that expands on, amplifies, or exceeds the joke presented in the video. This is a method of social participation I have noticed as I spend time on the app which I believe developed due to TikTok’s non-chronological comment display system. The comment section on TikTok lacks any visible continuity, making it difficult for users to hold any sort of sustained dialogue there. Instead of comments being displayed in chronological order, comments that get the most likes and replies rise to the top of the comment section. Thus, users like Cerulean may attempt to write the funniest or most entertaining comment so they can have the top comment—the most visible and most engaged-with comment on the video. I speculate that, in general, the desire to get a lot of likes on a comment commonly leads TikTok users to post formulaic, already-established funny phrases in hopes of appealing to other users who already get the joke. Cerulean’s type of TikTok participation, “adding to the joke,” is the other side of the coin to Saffron’s practice of liking comments. Where Saffron was contributing engagement by liking comments she enjoys or

agrees with, Cerulean was writing comments in the hopes of drawing the attention of users like Saffron. For Cerulean, “making” on TikTok was successful when his comments gained a high degree of engagement from users.

Vermilion also posted comments sometimes but did not try to “add to the joke.”

Vermilion: Sometimes, if it really gets my mind going, and I get really passionate about something, I'll leave my opinion and I'll be like, this and that, something, something, something. Or, like, if people are being unnecessarily rude in a comment section and I see too much of it, I'll be like, "Okay, people in the comments. Stop it." Yeah, or like, if someone is being entirely infactual—I mean, I try not to report videos, I mean, unless they're obviously harmful. But like, instead of like reporting it for misinformation, I'll try to be like, "Hey, this isn't correct. You should probably go do some research." But I try not to do that too much. Because, you know, I don't actually do like a lot of research on topics so I could not know what I'm talking about.

Ms. L: So typically when you're commenting, you're kind of responding to like the social atmosphere of the comments section. And more like informational stuff?

Vermilion: Hmm yeah. Or mainly, it's mainly like to defend people from hate comments, because I mean like, there's no reason to be unnecessarily rude to somebody for no reason or to make a nasty comment at somebody. So I'll be like, "hey, that's kind of mean." But sometimes I'll get like, "You know, oh, look at yourself, you know if you really have the boldness to comment on this person, but you should take a background check or something." I'm usually good at coming up with replies when I'm not put on the spot.

Vermilion showed a strong concern for the comfort and safety of others and chooses to participate in TikTok comment sections only when she felt “passionate” enough to help. However, the videos she made are different.

Vermilion: I don't really have a topic. It was just kind of random. Like, I've posted a couple videos of my animals. If it's a trend that I think is cute or funny, I'll be like, "Okay, I'll do it." Like, it's kind of sporadic, I don't really follow a certain type of video.

Ms. L: So you're really just following your heart? And not the trend?

Vermilion: Yeah.

Ms. L: That makes sense. So when you're inspired to make a TikTok video, are you finding inspiration kind of like through the app or through things that

are outside of you? And you think like, "Oh, that would make a great TikTok. Let me grab my phone."

Vermilion: Probably mostly things throughout the app, or like, if my animals are being cute, and I take a video and be like, "Oh, I'll post this on TikTok." There was this trend where people—it was like a sound of a chew toy. And my dog was, chew toys are the ones that make the sound. So I did it. And he like, did the little dog thing where he's like, "Huh? Huh?" Oh, it was really cute. So yeah, just kind of like things like that. Like, I'll see it and I'll be like, "Oh, this is relevant to me. I have a dog that likes doing cute things."

Vermilion seemed to make videos for herself but made comments for others. This is a distinctly different practice compared to Saffron and Cerulean's interactions with TikTok through comments alone.

Another difference can be found in Celadon's TikTok use, which was almost the opposite of Vermilion's, focused entirely on making entertaining videos:

Celadon: I do make TikTok videos. Whether it'll be like trying out their stupid filters, or a transitional make up video where I'm like no makeup, and then I turn my head and then full makeup, or I made a compilation of me going to build a bear and getting my grandma's voice in a build a bear, or a funny video of my cat. Like, just kind of like stuff that I think other people would enjoy to see maybe. The most views I've ever gotten on a video though, it was the first video I ever posted, and it was actually an art video. It was me painting an UNO card pink, and putting hearts on it. It was an UNO reverse card, and it got like, here I can check, I wanna be accurate with it. I was so proud of this TikTok.

In just this answer, Celadon made several interesting statements. She has used her school art skills to make a TikTok before, and she used her personal makeup art in her TikTok videos, showing an integration of real life and online practices that none of the other three participants allow. Celadon had chosen what content to produce based on what other people might enjoy seeing, which showed an interest in entertaining as well as being entertained. She did not seem concerned about "everyone" seeing her videos like Vermilion, and instead was proud of how many views she had gotten on her art video. Sadly, though, she had run into some trouble.

Celadon: I did remove it though because someone commented something mean. So, there is haters when you do get views, no matter what.
Ms. L: Yeah.
Celadon: Um, they said something about me having nothing better to do with my time. I was like, okay.
Ms. L: That person is a person who doesn't have anything better to do with their time.
Celadon: Yeah. Um, it's not loading 'cause I don't have good service, but the other most viewed video is the one of me doing the build a bear, and that one's got like, I would say it's got 533 likes.
Ms. L: Wow!
Celadon: And then the, the one of the, um, UNO card has 13,000 views, but it only got like 2000 likes. So, the views were way higher than the liked part of it.

Celadon used the number of views and the proportion of views to likes to measure the apparent success of her videos. In explaining why she had to take down her most viewed video, she noted that the wider the audience (more views), the more likely it is to attract negative or mean comments from some users (haters). Celadon's confidence in discussing her video statistics and her pride in her popular videos tells me tells me she was an experienced and dedicated TikTok user. She was aware she was creating content for an audience, and those viewers gave her feedback through views, likes, and comments. Not only that, she also valued the engagement and created content in the hopes of continuing and expanding the exposure. For Celadon, "making" on TikTok was successful when she garnered a high degree of engagement from others.

The participants demonstrated the wide range of participatory options available on TikTok, from simply liking comments to making videos intended for as wide an audience as possible. Each student chose what degree of engagement was most desirable for them, and typically did not seem to deviate from that practice. It is important to note that each level of participation is generative, in that carrying out that type of participation adds something new to the TikTok experience which can be viewed by others. Comments are considered a valuable

aspect of the TikTok experience, and even just leaving a like on a comment can change the order in which it appears in the comment section for other users. Yet, as Cerulean points out, a higher degree of participation leads to more exposure to the general TikTok population, which can attract negative, unwelcome attention, and each participant either avoided or embraced this risk in their own way.

Notably, the participants were selective about which of their real-life friends they followed or allowed to follow them on TikTok. Celadon got her boyfriend into TikTok after they posted a video game clip he made and it got lots of views. She only had one friendly acquaintance who makes videos—even though she followed their accounts, Celadon's close friends only browsed. Saffron also followed only her close friends and says it was "weird" when TikTok suggested she follow people she had in her phone contacts. She preferred to follow only friends she knows well. Vermilion felt the same about friends following her, saying, "I tried to stay away from people following my TikTok that know me if I'm not super close with them. I could count on my hand how many people that are my friends that follow me." She did not watch her friends' videos either. Additionally, both Vermilion's and Celadon's parents were on TikTok. Vermilion stated firmly she does not follow her parents, though she was working on convincing her mom to make a TikTok account for her baby goats. Celadon shared TikToks with her mom in a "girls' family group chat." Only Celadon had integrated TikTok use into her daily home life and communication with her parents to such a degree, which presented an interesting dichotomy when compared to Vermilion and Saffron, who both shared their traditional artwork with their mothers, but made no attempts to involve their parents in their personal TikTok use. It is clear while the participants presented themselves authentically on TikTok, they were protective of who had access to that facet of their lives, including their families.

While Celadon posted her videos publicly, Vermilion did not and provided an interesting explanation:

> **Vermilion:** Okay, so, I have my account on private. So like, I've made like a couple videos, but not for clout or stuff like that. I just was like, "Oh, this is a funny concept. I'm just gonna do it." So I don't really expect anyone to watch what I post. Yeah, more of a viewer.
>
> **Ms. L:** So for your private videos, are they set to like uh followers only? Or are they like just for you?
>
> **Vermilion:** For followers, because like, I don't care if people see them, I just don't want like, everyone to see them.
>
> **Ms. L:** You're not looking to go viral?
>
> **Vermilion:** Yeah. Yeah, I know, I'm kind of like, going all over the place with this, but I don't know how people with large followings do it. It's like, there's so much expected of them. And I'm like, I'm sorry. I'm not going to pressure myself to post more than once a month because that's just a lot of stuff. And then celebrities, I would not be able to handle it if people were constantly suffocating me with cameras. I would end up going ballistic. I would end up like Britney Spears.

Vermilion invoked the image of Britney Spears, head freshly shaven, photographed mid-public breakdown, battering a paparazzo's car window with an umbrella (Rosenbaum, 2015). Vermilion made a distinction between "people" and "everyone" seeing her online presence. She was comfortable sharing her social media work with people, but only if "people" are few enough for her to avoid becoming a celebrity. Should she gain celebrity, "everyone" would know her, which she considered not only undesirable but, given the invocation of Spears' severe breakdown, threatening to her mental health. Vermilion had even had a few comments get a lot of attention in the past, and her telling of the experience provided more insight into why she kept her account private.

> **Vermilion:** Only like a handful [of comments]. I mean some of them, I still see I get a notification that somebody liked it. And it's got like, several thousand likes, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so popular." I mean, usually, I try not to, you know, make a viral comment. Because that brings in people with differing opinions and people that like when I didn't have my account on private. People will come onto my page and make comments on my videos that were really harmful. So that's the main reason I went private,

because it was just unnecessary comments that I wasn't asking for, kind of like the criticism. So I kind of went private and I was like, "You know, it doesn't really matter. People will say what they want to, but you know, they can't do it this way."

Ms. L: I love that you drew the boundary. Did any of your videos ever go viral before you pulled them off and turned them private?

Vermilion: No, I'm kind of thankful. I mean, probably my last videos had like, maybe 10 likes. So I was pretty content. I was like, "You know what? I'll just kind of fade away with nothing to leave."

Having received comments from strangers that were unwanted and harmful to her undoubtedly impacted Vermilion's social engagement with others on TikTok, leading her to close herself off from the general population of users.

Saffron, too, had had some comments get popular:

Saffron: Usually on a video if I saw it first, so I was one of the first few people to even say anything, then that's when people would be like, "Oh, me too!"

Ms. L: How did that kind of, like, sudden influx of likes make you feel?

Saffron: I jokingly sent it to Beryl and I was like, "Look, I'm famous." And she was like, "Okay." (*laughs*) I was definitely kidding, but I was like, "Oh, that's a little weird." At first, I thought it was one of those spam things-

Ms. L: Mm-hmm.

Saffron: -but yeah. I don't make anything, so, maybe if I were to make videos and then I had gotten a bunch of likes on a comment I'd have been like, "Oh, they're gonna see all my videos now, and I'm gonna get famous!" But, like, you know.

Ms. L: Okay. So this was more just like, "Ha, fun."

Saffron: Yeah. I don't... I'm not looking for anything.

Ms. L: Yes. You're not after the clout.

Saffron: Yeah. (*laughs*)

Saffron inadvertently described the mechanism that got Vermilion all that unwanted attention—often users with a popular comment will get more visitors to their page to watch their videos. However, since Saffron had no videos to see, she had not experienced the same harassment Vermilion did in the past. This reinforced, for her, Saffron's choice to stay private and not put her content online. Not only did she feel anxious and self-conscious, but she was also protecting herself from potential virality or celebrity. Both Vermilion and Saffron carefully

limited how accessible they are to others on TikTok because both recognized that increased attention inevitably draws people intent to harm. They both took steps to feel comfortable in their online lives and protect themselves.

As opposed to Saffron and Vermilion, when Celadon posted videos, she hoped they would get a lot of attention. Despite the popularity of some of her previous videos, Celadon did not believe she had ever truly gone viral.

Celadon: Viral to me is like your likes are in the “this point this” [format], like 50.1K. If you can see all four numbers on my likes, then it's just like, oh it got a small view, but it's not viral. Viral is like, like I said, you get a lot of comments, you get a lot of views, and likes, all together. You don't get just one or the other. 'Cause like I said, with my one, it was like, yeah, I got 13.1K views, but it only got like 5,000 likes. So it's not like it's super [popular], like, it didn't reach people across America. Maybe people in half the states, if one person, you know, saw it from here and here and here.

Ms. L: Yeah. That makes sense. Would you want something to go viral?

Celadon: Yeah. I'm a pretty extroverted person, I wanna be influential. I wanna go into cosmetology, so I want to build a client base. I want to be viral and people to be like, "I want her to do my makeup." I'm just a very people person. I want people to be inspired. 'Cause my whole family is introverts, and I just wanna break from that.

Celadon valued all viewer interaction highly. Her boyfriend, who she considered her “number one supporter,” commented on all her videos. She especially appreciated when her friends commented on her videos and considered views less valuable than comments:

Celadon: I think comments are so important. There's not a single TikTok video that I don't watch where I don't click on the comments. I'm a comment reader 'cause sometimes comments are funnier than the video, or a person falling and then someone in the comments will make me laugh for 30 minutes because it's something funny they said. I think if the comment feature was deleted, I wouldn't get on TikTok. I'd be bored. Comments entertain me 'cause some people just are so comedically funny, like, I don't understand how they... I was like, "I wish I came up with that. That was so funny." Comments are... if there was no comments, I'd be sad. Not even just like, sure, some people comment on my posts sometimes, but if my video went viral and it had like 100,000 likes and no comments, I'd be like, this didn't go viral. I wouldn't believe it went viral.

It is interesting that Celadon, who valued comments so highly, hesitated to comment on videos she thought her friends might see for fear of appearing “stupid.”

> **Ms. L:** Do you leave comments?
> **Celadon:** Very rarely because if you mutually follow someone, and then comment on someone else's video, your comment will show up at the top for your friends. So, if they see the same video on their For You Page, and then click on it, and then like my comment, I'm so embarrassed. 'Cause if I comment something stupid they'll be like, "Oh my goodness, why did she comment that?" They can see it, they know I commented it. So, I only comment if I know I'm not gonna be embarrassed if one of my friends sees it. So, that's how it usually goes. 'Cause I know my friends and I, like, the more videos you send to someone, the more your For You Pages are gonna, like, look the same.

To be clear, the “For You Page,” or FYP, is a custom individually tailored feed built by TikTok’s proprietary recommendation system, the Algorithm ("What is the ‘For You’ feed?," 2023). TikTok also offers a “Following” page, which displays content from the creators a user follows, though in my experience, most users ignore the Following page in favor of their FYP.

Celadon’s concern added an interesting layer of complexity to how the participants protected their authentic presence online. Celadon was confident and excited to share her videos publicly but was reluctant to write comments because she could not be sure if her friends would see her comments. She limited her participation on TikTok to making videos, which allowed her to better control when her content is seen by her close friends.

Conversely, Cerulean’s main form of participation on TikTok was posting comments. He actively sought to “add to the joke” and make engaging, entertaining comments. Out of the participants, Cerulean spoke the least about how he uses TikTok in relation to his real-life friends. He mentioned one friend of his makes videos occasionally, which he watched, but he did not mention at all if he shared any part of his TikTok use with his real-life friends. He told me he was new in town the year before and had only just begun making good friends. He might have

lacked the stronger friendships within which he would have liked to share his TikTok presence. However, he did enjoy general engagement with the comments he wrote, and would enjoy starting a trend:

Ms. L: If you took your best joke and you put it on TikTok, and everyone started copying it, would you feel excited or would you feel like, "Hey, everybody's copying me, quit that." What would your feelings be?
Cerulean: No, I'll be excited and stuff, I would really be excited. I wouldn't be like, "Oh, don't, stop that, stop putting attraction to me," like, I wouldn't like that. I would like for them to, yeah.
Ms. L: Yeah, so-
Cerulean: -like, to get a video attraction and stuff.
Ms. L: So, you wouldn't mind at all if they took your format and ran with it?
Cerulean: Mm-mm.

While Cerulean and Celadon posted publicly, and Vermilion and Saffron tended to keep things private, all four participants gave clear indications that they felt a difference between being seen on TikTok and being seen by friends or family on TikTok. They were conscious of how their contributions to the app can bring attention to their authentically presented online selves, whether positive or negative, and took steps to control what sort of feedback they receive.

Though the participants each had different levels of comfort with interacting with the general TikTok userbase, they did connect with friends and family by sharing TikToks to entertain and joke with the recipients, as well as share knowledge. As previously noted, Celadon shared TikTok videos with her mom and the girls in her house. She also maintained a group chat with friends in Ceramics 3/4 where she sent TikTok videos containing interesting ceramics tips and tricks to inform the group of new techniques to try in class. Saffron sent “like, too many” TikToks to friends, choosing videos she thinks they would enjoy. As noted earlier, Vermilion sent most of the content she shares with real-life people to only close friends, “especially [her] best friend, Cinnabar.” She enjoyed knowing what her friends will find funny and being able to

entertain them. Even within the boundaries they had established between real life and TikTok, the participants used the sharing of TikTok videos to bond with friends and share knowledge.

Why Be on TikTok

Each student was prompted to name what they go on TikTok for, and their answers were predictably similar. Cerulean answered, “Mostly, like, entertainment and stuff, yeah. Mostly entertainment.” Vermilion answered, “Entertainment. There's a lot of funny videos on there that I like. Also for art, you know, inspiration.” Saffron said, “Mmm, just, like, the entertainment. Sometimes I use it as a search engine, too, which is kind of dumb, but sometimes it works.” Celadon, having already mentioned a bit of her entertainment/decompression motivation to go on TikTok in answering other questions, elaborated on what she hopes to see: “Comedy videos, makeup videos, and then art videos.” She described a boundary she holds between her ceramics work in school and her TikTok use, describing how TikTok ceramics videos are “corny” whereas Instagram hosts “true potters” who “sell their work, like, functional pieces.” She said, “Instagram Reels, which is like the TikTok of Instagram, but the same thing, but they just post more educational on there. TikTok is more comedy to me.” Yet, she still sent TikTok ceramics videos to the Ceramics 3/4 group chat. It seems even though she viewed TikTok ceramics content as less serious or less practical, it was still useful in sharing some knowledge and entertaining her friends.

Tellingly, each student mentioned entertainment first, either directly or indirectly, before discussing any other of their uses of TikTok. Saffron spoke about looking up cookie recipes and “sketchbook things” to learn specific skills. Vermilion explained how she uses TikTok for art inspiration, saying, “I like to save a lot of videos so I can use that as, like, reference, because for me, a lot of times it’s really hard to create art if I don’t have a reference or inspiration to do so.”

She carefully clarified she prefers to avoid news on TikTok unless it is “like World War 3. I'm like, oh, that's important. That's serious. I should probably, you know, inform myself, because I think informing yourself before speaking on subjects is really important because I don't want to sound stupid.” Again, she showed a clear consciousness of how her presence or contributions on TikTok might be perceived by others, and she felt a responsibility to stay informed even if it meant watching content she does not enjoy, which is common for online people her age (Stahl & Literat, 2022). Still, she valued the inspirational art content she encounters enough to save it on her phone.

While Cerulean said he used TikTok for “mostly entertainment,” he found being on TikTok let him “learn about some culture and stuff like that,” and gave him a point of view not available to him in school:

Cerulean: [I can see], I don't know, like, some other type of places. And, like, here you only have this school, but on there you've got, like, um, Texas, Florida, New York, other countries. So, it's mostly, like, other cultures and stuff, not only Madder County.
Ms. L: So, you feel like it broadens your horizons.
Cerulean: Yeah.
Ms. L: You can see more of the world.
Cerulean: Mm-hmm.

Clearly, for the participants, TikTok was a place to be entertained and entertain others, which is consistent with the average Social Media use and motivations of the Madder art students I surveyed.

When asked about their favorite thing about TikTok, each student’s replies added further complexity to their reasons for being on there in the first place. Cerulean admitted at first, he did not like TikTok at all, citing that “back then it was really cringey.” Now, though, he enjoyed it because “most teenagers are going on to it,” adding more content, and he could see cultures and viewpoints he would not otherwise encounter. Cerulean’s social connection to TikTok was

clearly strong. He was seeking entertainment, but preferred entertainment created by people his age that are up-to-date and current (as to avoid cringey-ness).

Vermilion's explanation of what she likes most about TikTok echoed her favorite thing about art class:

Vermilion: I like that it's like an app that anyone can use for anything. There's a lot of freedom. I mean, obviously, there are some things that I try to avoid. But I think that it's also a good app to bring awareness to things. I didn't mention that. But I do like seeing videos that bring awareness to things, which I think is very helpful and very informational about oppressed communities or cultures. I'm really passionate about being an avid supporter of people who are minorities. So I like, kind of, I really gravitate towards that, too. And that's one of the biggest reasons why I like TikTok.

Ms. L: Okay. So you feel like that's a good place to get informed and like be supportive of these communities?

Vermilion: Mm-hmm. I mean, obviously, there are better ways to do it. Sometimes I'll come across a video that is like, people saying, they try to stay away from this, but you know, it always works. "TikTok, do your thing" by like, bringing awareness to stuff. So yeah, I would say yeah.

It is interesting to see Vermilion's favorite thing about art class was the same as her favorite thing about TikTok: a lot of freedom. Also, she clearly saw TikTok as a useful source of information about the world, despite her avoidance of the news, as TikTok helped her fulfill the responsibility she feels to stay informed. She particularly appreciated TikTok's power to raise awareness about "oppressed communities or cultures," and she relied on her TikTok feed to expand her social awareness and inform her "really passionate" support of minority groups.

Saffron appreciated TikTok's in-built instant gratification, saying, "I can just open it and it's already ready, you know?" She valued that when the TikTok opened on her For You Page, it would already be showing something she would enjoy.

Celadon chose to answer with something not about the app specifically, but about the culture surrounding it:

Celadon: Sending funny videos to my friends and them sending 'em back to me. It's like, oh, they thought this video was funny, and they wanted to show me too. It's like, they were thinking about me when they saw this. I love getting a good laugh. It makes my, like, cheeks hurt from laughing so hard at some of these.

Since Celadon so deeply integrated her online life with her real life, it is not surprising she found the best thing about TikTok was how it enriched her real-world relationships and provided her with positive real world socializing experiences, like laughing until her cheeks hurt. Celadon, Vermilion, and Saffron all valued using TikTok videos to entertain friends, making them feel thought of and cared for, and receiving the same attention in turn.

Saffron explained how the Algorithm also brings her inspiration for ceramics class, "A lotta the times, like, without looking for it, I will find ceramic videos or something, and I'll be like, 'Maybe that'll be on plates,' or something like that." Vermilion said she enjoys art challenges that ask the viewer to draw a picture with variables based on the user's personal traits and gave an example, "Like, if you have a dimple, then give your character this or that. If you have a dog, give [the character] a nose, or don't give them a nose." I find this to be a splendid example of the playful community creativity that is often a significant trait of TikTok trends. Not only was Vermilion being entertained, she was also finding inspiration and making art by playing a community-driven game.

When asked what she would do if she could start a TikTok trend, Vermilion answered:

Vermilion: Maybe like sharing, who else has done this as a kid, or like, I made my own banana bread recipe. I did it by going off of other banana bread recipes that I've done because I went through this phase where I just made like five in a week. And I just kind of mixed it all together into one. And I made my own, but it's not really my own. Because I feel like I shouldn't own that. I should probably take a food class and really make my own, or how many other people have done this, or has one of these kind of trends, because I like seeing those like, oh my gosh, I still have this McDonald's toy from when I was five.

Vermilion showed an curious level of sensitivity to giving credit, much like Celadon. She felt that even though she has combined several recipes for banana bread to make her own, she could not claim it as hers because she felt "like I shouldn't own that." She stated she needed to be better educated in food before she could make her own recipe. This seemed connected to her extreme caution concerning how she might be perceived by others on TikTok, and showed her sense of responsibility and justice drove her to do the "correct" thing by not claiming credit for something she felt is not hers. Still, her reply to the question indicated that were she able to create a trend, she would have liked to make something that would allow people to connect with one another. Even though she kept tight boundaries around her own TikTok presence, Vermilion clearly still viewed the culture of the app as a place where it is possible to foster community through shared experience.

Cerulean, being the most dedicated TikTok creator of the participants, gave her thoughts on why she is so into making content:

Ms. L: Following up on that. Do you find you focus most of your kind of effort into TikTok, or do you also post to other places?

Celadon: Instagram is more just like to spread what I do with my life. Like photos I took with my friends or this, but TikTok for the goal to reach to people who aren't in my community. I wanna reach farther.

Celadon put her personal art, makeup, on TikTok because she wanted to turn her art into her career. Celadon also believed high schools should offer more "career-based" programs like cosmetology, explaining, "I think the fine arts department is sometimes underestimated with how far people can go with it, but people make a lot of money as content creators." She continued, "and that's not even just for fine arts, like, I do believe there is more classes that we should have that take a bigger step into people's careers in the future." She painted a picture of student engagement, saying, "imagine people being like, 'I get to go to my cosmetology class today,

that's gonna set me up for my future.’” She also declared her support of an Internet business class for high schoolers:

> **Celadon:** People take their businesses from social media, especially TikTok. People have their websites in their bios, promote theirs through social media. Like, social media is such a vital platform for content creators because that's how they make their income, that's their job. Like, if people don't wanna say it's a job, then they're lying because they're making six figures a year because they chose that as their career, they built on it, they dedicated their time to it. I know a ton of makeup creators who go from that to having their own studio. They open their own studio, show the process on TikTok, "Hey, I'm opening my studio, I couldn't have made this possible without you guys." That's the go-to phrase, because it's true, they couldn't have done it without their viewers. So that's why I think TikTok is so vital for business owners and entrepreneurs 'cause they build their bases off of that.

In my experience, the kind of thought and consideration Celadon has put into her presence on social media is not only normal for contemporary high school students, but essential. As she planned for her future, she considered every aspect of her life, including her life on TikTok.

Vermilion carried herself with a great deal of caution in her online life to protect herself from unwanted interactions—this required a comprehensive knowledge of not just how TikTok works as an app, but how TikTok functions as a culture. Cerulean was engaged in his TikTok practices and culture deeply enough to successfully make top comments, and to anticipate what sort of activity would most likely earn him virality. Saffron hesitated to consider herself or her creative products valuable enough to share, but she still actively engaged in social aspects of TikTok and regularly gathers knowledge from the app.

Each of these participants, despite initially having cited “entertainment” for their reason to go on TikTok, clearly seek out playful community and socialization on the app as well. This was evident right at the end of the interview as well, when I asked them if they had any questions for me:

Cerulean: What are some videos that you really liked in TikTok?

___

Vermilion: What are your favorite videos to see?

___

Saffron: I wanna know what's on your For You page, like, what kind of videos you get.

___

Celadon: What is your favorite TikTok video? That you've seen in the past few days, like, what is something so funny that you, like, have been thinking about or an audio that's stuck in your head?

All four of them asked me about my own TikTok preferences, which I happily shared. This shows they were engaging in the same analysis I aimed to do during the interview—by understanding what TikTok videos I like and what shows up on my FYP, they gained a better understanding of who I am. By the end of the interview, each of them was comfortable enough with me to want to get to know me better and used our established shared context of TikTok to do so. Though all four participants were on the app to be entertained, it is clear they considered TikTok to be a significant aspect of their sense of self and their social sphere.

As stated above, asking students to describe the content they watch, their favorite types of content, and their favorite creators allowed further insight into their uses and perceptions of TikTok. I asked "where" each student spends most of their time on the app as well:

Ms. L: What side of TikTok is your favorite?

Cerulean: Mostly just, you know, the teen TikTok and mostly the people... not dancing, but it's mostly, you know you have the guys making jokes and then you just have the girls being girls there.

Ms. L: Do you have a reason why you might like that? Is it just kinda what the algorithm feeds you or are you looking for that kinda thing?

Cerulean: It mostly feeds me, yeah. And some stuff it just adds, like, oh, you're this race, so you're gonna put some stuff, like, oh, you're Dominican, so just put this in here, some of this. Just, like, some slander, and stuff like that, yeah.

I will unpack that exchange. When I used the phrase “side of TikTok,” this is a term TikTok users employ to discuss what kind of videos they most often see in their feeds. Communities spring up around types of content they consume, some of the largest, most predominant “sides” being Straight TikTok and Alt TikTok (Merrilees, 2020). When I asked Cerulean what “side” of TikTok he likes most, I was asking him to tell me what sorts of videos he sees most often, and what TikTok cultures he engages with most. His answer, “teen TikTok,” told me he was seeing content made by or for teenagers specifically. It also told me he was on a side of TikTok I do not often see in my own day-to-day TikTok use, which meant I would be less familiar with any content or trends he might reference in our discussion. When I asked if the Algorithm “feeds” him content from teen TikTok, I was essentially asking if he used his Following page to curate his content himself by choosing who he follows or if he stayed on his FYP which allows TikTok to curate for him using the Algorithm. Cerulean’s answer told me he was using the FYP, and in fact he later told me “I mostly never go on the Following page.” His answer also told me he was aware the Algorithm was curating his feed based on not only his interactions with the content in the app, but his demographic information and cultural background. Based on this short exchange, Cerulean and I could glean quite a lot about each other. He might have more confidently identified me as an experienced TikTok user, and I had a general sense of what his FYP looks like on a given day.

Unfortunately for me, Vermilion’s answer was less direct:

Ms. L: So in terms of what your feed shows you, do you have like a favorite side of TikTok?

Vermilion: Kinda. So I see a lot of videos, like funny videos, or like, helpful videos of the game I play cuz the [fandom is] huge, there's a lot of people. I usually try to stay away from the fandoms because they're crazy, crazy ballistic. Sort of TikTok of a non-harmful, funny side, like dark humor is funny. But when you're joking about someone else's trauma, it's like, if you can't

relate to that, why are you making the jokes? So yeah, mainly I'm like, comedy to go, I guess.

Ms. L: So would you say you're typically seeing folks that are closer to your age? Are you seeing kind of older, more established comedians trying to like break into the TikTok sphere with jokes?

Vermilion: I just generally mean, I don't really know if it's generally my age range.

Ms. L: It's hard to tell.

Vermilion: I kind of assume that it's like between 15 to 17. Cuz like, it's more like memes, or, you know, I don't really know how to explain it. Just my sense of humor's kind of, I'm told it's kind of wacky. So like, I don't know. It's an example. Like, there's these funny animations, it's these little blobs that are doing things, I don't know. Um, what was the question?

Ms. L: Oh, you sort of answered it. Why would you say you like the kind of comedy meme you like—also, when you say comedy, are you talking kind of like sketch or just kind of like somebody is talking and they're saying funny things, or like the animated shorts, where people are like, fully animating a thing that is funny?

Vermilion: I think like just the whole range of things like memes, old lines, new lines, funny TikToks, anything like that. If it's like a funny meme, or funny sketch of a meme, or, you know, someone using a sound, kind of like a whole random range of things.

Ms. L: Why would you say this is what you gravitate towards?

Vermilion: Because it's weird. It's like, it's funny. It's weird. It's kind of like, you know, kind of like my, my zone. I'm funny. I'm weird. I don't really have a clique, really, of a certain, um not my mind isn't organized. Kind of all over the place. And that's how I gravitate towards TikToks.

It took a much longer exchange for me to understand what side of TikTok Vermilion might be on, and since she did not name it herself, I asked more questions to get more information that would have been covered in the shorthand of the side's name. My impression was Vermilion saw content that falls more into Alt TikTok, tempered by younger Gen Z humor, proclivities which was as she calls it "a whole random range of things" and is unique to Gen Z (Stahl & Literat, 2022). Vermilion stated she enjoys dark humor, but not when the joke hinges on "someone else's trauma." Gen Z youth on TikTok display a strong sense of activism and fairness, especially in connection to mental health (Stahl & Literat, 2022) and Vermilion illustrated this in her opinion that the often-disturbing Gen Z dark humor is funny, except in cases where the person making a joke about trauma has not experienced that trauma personally,

which renders the jokester unable to relate and thus making the joking unfair and insensitive. She preferred funny TikTok content that is "non-harmful," which told me she had a strong opinion on what is and is not harmful within the content she consumes. This was plainly related to her sense of personal responsibility to support causes and stay informed.

Vermilion briefly mentioned her slight interactions with fandom as well. She played an immensely popular game, Genshin Impact, which has, as of October 2023, a monthly average of over 60,000,000 active players and an exceptionally large online fandom (*Genshin Impact Live Player Count and Statistics*, n.d.). She called fandom "crazy, crazy ballistic" and said she tries to avoid interacting with fandom despite enjoying fandom-made TikTok videos about the game. She was reluctant to join in with a community built around a game she enjoys because of the behavior she had seen them display, which once again demonstrated her careful boundaries built to protect herself and her feelings as she engaged with TikTok.

Most importantly, though, was Vermilion's description of her preferred content as funny and weird, and then immediately after, her description of herself as funny and weird. She directly aligned her sense of self with the type of content she most preferred to see on TikTok—she chose content she related to and saw herself in.

Similarly to Vermilion, Saffron did not name a side specifically:

Ms. L: Do you have a favorite side of TikTok?

Saffron: Mmm, I don't know. I got off of the dancing side to the traditional stuff recently. And then I guess a lot of it's, like, storytelling, I guess, if that could be a side? But I really like hearing people like, "This happened to me today. That was wrong."

Ms. L: What would you say draws you to that kind of story content?

Saffron: The first video is usually like a thumbnail, basically. So the first video is very short, but it's really interesting, kind of like a little hook, and then I'm like, "Okay, I wanna know what happens!" Then I'll go over to their page and go to the couple of videos of the storytime that they did, so.

Ms. L: Yeah, okay. Do you ever get hooked into those videos where it's, like, somebody making a recipe or doing their makeup, but it's, like, a story from Reddit, and then-

Saffron: Yeah!

Ms. L: -you have to, like, go find the next part?

Saffron: But they always cut those off and it makes me so mad. They cut them off at what actually happens at the end. I'm like, "I get you were done, but the audio was not done."

Saffron mentioned “storytime,” an older YouTube term that has spread to other social media platforms. Originally, storytime videos were a type of YouTube content where a YouTuber would tell a dramatic personal story and would make the title of the video very clickbait-y and include the word “Storytime” in it (*YouTube "Storytime" Clickbait Parodies*, 2016). At this point, I posit “storytime” has come to include any video where someone is telling a personal story in an engaging way. Saffron described the typical view-grabbing technique of storytime accounts: a short hook video draws in users, who then visit the account page and watch more videos to hear the rest of the story, and the increased views on the account make that account’s videos show up more often on the FYP. The videos I mentioned, where a domestic activity (for example, doing makeup or cooking) is dubbed over with audio reading of a popular Reddit post, are especially clickbait-y in this sense. The goal of the poster is to get the user onto their page, watching more of their activity videos, trying to find one that has the audio of the end of the story (which just might not exist). Saffron enjoyed these, though she admitted the click-driven format is often frustrating.

Saffron also gave a small hint that she was, like Vermilion, concerned with activism and justice. She explained she liked to hear stories where people relate an experience that was unjust or “wrong.” In my experience, these kinds of videos often have very lively comment sections, and for someone like Saffron, who enjoyed reading comment sections, an active comment section was clearly appealing to her.

It is also interesting to me that she mentioned having recently "gotten off of the dancing side" and onto the "traditional stuff" in which she included storytime TikTok videos. This tells me she was previously on Straight TikTok, which is what the average person might think of first when thinking of TikTok (dancing teens, dumb pranks, influencers in hype houses). Saffron had newly entered a side of TikTok which she referred to as "traditional" which I interpreted to mean "more like YouTube" than the content she was seeing before: instead of intricate dances done to the latest hit songs, creators talk to the camera and tell stories. This more intimate and personable content makes sense for self-conscious Saffron—she could feel connected to others without making TikToks herself by listening to others' stories and reading comments to see who else agrees with her thoughts.

Celadon immediately distanced herself from the dancing side of TikTok as well:

Ms. L: What side of TikTok is your favorite?

Celadon: Definitely not dancing videos. I don't like people who dance and then lip sync the songs unless it's a musical theater song. There was one that was trending recently, I really liked watching those videos of people doing the singing of it. I like those. I like people who do comedy, who post funny cat videos. I don't really follow the popular, like, verified creators unless they're comedy-based. It's just not my vibe. I don't see myself sitting there and watching a minute-long dance video.
Like, cool, like I appreciate the original creator of the dance or whatever, but it's just not my interest, which is what a lot of the broad creators are on, are like just viral TikTok dances, which is all right. I rode with that trend for a little bit, but it was more like 2019 me.
2021, 2022 me is just like, art, funny comedy, animal videos, like, people flipping houses and renovating, that's also art. I love people who find curbside furniture and renovate them, just that kind of side, like, something that's gonna keep me, something that grasps me, I'm the viewer that they need to grasp, and they grasp me, you know, they got me.

Celadon, who already stretched her definition of "art" to include makeup, stretched again to include house flipping, renovation, and upholstery repair. Celadon was the only participant to push her definition of art past traditional forms most often taught in schools, and she was also the

only one of the participants who actively put her art form of choice on TikTok. It is interesting to see she viewed Straight TikTok as immature, “more like 2019 me.” She framed her current, older, more mature self as looking for art, comedy, and animal videos instead of viral dances and lip syncing, implying that TikTok preferences change with personal growth or age.

Notice Celadon said “I appreciate the original creator of the dance” when she talked about viral dance trends she no longer liked to see. This is evidence of her acquired sense of responsibility and fairness, as also shown by Vermilion and Saffron. Crediting creators of choreography became a hot-button issue in TikTok culture in 2020 and 2021, peaking after multiple incidents where popular White creators went viral for using less popular Black creators’ choreography with no credit to the Black creators at all. For a particularly public example of this, consider famous TikTok star Charlie D’Amelio going on Jimmy Fallon’s talk show to do several viral TikTok dances without once mentioning the original Black creators of the dances (Colombo, 2021). From what I see in my own TikTok use, it is now a social expectation for popular or verified creators doing viral dances to credit the original choreographer in the caption or comments. This also goes for joke formats, or trends, to a lesser extent. In general, it is considered good manners on TikTok to credit the originator of an idea, especially if the creator posting the imitation is more popular than the originator. By saying “I appreciate the original creator of the dance,” Celadon was signaling she followed the common courtesies of TikTok social norms even if she did not like the content from that side of TikTok anymore.

I continued with more questions, wanting to go deeper into the reasons for Celadon’s TikTok choices:

Ms. L: Why would you say you're drawn to [the] art and comedy end of things?
Celadon: Because of my classes at school. Like, I do ceramics, so I'm gonna wanna watch people do ceramics. I watch people paint their room, so I painted my room. I followed with the forest green trend, you know, greens are in

now. So, I'm kind of, not gonna say a follower, but I do get a lot of my inspiration from trends.

Ms. L: That makes, I mean, trends are trends.

Celadon: Yeah. That's why they're called trends, everyone wants to do 'em.

Celadon gave another fascinating answer, indicating again that she was quite comfortable blending her real life with her online life. While Vermilion and Saffron maintained careful boundaries between their online lives and reality, Celadon carried her interests from school into her online presence, including TikTok. She also brought online trends into her real life, for example, joining the forest green trend by painting her room forest green. She hesitated to call herself a "follower," clarifying that she got *inspiration* from trends. She implied she avoided just copying the trend whole cloth, but instead put her own spin on it. A better term may be "participant" as she seemed to be joining trends by contributing new, unique-to-her, content.

Having gained an understanding of "where" the participants spend their time on TikTok, I asked them to describe favorite trends or kinds of TikTok they most enjoy.

Ms. L: Do you have favorite trends or favorite kinds of TikToks that people make?

Cerulean: Mostly the guys making jokes type of [trends], yeah.

Ms. L: So, like, comedy style or, like-

Cerulean: Yeah, comedy.

Ms. L: -like, sketch style?

Cerulean: Like, comedy stuff, yeah.

Ms. L: Does the Algorithm ever feed you, like, standup routines? Like, fully a video of people doing standup? Or is it mostly people making TikToks?

To translate a little—I was asking Cerulean if he sees TikTok content that is imported from other platforms, such as clips from standup specials on TV or standup routines posted by comedians on YouTube, or if he sees comedy content that is "native" to TikTok—made on the app, for the app.

Cerulean: No, it's not that type of standup. It's just, like, them talking and just the little writing at the top or stuff.

Ms. L: Okay. Can you explain why you like that kinda thing?

Cerulean: No, it's just sometimes it just pops up random stuff. Like, today, uh, I was watching a video in TikTok and it was like, "I'm like The Flash, but

> instead of being fast, I like boys," so it was, like, the dude, it was funny. Something funny. It's just, like, so random, but it was funny.

Cerulean referenced a trend I had never seen before, so I looked it up after our conversation. To participate, the user posts a video, usually of themselves, with text superimposed on the video in the format "I'm like [certain superhero] but instead of [superhero's superpower], I [have undesirable trait/engage in embarrassing activity]." I found the trend seemed to be associated with a sound featuring the song 556 (Green Tip) by Iayze, so I was able to use the Sounds feature of the TikTok app to find several examples of this trend to watch. On TikTok, creators can add audio, or "Sounds," to their videos by either uploading their own or choosing from a vast library of audio tracks already added to TikTok. When browsing, a user may click on the sound of a given video to see other videos using the same sound. If a sound is trending, this feature makes it simple for users to understand the formula of a given trend by observing the videos gathered "under" the sound, and then use the sound themselves to join the trend. In this case, having watched many of the most popular videos under the sound, I determined the textual material of the trend seemed, to me, to be conspicuously misogynistic, homophobic, and male. However, I believe the trend is intended to be perceived as subversively comedic, and Cerulean finding the joke funny gained him entry to the "in-group" of users who understand enough of the related cultural references to laugh at something that does not seem funny to someone on the outside (Chee, 2023).

Cerulean's responses to my questions about the Algorithm are interesting as well. He clearly enjoyed the content the Algorithm was feeding him and enjoyed the comedy videos he got on his FYP. Yet, he could not explain why he preferred what the Algorithm shows him. The Algorithm is built to feed him more of what he prefers, but it seemed Cerulean was letting the

Algorithm figure out what he liked with no conscious content-seeking of his own. Vermilion gave a similar answer to the same question:

> **Vermilion:** Kind of that, just whatever comes at me, I'm not really like specific about, you know, which one, like, "this one, not this one." I just kind of kind of like a whole range of [things]. If it comes at me and I like it, okay.

Instead of deliberately seeking out content they like, Cerulean and Vermilion let things come to them via Algorithm. They preferred to not search on their own for content they might like, and instead reinforced the Algorithm's "choices" by interacting with videos they liked to see, which led to receiving a higher volume of videos they were more likely to enjoy.

My conversation with Saffron on how she interacts with TikTok, however, was different in that she took a more active approach to seeking out content:

> **Ms. L:** Do you have a favorite trend, or a favorite kind of TikTok?
> **Saffron:** Mmm, I don't really know. I like the trends that are, like, just, like, a quick saying. I don't know an example, but it's like a clip of a lyric, and they make something off of that?
> **Ms. L:** Mm-hmm.
> **Saffron:** I don't even know an example, but-
> **Ms. L:** No, I think-
> **Saffron:** -if that makes sense.

Saffron was trying to describe a common TikTok format where the creator will choose a sound with a monologue or dialogue. In the video, the creator lip syncs along with the sound, but on screen, captions that are different from the audio—discussing a different topic while utilizing the same conversational structure and flow as the audio—are displayed for the viewer to read. This creates a juxtaposition of the context of the original audio with the newly created often comedic context of the creator's captions. The humor is also frequently augmented by the creator acting out exaggerated facial expressions and body language as they lip sync. I understand why Saffron liked this format, as it often involves relating some sort of funny story or event and could even be considered a subgenre of the storytime type content she enjoyed.

Ms. L: Could you describe why you like that kind of content?
Saffron: I like that you can go to the sound and then see, 'cause, like, if I really like it and I've seen a bunch of them, and they're all pretty funny, then I can go to the sound specifically and see what other spinoffs that they've done or whatever. Like, other people.

Saffron used the same TikTok feature in her day-to-day browsing that I used to look up examples of Cerulean's favorite trend. She enjoyed this feature because she could actively seek out more content of the same type when she encountered a funny trend she likes. This practice, considered in combination with her use of TikTok as a search engine, shows Saffron was willing to put in extra effort to find content she enjoyed instead of waiting for the Algorithm to bring it to her.

Celadon was far more specific in her answers about trends:

Ms. L: Do you have a favorite trend or like a favorite kind of TikTok?
Celadon: Oh, right now, what do I like? I love SpongeBob audios [that] go viral all the time, all the time. There's like, once a month, a new viral SpongeBob audio. And my favorite one is Squidward's Tiki Land song right now.
Ms. L: Yes.
Celadon: So, that one's been stuck in my head for like the past three days. Before it was people doing like Encanto cosplays. Those were amazing. Those were so crazy talented. There're so many people who looked just like the characters. That was probably my favorite trend. Or people, like, doing comedy skits, like this one guy who did every single character, and he would [do] skit as them, and it was hilarious, like, that was one of my favorite recent trends as well, it was Encanto.

Celadon was showing a lot of trust in my TikTok savvy here—she expected me to know the Squidward's Tikki Land Song trend (I did), and to have seen the explosion of fandom content related to the release of the movie Encanto (I had). It is interesting that here Celadon mentioned two different modes of trends. The Tikki Land trend sprang up from a specific sound, much like the trend Saffron liked. The Encanto trend was not developed on one specific audio, but instead became a trend due to the massive popularity of the movie at the time. I remember seeing several

sub-trends pop up within the larger Encanto outpouring, some based on audios, some based on choreography, and some based on fan-made sketches or moments from the movie.

Celadon displayed a more conscious consumption of content than the other three participants, which was to be expected based on her degree of involvement with TikTok. Because she created videos with the goal of viewer engagement, she made sure she is well-versed in the TikTok cultures she was hoping to appeal to, which is clear in the enthusiastic and rigorous way she consumed content on the app.

When asked who his favorite creators are, Cerulean did not mention any names but said he did have favorites:

Ms. L: Why would you say those folks are your favorites?
Cerulean: Mm, some of them joke. Some of them are just, like, interesting stuff. Like, there's this one guy that talks about, like, different type of animals and how, like, they act and it's just some random stuff about animals. Some guy's just, like, slandering and stuff. So, it's mostly those type of stuff.

I believe Cerulean was referencing popular TikToker and YouTuber Mamadou Ndiaye, known as @mndiaye_97, who makes videos sharing animal facts with comical wordplay and a matter-of-fact tone of voice. I noticed Cerulean had just been mentioning content he finds funny and entertaining—even @mndiaye_97's animal facts are intended to be funny and entertaining as well as informative.

Ms. L: So, you're looking at mostly informative or, like, talking, kind of. Do you tend to see dancing, art videos, or crafting, or food making? Is it mostly just sit and talk videos?
Cerulean: It's mostly just jokes, it's barely [ever] like, drawing videos, but I don't see the little tutorial videos. When I see an art video, it's mostly the animation type of videos. Like, right now there's this one guy that's making videos of, like, alphabet lore and that F is the main villain. It's really corny and I-
Ms. L: Why F?
Cerulean: I know! They got, right now, they got the E and D are, like, locked inside his lair.

Cerulean excitedly showed me the alphabet lore animation videos on his phone. He noticed the newest video, for the letter M, had just been posted, and since he had not seen it yet, we watched it together. The animations were funny, comedic, but also showed Cerulean enjoyed a type of TikTok more related to his passion for drawing and animation. This was the only way in which Cerulean connected his personal art and his TikTok practices during our conversation.

Vermilion named creators directly. She mentioned Brittany Broski of Kombucha Girl fame, saying she genuinely enjoyed Brittany's "really funny" content. Vermilion mentioned a few artists she thought "draw really creative" that she liked to use for inspiration.

Vermilion: I'm not like a big fan of Doja Cat's music, but I think she's like a really funny person. She is talking about how people say all the time, like, I forgot that she was a celebrity. And she's like, "I don't know how to be a celebrity." So I commented, I don't know, put yourself in rice or something, turn it on and turn it back off. Because [it's] a thing that people will say randomly and I think it's funny.

This act of leaving a funny comment is the same type of participation Cerulean regularly engages in. Vermilion participated in Doja Cat's joke by adding her own, suggesting Doja Cat try common iPhone troubleshooting techniques to "fix" her inability to be a celebrity (Doja Cat is a music celebrity). However, Vermilion noted it is not her original joke. She was repeating a thing she has seen other people comment that she thought was funny, which as discussed earlier, is a common TikTok practice potentially driven by the desire to make the top comment on a video that leads to formulaic, repetitive commenting. Vermilion might not have been seeking that level of engagement, but she was participating in TikTok cultural norms by leaving a formulaic comment that she and others found funny.

Ms. L: Do you find you're drawn to those folks because you relate to them? Or it's more just, like, they're entertaining to you?

Vermilion: I think it's just more that they're entertaining. I try not to relate myself to TikToks too much because like I don't want to, I don't want to like try to fit myself into a certain category of what kind of person I am on TikTok,

> or this and that. But like, videos like the one I was talking about, like yeah, I don't really know how to exist. I'm just kind of here.

Interestingly, Vermilion expressed reluctance to narrowly define herself by finding affinity in TikTok videos. She said, just like Doja Cat, she does not "really know how to exist" and "I'm just kind of here." I interpret this to mean Vermilion preferred to keep her sense of self separate from her online spaces: she was happy to seek entertainment and inspiration on TikTok but did not want or need to define herself by the content she consumes. This is in direct opposition to her description of enjoying "funny and weird" content because she was "funny and weird." It is interesting to see this juxtaposition.

My conversation with Saffron was less specific, but still illuminating:

Ms. L: Do you find you have favorite creators?
Saffron: Yeah, I have, like, a handful of some that I really am interested in, and I kind of will even follow on Instagram now. And then I like some that I really used to follow, and they're, like, popping up again and they look really different and everything.
Ms. L: Do you find them through the algorithm feeding them to you, or did you find them somewhere else, and they directed you to TikTok?
Saffron: Usually through just my For You page. And every now and then, I'll follow, like, if I was really into this one creator and then I ended up kind of falling out, but got interested in one of their friends, and then I'll see that they're in the comments, 'cause it puts who you're following. So if I'm following someone, like, whoever, they'll be at the top of the comments.
Ms. L: Mmm.
Saffron: So I'll get back into them. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I forgot about them!"

Saffron did not mention specific creators but explained how specific features in the comment section of TikTok enabled her to keep up with creators she might have otherwise lost interest in over time. The TikTok feature that shows comments of people she follows at the top of the comment section helped her rediscover previously interesting creators. This is the same feature that made Celadon reluctant to post comments due to concerns that her friends might see and judge her, though clearly this feature was used differently by Saffron. She noted if she was

particularly interested in a specific creator, she would follow them on Instagram, which implies she perceived a functional difference between TikTok and Instagram.

Also, to clarify how Saffron used the phrase “falling out,” in this context, it does not mean she and the creator had a big argument that led to the end of their friendship. Instead, she meant she saw less of the interesting creator over time and shifted her focus to other creators.

Ms. L: Do you find your favorite creators are making the type of content you wanna see, or are you following them more for their personality or their life?

Saffron: I think if I more so like their personality, I'll just follow their Instagram or whatever, but usually if I like them it's because of the type of stuff that they make. But if I also like them individually, then I'll follow them somewhere else.

Ms. L: That makes sense. Awesome. So TikTok is really for you, content driven, not necessarily creator driven.

Saffron: Mm-hmm.

Here, Saffron provided more clarity on the way TikTok and Instagram function for her. She considered Instagram a more personality-based social media, meant for following specific people, a viewpoint Celadon shared. Both Saffron and Celadon viewed TikTok, conversely, as a place for finding interesting, entertaining content regardless of the creator.

Celadon, unsurprisingly, reeled off a list of her favorite creators by name, including makeup artists (Abby and Charlotte Roberts, Jordan), comedy creators (Brittany Broski, @Shreksdumpster, Ysabelle Wallace), and slice-of-life creators (@AlongCameAbby). She describes @AlongCameAbby as a little girl whose cheerful antics are filmed by her dad. Celadon said, “And that's typically stuff [that would] be on my mom's For You Page, like, mom bonding with her daughter, but like this dad and this little girl are so funny and so precious.”

When Celadon explained what shows up most on her FYP, she opened her app right there for me to see and despite her first guess (an “off-putting” Snapchat video recording), the first

video she saw was “some girl from my school,” recommended by the “people you may know” feature, the same feature Saffron considers “weird.”

Celadon: That's how I find people who used to go here, or I've known through another friend, and mutual followers show up.
But just sometimes randomness, someone saying something funny while laying in their bed, and they're like, I'm gonna upload this to TikTok. But usually, it's just comedy, like someone recording something funny, or recently with like the world's, you know, like what's going on in Russia and Ukraine and stuff. That has been a huge thing on my For You Page, but as all people though, because it's what's happening in the world, and people are gonna update on it, and some people are gonna be insensitive about it. So that's what a lot of my For You Page has also been recently besides the comedy, I've seen a lot of updating on stuff.

Ms. L: That kinda discourse?

Celadon: Yeah. That's very off-putting on my For You Page. Like, that's something that usually wouldn't show up, but it is, just because it's like worldly, it's like universal.

Ms. L: Do you kinda scroll past news stuff?

Celadon: Yeah, because it makes me upset. It hurts my heart when I see some sad videos so I just go past them. Not because I don't care, but because, like, I don't feel like crying right now.

Ms. L: Yeah. You said before, TikTok is where you go for entertainment for relaxation, and then next news in, that's-

Celadon: -It's like, uh-

Ms. L: -against where you're going.

Celadon: Yeah. I don't wanna go like laughing from 30 minutes to like a sad song or someone's crying, and I'm like, oh no.

Celadon reemphasized her understanding that with increased engagement comes unwelcome behaviors. She again displayed awareness of and care about her own emotional state. She knew that seeing the war imagery would make her upset and feel like crying, and she avoided it on TikTok because she wanted to maintain a separation between her entertainment and challenging, disturbing real-world events. She showed comfort with discussing emotional state and mental health, which is directly related to the Gen Z online identity (Stahl & Literat, 2022). However, she was also showing a sense of social responsibility to care about world events, much like Vermilion, which is also related to the Gen Z online identity (Stahl & Literat, 2022).

Whether or not they actively sought out new information, the participants did engage in learning on TikTok. The participants were prompted to name the kinds of things they learn on the app:

Cerulean: Some stuff, yeah. Like, right now I'm starting to work out and [it's] mostly just showing me workout videos and stuff like that. Just shows me, like, here are tutorials, so just sometimes form, here, it gets messed up. And some stuff is just also some art tutorials. But, yeah.

Ms. L: Do you feel like you can learn the same way from TikTok that you might learn in school?

Cerulean: I mean, there's-

Ms. L: Like, following a tutorial versus following what a teacher explains?

Cerulean: -in TikTok, I don't think so, 'cause it's one-minute videos. It just adds to the learning in school. But if I need to, like, learn about AP classes, they would just show me a little bit about AP classes and tell me about that.

Ms. L: So, it's more like surface-level knowledge.

Cerulean: It's just, like, added to. 'Cause you can't add, like, a whole class time... in just one video.

I appreciate Cerulean's nuance in describing the type of learning he engaged in during school and the type of learning he accessed on TikTok. He demonstrated understanding that the depth of information available in a short video is nowhere near the depth of any class he was taking. He viewed knowledge he gained from TikTok as surface level and supplementary, adding on to his school learning. Notably, he described TikTok as a place where he can learn more about school itself, not just the content being taught in classes. However, he said if he needed more information on AP classes, "they would just show me." Cerulean did not mention actively searching for these videos. He was letting the algorithm bring him content it thinks he would enjoy and taking a more passive position in content consumption, which could be argued is more in line with an entertainment use than a learning use.

Vermilion, conversely, was active in seeking new information to help her with goals and desired skills. The only specific example of what she has learned from TikTok she could name was "turtles can breathe through their butt apparently." Yet, she did feel she learns "a variety of

things" over time. She made a distinction between where information comes to her passively (TikTok) and where she goes to search for knowledge proactively (Google). Vermilion searched for examples of different methods to accomplish her goals so she could "try to find my own kind of style doing it." She explained, "I don't really watch a lot of tutorials for anything." Instead, she attempted to reverse engineer artistic processes from images she finds online. She offered an example:

> **Vermilion:** Like, I am really bad at doing trees and leaves. So I'll look for ways to do it differently so that I can try to find my own kind of style of doing it. I just kind of like [search] "tree leaves," you know, paintings or pictures, like I'll look for an image on Google. And then I'll try to recreate it in a different way, kind of.

She used Google Images, which returns many images per search, to collect several points of reference for herself before choosing one to imitate or recreate. Because I consider TikTok's search feature to be infamously inaccurate, I asked if Vermilion enjoys finding new information while she scrolls.

> **Vermilion:** Depends on what it is. I mean, in terms of information, yeah, most the time, it's kind of helpful. I mean, not really currently. I mean, it's not really that helpful, but like, oh my gosh, I spill paint on my dog. Oh, my TikTok told me not to shave his hair off. TikTok told me I could use, um, mashed potatoes or something dumb like that. But I feel like my parents don't always agree with like, the things you learn on TikTok. I mean, this wasn't TikTok, but there's this one time I was like, "Siri, can I cook my fried mozzarella sticks in the microwave?" And she's like, "Sure." And you actually weren't supposed to do it that way. But I still did it that way.

Vermilion described a type of ostensibly unorthodox knowledge often called "TikTok hacks." TikTok hacks can range from old wives' tales and urban legends to fascinating and effective remedies to common household issues. However, in my experience, viral TikTok hacks are often viewed as dangerous or irresponsible, and are commonly ridiculed on and off the app. Vermilion's made-up example of using mashed potatoes to remove paint from dog fur shows she

was aware that the hacks are often outlandish. Her acknowledgement that that her parents do not approve of TikTok hacks shows she was aware the knowledge she gains from TikTok may be questioned or forbidden by authorities in her real life or might be outright wrong.

I discussed this with Saffron as well:

Ms. L: We already talked a little [about how] you use TikTok as a search engine to look things up: how to do stuff, how people are doing things. Do you find you learn any other things? Like, what kind of things do you find yourself getting surprised by, or even searching out and being like, "I learned this today because I went on TikTok"?

Saffron: I'll find, maybe, animal facts, which is really weird. They'll be like, "Did you know about this?" Or a lot of it is like the current events; I'll see a bunch about—it'll be actual news people or whatever that are also on there, and they're like, "Let's make it short and explain it on TikTok." So I'm like, "Okay! That makes sense."

Ms. L: We talked a little bit already about [how] you like looking for things like recipes, 'cause you're already in the process, you're like, "I'm gonna make something," and so you go looking. But do you have a favorite thing to learn from TikTok? I know that's a weird question.

Saffron: I think I just like learning more skill-based stuff, I guess. Like, I'll look for hair ideas, or I'll learn how to [make] recipes, or maybe a couple art things. But it's more so not actually learning how to do it, but it's like an option of what to do rather than, like, how to, if that makes sense.

Ms. L: Yeah! Totally. So would you say you look through a bunch of videos of kind of the same process happening before you settle on one?

Saffron: Mm-hmm. I think so, yeah.

Saffron seemed to prefer searching for useful information, such as quick and easily digestible news stories, or instructions for new skills. Interestingly, Saffron also seemed to prefer learning through aggregated information, like Vermilion. Both searched for a range of options, whether on Google or TikTok, before choosing how to move forward. Celadon, having already explained she tends to search on Instagram and YouTube to learn new skills, said she also comes across things to learn on TikTok despite not actively searching for it.

Celadon: I learned that instead of trimming a foot, while your clay is still wet, score and slip a foot on, and then just straighten it up with a wooden straight tool or the metal one. And I'm like, I need that 'cause I hate trimming. So, I've definitely found some stuff, and I'll instantly send it to my friends. And

because we have a text group chat too, I'll send a TikTok to the text group chat and be like, "Guys did you know you could do this?" Every once in a while I'll get something and be like, I had no idea you could do that.

Ms. L: Do you find yourself learning outside of ceramics, like makeup or cooking or like-

Celadon: Yeah, my mom has a TikTok account, and she does cooking. She did a cooking video and got like 3000 views on it because it was a healthy thing, and it's like a point system. And so, all these people who were doing this point system took her idea, and was like, "Oh, I can make this, and it'd be this amount of points, and it's a good, healthy, balanced meal." Stuff like that. Or people be like, here's a better way to apply lashes, and I'll be like, oh my gosh, I have trouble applying lashes, this is helpful to me. Or this whole audio that was a step routine on a different way you should apply your foundation, put this first and this and steps. And I followed that for like six months before I found another one I liked. So, there is stuff makeup-wise on TikTok that completely influences me on how I do mine. 'Cause I'm like, oh, theirs looks good, I wanna do that and make mine look good.

Ms. L: So, would you say you enjoy learning from TikTok?

Celadon: For sure. Usually, I mean, I'm not gonna get a makeup video that's a prank. Like, I'm gonna watch someone do it before I do it myself.

Ms. L: No turning faces blue?

Celadon: Yeah. A lot of times, someone will be like, "I'm trying out this new viral hack, oh, it worked out well for me, you should try it too." I'm like, okay, I'll try it. If it works for me, it works for me.

Celadon did not seem to have the same inclination to collect content before choosing a source of knowledge that Saffron and Vermilion do. Celadon even related an anecdote from the point of view of the distributor of knowledge instead of the recipient. She explained some techniques she finds on TikTok "completely influence" her, and only needed to, as she confidently stated, "watch someone do it before I do it myself." Like Vermilion, Celadon seemed aware of the dubious veracity of TikTok hacks, but also like Vermilion, was willing to try it if it seems reasonable. Both displayed a particular level of trust in knowledge they encounter on TikTok.

Overall, my conversations with the participants show that teenagers use TikTok for multiple purposes, including entertainment, social bonding and communication, and leisure.

They deeply value being able to exchange TikTok videos with friends, which is based in showing they care about their friends and makes them feel cared for by their friends in return. They would like to present themselves authentically online, but are conscious of potential feedback they may receive, which leads each student to make individual choices about how to control their privacy and participation on TikTok. Some students take steps to protect themselves from experiences they feel are harmful, showing they are aware that more exposure to "everyone" or "people" online can invite negative experiences. Success for the participatory options on TikTok that require making creative content is measured by teens in terms of engagement from others. Participation on TikTok is considered generative, or at least additive, in that making comments is perceived to be just as valuable as making videos, and even liking a comment can change the experience of that comment for other users.

The content sought by each participant is related to their individual personalities and preferences, and they either enjoyed or just did not mind the Algorithm choosing their FYP content for them as they scroll. Saffron, and occasionally Vermilion and Celadon, used TikTok like a search engine to gather information and learn new skills. All four participants displayed some level of trust in the Algorithm and the information they find on TikTok, which shows they were willing to and would learn from TikTok. They would share that knowledge with friends. Still, the four teens in this study appear to view TikTok primarily as a source of entertainment and social opportunity that allowed them to participate creatively and express themselves.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS

It may be understood that most students, when discussing “art” with an art teacher and no externally provided definition, will default to “standard” or “traditional” art forms like painting, drawing, or sculpture. Of the participants, only Celadon pushed past this boundary, declaring makeup to be her personal art of choice, though she qualifies this with a quick, “depends on what you wanna call art.” She defines creating makeup looks as “drawing on my face with like colorful paints and eyeliners and stuff,” which places makeup within the boundaries of the traditional art form of drawing. However, she does define house flipping and furniture restoration as “also art.” No other student included a form of art outside painting, drawing, sculpture, or photography during our discussions, even when discussing personal art made at home outside of art class. Based on these discussions, I can conclude that many students likely perceive school art to include only those traditional forms of art and do not perceive the creative making they do online to be related to academic artmaking.

I suggest school art holds the most value for students socially, as opposed to mastery of artistic technique or development of artistic process. Each of the four participants, in their own ways, seek to share their school or personal art with people in their lives, especially close friends and family. They consider socializing to be an important, often favorite, part of art class. My Carmine Lake students exhibited the most extreme examples of this behavior, often completely discarding their finished artwork unless they wanted to show it to someone outside of class.

Clearly, making school art or personal art has an integral social function, whether socializing during making time in class, or afterwards, in the display of their work to their chosen audience.

Usually, school art stays in real life unless the student already combines their offline and online lives significantly. All four participants work to be their genuine selves online, but still hold boundaries between their real-life creative work and their online creative presence. Saffron and Vermilion do not post their school or personal work online and expressed concern or caution around receiving too much exposure or going viral. They both also show their school art to a select few friends and family members in their lives. Cerulean posts some of his personal work on his Instagram art account, but he says it is only fanart, which was not allowed in art class at Madder. He does not post art on TikTok, complaining it is "too much work" and that he does not want to "draw so much just so [he] can make an animation and stuff." Only Celadon, who hopes to be an influencer, posts her personal art on TikTok. She has not posted her school art on TikTok, though she indicated she might begin doing so in the future. Even with her strong desire to achieve virality and become an influencer, she is still conscious of the potential harm that might come her way with so much exposure. Overall, it seems the participants consider school art to be either not entertaining enough for TikTok, not worth the effort of posting, or perhaps, too personal to post online and so is restricted to real-life friends and family members.

It is important to note students perceive TikTok to be for entertainment, leisure, and socializing primarily before any other use. The participants report using TikTok to fill time, entertain themselves, and relax. According to my survey, this is consistent with the average social media use of Madder art students as well. The participants also find value in using TikTok videos to entertain friends, strengthening social bonds by sharing comedic jokes curated for their friends' specific senses of humor and receiving the same care in return. Vermilion also finds

value through using TikTok community-driven games to find inspiration and make art. Even for the participants with stronger boundaries between real life and TikTok, they still share TikTok videos with their friends to bond and share knowledge. Vermilion, Saffron, and Celadon discussed giving their school artwork to parents or friends, but for them, the choice to gift their art seems disconnected from the class itself. This suggests that these students consider TikTok a more productive and accommodating means of socializing and being entertained/entertaining than art class, despite considering socializing an important favorite part of class.

While the participants view TikTok as a place to socialize and seek entertainment, participation in the app inherently requires creativity and some level of creative social contribution. The four participants represent a range of participatory options available on TikTok, spanning from only liking comments, to writing comments, to making private videos, to making public videos in the hopes of being an influencer. Each student has chosen what type of TikTok "making" is most desirable and comfortable to them, and they typically engage in that making any time they are on the app. Cerulean considers his comment-writing "making" to be successful when his comments gain lots of engagement in the form of likes and replies. Celadon sees her video making as successful when her videos get a lot of engagement in the form of likes and comments. Both students require input from other TikTok users, the TikTok community at large, to generate successful work; put simply, TikTok is a place where meaning-making happens in community (Stahl & Literat, 2022; Steele & Hardy, 2023; Vickery, 2020). Considering that students seem to value their school art primarily when it is involved in some sort of social exchange (a friend seeing it, or a family member receiving it as a gift), it follows that students would be comfortable "making" in their perceived more productive socializing space, TikTok.

Nonetheless, I discovered students perceive some similarities between school art class and being on TikTok, which was completely unexpected by me and not anticipated in formulating my research question. As discussed above, students consider socializing to be a part of TikTok and art class. The participants specifically mentioned interacting with friends to be important to them both in class and on TikTok (or with TikTok, outside of class), which indicates they consider socializing to be a necessary part of the creative process. Students desire opportunities to socialize in creative environments, online and in real life. Additionally, students desire opportunities to make creative things to entertain others and/or themselves.

To summarize, this study found most students perceive art made at school to be restricted to only traditional forms of art such as drawing, painting, and sculpture. When students engage in creative making, whether in art class or on TikTok, their process and product have an essential social function. While students may perceive TikTok as a place to carry out creative making, they consider it to be a social space first, where successful creative making requires engagement from the TikTok community. However, few students post their creative making from art class on TikTok as they may consider it either not entertaining enough, not representative enough of their personality, or potentially, too personal to post online. Whether on TikTok or in art class, students require socializing and opportunities to entertain and be entertained during and after they engage in their creative process.

CHAPTER 6:

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Teens' Desire for Social Interaction

One of the goals for this study was to discover how educators could guide students to understand that the time they spend playing on social media is valuable, and that the things they make there are valuable too. While I personally still consider play necessary for creativity (Gude, 2010), the literature and the results of this study do not show students consider TikTok and other social media to be explicitly a place to play. The social aspect of social media appears to be far more valuable to art students. TikTok, along with other social media platforms, provides space to strengthen bonds with peers, engage with larger communities, and do some creative making on their own terms (Literat, 2021; Olson, 2016; Overby & Jones, 2015; Stahl & Literat, 2022; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021; Vickery, 2020). Students likely do not seek the same degree of interaction in their school art because the classroom environment militates against aspects of their full social creative process that they deem necessary and seek out on social media. As suggested by this study, with a more comprehensive understanding of how high school students perceive content creation on TikTok, educators may understand that in secondary art classroom environments, there is a lack of opportunities for students to socialize, entertain peers, and engage in creativity supported by communities of their choice.

Pedagogical Strategies Recommended for High School Art Classes

In the following, I suggest strategies that may be implemented within secondary art classrooms to engage with teens' desire for social creative making more fully. I must note, a

shortcoming of this study is that due to the necessarily closely defined scope of my research, I am unable to carry out a comprehensive survey of current pedagogical practices that are *actively* being implemented within high schools. There may be teachers out there doing just these things I am about to recommend, and I just am unaware of it because they do not publish research, or I have not read their research, or I just did not learn about their pedagogical strategies in my own program seeing as time is finite and curricular choices must be made. I must also note these suggested strategies are broad, and intended to function less as, for example, a classroom procedure, and more as a philosophical baseline for teachers to hold as foundational when designing their classroom environment and curriculum.

Art educators should recognize that contemporary teenagers consider socializing to be an expected and necessary aspect of art class and of the creative process. I suggest incorporating opportunities to socialize into as many aspects of class as possible—not just free time or making time. It may seem counterintuitive, as educators often think of "socializing" to be purely disruptive and inappropriate. When scaffolded appropriately, however, teens will be able to access peer interaction as the necessary component of creativity that they see it as, and not just a way to avoid listening to instructions. Expect silliness, experimentation, and exploration of the boundaries of their agency as the students make art. Students want to entertain and be entertained, so establish boundaries that allow for this practice to happen as a part of creative making. Encourage a broad definition of art as well and accept that some creative endeavors do not have a product at the end that can be turned in and graded.

When possible, provide opportunities to show art made in class to peer groups outside of class in addition to sharing work within class. Contemporary students are connected with others more than any other generation, and often evaluate their creative products based on the quality

and quantity of response they receive from others. Within the classroom, create secure-feeling "safe" spaces in which to give and receive feedback from peers. Teach students not just how to engage in formal critique, but give them constructive, supportive tools to engage with art in all stages of making. On social media, students' actions and perceptions of "correct" behavior are informed by the online social environments they join. Foster an environment of informal spontaneous feedback to peers but teach how to identify and avoid making harmful comments. Teach how to address harm caused as well. While social media platforms like TikTok come somewhat "pre-loaded" with cultural expectations, educators are responsible for defining the culture of the classroom along with their students. High school aged students already have strong ideas of right and wrong and conduct themselves online with respect to those ideas. Allow students the agency to do so in the classroom and in their creative making.

Provide opportunities for students to receive engagement on their class artwork at all levels of formality, not just critiques or teacher feedback (like grades), which will allow students to more completely evaluate whether they personally consider their artwork to be a success. However, keep in mind some students will not want engagement and may desire privacy instead. Contemporary teens make decisions about their privacy based on their understanding of what will maintain their comfort and safety every day online. Allow students the agency to make these choices in the classroom as well and provide alternate means of assessment and feedback to students who want more creative privacy.

To that end, recognize the profound consciousness contemporary teens have surrounding privacy, online life, and the importance of their own agency. Consider reevaluating how art is assessed in the classroom. Are the students being judged on final projects or completing a predefined artistic process? Or are students being evaluated on how they are present in their

creative endeavors, in the class, and in their communities within school? Even students with tightly held boundaries who are reluctant to immerse themselves fully in a creative community are still contributing to the playful social environment of the classroom in their own way.

I would like to place further emphasis on this point: recognize the drive to socialize and be entertained. Allow and encourage silly art. Let memes and fanart be art—participation is generative! Support the students who wish to entertain and discuss the viewer's role in art and creativity. Support the students who wish to be entertained and discuss ways to engage with entertainment creatively. Encourage learning from all sources but stress the importance of online literacy when collecting online knowledge.

Recommendations for Future Research

Clearly there is a dearth of art education studies focused on social media. I believe TikTok is an especially rich source of data ripe for art educator exploration. I would find significant value in research exploring the visual arts and animation side of TikTok, only briefly examined here via Cerulean, to consider how contemporary teens interested in art view art careers considering the prevalence of social media consumer culture. Also of value would be further exploration into the motivations of contemporary students who engage in visual art production for TikTok and engage in school art classes voluntarily (as opposed to those meeting a requirement for graduation) to better inform not just how to teach but what to teach in secondary art classes.

TikTok, and social media in general, is a new and continually developing avenue of exploration for art education pedagogy. We as art educators must utilize this avenue of insight into contemporary students to inform our pedagogies and practices, because our students are

already seamlessly integrating social media like TikTok into not only their daily lives, but into their practice of creativity as well.

Furthermore, I strongly recommend that art education researchers investigate play—well-structured and clearly defined play—for secondary-aged art students. Art is generally one of the few secondary subjects not yet constrained by punishing mandatory testing, inflexible district- or state-imposed curricula, or pacing guides meant to improve standardized test scores. Art educators often have an uncommon degree of freedom in deciding not just what to teach, but how to teach it. Where is play? Where did playing go? Why are students not playing while learning? Witnessing the incidents where students actually played in my room, whether on TikTok or not, was so joyful, so exciting, so ecstatic for me that I just let it happen. Why are secondary students not supported in playing, when it is clear play is necessary for both artmaking and learning (Gude, 2010; Hamlin & Fusaro, 2018; Han, 2015; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2020)? This question remains unanswered by this study, suggesting an area of fruitful inquiry in the future.

Closing Statement

A topic perhaps conspicuously absent from this study is teens' use of TikTok as an escape. I have watched my own students spend hour after hour scrolling through videos, barely pausing to let any play through, avoiding anything and everything around them including their classwork. I have also watched myself become engrossed in the same endless scrolling sitting at my desk after the last bell, completely disengaged, just letting the stimulus from my phone wash over me while I ignored everything else. While this study urges art educators to recognize the social, creative, and occasionally playful uses teens have for TikTok, it would be irresponsible to hold up TikTok as some sort of perfect tool for encouraging teenage creativity. Sometimes, an

escape needs to be an escape, and that is okay. However, it is necessary to discover why art students escape into TikTok (or Snapchat, or YouTube, or other platforms) when they want to "leave," seeking distraction online.

Looking back to my very first notes at the beginning of this applied project, I am ashamed of my condescension and presumption. I believed high school students just did not recognize the TikTok content they make as art, and it would be my responsibility to design curricula to lead them to the "discovery" that they are already artists making art. I naïvely placed myself in a position of presumed superiority to the students I hoped to study, considering their own knowledge and experience to be so underdeveloped as to not even exist. I am so thankful I was wrong. Secondary art students do not need an art teacher to lead them to some false finding of their own creativity. Students need an art teacher who acknowledges, welcomes, and encourages the creative lives students are already living, especially online.

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APPENDIX A:

LITERATURE REVIEW FIGURES AND TABLE

Figure 1

Search Term Spreadsheet

search engin	# of results	# pulled	journal	term	location	connector	term	location	connector	term	location
T&FO	14	1	any	tik tok	anywhere	AND	arts	anywhere			
T&FO	182	2	any	tik tok	anywhere						
T&FO	152	12	any	tiktok	anywhere						
T&FO	1	1	any	"art education"	keywords	AND	"social media"	keywords			
T&FO	10	5	any	"art education"	keywords	AND	"social media"	anywhere			
T&FO	306	55	any	"art education"	anywhere	AND	"social media"	anywhere			
T&FO	0	0	any	"art education"	keywords	AND	"new media"	keywords			
T&FO	9	2	any	"art education"	anywhere	AND	"new media"	keywords			
T&FO	481	76	any	"art education"	anywhere	AND	"new media"	anywhere			
T&FO	186	24	any	"social media"	keywords	AND	education	keywords			
T&FO	13	2	any	internet	anywhere	AND	"art education"	keywords			
T&FO	91	26	Art Educatio	"social media"	anywhere						
T&FO	40	7	Studies in Ar	"social media"	anywhere						
T&FO	0	0	any	new literacy	keywords	AND	art education	keywords			
T&FO	90	5	any	new literacy	anywhere	AND	art education	keywords			
OTW	N/A	N/A	Transformat	education	anywhere						
T&FO	44	15	any	play	keywords	AND	art	keywords			
T&FO	118	37	International	art education	anywhere						
T&FO	346	70	any	gameplay	anywhere	AND	art education	anywhere			
T&FO	70	14	any	content creation	keywords						
T&FO	293		any	content creator	anywhere	AND	art education	keywords			
Google Scho	40600	39	any	content creation in social media	all	with	contect creation	exact	with	art educatior	at least one
Google Scho	64	16	any	content creation in social media tiktok	all	with	art education	exact			
Google Scho	212	9	any	gameplay	all	with	art education	exact	with	"video game	EXCLUDED
Google Scho	1330	14	any	art education	all	with	art games	exact	with	"video game	EXCLUDED
Google Scho	17400	7	any	third space	all	with	art education	exact	with	digital	at least one
Google Scho	286	4	any	art education	exact	with	third space	exact	with	social media	exact
Google Scho	3670	8	any	tiktok	exact	with	art	exact			
Google Scho	236000	1	any	david herman media studies	all						

Figure 2

Research Concept Map

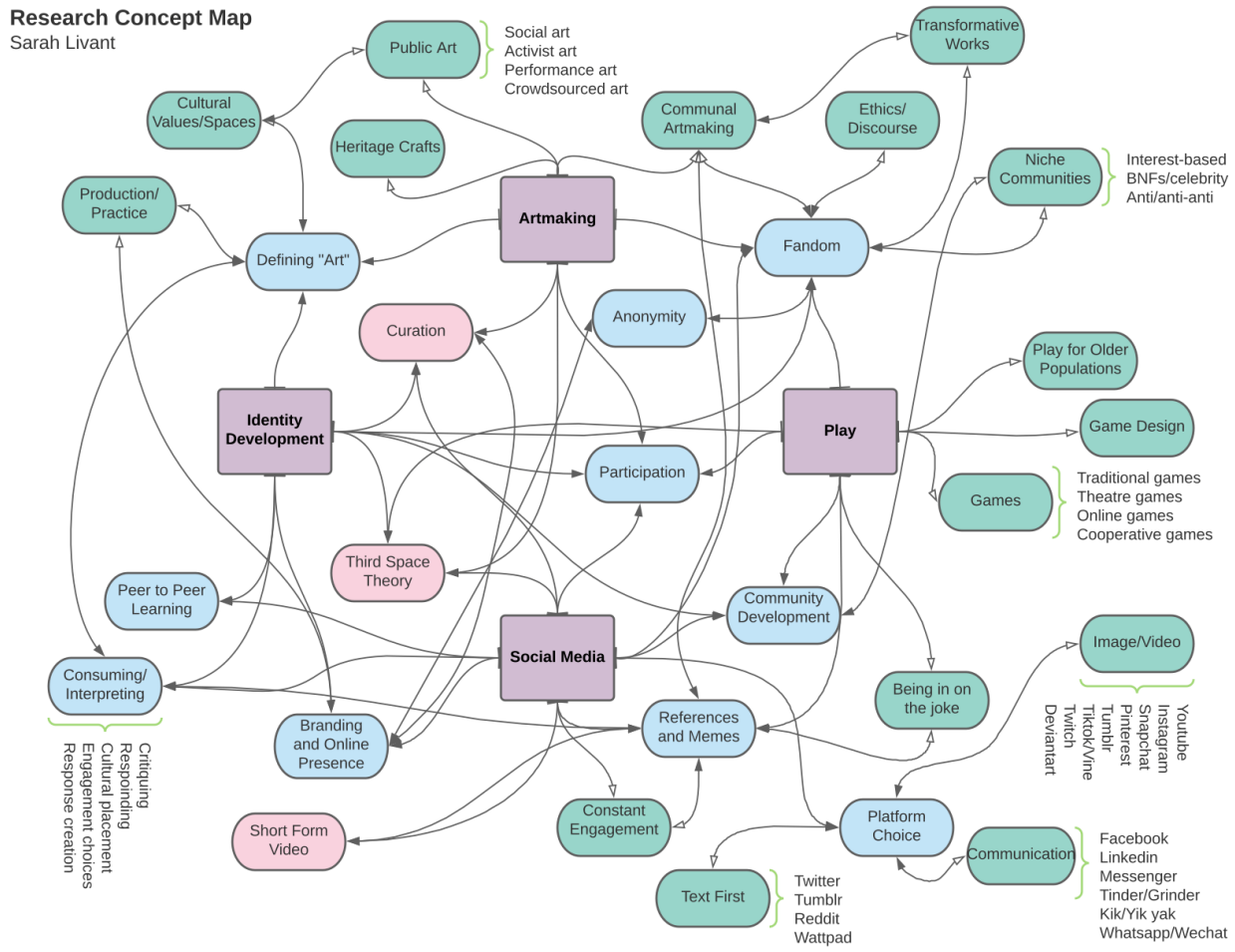


Table 1

Topics with Weighted Point Values

Source	Point Value	
From an art ed journal	1	(Art Education, Studies, Arts Ed Policy)
OR From a play journal	1	(Int. Journal of Play)
Published		
2020 or newer	2	
OR 2019	1	
Topic		
About social media in art ed	2	
OR About social media in education	1	
About play in art education	2	
OR About play in education	1	
About TikTok in education	2	
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS:	9	

APPENDIX B:

SOCIAL MEDIA USE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking this survey! I'm really excited to learn more about your social media use. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can end your participation at any time. The data I collect through this survey will be compiled anonymously, and your name will be removed from your answers.

1. What is your name?
    a. _____
2. Do you have access to a smartphone?
    a. Yes, and it's my phone
    b. Yes, but it's not my phone
    c. No
3. What social media platforms do you use? Check all that you use.
    a. Instagram
    b. TikTok
    c. Snapchat
    d. Kik
    e. Discord
    f. Tumblr
    g. Other(s): _____
4. How much time every day would you say you go on social media? Please be as accurate as you can—I won't judge!
    a. 30 minutes to 1 hour
    b. 1 to 3 hours
    c. 3 to 6 hours
    d. More than 6 hours
5. What kind of content do you post on social media? Check all that apply.
    a. I don't post online
    b. Pictures I take
    c. Videos I make
    d. Text I write

    e. I repost others' posts
    f. Other: _____

6. What audience do you share your posts with on social media?
    a. I don't post online
    b. Just my friends and family
    c. People who follow me
    d. Anyone online can view my posts
    e. It varies by post

7. What's your favorite kind of content to look at on social media?
    a. _____

8. If you could make a viral video, what would it be?
    a. _____

APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction:

Thanks so much for sitting down with me! We're going to start off talking a little bit about school, art class, that kind of thing, just to get us talking and establish a kind of baseline for us. I'll also be checking the Zoom and my recorder are working. Then I'll have some questions for you about TikTok. I'll take notes even though I'm recording, just to help my memory. Does that sound okay with you?

[if yes, proceed]

Okay, remember at any time you can stop if you want, and you can ask me questions too. I'm really interested in what you have to say! So as much as you're comfortable, please feel free to answer as honestly as you'd like! Let's get started.

Questions:

I. "Icebreaker" (baseline "art class" vocabulary)

a. What's your favorite project in art class been so far?
    i. Why?
b. What's your favorite art medium to work with?
    i. Do you get to use that medium here in class?
c. Do you make art at home or in your spare time?
    i. What kind of art?
d. Who outside of school do you share the work you make in class with, if anyone?
e. If you could make up an art assignment for us to do in class, what would it be?

II. TikTok Use

a. When do you usually use TikTok?
b. What do you go on TikTok for?
c. Do you make TikTok videos?
    i. [if yes,] would you be willing to show me some?
        1. [if yes,] what inspired you to make this?
    ii. [if no,] why don't you make your own?
d. Do your friends make videos?
e. Do you leave comments on other people's videos?
f. Do you usually just scroll on your For You Page, or do you go on your follows page too?

III. TikTok Content

a. What side of TikTok is your favorite?

i. Why? [relate, talk about favorites, draw out vocabulary]

b. What are your favorite trends or favorite kinds of TikTok?
    i. Why? [relate, talk about favorites, draw out vocabulary]
c. Do you have favorite creators?
    i. [if yes,] why are they your favorites?
    ii. [if no,] do you have a favorite type of content?
d. Would you mind showing me some of your favorites? [do not take or touch phone, just watch if offered]
e. What kind of stuff usually shows up on your For You Page? Would you mind showing me? [do not take or touch phone]
    i. Would you be willing to send me the first 5 videos that come up on your For You Page? [if yes, provide study TikTok account]
f. What kind of things do you learn from TikTok?
    i. What do you like learning from TikTok videos?
    ii. [if nothing,] what makes you say that?

IV. TikTok Identity/Creativity

a. [if they make videos,] what do you do to get ready for making a video?
b. [if they make videos,] where do you come up with your ideas for your Tiktoks?
c. Do you think you act or speak (or write) differently on TikTok than in other parts of your life?
    i. Can you elaborate on that?
d. If you could start a trend, what would it be?
e. What past trends did you really like?
    i. Why?
f. Have you had a video go viral before?
    i. [if yes,] what was that like?
    ii. [if no,] would you want anything of yours to go viral?

APPENDIX D:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROTOCOL NO: PROJECT00004842
STERLING IRB ID: 9638

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM, PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM, AND ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS (Ages 14-17)

STUDY TITLE: TikTok as Creative Space: Youth Perception of TikTok and Implications for Secondary Art Pedagogy

PROTOCOL NO: PROJECT00004842

STUDY INVESTIGATOR: Sarah Livant

STUDY SITE: Jackson County Comprehensive High School
152 Jaxco Jct
Hoschton, GA 30548

TELEPHONE: (706) 367-5003

SPONSOR: University of Georgia

This consent form is for use in a research study which may involve both adults and minors. Minors do not have the legal capacity to consent to their participation. Accordingly, when an individual cannot legally consent to participate, the pronouns “you” and “your” should be read as referring to the participant rather than the guardian who is signing the form to give consent. If you are a minor, your parent or legal guardian must sign this form.

Introduction

My name is Sarah Livant and I am a graduate student of Art Education at the University of Georgia. I am inviting you to take part in a research study. My supervisor for this study is Dr. Christina Hanawalt, who is a faculty member in Art Education at the University of Georgia.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research study is to investigate teenagers’ relationships to content creation on social media, specifically the short-form video app TikTok, to better understand their perceptions of their creative acts. This perception of creative acts on TikTok will be compared to teens’ perceptions of making art in school to better understand the disconnect between online content creation and school-based artmaking. This information may help design classroom environments more likely to produce the type of creative energy present in social media spaces like TikTok.

This study involves a survey that up to 175 students will complete anonymously during the school day. In addition, up to 10 students ages 14 to 18, inclusive, will be asked to participate in an interview for the study.

PROTOCOL NO: PROJECT00004842
STERLING IRB ID: 9638

The results of the study, including your information, may also be presented at meetings or in articles written about the study (publications). If the results of the study (including your research or health information) are published, your identity will remain confidential.

If you choose to share any of your work from class or on TikTok with me during the interview, with your permission I would like to take photos of that work which may be used in research presentations of the research findings. Your identity will not be revealed when the photos are used.

Please initial if you grant permission for me to use photographs or images of your work in publications or presentations (without your identity): ____

Risks to Confidentiality

Even though the study investigator will work to create a quiet and mostly private area to conduct the interview, other teachers will be present in the classroom while we talk and may overhear our conversation.

Whom can I contact if I have a question?

The people conducting this study will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the study investigator: Sarah Livant at sarah.livant@uga.edu or Dr. Hanawalt at hanawalt@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the Sterling Institutional Review Board Regulatory Department at telephone number 1-888-636-1062 (toll free) or info@sterlingirb.com.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

If you have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers, and want to participate, then sign the consent form and keep a copy for your records.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date

Researcher's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date

PROTOCOL NO: PROJECT00004842
STERLING IRB ID: 9638

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

- You are being invited to participate because you are a high school aged TikTok user.
- You are willing to participate in an interview.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will participate in an audio recorded interview to discuss your interest in and thoughts about TikTok and your experiences in high school art class. This interview may last up to one hour and will take place during the school day in a classroom. At least one other teacher will be present during the interview.
- You will be asked permission to use your responses as data for research.

Am I required to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. In the event that you decide to refuse or withdraw participation, your relationship with the investigators will not be negatively impacted. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your grades.

What are possible harms or discomforts that I might experience during the research?

The risk of harm and discomfort from participating in this research study is only mild boredom or tiredness.

What are possible benefits of this research?

You may benefit from thinking more deeply about your relationships to your online life and your schoolwork.

Will I be paid for taking part in the research?

No, there will be no monetary compensation for participation.

Will there be any cost for taking part in the research?

No, there is no cost to you.

How will you keep my private information confidential?

Our interview will be recorded (audio only) and will be stored locally on one computer and used as research data for the study. The recordings will not be shared and will not contain your name or be in any way associated with your name. Transcriptions (written documentation) of our interview will not include your name or be associated with your name. Any information collected during this study will remain with the study investigator and the supervisor Dr. Christina Hanawalt only and will not be used or distributed for future research by others.

PROTOCOL NO: PROJECT00004842
STERLING IRB ID: 9638

Assent (Minors Ages 14-17)

I have read this consent form (or it has been read to me). All my questions about the study and my part in it have been answered. I agree to be in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant (Ages 14-17)	Signature	Date

Parent/Guardian Permission (for Minors Ages 14-17)

Signature of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date

APPENDIX E:

SURVEY RESULTS FIGURES AND LIST

Figure 1

Survey Participant Art Class Enrollment

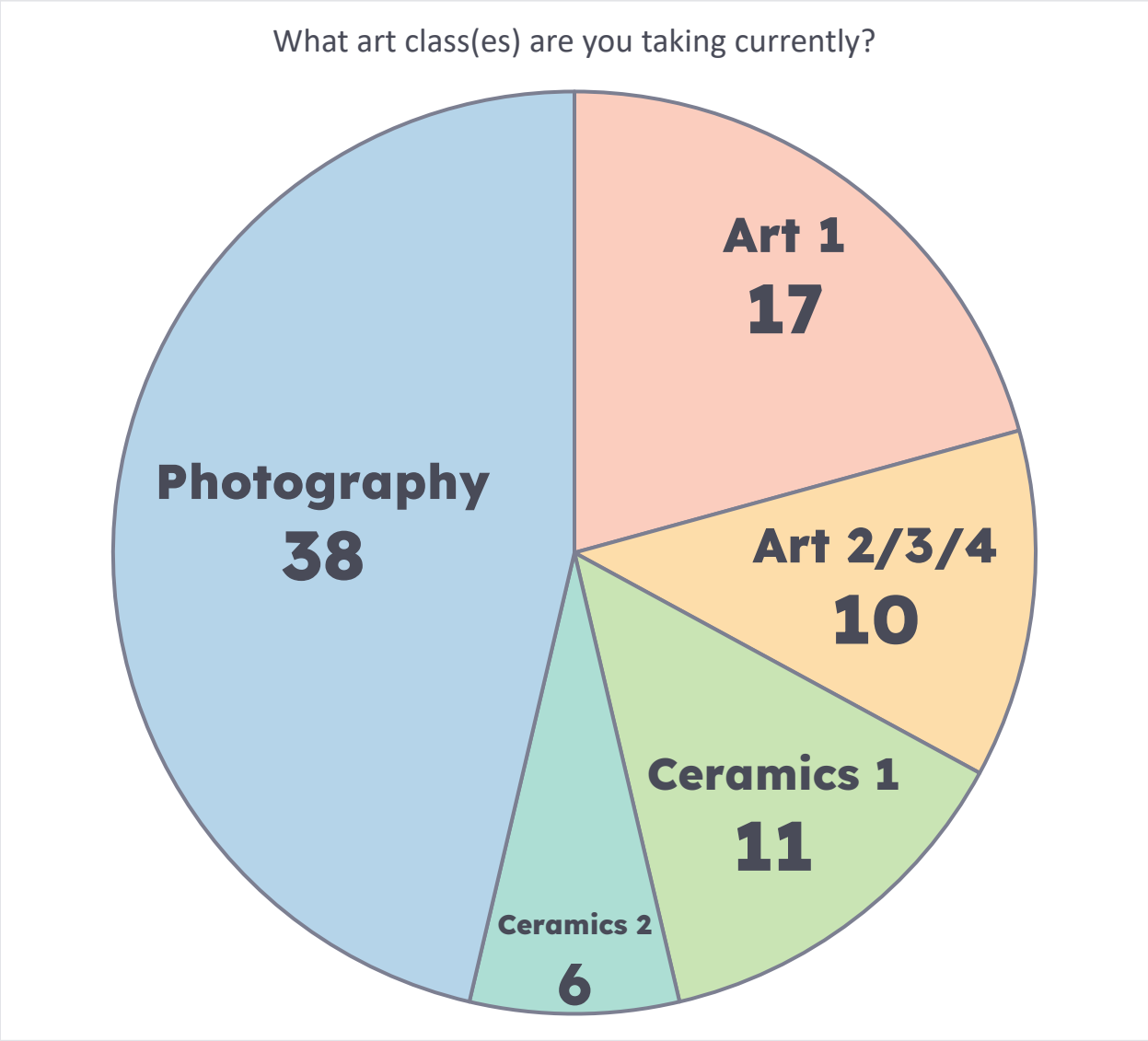


Figure 2

Social Media Platforms Used

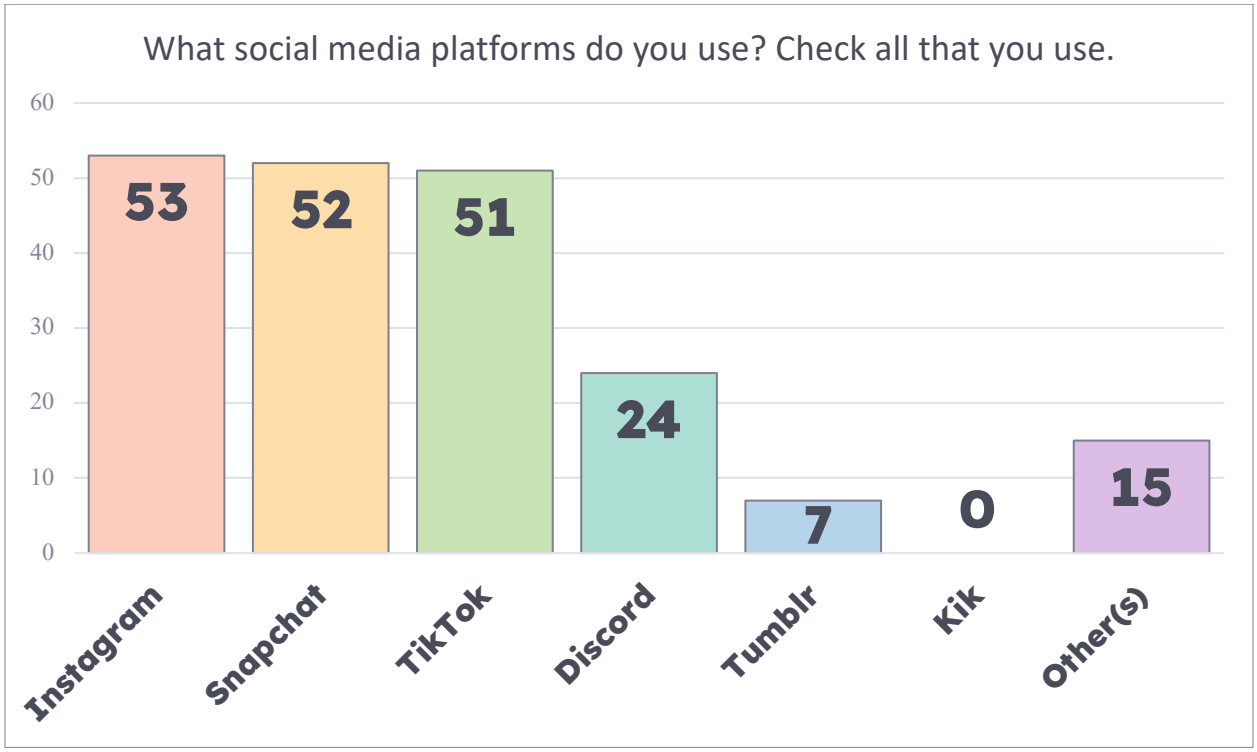


Figure 3

Time Spent on Social Media Daily

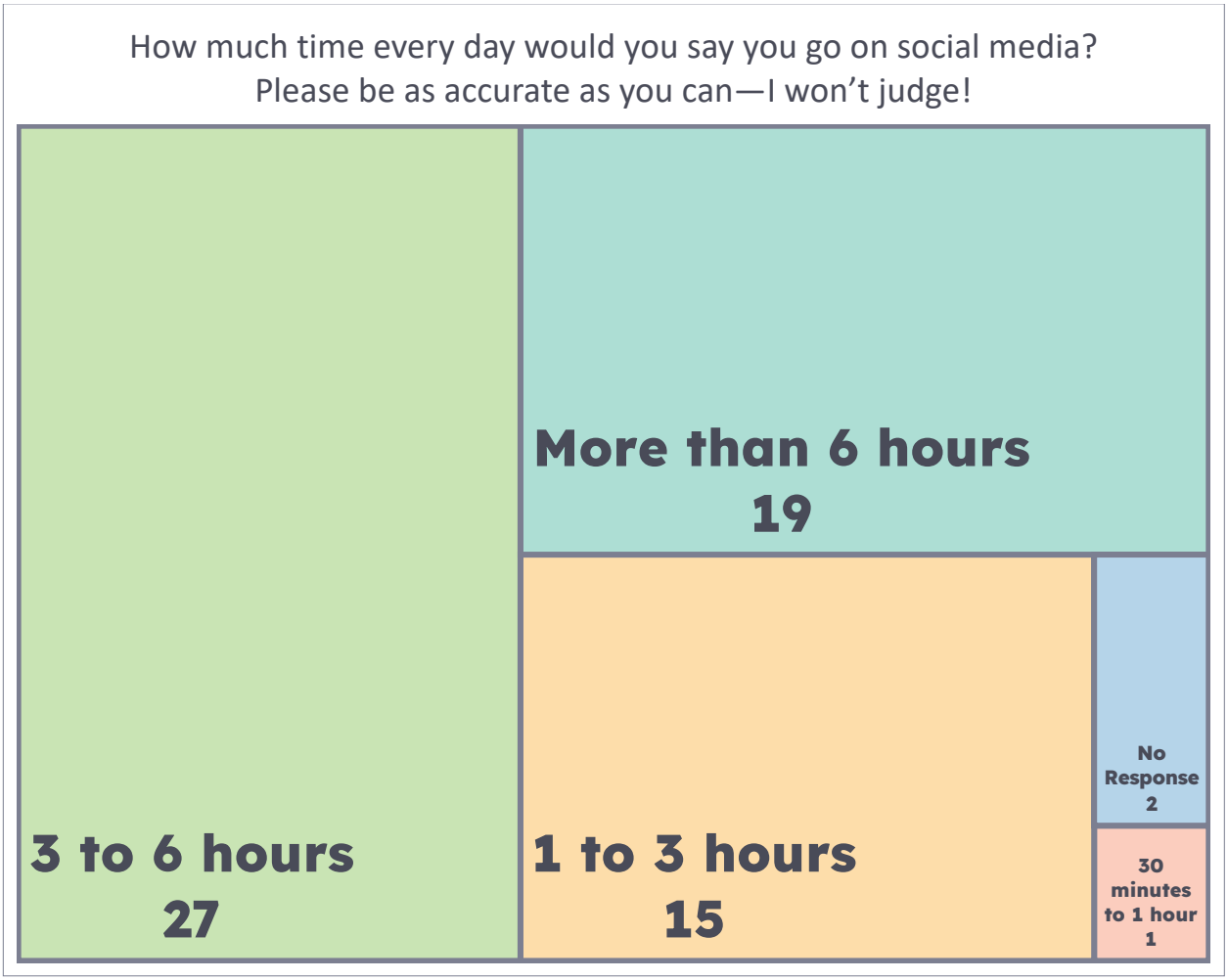


Figure 4

Type of Content Posted on Social Media

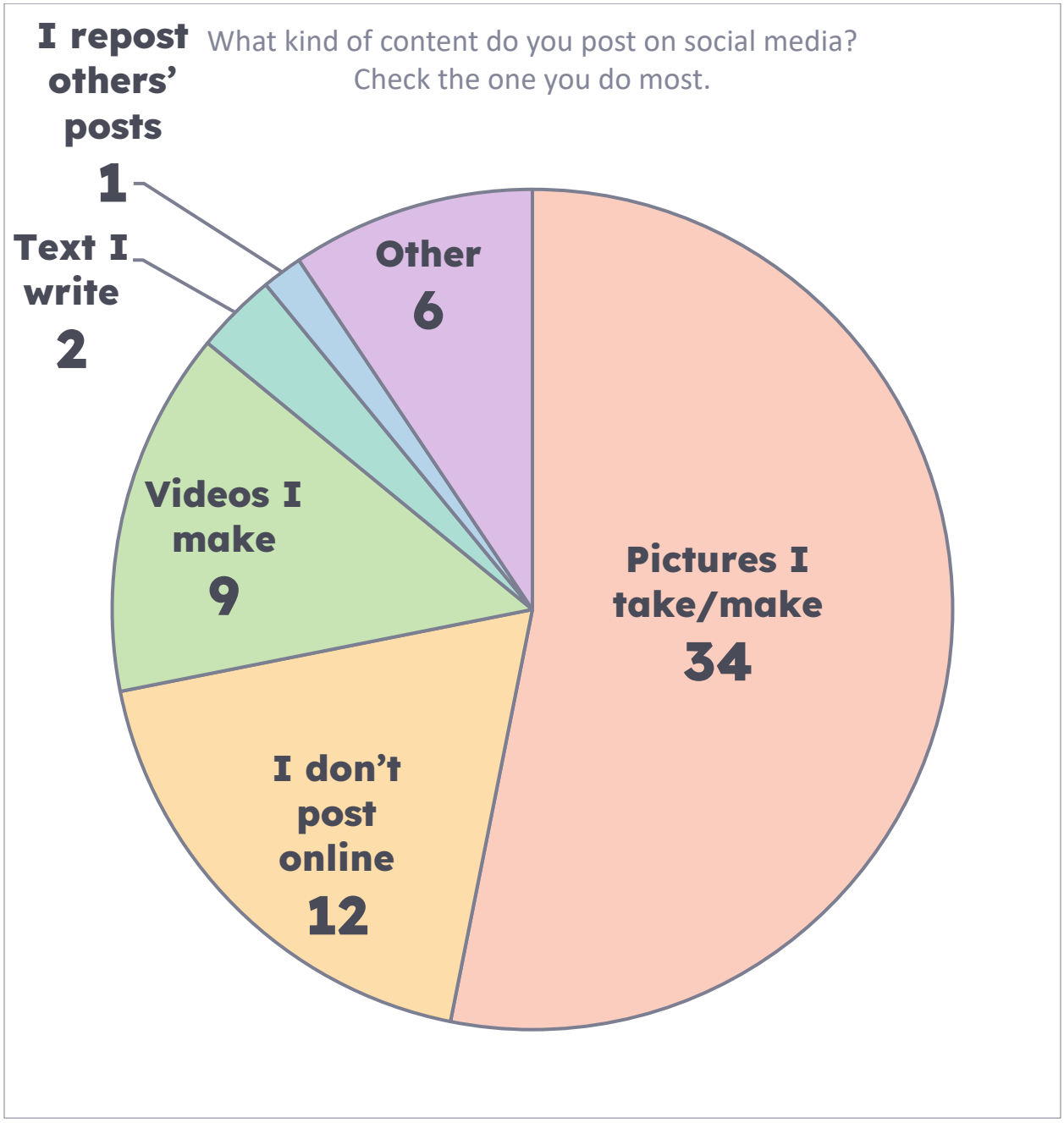
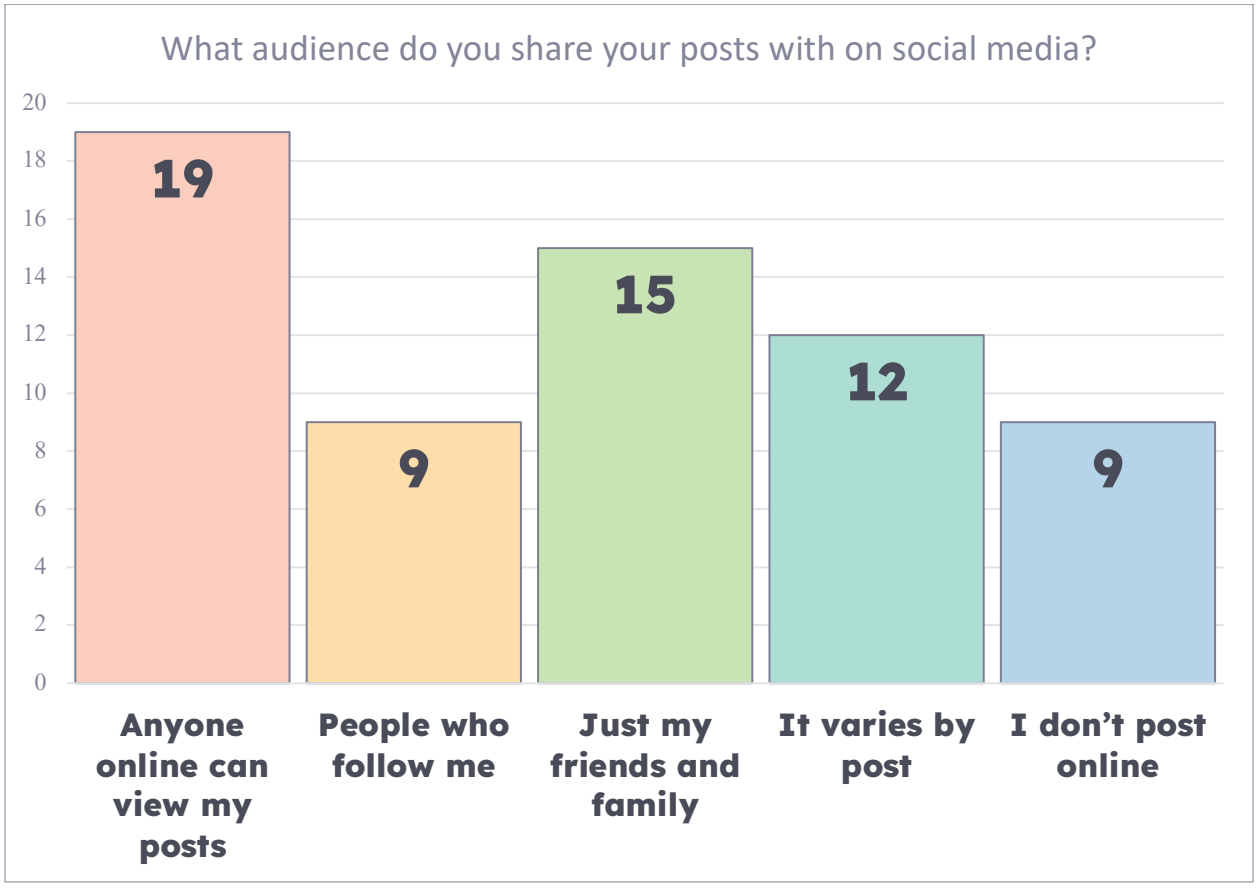


Figure 5

Privacy Preferences



List 1

Viral Video Response Subcategories

- Art
  - Animation
  - Classical Dance
  - Dance
  - Drawing
  - Entrepreneur
  - Fandom
  - Film
  - Jewelry
  - Makeup
  - Music
  - Painting
  - Photography
  - Singing
  - Video Games
- Entertainment
  - Aesthetic
  - Comedy
  - Games
  - Group
  - Influencer
  - Memes
- Learning/Knowledge
  - Culture
  - History
  - How To
- Social
  - Activism
  - Cars
  - Celebrity
  - Dancing
  - Entrepreneur
  - Games
  - Group Activity
  - Personal Interests
  - Pets
  - Politics