Streaks, Stories, and Social Capital: A Bourdieusian Approach to Teenagers’ Use of Snapchat

by

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ABSTRACT

STREAKS, STORIES, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: A BOURDIEUSIAN APPROACH TO TEENAGERS’ USE OF SNAPCHAT

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Snapchat is one of the most popular social media platforms used by young people. On Snapchat, users can directly message or broadcast time-limited pictures and videos to each other. To date, research into teenagers using social media has included platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, but there is little research regarding how teenagers use Snapchat. Drawing upon a Bourdieusian framework to interpret Snapchat as a field in which young people struggle for social capital, this study explores Snapchat use among high school students in Southern Ontario through semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest teenagers use Snapchat to enhance their social capital through prosocial and antisocial behaviours, respectively. Based on these findings, I encourage 1) future researchers to consider peer group dynamics, both online and offline, when conceptualizing young people’s social capital, and 2) parents and teachers to promote prosocial behaviour on social media as opposed to limiting young people’s access to social media.
DEDICATION

To Jeff Costa: The smartest and sassiest sociologist in the making.
Hunny, you are missed dearly.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say this thesis is the result of solely my own efforts would be ridiculous. From course work to COVID-19, I was lucky enough to have an incredible support system by my side to celebrate the highs and conquer the lows. Thus, I attempt to express my deepest gratitude to the following individuals:

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Teenagers and Social Media

As a high school student from 2009 to 2013, social media was standard practice in my everyday life as a teenager. Over those four years, I watched parody music videos on YouTube with my friends, posted aesthetically pleasing song lyrics and pictures to my Tumblr account, and fell victim to a vicious rumour posted on Formspring (now known as “Spring.me”). By the time I graduated high school, Myspace was a middle school memory, all of my peers were using Twitter, and Facebook was just starting to be replaced by Instagram as the “cool” picture-sharing platform. Although many of my high school memories are offline, I documented most of these memories on my Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram accounts. Put simply, for my peers and I, social media was a tool we used to communicate with each other, broadcast the “cool” and “fun” things we were up to, and document the memories we shared.

Although today’s youth may consider some of the aforementioned platforms I relied on in my teenaged years as socially extinct – and some of the platforms I barely touched are now vital for teens’ sociability – social media remains prominent in the daily lives of teenagers for the same purposes (boyd 2014). Given the proliferation of online-mediated communication and the surge of cell phone ownership among young people over the last two decades (Pew Research Center 2018a), social media in some form is likely to persist in not only the daily lives of teenagers’, but for anyone living in this networked era (boyd 2014; Lenhart 2015; Pew Research Center 2018a).

1 Throughout this thesis, I use the terms “youth,” “young people,” “adolescents,” and “teenagers” interchangeably to describe individuals between the ages of 12 to 17.
Social media are “the sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social networking sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content” (boyd 2014, 6). Aside from a space to create and broadcast content, social media also allows young people to socialize with each other informally and constantly (boyd 2014; Uludasdesmir and Kucuk 2018). In its early years, young people used these platforms as an alternative means of socializing away from their offline lives (boyd 2014). Accordingly, some research suggests teenagers are more likely to share content and personal information with strangers online than any other age group (Lemish, Ribak, and Aloni 2009). More recently, young people use social media to interact with both new people they meet online and individuals from their offline social networks (boyd 2007). However, boyd (2007) contends that teenagers are more inclined to socialize with their offline friends or “follow” celebrities they admire online than interact with strangers.

Teenagers use social media as a tool to supplement offline relationships (boyd 2014). Specifically, teenagers use social media to stay connected to their loved ones, especially if they are geographically distant, and to build connections with classmates or peers (Wellman et al. 2001; boyd 2014; Waddell 2016; Abar et al. 2018). boyd (2014) uses the term “networked publics” to describe the role of social media in the daily lives of teenagers. boyd (2014: 8) defines networked publics as “simultaneously 1) the space constructed through networked technologies and 2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.” As adolescents have become more familiar with the internet, physical public places such as malls, parks, and hockey rinks are paired with social media as arenas for teens to maintain or enhance their social networks and establish autonomy apart from adults (Navarro and Jasinki 2012; boyd 2014). Thus, while teenagers may be using these
networked publics predominantly to interact with their peers, strangers may be witnessing these interactions or watching what others post.

Although a plethora of platforms exists across the social media landscape, some have reached immense popularity with hundreds of millions or billions of users (Golding, Raeymaeckers and Sousa 2017). Below, Table 1.1 lists and describes the most popular social media platforms among North American teenagers2 (Pew Research Center 2018a). According to a report published by the Pew Research Center (2018a), 97% of teenagers use at least one of the seven platforms listed in Table 1.1, with YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat being the most popular among teens aged 13-17.

1.2 Impact of Social Media on Teenagers

Considering the pervasiveness of social media use among teenagers, a growing body of literature explores the relationship between young people’s well-being and their use of social media. Altogether, the relationship between teenagers’ well-being and social media is debated in the literature (Weinstein 2018). Generally, teenagers speak positively about their experiences on social media platforms (boyd 2008; Weinstein 2018). A Pew Research Centre report (2018b) indicated that most teenagers felt better connected to their friends (81%) and indicated having a support system (66%) as a result of using social media. Further, this report showed that teenagers were more likely to associate positive emotions with social media use than negative emotions, such as feeling included rather than excluded (71% vs. 25%) and feeling confident rather than insecure (69% vs. 26%) (Pew Research Center 2018b). Additionally, O'Keffee (2011) identified knowledge sharing and fostering self-expression as other positive outcomes teenagers experience from using social media.

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2 The Pew Research Center (2018a) classified teenagers as participants 13-17 years old in this report.
Table 1.1: Names and Descriptions of Popular Social Media Platforms Among Teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year Created</th>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Media-Sharing</td>
<td>YouTube is a video-sharing service that allows users to upload their videos and watch videos posted by other users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Media-Sharing</td>
<td>Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing platform that allows users to edit and upload photos and short videos for other users to view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Media-Sharing</td>
<td>Snapchat is a hybrid platform with features of an instant-messaging service and a media-sharing platform. Distinct from all other platforms on this list, the content shared and received on Snapchat is ephemeral: pictures, videos, and texts disappear shortly after they are sent or posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>Facebook is a social networking service that allows users to design a profile, connect with other users, post pictures, videos, or web links, and join groups or events based on personal interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Microblogging</td>
<td>Twitter is a microblogging service in which users post short messages (i.e., “tweets”) for other users to see, respond to, or share with others. Unlike YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, Twitter is a text-based platform. However, tweets can include images, videos, or web links.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Microblogging</td>
<td>Like Twitter, Tumblr is a microblogging platform where users post content that is visible for other users. However, Tumblr users have more creative freedom with regards to how they design their profiles and the content they post than on Twitter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Discussion Forum</td>
<td>Reddit is an online discussion forum where users can join communities based on their interests and engage in conversations on various topics by voting, ranking, or commenting on preestablished discussions or submitting their own.</td>
</tr>
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However, negative outcomes of social media use are also common. That same report from the Pew Research Centre (2018b) shows that a sizeable minority of teenagers feel pressured...
to post content that others will approve of (43%) or will gain attention from their peers (37%).

Additionally, 45% of teenagers reported feeling overwhelmed by the conflicts with their peers they endure online (also referred to as “drama”), with 13% reporting that they feel this way often (Pew Research Center 2018b). Further, some studies have found that frequent social media use is associated with a higher level of anxiety, depression, and poor sleep quality in adolescents (Woods and Scott 2016; Barry et al. 2017).

Still other studies have concluded that social media have mixed or no effects on teenagers’ well-being (Best, Manktelow, and Taylor 2014). Some scholars contend that teenagers’ experiences on social media reflect their experiences offline (Davis 2012; boyd 2014; Weinstein 2018). In this case, social media amplifies the presence of offline behaviour (boyd 2014). Although these behaviours can be positive or negative, much public and academic attention has been given to the latter, with cyberbullying and sexting reflecting two public concerns that have become increasingly discussed in the literature, in legal discourse, and among adults directly involved in teenagers’ lives (O’Keefe et al. 2011).

Although many scholars have studied teenagers’ well-being and social media use, only a handful of researchers have explored the relationship between teenagers’ social capital and social media (e.g., Tomai et al. 2010; Billet 2011; Smylie 2015; Nilan et al. 2015; Balleys and Coll 2015). Social capital, in its simplest form, is the beneficial outcome an individual acquires from building relationships with others in their social networks. For an individual to acquire social capital they must be well-known by their peers. Typically, individuals are well-known as a result of being connected, either closely or vaguely, to others.

Social media enhances teenagers’ feelings of connection to their friends (boyd 2014; Waddell 2016; Abar et al. 2018; Pew Research Center 2018b) and past research suggests a
positive relationship between using social media and attaining social capital. However, only a handful of studies have explored this relationship in the context of teenagers. In this thesis, I contribute to the literature on teenagers’ social capital and social media use by exploring how young people use Snapchat, a social media platform that, despite its popularity among young people, has received little attention from scholars.

1.3 What is Snapchat?

Since its creation in 2011, Snapchat has rapidly developed into one of the most popular social media platforms among young people (Vateralus et al. 2016; Lemay et al. 2017; Moran, Salerno, and Wade 2018). In 2018, Snap Inc.4 reported that Snapchat had 188 million daily users and generated an average revenue of $1.40 per user. According to Statistica (2017), Snapchat is the most commonly used social media platform among teenagers and young adults, followed by Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, Pew Research Centre (2015, 2018) data shows that Snapchat’s popularity among young people grew by nearly 70% over the last few years: 69% of teenagers reported using the platform in 2018 compared to 41% in 2015 (Pew Research Center 2018a).

Snapchat is a smart-phone application (“app”) that allows users to share content both directly and in a broadcast form (McRoberts, Hall, Ma, and Yarosh 2017). For the former, Snapchat users can communicate privately to other users on their friend list through time-limited video and picture messages (i.e., “snaps”), an instant messaging forum, or a call feature (Piwek and Joinson 2016). For the latter, participants can utilize the MyStory feature, in which a user posts a snap that is visible to their entire contact list (i.e., a “story”) (Moran, Salerno, and Wade 2018). Taking its dual forms of communication into consideration, Snapchat is both an instant messaging

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4 Snap Inc. is the company that owns Snapchat.
forum and a social media platform. To illustrate how Snapchat functions, Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are two images from my own Snapchat account; I explain them below.

Figure 1.1 displays the “My Profile” feature, in which users can view all of the information related to their Snapchat account. Unlike other social media platforms, users (i.e., Snapchat “friends”) cannot see one another’s’ profiles; the only content visible to others is the snaps or stories a user directly posts. When users open Snapchat, they will immediately see Figure 1.2. This is Snapchat’s “home screen,” where users can select different activities such as taking a picture (the circle in the lower middle section of the screen), adding effects to their camera lens (top right corner), exploring the news page (“Discover,” bottom right corner), using the chat forum (“Chat,” bottom left corner), or viewing their profile (top left corner).

Distinct from other types of social media, Snapchat is an ephemeral platform: all content
sent or broadcasted by a user disappears shortly after it has been opened or posted. Specifically, text messages disappear once users leave the chat screen, pictures and video messages are only visible to the recipient for a maximum of 10 seconds, stories only broadcast for 24 hours, and unopened content will be removed if it is not viewed within 30 days (Faklaris and Hook 2016; McRoberts et al. 2017).

However, there are measures users can take to preserve a snap they have received. For example, Snapchat includes a “replay” feature, in which users can view a snap they received from a friend twice. This action can only be performed once a day and the “replay” has the same time-limit as the original message. Further, outside of Snapchat, most smart-phones are equipped with “screenshot” and “screen-record” features in which an individual can save a picture or video of their phone screen. Therefore, individuals can save pictures or videos sent on Snapchat by either screenshotting or screen-recording their phone screen when the snap appears. Although Snapchat will automatically notify a user when their content is replayed or screenshotted, screen-recording goes unnoticed by the sender. While previous research suggests these measures to save Snapchat content are not commonly deployed (Piwek and Joinson 2016; Cavalcanti et al. 2017), Faklaris and Hook (2016) pointed out that many third-party apps also exist to archive Snapchat content without informing the sender.5

1.4 How is Snapchat used?

Snapchat provides a space to instigate and strengthen peer, romantic, and familial relationships through the constant exchange of real-time images (Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid 2015; Waddell 2016; Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017). As an instant-visual platform, users feel present

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5 SaveSnap, Snap Keeper, Snap Sender, and SnapBox are a few examples of apps intended to preserve Snapchat content (Faklaris and Hook 2016).
in the lives of others they communicate with on Snapchat (Jeong and Lee 2017). Accordingly, Snapchat is used for inattentively sharing routine and mundane activities and/or moments of everyday life (Bayer et al. 2015; Piwek and Joinson 2016; Alhabash and Ma 2017; McRoberts et al. 2017; Moran, Salerno, and Wade 2018), especially humorous content and selfies (Roesner, Gill, and Kohno 2014; Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid 2015).

However, Snapchat’s self-deleting nature elicits users to share moments that are considered inappropriate or unprofessional on other platforms (Charteris, Gregory, and Masters 2014; Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid 2015). For example, half of the college students that participated in Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid’s (2015) study admitted to sending or posting snaps when they were intoxicated. Others have found that the time-limited nature of Snapchat is enticing for sexting because it enables a sense of safety and security among users (Poltash 2013; Charteris, Gregory, and Masters 2014; Vaterlaus et al. 2016; Moran, Salerno, Wade 2018).

There are two noteworthy gaps across studies analyzing Snapchat use. First, most of these studies deploy a quantitative approach such as surveys or questionnaires (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017), which provides little insight about actual lived experiences and the context surrounding Snapchat use. Second, most quantitative research uses deductive logic, in which the scope of the analysis is limited to the researcher’s understanding of the subject (O’Reilly and Parker 2014). Considering Snapchat is a relatively new platform, more qualitative research that allows for observations and openness will enhance our understanding of how Snapchat impacts its users’ lives. Thus, the current study contributes to the small body of Snapchat literature by providing an in-depth exploration of the platform.

In addition to a lack of qualitative research, little research on Snapchat has included participants under the age of 18. Consequently, what we know about Snapchat comes from the
standpoint of adults, despite the app’s popularity among younger audiences. Moreover, the few studies that have included the perceptions of teenagers have largely focused on harmful or risky behaviours. For example, Byrne et al. (2018) included Snapchat in a list of platforms where cyberbullying takes place, but the authors did not elaborate further on the behaviour. Vaterlaus et al. (2016) also commented that participants believed cyberbullying occurred on Snapchat, but their analysis did not extend beyond tension caused by unwanted “screenshooting” (Vaterlaus et al. 2016). More recently, Uludasdemir and Kucuk (2018) found adolescents who use Snapchat were significantly more likely to be cyberbullied than adolescents who do not use Snapchat. Although the findings from Uludasdemir and Kucuk’s (2018) study imply that cyberbullying occurs on Snapchat, the authors did not indicate if or how this victimization occurs. Therefore, this study contributes an exclusive look at how teenagers experience cyberbullying on Snapchat, among other facets of Snapchat use.

Most studies exploring Snapchat use include an analysis of sexting (e.g. Poltash 2013; Charteris, Gregory, and Masters 2014; Roesner, Gill, and Kohno 2014; Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid 2015; Piwek and Joinson 2016; Vaterlaus et al. 2016; Moran, Salerno, Wade 2018). However, previous discussions of young people sexting on Snapchat is minimal. Indeed, I found only one study of sexting on Snapchat from a sample of teenagers (Ouytsel et al. 2017). However, Ouytsel and colleagues (2017) provided little insight into the potential harms that teenagers are exposed to from sexting. Given the popularity of Snapchat among young people, the potential risks associated with sexting, and the overlooked prevalence of teens sexting on Snapchat in the literature, the current study seeks to build from Ouytsel and colleagues’ (2017) introductory look at young people sexting on Snapchat by including this behaviour in my analysis.
1.5 The Current Study

In addition to providing an introductory look at how teenagers use Snapchat, in this thesis I explore how teenagers use Snapchat to maintain or enhance their social status. To do so, I employ a Bourdieusian framework in which I contend that Snapchat is a field that teenagers navigate to enhance their social capital. Among other things, I posit that behaviours like cyberbullying and sexting may be used to acquire and maintain social capital within youths’ peer groups. Given Snapchat’s popularity among young people and its reputation as a social media platform used for risky behaviour, the lack of research on how teenagers use Snapchat is concerning. Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide insights into how teenagers use Snapchat with a particular focus on how Snapchat use is associated with teenagers’ social capital. Accordingly, in this study I seek to answer the following two research questions:

1. How is Snapchat use associated with teenagers’ social capital?

2. How are exploitative behaviours on Snapchat associated with teenagers’ social capital?

In Chapter 2, I provide a brief historical overview of social capital literature. Beginning with Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Forms of Capital* (1986) and ending with authors who have applied social capital theory in studies of Snapchat use, this chapter provides context for the study’s theoretical framework.

Building from the theoretical insight provided in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I provide a scoping review of past research relevant to the current study. This chapter is separated into three parts. In Part 1, I explore past studies on the social capital of young people. In Part 2, I examine previous literature studying the peer group dynamics of teenagers; namely, interpretations and strategies of status and popularity in these groups. Finally, in Part 3, I analyze research that studies teenagers’ behaviour online in the context of social capital by concentrating on past
studies that have explored how teenagers maneuver relationship ties and achieve social status through social media.

In Chapter 4, I describe the study’s methodology. Specifically, I explain how this study began as a deductive, mixed-methods analysis focusing on cyberbullying but, due to the small sample derived from recruitment, transformed into an inductive, exploratory study. Then, I illustrate the techniques I used for research design, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I end this chapter by discussing the potential risks involved with the research design, the ethics clearances I received for this study, and, finally, my positionality as a young adult interviewing high school students.

In Chapter 5, I draw upon interviews with seven high school students, 5 females and 2 males, to explore teenagers’ Snapchat use and its relation to social capital. In short, I found that due in part to its dual function as a social media platform and an instant messenger, teenagers are on Snapchat constantly. Consequently, teenagers have constructed Snapchat into a field in which they build, maintain, and break relationships with their peers. Through Snapchat, teenagers foster weak social ties with acquaintances, keep constant contact with their close friends, and look for potential love interests. Participants also cited cyberbullying and revenge porn as activities teenagers partake in to look “cool” and to bond with their friends.

In Chapter 6, I connect the findings from Chapter 5 to the concepts surrounding social capital introduced in Chapter 2 and address the limitations present in the current study. Additionally, I discuss some of the implications for parents, teachers, and other individuals of authority to teenagers and suggest potential directions for future researchers. Finally, I close this thesis with my final thoughts regarding the importance of including the standpoint of teenagers in both social media and social capital research, respectively.
CHAPTER 2
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A BOURDIEUSIAN APPROACH

In this chapter, I introduce social capital as the conceptual framework for this study. First, I briefly overview key concepts introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu including *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *symbolic violence* to situate social capital in the larger context of a Bourdieusian framework. Next, I discuss the growth of social capital in the literature following Bourdieu, with a specific focus on bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Then, I discuss the limitations of social capital as a framework of analysis. From there, I turn to literature that applies social capital to the online domain. Finally, to conclude this chapter, I provide a brief overview of previous research that has applied social capital to social media, with a particular focus on the limited research that has explored the dynamics of Snapchat and social capital.

2.1 Pierre Bourdieu: *Fields, Habitus and Capital*

To begin, Pierre Bourdieu was a French Sociologist who, among other things, sought to deconstruct the dichotomy between theory and practice, to understand power dynamics among actors, and to develop a reflexive sociology (Power 1999). Most relevant to this thesis, Bourdieu focused his work on unequal power dynamics and how individual actors navigate these dynamics within and across social systems (Field 2003; Gopaul 2015).

Bourdieu is often credited as an influential scholar for introducing a number of key concepts to sociological thinking; namely, concepts such as *fields*, *habitus*, and *capital* (Jenkins 2002). Although this thesis is primarily interested in Bourdieu’s concept of social capital, an understanding of the interplay between Bourdieu’s concepts is critical to understand the individual function of each in practice. For this reason, I provide a brief overview of these terms and the dynamics between them before narrowing my analysis to the social capital literature.
2.1.1 Social Fields

First, one of Bourdieu’s core concepts is the social field (“field”): a social structure within a larger society that has its own rules, norms, and hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Julien 2015). The field is a relational space where actors are dedicated to a shared, specific activity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Given its broad definition, social fields are theoretically infinite – the number of social fields an individual participates in over their life course is limitless and subject to constant change. Accordingly, Bourdieu has applied the “field” concept to a wide array of social settings in the everyday life of individuals, including academia (1988), politics (1991), religion (2000), and mass media (1998).

Further, fields are created and perpetuated through the interest of the actors within them (Bourdieu 1998). By voluntarily entering the field and familiarizing themselves with the rules and norms within the field, actors contribute to the field’s existence and increase its autonomy from the larger society (Bourdieu 1998). Conversely, if actors lose interest in the common activity or potential power present in a field, the field will perish (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

The hierarchal nature of social fields situates these microcosms as sites in which individuals constantly struggle to maintain or hold positions of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Members of the field, sometimes subconsciously, pursue interests which may involve conserving or developing their position and the resources it provides them. Moreover, the position of an individual depends not only on their own actions in the field, but the actions of others as well. That is, an individual may gain or lose power as a consequence of another’s actions in the field. Lastly, due to the continuous nature of this competition for power, the strategies and tools to successfully gain or maintain power in a field fluctuate as social positions shift (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).
In sum, fields are social proximities where individuals endlessly strategize and struggle to accumulate and maintain valued capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Fields are a skeletal structure for human interaction – they include rules, norms, and positions for active agents. However, they do not possess the ability to shape the psyche of these agents; rather, this ability belongs to the habitus (Julien 2015).

2.1.2 Habitus

In *Practical Reason*, Bourdieu (1998: 95) wrote, “as an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others.” Put differently, the habitus describes how an individual’s lived experience shapes their thoughts and feelings towards, or away from, different actions or practices (Albright and Hartman 2018). Initially, Bourdieu (1998) used this concept to describe class relations, in which a person acted and behaved, consciously or subconsciously, in accordance with the norms and practices of others in a similar social position. However, the concept has been adopted by scholars for other facets of human experience including but not limited to geographical location, race, sexuality, and online interactions (Julien 2015; Albright and Hartman 2018).

Often, the habitus and the field are described in relation to one another: a person’s habitus is developed from the norms and values of a field and the position they hold in that field. Bourdieu (1998) describes the relationship between the field and habitus using an analogy to a game or sport, in which the social field is a playing field that has its own players, rules, and objects of the game while the habitus is the “feel for the game” players have through their experience in (or on) the field (Bourdieu 1998, 25). With this in mind, the rules and practices are
universal to members of a field, but the habitus of members in the field are unique to the individual.

2.1.3 Capital

Individuals in a field are constantly competing for capital. In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986: 15) describes capital as “a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible.” For Bourdieu (1986), capital, in all of its forms, is synonymous to power. If an individual possesses a substantial amount of valued capital in a particular field, this individual sits in a position of power (i.e., privilege) in this field (Bourdieu 1986). Additionally, in order for an individual to build capital, another individual must lose capital. However, it is important to note that this exchange of power among agents is not always overt, nor even intentional among actors. At times, individuals may gain or lose capital as a consequence of another’s discrete actions or behaviours (Bourdieu 1986). Conversely, actors may strategically strive to accumulate capital for their personal benefit.

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three types of capital: economic, cultural, and, social. First, *economic capital* refers to wealth, money, or institutionalized forms of money such as property rights (Bourdieu 1986). Second, *cultural capital* refers to non-monetary assets that generate social mobility (Bourdieu 1986). This includes a wide range of phenomena, from institutionalized knowledge (i.e., education), to internalized behaviour (i.e., mannerism and personal skills) to tangible objects (i.e., clothing or art). Finally, Bourdieu (1986: 21) defines *social capital* as:

…the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.
In other words, social capital refers to the status an individual acquires from building and sustaining meaningful connections with others. Unlike economic and cultural capital, social capital cannot be owned exclusively by one individual or exchanged through a market. Rather, Bourdieu (1986: 22) emphasized the production of social capital as an “unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and re-affirmed.” To build social capital requires constant upkeeping; individuals seeking social mobility must put time and effort into perpetuating the relationships that benefit them personally. Typically, these benefits derive from connections with individuals that sit in a position of power within a social field (Bourdieu 1986). At face value, this appears to only benefit the individual seeking social mobility. However, Bourdieu (1986) suggests that the individuals who already possess social capital in this exchange also benefit by reaffirming their position as someone worthy of being known. Thus, in the context of social capital, it is not what you know, but who you know that matters (Field 2003).

The potential social capital an individual can acquire from a group is dependent on the size of the field and the number of fields they are part of (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101). Put differently, an individual’s potential for social capital is determined by the size of their social network (i.e., the number of groups they are associated with) and the amount of resources (economic or cultural) these networks provide (Bourdieu 1986). As mentioned earlier, fields are evident in various facets of daily life. Accordingly, numerous social group (e.g., families, peer groups, coworkers, neighbours, or social clubs) represent potential fields that provide individuals opportunity to acquire social capital.

Altogether, Bourdieu (1986) describes economic, cultural, and social capital as transferable modes of power. Capital can be exchanged between members of a field and the
value of each type of capital depends on the field in which it is exchanged (Bourdieu 1986). An obvious example is the exchange of economic capital (i.e. money) for cultural goods or skills training (e.g., artwork, brand-name clothing, tuition). However, capital can also be exchanged more subtly. For example, Bourdieu (1986) described exchanging gifts (i.e. material objects) and greetings (i.e. learned mannerisms) as ways in which cultural capital is exchanged for social capital. Conversely, individuals may learn about certain cultural tastes (i.e. cultural capital) from their friends or family (i.e. social capital). Therefore, the value of capital is dependent on the field in which it is exchanged, and individuals can transform their capital to the most suitable form for social leverage in a particular field.

2.1.4 Symbolic Violence

If fields are shaped and maintained through the self-interest of their members, and fields are hierarchal spaces in which members compete for positions of power and privilege, then the values and norms that shape each field are constructed and perpetuated by members of the field in positions of power. Applying this notion to Bourdieu’s (1998) sport metaphor mentioned earlier, people in power are not only players of the game, but they are the referees as well.

However, in some circumstances the players without power (i.e., those lacking capital) are unaware of the advantages players in power bestow on themselves. Put differently, players with power are disguised as referees, in which case they tailor the rules of the game to benefit their own social position. Consequently, individuals without power may see the field as naturally unequal – they overlook that their powerful counterparts are the ones who perpetuate the unequal power dynamics which favor themselves (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1998; Barratt 2018).
This scenario describes what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as symbolic violence: people in power maintain control of the social structure by presenting the practices which benefit them as inexorably connected to the field. Consequently, people without power misrecognize these practices as natural and thus do not challenge the status quo, ultimately allowing people in power to remain in their positions. Although Bourdieu (1998) initially introduced the concept in relation to class relations and language barriers, many scholars have applied symbolic violence to a multitude of social settings demonstrating systematic oppression, including social media (e.g. Nilan et al. 2015; Recuero 2015; Barratt 2018). In Chapter 3, I briefly return to this concept in relation to young people and the power “popular” youth hold within their peer groups.

In summary, Bourdieu introduced field, habitus, capital, and symbolic violence to analyze the human interactions and the social positions of individuals during, and as an outcome of, these interactions. Considering the wide-ranging nature of the definitions for these concepts, a plethora of research have applied field, habitus, capital, and symbolic violence to analyze social settings across a wide range of academic disciplines (Bhandari and Yaunobi 2009). Later in this chapter, I return to these concepts in the context of online interactions and in Chapter 3, I apply them to the lives of young people. For now, I narrow my focus to social capital and its evolution in the literature from a single concept to a complex, multidisciplinary framework.

2.2 Social Capital Beyond Bourdieu

Following Bourdieu, various scholars published theoretical analyses of social capital. Together, these analyses demonstrate a number of competing social capital definitions before the turn of the millennium (See Figure 2.1). Among these definitions, there is a clear consensus that group participation benefits the members of the group to which they belong. However, the subtle

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6 For a robust list of scholars defining social capital, see Adler and Kwon (2002).
differences between these definitions lead to various interpretations of social capital. For example, some scholars follow Bourdieu and interpret social capital as a resource that individuals can acquire through relationships (Baker 1990; Portes 1998). Accordingly, these authors study social capital in the context of unequal power distributions and conflicts of interest (Poder 2011). Meanwhile, other scholars’ approach social capital from a functionalist perspective (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993) in which the relationships, rather than the resources, between group members are the focal point of the analysis (Poder 2011).

Table 2.1: Definitions of Social Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of Social Capital</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker (1990)</td>
<td>“A resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationship among actors.” (619)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman (1990)</td>
<td>“Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure.” (302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992)</td>
<td>“The sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putnam (1993)</td>
<td>“Features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.” (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portes (1998)</td>
<td>“The ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures.” (6)</td>
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</table>

Some scholars have expanded the concept of social capital to include different forms. Commonly, these forms are dichotomous. For example, when reviewing the literature I found types of social capital such as bridging and bonding (Putnam 2000), horizontal and vertical networks (Putnam 1993; Woolcock and Narayan 2000), structural and cognitive (Uphoff and
Wijayaratna 2000), strong and weak ties (Hansen 1999; Erickson 2004), informal and formal (Pichler and Wallace 2007), and finally, open and closed (Heffron 2000). In Table 2.2, I elaborate on these dichotomies.

**Table 2.2: Forms of Social Capital**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dichotomy</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Context/Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridging and Bonding</td>
<td>Putnam 2000</td>
<td><strong>Bridging Social Capital:</strong> “outward-looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages” (Putnam 2000, 22)</td>
<td>Putnam (2000) popularized the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital in <em>Bowling Alone</em>, in which he argues that social capital is declining in American society. In sum, Putnam (2000) describes gangs as exclusive, tight-knit groups that exemplify bonding social capital, whereas choirs and – hence the title – bowling clubs exemplify more heterogeneous groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bonding Social Capital:</strong> “inward-looking networks that tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups” (Putnam 2000, 22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal and Vertical</td>
<td>Woolcock and Narayan 2000</td>
<td><strong>Vertical Associations:</strong> “strong intracommunity ties give families and communities a sense of identity and common purpose” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, 230)</td>
<td>Woolcock and Narayan (2000) commented that these terms are associated with the networked view of social capital in which the outcomes and benefits are related to the group. Additionally, the authors commented that vertical is similar to “bonding”, and horizontal is similar to “bridging” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Horizontal Associations:</strong> “weak intercommunity ties, such as those that cross various social divides based on religion, class, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, 230).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Table 2.2 (continued): Forms of Social Capital</strong></td>
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| **Structural and Cognitive** | Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000 | **Structural Social Capital:** Social relationships that are shaped by rules and procedures that can be explicitly described and modified (Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000).  
**Cognitive Social Capital:** Social relationships are shaped by values and beliefs and produce an environment of mutually beneficial collective action (Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000). | Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000) determined that a mix of both structural and cognitive social capital contributed to a group of farmers achieving a better-than-average harvest after being told that there was not enough water in a reservoir for all of them to grow crops. Moreover, the authors suggest cognitive social capital develops through initially structural social capital (Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000). |
| **Strong and Weak Ties** | Granovetter (1983) | **Strong Ties:** Close friends  
**Weak Ties:** Acquaintances | Granovetter (1983: 205) argues that weak ties are more beneficial for an individual’s social mobility because acquaintances “are more prone to move in different circles” than close friends, to whom “are likely to have the greatest overlap in contact with those one already knows.” |
| **Informal and Formal** | Pichler and Wallace 2007 | **Informal Social Capital:** Social capital acquired from connections with friends or family and is typically associated with companionship and support.  
**Formal Social Capital:** Social capital that derives from a formally constituted organization and activities and is typically associated with civic participation. | Pichler and Wallace (2007) compared social capital relations across 27 European countries. The authors found that countries in the South and East of Europe favoured Informal Social, but in the South, this was mostly in the form of family support, whereas in the East informal support outside the family was also important (Pichler and Wallace 2007). Altogether, the authors argue comparing informal and formal social capital are useful for comparing cultures based on participation and cohesion (Pichler and Wallace 2007). |
| **Open and Closed** | Heffron 2000 | **Open Social Capital:** “Civically engaged and exercising open membership” (Heffron 2000, 255)  
**Closed Social Capital:** “Protective and exercising closed membership” (Heffron 2000, 255) | Heffron differentiated between open and closed social capital when interpreting the concept as a resource for policy development. The author suggests that open social capital is more advantageous for effective policy building and community co-operation (Heffron 2000). |
Despite their unique labels and contexts, these dichotomies offer similar interpretations of social capital. Typically, one concept leans towards companionship or inner-group connections while the other leans towards networking and outer-group connections. With this in mind, the terms “bonding” and “bridging” are most recognized in the literature, including the current study (Field 2003). For this reason, I expand on this typology below.

2.2.1 The Within vs. The Between: Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) applied the bonding/bridging typology to analyze the decrease of civic engagement in America. In doing so, Putnam (2000) defined bonding social capital as “inward-looking networks that tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups,” while bridging social capital refers to connections that are “outward-looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages” (22). Furthermore, some authors distinguish bridging and bridging social capital by their outcomes: whereas bonding social capital may help an individual get by, bridging social capital may help an individual get ahead (Putnam 2000; Woolcock 2002; Anheier and Kendall 2002).

Bonding social capital refers to close relationships built from kinship, trust, and mutual obligation (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009; Calridge 2018). Accordingly, bonding social capital derives from groups that are homogenous and exclusive (Calridge 2018). Commonly, the family unit is associated with bonding social capital (Aldrich 2013). However, scholars have identified other groups such as close friends, religious groups, and gang membership as characteristic of bonding social capital (Rhodes 2012; Aldrich 2013; Calridge 2018). With regard to power dynamics, social elites use bonding social capital to preserve power by maintaining close connections with other individuals with similar wealth or privilege (Szreter 2002). According to Bourdieu (1986), these connections, which are often symbolized by a family name or club
membership, produce distinction in which people with power establish themselves separately from people without power.

Conversely, bridging social capital refers to connections amongst individuals with shared interests but contrasting social identities (Claridge 2018). Bridging social capital exists amongst individuals who are acquainted, but not deeply invested in the relationship (Ahn 2012). Bridging social capital enables different groups to exchange information, share resources, and promote widespread interactions, values, and practices (Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Sajuria et al. 2014). Previous research emphasizes the benefits of bridging social capital as including reducing stereotypes, discovering new opportunities, and generating collective action (Deth and Zmerli 2010; Claridge 2018). Consistent with these benefits, the exchange of information and ideas brought forth through bridging social capital, as well as the larger network typically associated with this type of social capital, can leverage an individual for more powerful positions within their network (Adler and Kwon 2002; Claridge 2018). Namely, by expanding their network beyond close relationships, individuals may exchange knowledge and ideas that can be beneficial for accumulating power in other forms across different social fields. A common example in the literature is networking in the job market: if Person A and Person B have the same credentials for a job, but Person A has a personal connection to someone higher up at the company and Person B does not, Person A is at an advantage for being hired due to the preestablished positive reputation they have with someone in the company. In this case, bridging social capital provides a better opportunity for a candidate to gain cultural capital (i.e., a job title) and possibly economic capital (i.e., income). Thus, as Putnam (2000) suggests, bridging social capital allows the individual to “get ahead” with regards to their social positioning.
2.2.2 Limitations to Social Capital

Moving forward, in addition to the list of definitions and dichotomies displayed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, scholars have adapted social capital to different levels of analyses. On one hand, scholars interpreting social capital as a resource may apply a micro-level analysis to explore the individual benefits of social capital. On the other hand, theorists studying social capital as the relationships between people may utilize a meso-level (i.e., community groups) or macro-level (i.e., national, large-scale societies) analysis, depending on the size of the group under study. Clearly, the flexibility with which social capital can be applied to various social settings where power distributions are present is appealing for scholars (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009). Yet, the same flexibility which makes the concept appealing to a wide range of scholars is also scrutinized as having little analytical value. The lack of consistency with conceptualizing and operationalizing social capital makes it challenging to legitimize the impact and outcomes it produces. Considering previous social capital literature branches across micro, meso, and macro levels of analyses, determining consistent indicators to conceptualize social capital is a challenge for social capital scholars (Cavaye 2004; Álvarez and Romani 2017). Consequently, scholars remain concerned about the conceptual and empirical ambiguity of social capital (Poder 2011). It is important to note that Bourdieu, and other early social capital theorists, provide a conceptual foundation for social capital; however, these works do not provide instruction or indication of how social capital can be tested (Häuberer 2011). Thus, social capital literature is missing a clear, collective theoretical structure and method of measurement (Fukuyama 2001, Haynes 2009; Bhandri and Yasunobu 2009; Andriani 2013).

Despite these conceptual and methodological concerns, the application of social capital across the literature possesses more similarities than differences (Poder 2011). Generally, the
theory of social capital suggests that social relations are valuable resources (Bhandri and Yasunobu 2009; Poder 2011). For example, much research exploring social capital agrees that social capital derives from three key components: social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009; Poder 2011; Andriani 2013). First, social networks are where individuals create and foster social capital (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009). Peer groups, families, and organized committees are just a few examples of social networks where individuals build and maintain connections while situated in a social position among other members. In Bourdieusian terms, social networks are the fields in which social capital is a prominent form of capital. Secondly, if social networks are fields, then they must include a shared view of norms and values among agents within the field. Thus, norms of reciprocity refer to the mutual recognition of distinct, expected behaviours that continuously affirm and reaffirm that a relationship exists between actors (Bourdieu 1986). Unlike economic and cultural capital, social capital is embedded in relationships and cannot be commodified in a market (Portes 1998). Thus, these norms are signs and symbols that denote a relationship exists (Bourdieu 1986). Finally, while norms of reciprocity signify that a relationship exists, many authors use trust to measure the quality or legitimacy of these relationships (Fukuyama 2001; Ponthieux 2004; Andriani 2013). For this reason, Andriani (2013: 11) considers trust the “fundamental ingredient” to preserve social connections; an individual must believe that others will do them no harm and look out for their interests (Newton 2001). Additionally, the concept of trust is useful for unifying social capital literature because it is applicable at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level of social capital analyses – individuals can build trust with their peers, their community, or their government (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009; Andriani 2013). Therefore, despite the concerns
about the definition and measurement of social capital in the literature, the three aforementioned themes in most social capital studies provide a general sense of the concept.

From the beginning, definitions of social capital were ambiguous and subject to interpretation. As a consequence, the applicability of social capital to a wide array of social interactions across multiple disciplines makes social capital an appealing framework for scholars. In spite of these definitional and operational concerns, the concept continues to aid researchers in unveiling the potential or accumulated benefits, either for an individual or a larger community, that can arise from social interactions with others. For this reason, most scholars agree that while an improved analytical structure may enhance the reliability of social capital as a theoretical framework, the concept is integral for understanding the productive benefits of sociability (Haynes 2009; Poder 2011; Häuberer 2011; Andriani 2013). As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, this includes the productive benefits of interacting with others online.

2.3 The Internet: A Field of Fields

Bourdieu (1986) describes fields as the social structures where individuals compete for capital. Moreover, fields have their own norms, rules, and hierarchies (Bourdieu and Warrant 1992). Considering the profusion of people online and its information-sharing, knowledge-generating nature, the internet can be considered a field in which individuals compete for social capital (Julien 2015). The internet, and especially Web 2.0, is intrinsically a group setting, whereby the opportunities for establishing networks with individuals of similar interests online are theoretically endless. Moreover, the vast flexibility with online activities allow these groups the autonomy to produce their own rules and regulations for members to follow. Thus, not only is the internet a field in itself, but it also functions as a host for a plethora of other online fields as well (Best and Kruger 2006).
2.4 Social Capital Online

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) questions whether the internet will diminish or enhance civic engagement. Shortly following Putnam’s work (2000), some authors argued the internet has a negative impact on an individual’s social capital (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie 2001; Franzen 2003), while others (Katz and Aspden 1997; Lin 2001) contend that the relationship between the internet and social capital is predominantly positive. Additionally, some authors suggest the relationship between social capital and internet use depends on other factors such as why individuals are online, how frequently they are online, and how social capital is framed (Wellman et al. 2001). To elaborate, Wellman and colleagues (2001) found internet use aids maintaining ties with friends and family that are geographically distant but has little impact on the relationships with others that live near users. Additionally, internet use may increase offline participation in community groups, but decrease a sense of community offline (Wellman et al. 2001). However, considering the astronomical growth of social networking sites (i.e., social media) since the aforementioned studies were published, more recent literature tends to explore how online behaviour enhances social capital (Carmichael, Archibald, and Lund 2015). Specifically, a common theme in the literature is that the internet is a space where individuals can network with others both personally and professionally, and thus increase both bonding and bridging social capital (Pénard and Poussing 2010). Accordingly, previous research has studied social capital from a wide variety of online fields such as discussion forums (Wasko and Faraj 2005), online gaming networks (Shen, Monge, and Williams 2014; Reer and Krämer 2014; Trepte, Reinecke, and Juechems 2012) and, of course, social media platforms.
2.4.1 Social Capital and Social Media

Social media allows individuals to engage with others almost instantly, at little cost, and regardless of geographic barriers (Warren, Ainin, and Ismawati 2015; Neves 2013). From the functionalist perspective, previous scholarship indicates social media is an effective tool for civic participation (Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar 2015). Despite Putnam’s (2000) initial concerns with the internet and civic participation, studies from the past decade show social media can encourage political engagement (Wellman et al. 2001; Bauernschuster, Falck, and Woessmann 2014), participation in voluntary organizations (Wellman et al. 2011), environmental advocacy (Martinello and Donelle 2012), and promote organ donation (Warren, Ainin, and Ismawati 2015).

From the individual perspective, social media provides users with not only the ability to stay connected with family, friends, and other loved ones that live far away, but it provides the opportunity for users to build new relationships with others as well (Neves 2013; Waddell 2016). Recall from Chapter 1, social media typically involves a network of friends (e.g., on Facebook and Snapchat) or followers (e.g., on Instagram and Twitter) that users maintain ties with, and groups or “threads” where users can interact with one another about their common interests. With this in mind, a user with many friends or followers, and/or that participates in a number of social media-based networks, may accumulate more social capital than someone who does not (Nilan et al. 2015).

Additionally, scholars applied the bridging/bonding typology to explore the relationship between social capital and social media. Generally, since social media promotes users to formulate unique networks with acquaintances and individuals with similar interests, research tends to focus on bridging social capital (Burke, Kraut, and Marlow 2011; Liu, Baumeister, and
Ainsworth 2016). However, some literature shows that social media can supplement deep-seated offline relationships, and therefore contribute to users’ bonding social capital as well (Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe 2007; Waddell 2016; Liu, Ainsworth, and Baumeister 2016). In a meta-analysis of research exploring the relationship between social media and social capital, Liu, Ainsworth, and Baumeister (2016) found that social media use contributes to both bridging and bonding social capital, but a stronger association exists between social media use and bridging social capital.

However, most research on social capital and social media has relied on Facebook as the single measure for social media use (e.g., Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe 2007; Burke, Kraut, and Marlow 2011; Warren, Ainin, and Ismawati 2015). Consequently, these studies neglect the potential differences with regards to how people use different social media platforms. This is especially problematic given that Facebook use, especially among younger internet users, is declining (Pew Research Centre 2018a). More recently, some authors studied the relationship between social capital and other popular platforms such as Twitter (Hofer and Aubert 2013; Rehm and Notten 2016), Instagram (Paige et al. 2017) and Snapchat (Piwek and Joinson 2017). However, this literature remains limited. Since I only focus on Snapchat use in the current study, I briefly discuss the handful of social capital studies that include Snapchat in their analysis before closing this chapter.

2.4.2 Social Capital and Snapchat

First, Phua, Jin, and Kim (2017) compared Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat as platforms for creating and maintaining social capital. Contradicting Liu, Ainsworth and Baumeister’s research (2016), the authors concluded that Snapchat was used the least for bridging social capital but used the most for bonding social capital (Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017).
These results align with Piwek and Joinson’s work (2017), who found that Snapchat “offers a more intimate, private and ‘conversation-like’ mode of communication, and therefore its intensity of use is associated more with bonding rather than bridging of social capital” (364). Similarly, Waddell (2016) found that Snapchat is preferred to maintain closeness with friends and family that are geographically distant because it provides more real-time, candid insight into their daily lives than other social media platforms. These findings contrast previous literature which suggests that social media is more strongly associated bridging social capital rather than bonding social capital (Liu, Ainsworth, and Baumeister 2016).

Conversely, Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid (2015) argued that Snapchat is used more often for building new relationships than Facebook. However, contrasting findings may be due to the types of relationships at focus. While Utz Muscanell, and Khalid (2015) compared romantic jealousy from Snapchat and Facebook users, other authors (Waddell 2016; Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017; Piwek and Joinson 2017) focused more on friends and family. Thus, more research comparing bridging and bonding social capital on Snapchat is needed to support either of these claims. Further, how youth acquire or leverage social capital on Snapchat has been largely unexplored.

2.5 Conclusion: The Current Study

As emphasized in Chapter 1, young people are relying on Snapchat to communicate with their peers constantly (Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid 2015; Piwek and Joinson 2016; Alhabash and Ma 2017). Together, Snapchat’s popularity, the few studies that have explored social capital and Snapchat, and the substantial body of literature exploring social capital and social media, provide rationale for navigating the current study through a social capital approach.
Given that the literature analyzing the relationship between Snapchat and social capital remains in its infancy, this study contributes unique insight to Snapchat and social capital literature in two ways. First, although previous research has explored the relationship between social capital and Snapchat, no research to date has analyzed Snapchat as Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of a field. Building from Julien’s (2015) analysis of the internet as a field for social capital, in Chapter 5 I apply Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of the field to Snapchat. In doing so, I elaborate on the rules, norms, and hierarchies noted by participants that demonstrate how Snapchat is a field for acquiring social capital.

Secondly, previous literature studying Snapchat and social capital has yet to include the perspective of adolescents. Rather, young adults (i.e., post-secondary students) comprise an overwhelming majority of participants in research on Snapchat (Vaterlaus et al. 2016; Piwek and Joinson, 2016; Waddell et al. 2016; Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz, and Wrench 2017; McRoberts et al. 2017; Cavalcanti et al. 2017; Alhabash and Ma 2017; Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017; Moran Salerno, and Wade 2018). Considering teenagers rely on Snapchat to communicate with their peers, the lack of knowledge regarding teenagers’ use of Snapchat is troubling. As I elaborate in Chapter 3, teenagers may resort to negative behaviours such as cyberbullying (Nilan et al. 2015) or non-consensual sexual image sharing (Thomas 2018) to acquire or maintain status among their peers. Consequently, Snapchat may be a field where teenagers are deriving social capital through positive or negative means.

To conclude, in this chapter I introduced some of Bourdieu’s key contributions to the field of social research before providing rationale for applying a social capital lens as the conceptual framework for the current study. First, I described Bourdieusian terms such as field, habitus and capital to provide context for a social capital analysis. Then, I described how
scholars have transformed social capital from a single concept to a well-known sociological framework over the last few decades. After briefly acknowledging some concerns regarding social capital’s empirical and conceptual limitations, I provided rationale for using social capital by summarizing previous literature that successfully used social capital to study online networks. Namely, I discussed how social capital applies to social media use, with a particular focus on Snapchat. As mentioned above, few studies have adopted a sample of young people (i.e., children or youth) to study social media use. Although current literature focusing on young people’s social capital is not as scarce, its application in the context of young people interacting online is quite limited in comparison to adult-based studies. Therefore, in the following Chapter I emphasize the contributions the current study makes to not only the literature on youths’ online behaviour, but youths’ social capital as well.
CHAPTER 3
UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF PEER GROUP DYNAMICS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a scoping review of the literature relevant to the current study. Collectively, there is a vast amount of research on young people’s social capital, peer group dynamics, and social media practices. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections. First, in Part I, I provide a historical overview of how young people’s social capital is interpreted in the literature and how this interpretation has changed with the growing recognition of young people’s agency and autonomy. Next, in Part II, I step away from social capital literature and turn my attention to adolescent peer group research. Specifically, I focus on research surrounding relationship ties and status achievement in the context of adolescent peer groups – two key indicators of social capital. Since most peer group research does not employ a social capital perspective, I conclude this section by outlining how peer group networks constitute a field in which adolescents struggle for social capital. Then, in Part III, I turn to literature that has explored teenagers’ use of social media. Again, whereas some of this literature has employed a social capital framework, most focuses more broadly on how social media fosters relationship ties and influences status achievement for young people. To conclude this chapter, I summarize the rationale and significance of the current study based on the gaps that exist in all three sections of this review.

Part I: Young People’s Social Capital in the Literature

3.1 Historical Interpretations: A Lack of Age-ncy

Traditionally, sociology overlooked children and childhood experiences (Leonard 2005). Young people were portrayed as “human becomings” rather than human beings, in which
research outcomes focused more on young people’s future lives as adults rather than their present lives as youths (Leonard 2008). Consequently, early research assumed either the experiences of young people were synonymous to their adult counterparts, voiced through adult proxies, or neglected completely. However, developments in the sociology of youth and childhood have sought to change this narrative (James and Prout 1997). More recently, scholars studying youth recognize that young people are actors with agency and unique lived experiences (James and Prout 1997).

The social capital literature was no exemption to this criticism. Early social capital theorists are often criticized for depicting children as passive recipients of their parents’ social capital and for neglecting young people’s ability to produce their own social capital (Weller 2006; Holland, Reynolds, and Weller 2007; Leonard 2008). For example, Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as a resource that children inherit from their parents when they reach adulthood (Weller 2006). Unlike Bourdieu, Putnam (2000) acknowledged that children can reap the benefits of social capital during youth but, similar to Bourdieu, he sees social capital as an inherited resource (Weller 2006). For Coleman (1990), children that have strong social ties with parents, teachers, and other students – as well as children with parents that had strong social ties with teachers – are more inclined to academic success (Coleman 1990). However, Coleman’s focus on how these strong social ties will benefit students later on (i.e. post-secondary schooling) fails to consider how these connections benefit students’ lives in the present. Altogether, these authors neglected the resources young people may extract from relationships beyond parental ties and how these resources impact their daily lives as children or adolescents, respectively (Morrow 1999). In short, they have failed to consider young people as active agents in the formation of their social capital (Weller 2006).
3.2 Institutional Fields of Youth Social Capital

In response to this lack of consideration for young people’s autonomy, scholars have begun applying social capital theory to studies of both children and adolescents. Most of this literature posits that parental ties are important to consider, but that other relationships may be more prominent in shaping youth’s social capital (Bassani 2003; Schaefer-McDaniel 2004; Holland, Reynolds, Weller 2007; Holland 2008; Billet 2011, 2012; Smylie 2015). For example, siblings may provide each other with companionship, trust, and support, which are often associated with bonding social capital (Morrow 2001; Billet 2012; Aldrich 2013; Smylie 2015). Research has also found that older siblings may provide “bridging” opportunities for younger siblings (Seaman and Sweeting 2004; Holland, Reynolds, Weller 2007; Holland 2008). Holland, Reynolds, and Weller (2007) suggest an older sibling’s peer groups may provide a link for new friendships to their younger siblings. Similarly, Holland (2008) found that older siblings familiar with the secondary school environment provide younger siblings an advantage transitioning into high school. Holland (2008) reported that older siblings taught younger siblings about the “rules of the game” in high school and provided support or “back-up” in cases of bullying. Beyond the school environment, Seaman and Sweeting (2004) reported that older siblings can provide younger siblings insight about the norms and expectations for a wide array of youth-oriented settings, from community centres to house parties.

Further, schools are a key site in which young people are able to build and defend their social capital (Smylie 2015):

Aside from its educational function, one of the most important roles school plays in the life of young people is its ability to bring large groups of youth together under the one roof. It is within this gathering of young people and the resulting possibility of networking that the social capital value of school lies. Socializing and peer bonding commences initially at school, with the school playground being the primary place where peer allegiances are made and broken. (Billet 2011: 75)
Schools also provide students with opportunities to build relationships with adults outside of the family. Students may develop meaningful ties with their teachers, guidance counselors, or other parents within the school environment (Morrow 2001; Billet 2011; Darmody, Robson, and McMahon 2012; Lindfors et al. 2018). Through these ties, adolescents may experience emotional support, foster trust, and develop a sense of belonging in the school community and thus find an alternative source to the family for bonding social capital (Morrow 1999, 2001).

Moreover, a plethora of literature followed Coleman by studying young people’s social capital and educational outcomes. However, unlike Coleman, these studies measured young people’s social capital with indicators that reflect adolescents’ current lives such as participating in school extracurriculars and peer group academic values and interest (Dika and Singh 2002; Darmody, Robson, and McMahon 2012). Generally, these studies have found positive relationships between social capital and academic achievement: young people with strong social ties in their school environment achieve higher grades, score higher on standardized tests, and are more likely to attend post-secondary education (Dika and Singh 2002).

Beyond family ties and school networks, young people may accumulate social capital through community programs and organizations. For example, research suggests that participating in sports positively impacts adolescents’ social capital, especially for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds (Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell 2008; Richardson Jr. 2012; Bruening, Clark, and Mudrick 2015; Schüttoff et al. 2018). Richardson Jr. (2012) found that coaches can provide a link to bonding social capital for young people, especially when parental support is absent. Although Richardson Jr.’s study (2012) concentrated on inner-city African American boys, Bruening, Clark, and Mudrick (2015) drew similar conclusions from their longitudinal study of Sport Hartford: a

7 See Dika and Singh (2002) for a critical synthesis of this literature.
sport-based youth development program targeting pre-adolescent girls. The authors concluded that the meaningful relationships developed between the program participants and mentors (i.e. coaches) were crucial in fostering participants’ social capital (Bruening, Clark, and Mudrick 2015).

Finally, in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) identified religious affiliation as a prominent field for young people to acquire social capital. Religious affiliation fosters group interactions and lasting social ties, providing young people with cross-generational relationships built on trust and common interests (Park and Sharma 2016). Consequently, some research has found a positive relationship between young people’s social capital and religious involvement (Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1999; Kerestes, Youniss, and Metz 2004; King and Furrow 2004).

### 3.2.1 Issues Measuring Youth Social Capital in Institutional Settings

The aforementioned research shows that young people are capable of achieving social capital beyond the scope of their parents’ networks. However, most of the fields in which this research took place (i.e., the family unit, schools, community programs, and religious groups) are *youth-friendly spaces* (Billet 2011). Youth-friendly spaces are settings intended for young people but are organized and supervised by adults (Billet 2012). Considering adults are in control of youth-friendly environments, the values and norms situated in these spaces are often determined by adults.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, studies situated in youth-friendly spaces neglect the “rules of the game” that teenagers shape and adhere to outside of adult supervision. Without guardianship, young people may act differently and abide by their own set of rules and values. In other words, they construct their own field (Korkiamäki 2011). Consequently, interpreting young people’s social capital solely from research on youth-friendly spaces may be misleading (Leonard 2008; Billet 2012). Instead, scholars have called for more research incorporating how
adolescents interact in youth-specific spaces to the study of youth’s social capital (Schaefer-McDaniel 2004; Weller 2006; Billet 2011, 2012; Schmeichel, Hughes, and Jutner 2018).

Contrary to youth-friendly spaces, *youth-specific spaces* are free from adult authority and allow young people to acquire a sense of autonomy in their everyday lives (Leonard 2008).

**Part II: Peer Group Dynamics and the Conceptualization of Young People’s Social Capital**

Young people increasingly spend more time with each other and less time with adults as they mature (Jarvinen and Nicholls 1996; Sussman et al. 2007; Pellegrini et al. 2010). Unlike youth-friendly spaces, youth-specific places are often informal and involve teenagers “hanging out” with each other wherever they can escape adult supervision (Morrow 2001; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Weller 2006; Leonard 2008; Billet 2011). Hanging out can include a wide array of activities, such as sitting and talking, eating, and playing games in various locations such as parks, shopping malls, at home or as I discuss later, online (Morrill, Snow, and White 2005). By hanging out in these spaces, young people acquire social capital through simultaneously building and maintaining both strong and weak social ties with their peers and struggling amongst each other for positions of status in their peer groups.

**3.3 Strong and Weak Peer Group Ties**

Peer groups are networks of like-minded individuals that are shaped by a dynamic cluster of weak and strong social ties amongst members (French and Cheung 2018). Korkiamäki (2011) describes four types of relationships within adolescent peer groups: acquaintances, friends, special friends, and best friends. To elaborate, a “friend” is considered someone a person “hangs around with” but does not foster an emotional connection with, whereas a “special friend” shares an emotional bond and are often fewer in quantity (Korkiamäki 2011, 107). Conversely, French and Cheung (2018) described “friends” and “friendships” as meaningful ties built on mutual trust.
and companionship within a peer group, whereas “peers” and “social network” are used to describe casual, convenient ties to others in the same network. Similarly, Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003: 248) claimed that “friendships are voluntary, intimate, dynamic relationships founded on cooperation and trust, while group acceptance reflects the perspective of the child’s peer group.” Despite their conceptual differences, these scholars demonstrate how adolescent peer groups foster both bonding social capital and bridging social capital. On one hand, peer groups may provide young people the opportunity to foster meaningful relationships outside of kinship built on trust, companionship, support, and norms of reciprocity (Morrow 2001; Leonard 2008; Miller et al. 2009; Korkiamäki 2011; Smylie 2015). This opportunity, along with the homogenous and potentially exclusive nature of peer groups, suggests young people may develop bonding social capital from their peer group (Calridge 2018). On the other hand, peer groups include friends of friends, acquaintances, and even “frenemies” (boyd 2014; French and Cheung 2018). Thus, in addition to bonding social capital, young people may build and preserve bridging social capital within their peer groups (Jarvinen and Nichols 1996; Dijkstra, Lindenberg, and Veenstra 2008; boyd 2014).

3.4 Status Power

Past research suggests relationships among peer group members are dynamic (i.e., members of a peer group and the relationships within peer groups are in constant flux) and hierarchal (Newcomb, Bukowski and Pattee 1993; Merten 1997; Cillessen and Rose 2005; Milner Jr. 2006; Leonard 2008; Li and Wright 2014; boyd 2014, Abeele et al. 2014). Due to this structure, young people seek to achieve status (i.e., higher positions in the social hierarchy) within their peer groups. As I discussed in Chapter 2, status is a measure of social capital; the

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8 Marwick and boyd (2014: 1202) describe a “frenemy” as “someone who appears to be a friend but with whom there is distrust and uncertainty about the relationship.”
higher an individual’s status, the higher their social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Generally, status refers to an individual’s social standing determined by other relevant individuals (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003). Scholars maintain that the desire for status amplifies during adolescence (Milner Jr. 2006; Sijtsema et al. 2009; Miller et al. 2009; Salmivalli 2010; Li and Wright 2012; boyd 2014; Abeele et al. 2014). Milner Jr. (2006) contends that adolescents’ fixation with achieving status among their peers is due to lifestyle differences between young people and adults. Namely, young people’s lives are constrained from opportunities to acquire adult-based measures of status such as academic achievement, career development, or political involvement (Weller 2006; Milner Jr. 2006; Billet 2011). Instead, Milner Jr. (2006: 4) describes how “status power” replaces adult measures of status in the context of young people:

A teenager's status in the eyes of his or her peers is extremely important to most adolescents. Why this near obsession with status? It is because they have so little real economic or political power…They do, however, have one crucial kind of power: the power to create an informal social world in which they evaluate one another. That is, they can and do create their status system – usually based on criteria that are quite different from those promoted by parents or teachers. In short, the main kind of power teenagers have is status power.

Thus, young people with status power are not only “cool” or “in the know,” but also possess the ability to determine what is socially valuable (LaFontana and Cillessen 2002, 2010; Dijkstra, Lindenberg and Veenstra 2008; Billet 2011, 210; boyd 2014; French and Cheung 2018). Dijkstra, Lindenberg, and Veenstra (2008: 1295) describe the impact of status power as the popularity-norm effect, in which “the behavior of popular adolescents is responsible for whether behavior is more or less likely to be accepted or rejected by peers.”

Obtaining status power can be challenging for adolescents. First, the criteria young people use to evaluate each other’s “coolness” is manifold. Scholars have identified various measures of “coolness” among youth, such as fashion sense (Eicher, Baizerman, and
Michaelman 1991; Vaillancourt, Hymel, and McDougall 2003; Milner et al. 2006), athletic ability (Merten 1997; Dunn, Dunn, and Bayduza Kyungski 2018; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2003), dating and sexual relationships (Coleman, 1961; Milner Jr. 2006; Brown 1999; Miller et al. 2009), and partaking in health-risk behaviours such as smoking and underage drinking (Mayeux, Sandstrom, and Cillessen 2008; Ali, Amialchuk, and Nikaj 2014; Gommans et al. 2017). Additionally, what is considered acceptable or “cool” fluctuates both within and among peer groups (Milner Jr. 2006). Milner Jr. (2006) describes this fluctuation as a strategy put forth by individuals with high social standing as a means of retaining their status power. By constantly changing the status quo, adolescents with high social status make it difficult for lower-status individuals to challenge the social positions of those at the top of the peer group hierarchy (Milner Jr. 2006).

Further, measures of status are often gendered (Cillessen and Rose 2005; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2006). For example, boys are socialized to be reserved, aggressive, athletic and “object-oriented” (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992; Perry and Pauletti 2011; Moreau et al. 2019), whereas girls are socialized to be vulnerable, emotional, concerned with physical appearance, and “people-oriented” (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992; Perry and Pauletti 2011; Moreau et al. 2019). Accordingly, Milner Jr. (2006) posits that physical appearance is the most influential factor for status achievement among girls, while athleticism is the most influential factor among boys. Vaillancourt and Hymel (2006) similarly found that athleticism, a sense of humour, having a special talent, and being tough better explains popularity for boys than for girls. Thus, boys and girls may deploy different strategies, and face opposing struggles, to achieve status.

### 3.4.1 Conceptualizing Status
Young people identify high-status peers as “popular” (French and Cheung 2018). Researchers have explored two types of popularity: sociometric popularity and perceived popularity. Sociometric popularity refers to individuals who are often considered “nice” by their peers, exhibit prosocial behaviour, and thus gain status through terms of affection and social acceptance (Jarvinen and Nicholls 1996; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998; LaFontana and Cillessen 2002; Cillessen and Rose 2005; Oldehinkel et al. 2007; Li and Wright 2014). On the other hand, individuals can be disliked by their peers and still be perceived as popular (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998; Cillessen and Rose 2005). Perceived popularity refers to individuals who are considered “cool” and “prestigious” by others and are admired by their peers, despite not being liked by them (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998; LaFontana and Cillessen 2002; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Cillessen and Rose 2005; Li and Wright 2014). Contrary to individuals with sociometric popularity, those who are perceived popular gain status through achievement (Oldehinkel et al. 2007) and social preference (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998). Although both sociometrically popular and perceived popular individuals demonstrate prosocial behaviours, perceived popular individuals also exhibit aggressive, anti-social behaviours (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998; Hawley 2003).

Previous literature suggests that adolescents prioritize perceived popularity over sociometric popularity (LaFontana and Cillessen 2010). Drawing from a sample of 1013 young people, LaFontana and Cillessen (2010) found that middle-school and high-school adolescents prioritize perceived popularity more than any other age group in the sample. Indeed, this cohort prioritized perceived popularity over friendship, personal/academic achievement, following

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9 This sample included a wide age range of participants from 6 to 21 years old. LaFontant and Cillessen (2010) found a curvilinear trend, in which prioritizing perceived popularity increased with the age of participants until after high-school, in which prioritizing popularity began decreasing as the ages of participants increased.
rules, prosocial behavior, and romantic interests, respectively (LaFontana and Cillessen 2010). Given the weight adolescents place on perceived popularity, this age group may be more inclined to employ both prosocial and antisocial behaviours to improve or defend their social status (Merten 1997; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Olthof et al. 2011; French and Cheung 2018).

3.5 Anti-Social Status Strategies

Status is inexpansible: for one person’s status to increase another person’s status must decrease (Merten 1997; Milner Jr. 2006). Although this exchange can occur intentionally or unintentionally, at times young people purposely belittle others in pursuit of social gain (Merten 1997; Milner Jr. 2006; Sijtsema et al. 2009; LaFontana and Cillessen 2010; Olthof et al. 2011). Accordingly, scholars have studied anti-social strategies adolescents deploy to achieve status. For example, drawing from ethnographic data, boyd (2014) found that teenagers engage in drama to gain status. Drama is defined as “performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media” that typically involves friends or “frenemies” passing along negative information about one another, either directly to the person or others (boyd 2014, 137). According to Allen (2012; 2015), teenagers describe drama as conflict that involves trust-breaking and alliance building. Considering drama often stems from inner-peer-group conflict, the perpetuation of drama may cause a shift in peer groups dynamics in which some members’ status improves while other members’ status weakens.

Beyond drama, a plethora of research has investigated bullying and its relation to status achievement. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC: 7) defines bullying as “any unwanted aggressive behaviour(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings
or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.” Simply, cyberbullying is behaviour that adheres to the previously noted criteria and occurs through communicative technologies (CDC 2014).

Both cross-sectional (e.g. Vaillancourt, Hymel, and McDougall 2003; Sijtsema et al. 2009) and longitudinal (e.g. Sentse, Kretschmer, and Salmivalli 2015; Pouwels et al. 2018) studies show that bullying may be strategic for preserving or enhancing social status (Merten 1997; Dijkstra, Lindenber, and Veenstra 2009; Salmivalli 2010; Caravita and Cillessen 2012; boyd 2014). Some research shows that bullies may exemplify perceived popularity, in which they are not liked by their peers, but they can still be considered cool or powerful (Milner Jr. 2006; Salmivalli 2010; Olthof et al. 2011; boyd 2014; Sentse, Kretschmrer, and Salmivalli 2015). However, other research indicates that although bullying may be strategic if the perpetrator already has high social status, bullies with low social status are likely to maintain their social position or damage their reputation further (Milner Jr. 2006; Dijkstra, Lindenber, and Veenstra 2008). This notion aligns with the popularity-norm effect described earlier (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, and Veenstra 2008): when high social status individuals bully others, their behaviour may be less likely to be viewed as problematic by their peers. Thus, bullying may be a rational strategy for maintaining social status but not accumulating status.

3.6 Returning to Bourdieu: Peer Group and Status as Field and Social Capital

Altogether, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates how young people foster meaningful ties and compete for status power in their peer groups. Clearly, status power plays an important role in how adolescents interact with one another, yet this concept remains scarce in research studying young people’s social capital. Thus, I argue that to derive a more fruitful
understanding of young people’s social capital, adolescent peer groups should be considered as a field in which teenagers strive for social capital.

Bourdieu’s description of the social field aligns with the structure of a peer group. Fields are relatively autonomous spaces with rules and hierarchies crafted by their members (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Additionally, members of a field compete to increase or maintain the appropriate form of capital – that is, whichever form of capital translates to power in that field (Bourdieu 1986). Considering adolescent peer groups have limited access to economic gain, social and cultural capital are more suitable forms of power in this field. As a space outside of adult supervision where young people shape the norms that govern them, peer groups provide young people a unique setting for autonomy (Weller 2006; Billet 2011). Keep in mind, the rules of a field are shaped by the agents within that field who sit in a position of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Similarly, the norms and practices expected in a peer group are determined by members of the group with status power (Milner Jr. 2006).

Consequently, although positions in the field are dynamic, access to social capital is not equal. Considering these high-status individuals control the rules of the field, the process of replacing individuals with status power may be difficult. Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, the popularity-norm effect is comparable to symbolic violence. Symbolic violence refers to how people in power shape the rules of the field they dominate to perpetuate their social position (Bourdieu 1990). Victims of symbolic violence are under the false impression that the rules influencing their lower social position are “natural” to the field (Bourdieu 1990). In the context of peer groups and status power, adolescents with low social status may be under the impression that their status-achieving peers are better at adopting the rules of the field without realizing these individuals are producing the criteria that preserves the social hierarchy.
Altogether, young people competing for status and social ties within their peer groups exemplifies members of a field struggling for capital (Bourdieu 1986). Although some research has indicated that peer groups enhance young people’s social capital by fostering social ties (Schaefer-McDaniel 2004; Weller 2006; Leonard 2008; Billet 2011, 2012; Schmeichel, Hughes, and Jutner 2018), I contend that status power is an important dimension of young people’s social capital that has been neglected in past studies. Therefore, this thesis contributes to literature studying young people’s social capital by taking into consideration both relationship ties and competition for status as measures of the concept. Moreover, I contend that Snapchat exemplifies a youth-specific space in which peer groups build and maintain relationships with their peers while simultaneously competing for status among peer group members. Given my focus on Snapchat in the current study, for the remainder of this chapter I concentrate my analysis on previous research exploring youth peer group dynamics, and social capital, on social media.

**Part III: Adolescents and Social Media: A Social (Capital) Necessity**

3.7 Social Media as a Field

Adolescents are increasingly migrating to online spaces to socialize with each other. Often, these spaces are instant-messaging services and social media platforms (boyd 2014; Barry et al. 2017). Social media provides teenagers with an outlet to communicate with each other constantly, regardless of their geographic location, at low cost, and out of site from parents or other authority figures (Abeele et al. 2014; Best, Manktelow and Taylor 2014; boyd 2014; Abar et al. 2018). Given this description, social media platforms are youth-specific spaces (Marwick and boyd 2014). From a Bourdieusian lens, social media platforms are also fields; the individuals that log into these platforms shape the rules and social structure that users adapt and adhere to (Ahn 2012; Julien 2015; Metcalfe and Llewellyn 2020).
Since social media encourages human connection, these platforms are naturally linked to social capital (Ahn 2012). Researchers have compared the social capital levels between teenagers who use social media and teenagers who do not use social media (Tomai et al. 2010, Ahn 2012, and Xie et al. 2014). As expected, these scholars found that teenagers who use social media are more likely to have higher levels of bridging and bonding social capital than teenagers who do not use social media (Tomai et al. 2010; Ahn 2012; Xie et al. 2014). However, these scholars provide little insight into how social media use influences social capital. Conversely, in-depth explorations of how young people use social media to foster relationships and build status seldom incorporate social capital theory. Below I elaborate on past research exploring how teenagers use social media in relation to their social capital, regardless of whether these studies used a Bourdieusian framework.

3.8 Creating and Maintaining Social Ties on Social Media

Teenagers create connections on social media with people they know vaguely offline (Davis 2012; Yau and Reich 2019) and individuals that are completely distinct from their offline network (Weller 2006). For the former, adolescents may foster online-only relationships; despite being familiar with each other offline, they associate with each other solely online (Davis 2012; Yau and Reich 2019). However, more commonly, teenagers use social media as a starting point to build deeper connections with offline acquaintances (boyd 2014; Yau and Reich 2019). For instance, Marwick and boyd (2014) observed that teenagers tend to “friend” all of their classmates, including individuals that are not in their immediate friend group. Similarly, Gleason (2016: 37) indicated that teenagers use Twitter to “break the ice” with new contacts at school. Accordingly, due to the large networks young people tend to foster online, teenagers are able to

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11 Some exceptions include Nilan et al. (2015), Yau and Reich (2019), and Metcalfe and Llewellyn (2020).
use social media to develop relationships (boyd 2007; Marwick and boyd 2014; Gleason 2016; Metcalfe and Llewellyn 2020).

Teenagers also use social media to maintain offline relationships (Ahn 2012; boyd 2004; Pfeil et al. 2009; Lee 2009; Tomai et al. 2010; Billet 2011; Vidales-Bolaños and Sádaba-Chalezquer 2017). Namely, boyd (2007: 126) contends that maintaining contact with friends is the primary reason adolescents participate in social media:

*When I ask teenagers why they joined MySpace, the answer is simple: “Cuz that's where my friends are.” Their explanation of what they do on the site is much vaguer: “I don't know...I just hang out.”* Beneath these vague explanations is a clear message: the popularity of MySpace is deeply rooted in how the site supports sociality amongst pre-existing friend groups. Teens join MySpace to maintain connections with their friends.

The excerpt from boyd’s (2007) book suggests that teenagers use social media in a similar fashion to offline youth-specific spaces. The activities young people engage in when they are “hanging out” online such as light-hearted conversations, playing online games, commenting on or “liking” each other’s posts, and sharing or “tagging” each other in content such as news articles or memes all contribute to upkeeping relationships with their peers (Ahn 2012; boyd 2014; Gleason 2016; Yau and Reich 2019).

However, only a few studies have explored how teenagers create and preserve relationships on specific social media platforms. For example, Gleason (2016) argued that young people sustain friendships on Twitter through “social retweeting”12 in which act young people share their friends’ tweets as a sign of support. Similarly, high school students in Yau and Reich's (2019) study indicated that reciprocating Instagram “likes”13 on each other’s photos is a norm between friends. Thus far, Snapchat has been neglected in this body of research.

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12 A “retweet” is when a user posts another user's tweet on their profile that, inevitably, shows up on their followers’ timeline.
13 A “like” is a function on most social media platforms that allows users to show that they appreciate a person’s content or post.
3.9 Strategies for Status on Social Media

In addition to fostering social ties, young people use social media to augment their social status. Much like offline peer groups, adolescents who exhibit plenty of relationship ties and possess “cool” characteristics online are considered more popular (i.e. possess more status power) than individuals who do not (Metcalf and Llewellyn 2020). Namely, young people achieve status online through strategies of self-presentation. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Erving Goffman describes how individuals engage in impression management: they display an idealized image of themselves to others. With this in mind, self-presentation is “a subset of impression management whereby individuals develop their identities and roles and gain social rewards through their interactions with others” (Vogel and Rose 2016, 294).

Although self-presentation is evident in various facets of everyday life, researchers suggest the process of self-presentation is amplified on social media platforms (boyd 2014; Chua and Chang 2016; Charoensukmongkol 2018). On social media, individuals are allotted time to keenly and laboriously craft and edit their posts to display a more positive image of themselves (Davis 2012; Yau and Reich 2019). Consequently, social media users may endure an underlying pressure of positive self-presentation, especially on picture-based platforms such as Instagram and Facebook (Rui and Stefanone 2013; Seidman 2013; Ho Moon et al. 2016; Sheldon and Bryant 2016; Yau and Reich 2018). Due to this pressure, users tend to post pictures or comments emphasizing more favorable facets of their appearance and/or lives (Chou and Edge 2012; Vogel and Rose 2016).

Additionally, scholars agree that teenagers use social media for self-presentation purposes more often than other age groups (Charoensukmongkol 2018; Yau and Reich 2019).
Namely, teenagers tend to intentionally share or post content on their social media that they believe to be socially desirable, content their peers will find interesting, attractive, or “cool” (Davis 2012; Gleason 2016; Yau and Reich 2019; Noon and Meir 2019). Building from this, “social grooming” is a status-related strategy young people deploy on social media (Tufecki 2008; Ahn 2012; Balleys and Coll 2017; Yau and Reich 2019). Social grooming is defined as a bonding activity intended to “improve one’s reputation and status as well as access to resources and social and practical solidarity” (Tufecki 2008, 546). Scholars have identified social grooming practices on social media such as disclosing information regarding events or activities individuals are involved with, commenting on their friends’ content, or holding conversations on public forums, with the underlying intention that others will see these interactions (Ahn 2012; boyd 2007, 2014). Considering social capital, at its most basic description, is shaped by who you know and who knows you, social grooming can be interpreted as a means of increasing social capital (Leonard 2008; Balleys and Coll 2017). That is, by maximizing their social visibility, adolescents may be more apt to acquire higher status.

Alternatively, boyd (2014) contends using social media is advantageous for young people on their quest for status because it allows information, including the most recent status markers and “codes of coolness,” to spread easily and be picked up on instantly. In other words, social media helps young people stay “in the know” about their peer group norms (Billet 2011; boyd 2007, 2014). Thus, similar to offline youth settings, social media is a field where adolescents play by the “rules of the game” to earn status among their peers (Metcalf and Llewellyn 2020). Teenagers post flattering photos, comment on or “like” their friends’ content, and adopt the behaviour and style put forth by their peers in power (boyd 2014; Chua and Chang 2016; Yau and Reich 2019; Metcalf and Llewellyn 2020).
However, similar to offline status achievement, the rules of the field on social media are gendered. First, some scholars suggest that teenaged girls are more likely to use social media to stay in touch with close friends while teenaged boys are more likely to use these platforms to expand their social networks (boyd 2007; Goswami and Dutta 2016). Some practices identified in the literature reflect this difference. For example, Yau and Reich (2019) found that girls consulted each other about what content to post and often asked or expected their close friends to interact with their posts (i.e. comment on or “like”). Meanwhile, the same study found that boys “like” other individuals’ content more candidly and do not ask their friends for advice on, or to interact with, their social media posts (Yau and Reich 2019). Given that a sense of trust and loyalty are expected when girls interact online with each other, this may suggest girls achieve more bonding social capital online than boys.

Additionally, some scholars indicated that adolescents tend to post content that reflects the norms of their respective gender. For example, in an analysis comparing Instagram posts between boys and girls, Yau and Reich (2019) found that boys typically posted content of themselves that displayed masculinity such as playing sports, “play” fighting with each other, or flexing their muscles. Meanwhile, the same study found that girls put more effort into enhancing (i.e., editing) their physical appearance on their pictures (Yau and Reich 2019). Chua and Chang (2016: 195) found similar results and suggest that “girls negotiate their self-presentation efforts to achieve the standards of beauty projected by their peers.” Much like the offline peer group setting, gender norms play a critical role regarding what constitutes looking “cool” on social media.

3.10 Measures of Status on Social Media
Beyond self-presentation tactics, scholars have recognized certain features of social media platforms that young people use as status indicators. For example, most social media platforms show the number of contacts (i.e., “friends” or “followers”) an individual possesses on their profile. For young people, the quantity of connections a person beholds is a measure of popularity: the more Facebook friends or Instagram followers a person has, the cooler they appear (boyd 2007; Vidales-Bolaños and Sádaba-Chalezquer 2017; Schmeichel, Hughes, and Jutner 2018). Teenagers also use the number of comments or “likes” their posts receive as a social statistic; these numbers quantify approval from their peers and allow for comparison between others in their social network (Marwick and boyd 2014; Nilan et al. 2015; Chua and Chang 2016; Schmeichel Hughes, and Jutner 2018; Yau and Reich 2019). To demonstrate, Metcalfe and Llewellyn (2020: 99) published an excerpt from their interview data which epitomizes this function:

…depending on how many “likes” you get on social media determines where you are in the social, like the popularity hierarchy. The more “likes” you get, then the better you’re seen as a person. Helen [another interviewee] gets like 400 “likes” on her photos . . . the people who get 20-30 “likes” aren’t seen as anywhere near as big of a deal.

Similarly, Yau and Reich (2019) contend that young people’s popularity is determined by whether or not the number of “likes” their content receives meets a minimum threshold. Drawing from focus group discussions with adolescents, the authors reported that this threshold ranged from anywhere between 30 to 90 likes per post (Yau and Reich 2019, 201). It is worth pointing out that the numbers which indicated high social status for participants in Yau and Reich’s (2019) study were reported as indicating low social standing by the participant cited by Metcalfe and Llewellyn (2020). These differences suggest that, generally, more interactions translate to higher social status; however, the numbers which indicate popularity or “coolness” are unique to each field (i.e., peer group). Altogether, teenagers engage in self-presentation on
social media as a strategy for achieving social status, and the features that display an individual’s online network (“followers” and “friends”) along with the number of interactions an individual’s content receives (“likes,” “shares,” “retweets,” or “comments”) validate the feasibility of these strategies.

So far, research has identified status measures on popular platforms among teenagers such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, but not Snapchat. This is a problematic gap in the literature not only because of Snapchat’s popularity among young people, but also because Snapchat does not behold the aforementioned measures of social status. Snapchat does not allow users to see each other’s friends list, nor does it include the aforementioned features such as “likes,” “favourites,” or comment sections. For this reason, some scholars suggest self-presentation is less of a concern for individuals when they use Snapchat in comparison to other social media platforms (Bayer et al. 2015; Xu et al. 2016; Kofoed and Larsen 2016). However, these scholars drew these conclusions from adult samples. Considering self-presentation is heightened during adolescence, this suggestion may not hold for younger Snapchat users. Therefore, the current study provides an introductory look at whether teenagers use Snapchat in relation to achieving or maintaining social status.

3.11 Exploitative Strategies for Social Capital Online

Scholars agree that young people exploit others on social media to advance their social status (Marwick and boyd 2014; boyd 2014; Nilan et al. 2015). Below, I elaborate on three prominent topics in the literature concerning young people acting strategically malicious online: cyberbullying, drama, and revenge porn.

First, similar to in-person bullying, adolescents may cyberbully others to build status, amuse their friends, and consequently, accumulate social capital (Nilan et al. 2015). Namely,
some scholars have focused on the relationship between cyberbullying and status achievement. On one hand, Wegge and colleagues (2016) found that cyberbullying behaviour led to an increase in social status and perceived popularity for the bullies, however, perceived popularity was not related to subsequent cyberbullying (Wegge et al. 2016). Thus, Wegge et al. (2016)’s findings suggest that cyberbullying may be strategic for achieving social status but is not required to maintain status. Conversely, findings from Badaly and colleagues (2013) indicate that adolescents may rely on cyberbullying perpetration to move up the social hierarchy and that high social status individuals were commonly targeted in this quest for social mobility (Badaly et al. 2013). Other authors also suggest that high-status individuals may be at risk of victimization as a consequence of their large social networks: the more people in your network, the more bullies that troll this network (Katzer, FETCHENHAUER, and BELSCHAK 2009; VandeBosch and Van Cleemput 2009; Gradinger et al. 2012). However, Badaly and others (2013: 900) suggest “the aggressive strategies that [teenagers] use to gain and maintain status can place them in danger of reciprocated rivalry.” Clearly, the relationship between social status and cyberbullying is still in question in the literature.

Nilan and colleagues (2015) applied a Bourdieusian framework to their study of cyberbullying. Drawing from semi-structured interviews, Nilan and colleagues (2015) suggest teenagers cyberbully others on social media as a strategy for building social capital, especially if the victim lacks strong social capital or has previously experienced disapproval from peers. Specifically, the authors contend that teenagers build their social capital by teasing their classmates who have fewer friends or who are not considered “cool” on Facebook where their friends (i.e., bystanders) can witness this behaviour and display their approval (Nilan et al. 2015).
Uludasdemir and Kucuk (2018) were the only scholars found in this review that mentioned Snapchat with regards to adolescents’ experiences with cyberbullying and social media. Drawing from questionnaire responses, the authors determined that young people who use Snapchat are more susceptible to cyberbullying victimization than individuals who do not use Snapchat (Uludasdemir and Kucuk 2018). However, the findings from Uludasdemir and Kucuk (2018) do not explicitly indicate if young people are cyberbullied on Snapchat, nor how or why Snapchat increases the chances of victimization (Uludasdemir and Kucuk 2018). Therefore, in the current study, I aim to build from Nilan et al. (2015) and Uludasdemir and Kucuk (2018) by providing a more in-depth understanding of how teenagers use exploitative behaviour to enhance their social capital on Snapchat.

Secondly, Marwick and boyd (2014) suggest much of the meanness adolescents experience online does not fit the criteria of bullying. Drawing from interviews and focus groups with American teenagers, Marwick and boyd (2014) found that much of the meanness and cruelty young people experience online is drama. boyd (2014: 138) describes social media as “a key factor in the escalation of drama,” in which the overlap between most teenagers’ offline and online social networks allow for drama to transfer from one field to another easily (Allen 2012). Consequently, drama may intensify on social media with peers fueling the feud by giving it the attention it needs to survive and possibly joining in on the conflict (boyd 2014; Marwick and boyd 2014). Further, boyd (2014) suggests that the software design of social media platforms unintentionally fuels the spread of drama. Specifically, she points out how Facebook uses an algorithm so that users see “interesting” content (i.e., content with many “likes” or “comments”)

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14 Although boyd (2014) only mentioned Facebook in her example, other popular sites such as Twitter and Instagram behold similar patterns. Therefore, it is likely that drama escalates on other social media platforms similarly.
at the top of their feed (boyd, 2014). Consequently, this algorithm may perpetuate gossip or drama that has already ignited by directing peers to view and potentially engage in the conflict at hand (boyd, 2014; Gin and Norman 2016).

Researchers put a great deal of emphasis on the impact social media plays in perpetuating and expanding drama. Considering drama includes both dimensions of social capital (i.e., social ties and status achievement), I contend it is necessary to consider this behaviour when trying to understand how teenagers struggle for social capital, especially on social media. Therefore, the current study contributes to this small but significant body of literature by taking into consideration incidents of drama reported by participants as potential episodes of a struggle for social capital.

Lastly, with the proliferation of adolescent cell phone ownership over the last decade, a growing body of literature explores the sexting practices of adolescents. Sexting refers to sexually explicit or suggestive messages sent electronically from one person to another (Charteris, Gregory, and Masters 2014). Previous research investigating adolescents’ norms surrounding sexting has yielded conflicting results. Although De Ridder (2019: 575) found that young people consider sending sexual content as a norm violation, in which sexting violates the norm of “good online conduct,” most studies indicate that most teenagers consider sexting a normative practice (Abeele et al. 2014; Lippman and Campbell 2014; Johnston 2016; Thomas 2018). Alternatively, some studies suggest the norms and opinions surrounding sexting are contextual. For example, sexting may be considered acceptable if it is reciprocated between two people in a romantic relationship, but not if the relationship is “casual” or frivolous (Crooks 2017).
Additionally, research has indicated that attitudes towards sexting are gendered: boys are more likely to receive social approval for sending or receiving sexual content whereas girls struggle with mixed messages of being pressured and condemned for sexting (Thomas 2018). Specifically, Thomas (2018: 193) contends that girls experience a “double-edge sword – facing the label of either a ‘prude’ if they refuse to be sexual or a ‘slut’ if they are sexual.” Consequently, girls may feel anxious or concerned about sexting whereas boys tend to have positive feelings about the same behaviour (Bates 2017).

From a Bourdieusian standpoint, sexting involves strategies for both strengthening relationship ties and achieving peer group status (Ringrose et al. 2012; Abeele et al. 2014; boyd 2014). For the former, past research indicates that many teenagers reported sexting as mutually pleasurable and building trust and intimacy between romantic partners (Bates 2017; Ouytsel et al. 2017; Thomas 2018). For the latter, receiving and possessing sexual content may hold social value for young people (De Ridder 2019). Teenagers find information or content with sexual implications interesting and thus worthy of spreading to others (boyd 2014). Consequently, possessing a person’s sexual messages may function as a social currency in which young people “show off” these messages in exchange for social praise (Ouytsel et al. 2017).

Despite research that indicates sexting can be a positive activity for teenagers (Bailey 2015; Johnston 2016; Thomas 2018), much of the discourse surrounding teenagers and sexting, in both academic and non-academic settings, develops out of concern (Perry and Pauletty 2011; Abeele et al. 2014; De Ridder 2019). Mainly, these concerns focus around two potential repercussions of sexting: the pressure teenagers face to engage in sexting (Ringrose et al. 2012; Thomas 2018) and revenge porn, or the non-consensual mass distribution of sexually explicit images (Bates 2017; Thomas 2018). Revenge porn often involves malicious intent; the person
distributing the sext messages typically aims to humiliate the original sender after a romantic relationship ends poorly (Ouytsel et al. 2017; Thomas 2018). In terms of status achievement, revenge porn is similar to bullying and drama in that one individual intends to dismantle another person’s reputation by embarrassing or exposing them to others. Specifically, this behaviour is often reported as a boy sharing sexual messages he received from a girl with other boys for praise (Ouytsel et al. 2017; Bates 2017; Thomas 2018; De Ridder 2019). Thus, sexting may have more positive outcomes for teenaged boys’ social capital and more risks for teenaged girls’ social capital.

Further, scholars agree that individuals may be inclined to use Snapchat for sexting purposes because the self-erasing messages provides users with a sense of safety and security (Poltash 2013; Charteris, Gregory, and Masters 2014; Roesner, Gill, and Kohno 2014; Utz Muscanell, and Khalid 2015; Piwek and Joinson 2016; Vaterlaus et al. 2016; Moran Salerno, and Wade 2018). However, I found only one study that looked at sexting and Snapchat from a sample of young people (Ouytsel et al. 2017). Drawing from focus group discussions with teenagers, Ouytsel and colleagues (2017) found that Snapchat was the most commonly reported smartphone application used for sexting. Additionally, teenagers indicated that Snapchat is appealing for sending sexual content because the messages disappear quickly (Ouytsel et al. 2017). However, previous research exploring Snapchat as a platform for sexting does not mention cases or concerns of revenge porn. Thus, the current study not only introduces a Bourdieusian perspective to sexting and revenge porn in the context of teenagers, but it also provides introductory insight into teenagers’ sexting practices on Snapchat.

3.12 The Current Study
Altogether, the contributions of the current study to the literature are manifold. First, although few scholars have studied the relationship between social media and young people’s social capital, most of this research only measures social capital through social ties. This is unsurprising, given the limited consideration scholars studying young people’s social capital offline have given to power dynamics as well (Leonard 2008). Thus, alongside Nilan and colleagues (2015), this study is one of the first to consider teenagers’ peer group status as a measure of their social capital.

Secondly, online adolescent peer group research is mostly quantitative. To demonstrate, Best and colleagues (2014) found that a majority (74%) of literature on teenagers’ social media use and well-being used solely quantitative measures. The prevalence of quantitative research to understand young people’s offline and online behaviour is limiting. Evident from the discovery of how young people use the term “drama,” boyd and Marwick (2014) and Allen (2012) exemplify how qualitative studies are essential for bridging the gap between how researchers understand young people’s lives and their actual lived experiences. With this in mind, the current study contributes to the small number of studies using qualitative measures to collect data from teenagers regarding how they use social media use generally, and in the context of social capital theory.

Finally, Snapchat differs from other social media platforms because it does not include the typical tools adolescents use to achieve social capital online (i.e., “likes,” “retweets,” comment sections). Consequently, young people may be obtaining status and maintaining relationships on Snapchat in a distinct fashion compared to other social media platforms. As I emphasize throughout this thesis, research on adolescents using Snapchat is scarce. In some studies, Snapchat was mentioned – albeit briefly – in the broader context of young people’s
social media use (boyd 2014), cyberbullying (Uludasdemir and Kucuk 2018) or sexting practices (Ouytsel et al. 2017). Otherwise, teenagers’ Snapchat practices have been overlooked by scholars. Therefore, while my focus for this thesis is how using Snapchat is associated with teenagers’ social capital, I bring forth general, introductory insight as to how teenagers’ use Snapchat to the literature as well.

3.13 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter provided an extensive review of the literature on 1) past and present interpretations of young people’s social capital, 2) peer group dynamics and popularity among young people, and 3) how teenagers use social media concerning the two dimensions of social capital: social ties and status achievement. To summarize, scholars often neglect the power dynamics when conceptualizing young people’s social capital, which is limiting since young people struggle for status power within their peer groups. Moreover, teenagers have migrated this struggle for status power online; however, little research has approached this struggle from a Bourdieusian framework. Finally, Snapchat has yet to be explored as a field in which young people struggle for social capital. In the next chapter, I elaborate on my rationale for using a qualitative approach, among other methodological considerations, for this thesis.
CHAPTER 4
METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used in this study to explore teenagers’ use of Snapchat and its relation to social capital. Specifically, I explain the techniques I used for research design, recruitment process, data collection, and data analysis. Then, I end this chapter by discussing the potential risks involved with the research design, the ethics clearances I received for this study, and finally, my positionality as a young adult interviewing high school students.

Before I continue, it is important to note the transition from a deductive to an inductive approach that occurred during the research process. Before data collection, I intended on performing a mixed-methods study to learn mostly about cyberbullying victimization on Snapchat through a Routine Activity Theory (RAT) approach. Specifically, I prepared an online questionnaire and focus group discussion guide for students to participate in with questions surrounding the main concepts of RAT such as victimization, guardianship, and opportunities for deviance. However, after visiting 19 high-school classes and distributing approximately 500 consent forms to students, only 15 consent forms were returned and 10 of these forms indicated parental consent for their child to participate in the study. Consequently, a mixed-methods study was no longer feasible. Thus, rather than continue with the initial deductive frame of cyberbullying on Snapchat through RAT, I revised my analysis to follow a broader inductive analysis to avoid forcing data to fit my original themes. Below, I elaborate further on this process.

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) is a criminological theory introduced by Marcus Felson and Lawrence Cohen. In short, RAT suggests that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and a lack of guardianship intersect in time and space.
4.1 Research Design

As a result of the low response rate from recruiting for my initial research design, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students (n = 7) from a medium-sized high school (approximately 1000 students) in Southwestern, Ontario. Interviews were conducted in April 2019. Interviews allow researchers to learn about their participants’ experiences and thoughts more deeply than other qualitative methods such as focus group or content analyses (Aurini, Heath, and Howells 2016). Further, semi-structured interviews allow researchers some flexibility in administering interview questions while maintaining a degree of consistency and comparability by asking all interviewees the same questions (Aurini, Heath, and Howells 2016); however, semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to explore new themes and concepts as they arise during interviews (Nilan et al. 2015). As an outsider (i.e., an adult) with limited a priori knowledge about how teenagers use Snapchat, semi-structured interviews were thus ideal, and I adapted the interview schedule and probed unanticipated concepts while in the field. For example, the first couple of participants made reference to parts of Snapchat use I had not considered, such as “streaks” (i.e., sending snaps back and forth for consecutive days) and “bitmojis” (i.e., a cartoon avatar Snapchat users can create on their profile); I included questions pertaining to these concepts in subsequent interviews.

4.2 Recruitment and Participants

As I mentioned prior, participants were a non-probability sample drawn from a population of approximately 50016 students enrolled in 19 classes. The participating school was selected based on its location and having a previous connection with the school’s vice-principal, a key gatekeeper in school-based research. Classes were selected in collaboration with the vice-

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16 This number is an estimate based on class sizes and consent forms distributed. However, it does not consider factors such as absences, students in multiple classes, etc.
principal with an objective of balancing academic level (applied, academic, and open courses for junior grades; college, university, and open courses for senior grades) and students’ gender, alongside teachers’ cooperation.

To recruit participants, I visited all 19 classes to introduce myself and the study and distributed parental consent forms to every student. During recruitment visits, students were asked to return parental consent forms to their teacher whether or not their parents provided consent. This was intentional – considering the potentially sensitive nature of the interview topics (i.e., bullying, drama, deviant behaviours, revenge porn, etc.) it was important to maintain participants’ confidentiality. For example, I sought to avoid a situation in which a student was bullied or harassed by others for participating, or in which a student was outed as somebody who had experienced drama or other incidents with their peers related to Snapchat use. Parental consent was obtained for all study participants.

Teachers placed these forms in a sealed envelope, which the vice-principal picked up from participating classes two weeks after they were sent home with students. Then, I collected the consent forms from the vice-principal and contacted students via email, call, or text message to arrange an interview from the information provided on the signed consent forms.

Interviews for this study were conducted with seven teenagers, five females and two males, ranging from grade 9 to grade 12 (ages 13-18). At the time of the interviews, three participants were in grade 12, two were in grade 11, one was in grade 10, and one was in grade 9. All but one participant had Snapchat at the time of the study; the participant that did not have Snapchat had it twice previously (see Table 4.1).

17 Participants’ sex was determined based on researcher’s perception.
Table 4.1: Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
<th>Used Snapchat at the time of the interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>University/College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Risks

As is possible with any qualitative research involving human subjects, there were some risks for participants. Particularly, interviewing high school students in the school setting posited two types of risk for participants: psychological risks and social risks. First, considering the potentially sensitive nature of the interview discussions, participants were at risk of psychological harm by participating in the study: interview participants could have become uncomfortable talking about their experiences with Snapchat, especially in the certain contexts including but not limited to cyberbullying, status, and sending intimate pictures.

To minimize the risk of psychological harm, I informed students during the recruitment visits that questions about negative experiences on Snapchat, including cyberbullying, would be asked during the interview. This risk was also included on both the consent form and the assent form. Additionally, before beginning interviews, I reiterated to participants that they could skip

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15 Participants’ class level is based on the class they missed to participate in the interview.
questions or stop the interview entirely at any point if they did not feel comfortable. I also assured participants that I would not share their responses with their peers, teachers, and/or family members. Finally, at the end of the interview all students were provided with a list of free counselling resources at school and in the community.

Second, participants were at potential risk of social harm by participating in this study. Social harm refers to a loss of status or reputation. Namely, students could have been questioned or scrutinized by their peers for participating in the study, especially if they had experienced negative behaviour on Snapchat. Alternatively, participants could be pressured after their participation by parents or their peers after the study to confess their responses.

To limit the likelihood of social harm, I made a conscious effort to keep participation confidential. As noted earlier, students were asked to return consent forms regardless of whether or not they would participate to conceal which students had permission to participate. Moreover, before interviews teachers were called from the guidance office and asked to send students down for a guidance appointment. This allowed participants to leave class without classmates, or their teacher, knowing they were participating in this study.

In light of these measures to reduce the risk of harm to participants, this study was approved by two research ethics boards. First, this study received clearance from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board in February of 2019 (REB#18-08-028) and later received clearance from the research department of the regional school board in which this study took place in March of 2019.

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews took place in a private room in the school’s guidance office during school hours. Participants were called to the guidance office at the beginning of class and returned to
class when the interview ended. In addition to parental consent, I read an assent form to participants immediately before the interview. All participants provided voluntary informed assent by signing the assent form. Although parents or guardians gave permission for their children to participate, I found it important for students to express their personal autonomy by signing a separate form.

Interviews ranged from 12 to 45 minutes in length. The interview schedule included 8 questions and 14 probing questions (see Appendix A). These questions focused on why the participant uses Snapchat, how they use Snapchat, what they do and do not like about Snapchat, and, finally, whether they had witnessed or experienced cyberbullying or other deviant behaviours on Snapchat. Brief field notes were handwritten during the interviews and detailed memos, including descriptions of the participant, new questions or concepts that derived during the interview, and my personal reflections of the participant and the interview (e.g., their body language, tone, effective probes, etc.), were handwritten immediately following each interview and later digitized via word processing software.

Interviews were audio-recorded and later manually transcribed in their entirety, respectively. Participants and other individuals mentioned in the interview were anonymized with pseudonyms during transcription. Once transcribed and anonymized, the audio recordings were deleted. Then, memos and transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo12 for analysis.

4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

An inductive approach refers to a “bottom-up” analysis in which data are not bound to a specific coding frame (Braun and Clarke 2006). Consequently, research questions evolve through the coding process and conclusions are data-driven (Braun and Clarke 2006). Therefore, 

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19 Nvivo12 is a trusted computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that helps researchers organize and manage their data efficiently (Aurini, Heath, & Howells 2016).
although some themes surrounding victimization were considered before data collection based on the questions asked during interviews, I mainly used an inductive approach when coding interview transcripts and memos.

Specifically, data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to identifying themes and analyzing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is completed through the process of six phases: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and, finally, producing the report.

Applying Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process to this study, I familiarized myself with the data by transcribing the interviews, re-writing memos and field notes, and uploading these documents to Nvivo12. Once in Nvivo12, I generated initial codes that were considered before, during, and after data collection. “Codes” refer to the terms “used to describe the word or short phrase that captures the main essence of one small dimension of your data” (Aurini, Heath, and Howells 2016, 192). Codes were highlighted and sorted into “nodes.” After completing coding, I developed themes from the data by grouping codes based on patterns relevant to the research questions (“status,” “popularity,” “cyberbullying,” etc.) recognized during interviews and the coding process. Specifically, codes were grouped under a new node which was labeled with the theme.

To confirm that such themes accurately represented the data, I reviewed the transcriptions, memos, and field notes and made any adjustments necessary. With thematic coding, data are not analyzed through a linear process; it is a recursive process requiring moving back and forth between the phases of coding as needed (Braun and Clarke 2006). Referring back
to my earlier account of transitioning from a deductive to an inductive approach, the phase of reviewing themes involved returning to earlier stages to include data originally excluded from the analysis such as using the Snap Map, maintaining “streaks”, and cases of revenge porn.

After revisiting the data in the review stages, themes were finalized and defined. Then, certain quotes that most clearly articulated the themes, were selected to be displayed verbatim during transcription and coding in this report. Not only does this humanize the data presented, but it allows participants to play a part in the recollection of their experiences as well.

4.5 Positionality

Earlier, I mentioned my position as an “outsider” researcher. Simply, this refers to my position as a young-adult woman interviewing teenagers in a high school environment. Considering the researcher controls an interview by virtue of asking the questions, power dynamics exist in all interview studies (Eder and Fingerson 2011). However, my position added another power dynamic: age. By the time they reach high school, teenagers are taught to respect, obey, and listen to adults (Eder and Fingerson 2011). This is especially the case in school environments, where students are expected to treat their teachers as superiors (McGarry 2016). Therefore, as an adult in a school setting, students may have felt concerned sharing information with me they would not share with their teachers, parents, or someone else of authority.

With this in mind, I made it a priority to strike a delicate balance between presenting myself as approachable, yet professional: a non-dominant positionality. Specifically, I implemented subtle strategies to counterbalance my position as a researcher during recruitment visits and interviews. For example, during recruitment, I dressed casually, introduced myself by my first name and as a student-researcher, and told students my goal was to learn from them. In addition to emphasizing my youth, I scheduled interviews through texting (and phone and email,
if the participant preferred), which is a more common form of communication for teenagers (Pew Research Center 2015).

Furthermore, previous literature suggests young participants are more willing to engage with a researcher when the researcher emphasizes commonalities between them (Hampshire et al. 2014). During interviews, I made an effort to discuss common interests that derived from the conversation even if the topic was not related to the study. For example, with most participants, I admitted I attended their school’s rival high school, which usually led to friendly banter about which school is better. Other times I would elaborate on similar interests such as sports, high school jobs, and preparing for university life. Although these topics do not relate to Snapchat use and social capital per se, they allowed participants to get to know me as more than a researcher. Consequently, they may have felt more comfortable talking to me about their Snapchat use than they would to someone who appeared as more of an authority figure. Adding to this point, I dressed casually for the interviews – usually, I wore a hoodie and jeans with sneakers. I did this with the intention of emphasizing my position as a youth and to create a conversational, comfortable atmosphere, rather than a professional setting.

In reflection, I believe how I presented myself contributed to the richness of the data. For example, some participants felt comfortable enough with me to share some of their negative behaviours on Snapchat, despite not being asked. For example, Zac openly admitted to me that he and a friend cyberbullied another Snapchat user. In another interview, Tina told me about a folder on her phone filled with screenshots and screen-recordings of conversations in which someone is talking about another person behind their back, and intimate photos (i.e., nudes) people have sent her. Together, these conversations demonstrate that participants felt comfortable opening up to me and suggest that they were honest and candid with their responses.
4.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter described the research methodology I used for this study. In detail, I explained the research design, recruitment process, data collection, and finally, data analysis used to explore how teenagers use Snapchat and its relation to social capital. Then, I addressed the potential risks to participants in this study affiliated with the research design, and my positionality as a young adult researcher in a high school setting. Although I did not follow up with students after interviews, most participants appeared to enjoy talking about their experiences with Snapchat. Participants demonstrated engagement in ways such as elaborating on their experiences with Snapchat beyond the context of the questions asked and voluntarily showing me their Snapchat account on their phone during the interview. As the next chapter demonstrates, the participants’ eagerness to share their experiences with, and opinions on, Snapchat in such detail was a vital component of my findings for this thesis.
CHAPTER 5
RESULTS

This chapter describes my findings from this study. To align with my research questions, this chapter is divided into two sections. Part I focuses on the first research question, “How is Snapchat use associated with teenagers’ social capital?” I begin by emphasizing the popularity of Snapchat among the participants, and how this popularity contributes to applying Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “field” to Snapchat. Then, I describe the common behaviours and activities on Snapchat that participants described during interviews. By doing so I not only emphasize my interpretation of Snapchat as a social field, but I discuss the strategies teenagers employ to acquire and maintain social ties and status on Snapchat. Where relevant, I elaborate on how younger and older teenagers differ with regards to how they used Snapchat to enhance their social capital.

In Part Two, I narrow my analysis to answer the second research question, “How are exploitative behaviours on Snapchat associated with teenagers’ social capital?” Although participants reported a wide array of negative behaviours, they emphasized cyberbullying and revenge porn. Additionally, almost every case of victimization reported by participants involved a female as the victim. Thus, I conclude this chapter by elaborating on the gender differences I found in the data.

Part I: Social Capital on Snapchat

5.1: Teenagers Using Snapchat

First and foremost, Snapchat use is prevalent in the day-to-day lives of the participants in this study. Whether they are at home, at school, or engaged in other activities, teenagers use

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20 For this study, “younger teenagers” refers to teens in grades 9 or 10 (approximately 13 to 15 years old) and “older teenagers” refers to teens in grades 11 or 12 (approximately 16 to 17 years old).
Snapchat to stay connected with their peers. As shown in Table 5.1, all but one participant reported downloading Snapchat for the first time during middle school. Additionally, when asked why they downloaded Snapchat, participants echoed one another – simply, because their peers were already using it. Together, these responses suggest that by the time adolescents reach high school, Snapchat use is the norm.

Table 5.1: When and Why Participants Downloaded Snapchat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>“It was like a pressure thing almost, everyone around me was starting to get it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>“All my friends had it. Just a nice way to keep in contact with them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Age 12-13 (Grade 7-8)</td>
<td>“Bunch of my friends had it and no one ever uses iMessage anymore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>“I think it’s just cause everybody else had it probably and it was like an easier way to communicate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>“people had it and I was like you know what that sounds cool and just downloaded it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>“Cause all my friends had it. It was like middle school so, everyone was like sending pictures to one another and I was like, okay I’ll download it. So I’ll just download it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supplementing this notion that Snapchat is a central form of communication among teens, Sam described the process of downloading Snapchat as synonymous with cell phone ownership:

That’s what, to the younger demographic, like college and high school students, that’s like what they have. They don’t use Facebook because that’s not what they grew up with. When you get your first phone, or whatever it may be. Download Instagram, because that’s what all your friends have. Download Snapchat, because that’s what all your friends have.

According to Sam, not only are teenagers using Snapchat but, along with Instagram, it is considered a norm to use the app among their peers.

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21 In this study, middle school refers to grade six through grade eight and high school begins in grade nine.
22 Taylor downloaded the app in grade 6 but has since deleted it. Her rationale for initially downloading Snapchat was not discussed.
Not surprisingly, participants reported using Snapchat daily. As Table 5.2 shows, all respondents reported using Snapchat every day, and two participants described using Snapchat constantly. Participants indicated that they use Snapchat frequently because of its dual function as both a social media platform and an instant messenger. Snapchat is an audio-visual platform that allows contacts to send each other text or picture messages; however, it also has features characteristic of a social media platform such as contact profiles, news articles, games, and the ability for users to broadcast information through stories. Therefore, participants reported using Snapchat for reasons similar to other forms of social media and texting.

Table 5.2: Responses to “How often do you use Snapchat?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>How Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>“Every day [the] first time [I downloaded Snapchat]… once a week the second time [I downloaded Snapchat]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>“Every day, almost all the time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>“Every day for at least a little bit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>“All the time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac</td>
<td>“Every day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>“I use it every day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“Every day”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On one hand, participants reported using Snapchat as a means of entertainment when they were bored. For example, Sam described using Snapchat as a distraction during class time: “If the lesson I’m having or whatever I’m doing in class is super boring I’ll just go look through stories to entertain myself in some way.” Like other social media platforms, teenagers tap
through stories posted by others, look at the Snap Map, read the tabloids on Snapchat’s main page, or play a Snap Game to pass time. On the other hand, participants also used Snapchat to directly communicate with their peers. As Sam said, “About 90% of the time I would say I hear people go, ‘Snap me,’ not ‘Text me’…like, ‘Add the snap,’ not, ‘Here’s my phone number.’” By describing asking for a Snapchat handle as synonymous with asking for a phone number, Sam highlights Snapchat’s popularity and implies teenagers may use Snapchat as a texting forum more often than short message services (SMS).23 Echoing Sam, Bridget claimed, “Everyone uses Snapchat…it's the main way I talk to my friends now.” Further, Zac explained how he keeps in touch with his friends that live in another country. At the time of the interview, Zac had not texted his American friends for about five months. Instead, he used Snapchat to keep in touch with them regularly:

Yeah. I have their numbers too but obviously, I talk to them more on Snapchat, which is kind of weird. Like one of them, I haven't texted since like November I was checking last night, from last year, and we Snapchat every day.

Thus, it appears Snapchat is a primary platform for teenagers to communicate with their peers. Altogether, participants not only described Snapchat as a forum that fosters immediate, mundane communication with each other (i.e., texting), but as a domain where they create their own content and entertain themselves by watching their friends’ content, playing games, or reading news articles as well (i.e., social media). Evidently, such duality leads young people to be present on Snapchat often.

5.2 Teenagers Using Snapchat: “Rules of the Game”

Given its popularity, Snapchat may be thought of as a social field of importance for today’s youth with a distinct set of rules and norms (Bourdieu 1995). Indeed, participants

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23 SMS refers to typical, phone-number-to-phone-number texting on a mobile device.
indicated a number of norms and common practices distinct to Snapchat, such as maintaining “streaks,” using the Snap Map, posting and viewing stories, and preserving Snaps. Below, I elaborate on these activities to emphasize how Snapchat users’ construct it as a social field.

5.2.1 Streaks

First, all but one participant indicated that “streaks” were a routine component of using Snapchat. “Snapstreaks,” or simply “streaks,” occur when two users have “snapped” (i.e., sent pictures) to each other at least once a day for more than three consecutive days (Snap Inc. 2018). After eight consecutive days, a number indicating the length of the streak is displayed beside the user with whom a person shares a streak. If users do not send a snap to each other in a 24-hour period the streak ends, and the number disappears.

Participants indicated that upholding streaks was expected on Snapchat. In fact, four participants reported sending snaps to others for the sole purpose of maintaining a streak. However, the number of people who they held streaks with, and the duration of these streaks, differed between participants. For example, at the time of the interview, Tina had twelve different streaks, with the longest streak lasting fifty days. Bridget had seven streaks, ranging from a week to a year in length. Meanwhile, Zac estimated having 30 streaks ongoing at the time of the interview and, after checking his phone, he confirmed his longest streak was 905 days long.

Although most participants indicated that streaks are a routine component of using Snapchat, participants had mixed opinions with regards to streaks. For example, Sam indicated having streaks but spoke of them apathetically:

I don't have many streaks because I don't strive to have to talk to people every day. Or just to send that stupid message of your bedsheets and it says “streaks” across the top or whatever. But I know people who have like five 600-day streaks. I think that’s insane, but I don’t pay too much attention to it.
Further, Taylor indicated that streaks was one of the reasons why she deleted Snapchat: “…it would be really annoying to like get a bunch of notifications and it would just be like streaks, streaks, streaks.” However, despite speaking of streaks negatively, Sam and Taylor’s responses still demonstrate how maintaining streaks are a normative practice for teenagers.

5.2.2 Snap Map

Launched in 2017, Snap Map is a relatively new feature to Snapchat that, among other things, allows users to see each other’s real-time location. At the time of this writing, Snapchat users have the option to allow all of their contacts to see their location on the Snap Map, to select some contacts that can see their location on the Snap Map, or to be invisible (i.e., in “Ghost Mode”). However, users can view the Snap Map depicting others’ locations regardless of their own settings.

All participants reported being visible on the Snap Map at some point, but two participants – Jess and Tina – were in “Ghost Mode” at the time of their interviews. Among the four participants visible on the Snap Map, Zac and Alexis allowed select contacts to view their location, whereas Bridget and Sam had their location available to their entire contact list. Mostly, participants reported using the Snap Map to check in on their friends’ locations, either purposively or when they were bored.

Although most participants indicated being visible or checking the Snap Map routinely, the feature faced criticism from the group. Alexis and Jess both described the Snap Map as “creepy,” and Tina indicated turning it off because it made her feel uncomfortable:

Interviewer: Do you use the Snap Map?
Tina: I shut that off.
Interviewer: So you had it on or never had it on?
Tina: I had it on for the first two weeks and then I shut it off.
Interviewer: What made you want to shut it off?
Tina: I didn’t like it, cause my friends knew wherever...Or not even my friends. Anybody who’s on my contact list knew where I was and I was not really close with those people. I just felt uncomfortable sharing my location with them. Cause one time I was at [a mall in another city], that’s in [city], one guy from here he answered. Like he texted me on Snapchat and said, “Oh, you’re in [city]?” and I’m like how do you know that I’m in [city]? And then I turned it off right after that.

Alexis recalled a similar incident, in which someone questioned her location:

…so I work like down the street at [store] and my boyfriend’s house is really close to that. So if I told someone, “Oh, I’m working tonight!” And then they saw my location they’re like, “You’re at your boyfriend's.” I was like, “No, I’m working it’s really close…” So there’s kind of like that creepy why do you care factor.

Alexis also suggested that teenagers may use Snapchat because they feel obligated to: “Even if you’re on ghost mode people are like, ‘Why are you on ghost mode? Are you hiding something?’ So it’s kind of like you’re either open and showing everyone what you’re doing or you’re hiding and you’re doing something bad.” This may explain why most participants reported using the Snap Map, or that most of their friends are visible on the Snap Map, despite describing the Snap Map as discomforting. From a Bourdieusian perspective, not using the Snap Map exemplifies a rule violation that may result in disapproval from peers.

5.2.3 Stories

Stories, or the “My Story” feature, are snaps that are visible to an individual’s contact list for 24 hours, unlike direct snaps that disappear after being viewed. Moreover, users have the option of posting a “public” or “private” story. Similar to Snap Map settings, Snapchat users can post “public” stories that are visible to the user’s entire contact list, or “private” stories that are only visible to contacts selected by the user posting the story.

Participants’ responses varied regarding how often they post a story. Tina and Jess reported posting a story on average every other day. Alexis recalled her last story was a week before the interview. Sam estimated posting a story once a month, and Bridget stated she posts a
story only once a year. Consistent with previous research, participants commonly reported posting mundane moments or every-day activities as their story (Piwek and Joinson 2016; Alhabash and Ma 2017; McRoberts et al. 2017; Moran, Salerno, and Wade 2018). Nearly all participants specified that they tend to post a story when they are socializing with their peers. For example, Sam indicated that he posts a story of him and his friends performing BMX bike tricks, and Alexis said she would post a story when she would go out with her friends. Thus, posting a story appears to be a strategy for young people to broadcast their social capital to their peers.

Although the frequency of posting stories was inconsistent among participants, most indicated watching their friends’ stories regularly. While some participants indicated watching stories to cope with boredom, others described this as an intentional activity to gain information about their contacts and learn what their friends are up to. In particular, Tina described how her peers will post a story when they are at a party with a caption inviting viewers to join the party. Therefore, Snapchat stories may provide insight to teenagers about their friends that can be useful for enhancing their social capital, such as attending a party.

### 5.2.4 Preserving Snaps

Although Snapchat’s messages self-destruct after a certain amount of time, features on most mobile phones allow individuals to preserve other people’s Snapchat content before it disappears. For example, “screenshots” save the contents of a screen display as photos. On Snapchat, users receive an alert when someone on their contact list screenshots a snap they sent or a story they posted.

Participants indicated that they feel uncomfortable or unsettled when they see that their snap was screenshotted. As Alexis described, “You see a screenshot and that makes you into a panic like no matter if you said something bad or not.” Further, participants mentioned “screen-
recording,” a relatively new phenomenon brought forth by recent mobile phone updates. Similar to screenshots, screen-recordings allow users to video-record their screen. However, unlike screenshots, Snapchat does not notify users when their content is screen-recorded. As Tina admitted, screen-recording is an alternative for users who want to preserve someone’s content without notifying them. Specifically, she claims “there's always a loophole in it and like the screen-shotting thing, people find screen-recording as a loophole, and I'm pretty sure if Snapchat bans that too, or like does a notification people will find something else.” Screenshots were brought up by participants after I asked them if there are any negative aspects or risks associated with using Snapchat. Although almost all participants spoke of screenshots and screen-recording negatively, there was a consensus among participants that they occur frequently.

Altogether, the aforementioned features and the norms pertaining to these features provide a sense of how teenagers use Snapchat. Beyond communicating directly with others, young people are maintaining streaks, posting and viewing stories, checking the Snap Map, and worrying about screen-shots or screen-recordings. Thus, these common behaviours and the norms associated with these behaviours, combined with how often teenagers are using the platform, demonstrate how teenagers have constructed a social field on Snapchat. Bourdieu (1998) explained that agents in a field navigate the field’s rules and norms to leverage resources or power. As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, the teenagers in this study indicated a number of ways young people use Snapchat to build their social network, maintain social ties, and achieve status— in other words, how teenagers use Snapchat to leverage their social capital.

5.3 Bridging Social Capital: Building Weak Social Ties

Participants described using Snapchat not only to communicate with their friends, but also to expand their social network. Thus, they use Snapchat to foster both bridging and bonding
social capital. With regards to bridging social capital, most participants indicated that their Snapchat contact list derived from mostly weak social ties; participants knew most of their contacts on Snapchat but did not consider them a close friend. Usually, their contacts were other students from their school. For example, Bridget’s contact list was mostly young people she knew from school or from playing basketball outside of school, but she admitted she does not interact with them often:

Interviewer: Approximately how many friends on Snapchat do you have?  
Bridget: Guesstimate maybe 100?  
Interviewer: Okay. How many would you say you know personally?  
Bridget: Uhm, I’ve met all of them in person. They’re all just basketball friends or people around the school I’ve been in the same classes with. I’ve met all of them, but I’d say I probably only 10 or 20 of them I actually socialize weekly with them outside of Snapchat.

Similar to Bridget, Tina admitted to being close friends with only a fraction of her contacts on Snapchat:

Interviewer: How many people would you say are on your contact list?  
Tina: Like 200.  
Interviewer: How many of those people would you say are actually your friends?  
Tina: Like close friends?  
Interviewer: Like close friends. People you talk to at school or…  
Tina: Oh, like 50.

Although Sam did not provide an approximate number of contacts he has on his Snapchat, he suggested that he does not communicate with most of his contacts regularly: “I know about 98% of them…and 92% of them don’t talk to me.”

If teenagers do not interact with their contacts outside of Snapchat, how do they build these weak ties? Many participants referenced Snapchat’s “Quick Add” feature as a means of connecting with other people easily. The “Quick Add” feature is a suggested list of Snapchat users’ people might know based on factors such as your current contact list (i.e., mutual friends),
Snapchat accounts you subscribe too, and your current location (Snap Inc. 2018). By looking at the list, users can select who they want on their contact list and send them a friend request.

Some participants highlighted the convenience of the Quick Add feature for building their personal network, especially among school acquaintances. Tina described a scenario in which she and her friends took advantage of the Quick Add when they visited a neighbouring school for a Football game:

So I hang out by Central High and you can add people by location, so we went there for, it was a game. It was at Central High’s field. And everyone was adding up everyone cause that’s what high schoolers do. And then yeah, that’s usually how I add them, through quick adds. It’s based on your mutual friends, and most of my friends that go here they have friends in [a neighbouring town], and [another neighbouring town] and all that so they just add me too cause, we have the same friends

As Tina exemplifies, young people use the Quick Add feature to create connections with mutual friends outside of their own school network. Thus, young people may acquire bridging social capital by expanding their Snapchat contact list to friends of friends and people nearby.

5.3.1 Maintaining Weak Social Ties

After adding each other on Snapchat, participants indicated that they commonly foster these weak connections through streaks. To illustrate this point, when I asked Tina if she had streaks at the time of the interview, she admitted she “had streaks with people that [she] didn’t know, like [she] knew them from probably saying hi in the hallway and then we would have streaks.” Similarly, Bridget also acknowledged having weak ties with the people she kept streaks with:

Bridget: … mainly I think I had like six people, I don’t talk to five of them, it’s just streaks. Send a picture and that’s it.
Interviewer: Are you friends with these people outside of Snapchat?
Bridget: Not anymore.
Interviewer: So you’re still keeping the streaks even though?
Bridget: Yeah, just cause. I don’t know why. I really contemplated ending one of them a couple months ago but, I’m almost at a year with one of my friends that I do talk to
somewhat outside of like, goes to the school so I talk to him sometimes so I’m like, I’ll keep that.

As Bridget suggests, most streaks were not coincidental – that is, they are not a passive consequence of users communicating with each other on Snapchat often. Rather, they are intentional; teenagers send each other snaps solely for the purpose of upholding a streak. Accordingly, snaps intended for a streak are often designated as such. Bridget explained that Snaps intended to maintain a streak were “just a picture that says streaks or just an ‘S.’” Similarly, Tina illustrated this sentiment: “Most days it would just be a blank screen and then like an S. Or other days when I was feeling like really artsy it would be like the picture of the sun, and then it would just be S. Everyone just sends S for streaks.” Thus, snaps intended only to maintain streaks are often frivolous or meaningless outside of maintaining a streak. They are a simple strategy that teenagers employ to maintain ties with peers and require little emotional effort.

5.4 Bonding Social Capital: Building Strong Social Ties

Participants indicated that most of their friends on Snapchat were individuals they were already friends with. This was not surprising since the foundation of weak social ties on Snapchat is friends of friends. However, teenagers build meaningful connections with their peers on Snapchat. For example, Tina described a scenario where one of her peers offers to FaceTime her when she posts a Story complaining about her parents: “I’ll be like, ‘They’re not letting me go out, what the Hell,’ and they’ll be like, ‘Oh, I’m not going out either, let’s just Facetime.’” In this case, a purposeful interaction began on Snapchat but flourished in a more intimate setting. Considering Tina recalled this scenario as something that happens often,
Snapchat, like other social media, appears to be a field where teenagers transform their weak offline ties into strong ties online.

While Tina describes these connections as candid, Sam reported that many people on his contact list use Snapchat in a more direct fashion to build strong ties with others. As he describes, “Mostly it’s people…there’s a bunch that just say, ‘Someone snap,’ like, ‘Someone talk to me’…and then there’s a bunch that’s just like, ‘Who wants to hangout? Who wants to do this?’” Alexis echoed this sentiment; however, she suggests this strategy is more common among younger teenagers:

I think that younger grades kind of just use the Snapchat like on their stories as like ‘Someone snap!’ or ‘Someone hangout with me!’ and then as you get older it’s more ‘Let’s Snapchat my friend doing this dumb thing; let’s post something of my friend that they're not going to appreciate the next morning.’

The behaviour Alexis, a grade 12 student, describes is almost identical to what Sam, a grade 10 student, reported. It may be that by senior grades students have already formulated strong social bonds in the school environment and therefore use Snapchat to foster meaningful relationships more often than trying to formulate weak ones. Along this line, Tina suggested that Snapchat becomes a more prevalent site for drama and dating as teenagers mature:

Grade 9 and 10 I would say it's more for like, fun. Like they would use it to Snapchat stupid things, like oh look at him he's doing crazy stuff. And grade 11, grade 12 it's more that mean kind of vibe. Like the bitching and then like, grade 11 and 12 usually, they don't use Snapchat as much but when they do use Snapchat it's for the dating purpose. And in grades 9 and 10 none of my friends used Snapchat for that.

Bridget echoed a similar sentiment: “I think like as you get older, more mature people use it. Just kind of like, I want to say like a dating thing. They get talking through Snapchat first”.

Altogether, teenagers actively try to strengthen social ties on Snapchat. However, the types of bonding social capital older teenagers seek out on Snapchat may differ from their younger schoolmates.
5.4.1 Maintaining Strong Social Ties

As reported at the beginning of this Chapter, many participants downloaded Snapchat simply because, as Jess put it, “All my friends had it – just a nice way to keep in contact with them.” Accordingly, participants indicated using Snapchat to stay in constant communication with their friends. For example, Tina explained how the convenience of sending quick pictures on Snapchat was useful in cases of “FoMO,” or feeling of missing out, when she could not be with her friends: “Like, if I’m not able to hang out with them I could just, like, kind of be a part of it cause we’re just sending pictures back and forth.” In this case, Snapchat helped Tina feel included with her friends despite being physically distant. In another case, Alexis revealed that she and her best friend use the Snap Map to monitor each other when they are on a date or meeting someone for the first time:

But you can select people to see your location as well, so I think I have that on for like, my best friend. And we just kind of did it as a safety thing. So if she goes out with someone that I’ve never met, like she goes out with a guy or whatever I can see where she is and it’s kind of like, if you need help, I can go to you I can see directions.

Although streaks were more commonly maintained with acquaintances, some participants included streaks in the context of nurturing close relationships. For example, Zac mentioned that his longest streak was with his best friend and Taylor indicated that her longest streak was with her cousin. Bridget’s description of streaks echoes how teenagers hang out online: “Just because, like, if you have nothing to talk about or anything but you still kind of want to like, I don’t know, it sounds weird just like oh you are technically talking to someone, but you’re just like sending funny faces.” Thus, despite not being in the same proximity, streaks allow teenagers to feel present to and interact with their close friends or family members.

Teenagers use Snapchat as a means of building and maintaining weak social ties with their peers. Snapchat’s “Quick Add” feature makes it easy for users in close proximity, both
physical and relational, to introduce friends of friends to one another, and “streaks,” a light-hearted but time-pending activity keep these social ties intact. Further, teenagers use Snapchat as another platform to stay in contact with pre-established friends and loved ones. However, in some cases, namely in the context of dating, Snapchat was used by teenagers to develop significant relationships with others.

5.5 Status on Snapchat

As boyd (2014, 151) explained, “as teens engage with networked publics, they must negotiate a social ecosystem in which their peers are not only hanging out but also jockeying for social status.” Within their own social networks, young people evaluate each other based on “coolness” or being “in the know” (Billet 2011). Consequently, once teenagers migrated to online social platforms to interact with their peers, their presence online became subject to such evaluations.

Snapchat is not only an online space where teenagers can hang out, but it is a field in which teenagers strive for status as well. Earlier, I mentioned how teenagers enjoy posting stories of their everyday life; however, participants agreed that teenagers often display the more favorable facets of their everyday lives on Snapchat. As Alexis described, teenagers often posted on Snapchat “when they’re out doing things with other people” or specifically, “if [they]’re with a big group of people or at a party.” When I asked Tina when she used Snapchat the most, her response exemplified Alexis’ description: “Like, I usually go out with my friends, so I post that I’m with them, or if I do something cool over the weekend I’ll post it.” Sam also claimed that most of the Stories he viewed and snaps he received were his peers socializing. Additionally, he added that most of his peers posted snaps or Stories on holidays too: “They’ll post, ‘Hey! Look what I got,’ or, ‘This is what happened!’” Thus, teenagers appear to use Snapchat to broadcast
more favorable facets of their everyday lives. Presumably, these snaps and Stories of favorable facets are status markers selected on the premise of achieving “coolness” or acceptance from their peers.

Aside from posting gifts they receive or parties they attend, teenagers may also acquire status by gossiping (boyd 2014). Tina describes how teenagers use Snapchat’s story feature to employ both strategies:

Interviewer: What’s the difference between what you post in your private story versus your public story?
Tina: Well my private story is more private so it’s my, like I’m talking to a guy, and then he like did something stupid, so then I post it on my private story so all my friends could see it. Or I could post on my private story how much I dislike someone, or a teacher, and that type of stuff. But my main story would just be cute things that I did over the weekend…Yeah, like your private story is more like you’re complaining. I find them most people’s private stories are people complaining about stuff, or hating on something, or talking about someone or something like that. Whereas a main story, you don't obviously do that cause everyone in your contact list can see it. So on your main story, it's more stuff that you would want people to see.

First, Tina’s description of public stories as “stuff that you would want people to see” highlights the previous point regarding self-presentation – teenagers use Snapchat to broadcast content that appeals to their peer group. Further, Tina’s description of what she, and her peers, post on their private stories reflects a darker side of bonding social capital: teenagers may develop stronger ties to their friends by putting down others that are already subject to peer disapproval. As Tina admitted,

… people will bitch just to get attention. Like, I’ve done it, I’ll bitch and then I'll be like oh I'm getting attention from it. I think people just want the attention from like they'll be like, "Oh yeah, I hate that person too!” Or, “I dislike that person too,” and they'll be like, “Oh, we have so much in common!” That type of thing. So, yeah, I think that people just want the attention so that's how they get it.

Evidently, the attention Tina received from complaining about others enabled her to increase her social status by bonding with a friend at another person’s expense.
However, results from this study suggest that the strategies younger teenagers deploy on Snapchat to gain status may differ from older teenagers. For example, Bridget, in grade 11, describes streaks as a status indicator for her sister, who is in grade 9:

I know a couple of years ago it was like ‘I have this many streaks.’ It was a big status thing. Like my sister that’s two years younger than me, last year I would send them, and I only had 6 or 8 and she would go oh my goodness Bridget I have like 30 [emphasis added].

Bridget’s tone of voice when she mimicked her sister suggests that her sister attempted to belittle Bridget for having fewer streaks, but Bridget did not see this as an issue. Given that grade 9 is the first year of high school, perhaps younger teens use Snapchat as a quick means to establish social status upon entering the high school environment.

**Part II: Negative Strategies for Social Capital on Snapchat:**

**Cyberbullying and Revenge Porn**

5.6 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be a strategy to elevate social capital, especially when the victim already endures peer disapproval (Nilan et al. 2015). All participants believed that cyberbullying happens on Snapchat and all but one participant reported witnessing or experiencing cyberbullying on Snapchat. Among the seven participants, one participant identified as a victim of cyberbullying and another admitted to being a perpetrator on Snapchat. Below, I elaborate on cases the participants in this study described in which they experienced or observed cyberbullying on Snapchat, and the status gain or loss involved in these cases.

5.6.1 Why Snapchat?

When I asked participants why cyberbullying happens on Snapchat, they were quick to mention Snapchat’s ephemerality as a measure of security for bullies. Jess told me that “it’s really easy for people to say what they want to say cause it’ll delete right away.” Similarly, Zac
claimed the self-destructing nature of Snapchat “definitely enables people to bully more often” because it “makes people feel more comfortable doing it cause they feel they can get away without repercussions.” Thus, Snapchat’s ephemerality is advantageous for bullies as they troll the platform without fear of being caught.

In addition to its ephemerality, participants indicated that bullies favor Snapchat because of the relatively anonymous nature of Snapchat profiles. Specifically, Alexis pointed out that other popular platforms such as Instagram and Facebook require more personal information for users to legitimize a profile – that is, pictures, background information, and other mutual friends help identify an individual. On Snapchat, profile information is limited to a user’s handle and an optional bitmoji, a personalized cartoon avatar. Consequently, as Jess indicated, some bullies troll their victims through fake Snapchat accounts:

Jess: Yeah. It’s really easy to form a group and go after someone… just really easy to cyberbully someone.
Interviewer: How?
Jess: Like you can make fake accounts or something without anyone knowing who you are, and you could add the person you want to go after.

Although making fake accounts to target victims is not unique to Snapchat use, the norms surrounding Snapchat makes this approach more feasible for bullies. Moreover, the actions Jess described suggests bullying on Snapchat can be a group behaviour, in which peers bond by targeting a victim together. Thus, bullies are key agents that exploit the field’s structure and norms to build social capital; the lack of personal information visible on a Snapchat account, combined with the norm of using the platform to foster weak social ties, provides a unique domain for online perpetrators in which not only are potential victims accessible, but friends can easily join in on the bullying as well.
5.6.2 Direct Bullying vs Broadcast Bullying

Participants described various cases of cyberbullying on Snapchat that can be categorized into two types: direct bullying and broadcast bullying. Direct bullying is similar to face-to-face bullying, in which the perpetrator(s) directly confront their victim(s). On Snapchat, direct bullying was identified by sending mean snaps to someone directly or responding harshly to a victim’s story. For example, when I asked Zac if he experienced cyberbullying on Snapchat, he admitted that he and his friend were perpetrators:

And like, I have this one girl that me and my friend find hilarious on Snapchat… we see her public stories, so we send her things we laugh at her all the time, we make jokes at her so that’s cyberbullying to a certain extent

Zac’s description of the victim suggests she had weak social standing: “well what we think we know of her, cause we don’t know but she’s like homeless for a while, she had a baby.” This case demonstrates how direct bullying on Snapchat fosters social capital because Zac and his friend bond over constantly teasing someone of lesser social standing.

Whereas direct bullying is directed at the victim, broadcast bullying refers to cases in which perpetrators shared content about their victim. In these cases, perpetrators send snaps or post Stories in which they were mocking, teasing, or insulting someone to their peers. For example, Alexis recalled an incident at school where her peers were teased for playing in the school talent show:

I know that there was a talent show in the caf at break, and there was a group that went up and they were like a rock group, and one of the guys was doing screamo. Everyone recorded that and had it on their story like, “What is happening, get off the stage.”

As Alexis emphasizes, there was a group consensus that the show was not “cool,” as “everyone” was posting a Story to criticize the band’s performance. Similarly, Tina described a case where one girl was targeted by her classmates both in-person and on Snapchat:
There’s this girl Maddie that goes to our school, and she’s not liked by others…she gets bullied a lot, like outside of Snapchat. Maddie had done something in class. Like she said something stupid or whatnot and then people started picking on her for it, and someone recorded it. Like, her ranting, and then that got circulation really fast within our school…So it was originally on Snapchat, but someone screen recorded it, and then posted it on their Instagram story, too. So it gained traction there. And then, Maddie actually didn’t come to school for a full month cause she was embarrassed.

These cases demonstrate how social capital is achieved at the expense of someone else’s belittlement. However, unlike how Zac and his friend bonded through teasing their victim, with broadcast bullying perpetrators seek status through their peers’ approval. As Alexis indicated, the band’s screamo music was deemed “uncool” by the larger group; thus, to appeal to the larger group’s interest, individuals posted stories making fun of the band’s performance. Consequently, these individuals built their social capital by reinforcing the band’s low social status. Similarly, Tina suggested that Maddie had low social standing before this incident, making her a suitable target for bullies looking to amuse their friends.

The distinction between who does and does not possess social capital is not always as clear as the last two examples suggest. As boyd (2014: 113) contends, “it’s quite common for former friends to turn on each other in a quest for popularity and status.” This was the case for Taylor, who claimed she was victimized on Snapchat by someone she had considered a close friend:

I had a friend and we had a really tight close relationship, and then it suddenly just broke off. They blocked me on one of my accounts cause at the time I had an iPad as well, and I used Snapchat…so I had to have like two separate accounts…So I logged on to the one on my iPad, and I noticed they hadn’t blocked me on that one. So I checked their story and they were absolutely like, being so toxic about me. Calling me so many rude names like dumb, and selfish, and ignorant, and it really hurt my feelings that they were just talking behind my back and completely throwing so much shade in my direction.
Taylor’s perpetrator attempted to improve her social status by damaging Taylor’s reputation. Thus, just as Snapchat can be a platform where friends build bonds through cyberbullying, it appears cyberbullying on Snapchat is used as a means to break these bonds as well.

**5.6.3 Cyberbullying (Girls) on Snapchat: A Gendered Strategy for Social Capital?**

With the exception of the rock band described by Alexis, every incident of bullying on Snapchat reported in this study involved a girl as the victim. This aligns with some previous literature that indicates women experience online victimization more than men (Crooks 2017). Girls were often victimized for their appearance, their sexuality, or both. For instance, Bridget told me that one of her friends was bullied on Snapchat for being “too skinny:”

…she did get comments and stuff on stuff she posts or even just messages about how she looks and how she looks unhealthy… it was more just because of how skinny she looked like she looked unhealthy. People would judge her for running or tell her to go eat a burger or something.

Since the bullies directly messaged the victim or commented on her posts, Bridget’s recount of her friend’s victimization exemplifies direct bullying on Snapchat. Taylor also described an incident in which her friend was bullied for her appearance. However, in this scenario, the victim was insulted through broadcast bullying:

Taylor: I remember at the time my friend got made fun of because people kept calling her like, saying that she was balding. Even though she wasn’t. And people made fun of her on Snapchat as well.
Interviewer: How did they make fun of her on Snapchat?
Taylor: They just posted about her on their stories.

In addition to body image, participants reported cases of “slut-shaming” on Snapchat, in which girls are bullied for their perceived sexual promiscuity (Ringrose and Renold 2013). For example, Jess told me that her younger sister, a grade 10 student, confided in her when she was bullied on Snapchat. Jess explained her sister was attacked by her peers for “dressing at an older age” and because “she move[d] on from guys too quickly, like slut-shaming.” Similarly, when I
asked Tina if she witnessed cyberbullying on Snapchat, she explicitly told me she constantly sees girls post in their private stories mean things about other girls:

Okay so they would say like bitch or she’s a fucking whore, or something like that, and then if someone else said it, let’s say if I saw it on one friend’s account, it would immediately be said on another girl’s account, and then it would just go from there. Like it would be kind of a snowball effect.

Tina indicates that girls are not only the victims but also the bullies. A few participants recalled one incident in which two girls were bullied for posting a provocative “selfie” in a Snapchat story. Alexis describes how these girls were subject to both direct and broadcast bullying as a result:

So they had a story that was a picture of them with cleavage or something… And people used that as an opportunity to screenshot their stories and post it on their stories: ‘go bash these people’… ‘go message these girls’ or ‘go and like, tell these girls what they’re doing isn’t okay’ or ‘look at these sluts’

Further, when I asked Alexis why she thought the girls posted the story, she responded, “The pressure of high school, [the girls thought,] ‘I want to post this on my story to be cool’ but that’s not how you get cool and people honestly showed them that in the wrong way.” From a Bourdieusian perspective, Alexis believed these girls misunderstood the rules of the Snapchat field when they posted this story.

**5.7 Sexting and Revenge Porn**

Participants agreed that sharing or exchanging sexually suggestive or explicit photos (commonly referred to by teenagers as “nudes”) was common among their classmates. Consequently, a few cases of revenge porn through Snapchat were reported in this study. Consistent with previous literature, in all of these cases, a female was the victim. First, Alexis described a case in which her friend was being blackmailed by her ex-boyfriend with pictures she had sent them when they were together:
But then eventually like she had the last straw and ended it with him. And then he was saying like, “Well I have all these pictures of you,” like nudes, and “I’m going to send them to your dad.” So he went off and sent them to her dad, and like threatened to tweet them. Like had them typed out in the tweet and screen-shotted it and sent it to her like, “If you don’t get back with me…”

Although the ex-boyfriend threatened to distribute these pictures on Twitter, Alexis indicated he had them stored in the “My Eyes Only” folder, a feature on Snapchat that lets users preserve snaps in an album that can only be accessed through a passcode.

The other revenge porn cases reported involved pictures being distributed on Snapchat. For example, Zac described a case in which the victim was bullied as a consequence of her pictures being shared in a boys’ group chat:

Zac: Oh actually, it wasn’t like a nude but it was a scandalous picture, but it got sent to a guys’ group chat and then like the messages they sent about that certain photo got back to the girl and then she felt really bad about it.
Interviewer: Do you happen to know what they said to her?
Zac: …they were just like oh she's like ugly why would you ever go for her blah blah blah.

Similarly, Tina narrated a case in which a girl responded to finding out her boyfriend was cheating by sending his other partner’s intimate photos to their peers:

Tina: It was Jackson and April, April had found out he was cheating… and so she started posting about her, and screenshots came up about like, they were like nudes, and April started circulating those pictures. And then they got to almost everyone in the school…
Interviewer: So April started snowballing the nudes of the other girl?
Tina: Yeah, and then everyone else started to circulate it. Most of the guys. Cause they had got a hold of the pictures, and then they would circulate it around the school more cause they’re nudes.
Interviewer: Is nudes in general an issue around school?
Tina: Yeah. There was another incident this year where, he’s a friend of mine, Chris. He got caught with a girl’s nudes on his phone cause he was showing it to all of his guy friends in class… it’s a big issue …if you send nudes on Snapchat or any social platform, they’re probably going to be screen-shotted or screen recorded.

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25 Snapchat users will still receive a notification if their content is screenshotted or saved, but they do not get a notification if their content is placed in the My Eyes Only folder.
Tina’s description of April’s response suggests she was trying to ruin the other girl’s reputation by circulating her sexts (i.e., “nudes”) to others. Although most cases in the literature describe revenge porn as predominantly boys sharing girls’ pictures, the case described in the excerpt above suggests girls also partake in revenge porn to ruin another girl’s status.

As boyd (2014) pointed out, sexual pictures are common status markers because they tend to spark interest. Drawing from these interviews, sharing intimate photos of girls appears to be strategic for boys to achieve social capital among their male peers. As Tina described, Chris tried to build status among the other boys in his peer group by “showing off” the sexts he had on his phone. Thus, possessing and sharing girls’ intimate pictures appear to be a currency which boys exchange for social capital.

5.8 Conclusion

In summary, teenagers use Snapchat often and for reasons related to their social capital. Teenagers follow the “rules of the field” on Snapchat such as upholding streaks, checking the Snap Map, posting and watching stories, and navigating the complex dynamic of preserving snaps without wanting their snaps preserved. Within this field, teenagers deploy strategies to build and maintain bridging and bonding social capital, respectively. On one hand, participants in this study use the “Quick Add” feature to build weak ties on Snapchat and maintain bridging social capital by upholding streaks with their peers. On the other hand, participants in this study also use Snapchat to develop meaningful ties with their peers, but for older teenagers this may be geared towards dating whereas younger teens may use the app for making new friends. Nevertheless, all participants indicated using Snapchat to maintain bonding social capital by communicating with their close friends through the app.
Beyond building and sustaining relationships, findings from this study suggest teenagers use Snapchat as a platform to improve their social status. At times, teenagers send snaps or post stories of their daily lives that they believe would gain approval from their peers, or as Tina described, “stuff that you would want people to see.” However, participants reported a number of cases in which content posted for peers’ approval involved exploiting others. Snapchat appears to be a field where teenage bullies’ bond by attacking a target in a group chat or sharing content that humiliates others with their friends. In addition to bullying, participants also reported cases of non-consensual sexting and revenge porn among their classmates. Specifically, my findings demonstrate 1) how boys use Snapchat to preserve sexts and share them with their friends in exchange for social status, and 2) a unique case of revenge porn in which a girl distributed another girl’s images. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the implications of these findings, discuss the limitations with this study, and put forth recommendations for future researchers as well as parents and teachers concerned with how teenagers use social media.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explain the results of this study in relation to social capital theory and previous literature on young people’s use of social media. In doing so, I answer the research questions guiding this study. After answering the research questions, I describe the limitations of this study, as well as the practical implications for future researchers studying young people’s social capital. Finally, I conclude this thesis with some final thoughts regarding the relationship between teenagers, social media, and social capital.

6.1 Discussion of the Findings

Recall, I sought to answer two research questions in this thesis:

1. How is Snapchat use associated with teenagers’ social capital?
2. How are exploitative behaviours on Snapchat associated with teenagers’ social capital?

Altogether, the findings of this thesis suggest using Snapchat is associated with teenagers achieving, maintaining, and losing social capital. More specifically, teenagers use Snapchat to build and maintain social ties with their peers and strive for status achievement through both prosocial and antisocial behaviours.

Fields are social structures in which individuals “play the game” to acquire desired capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Julien 2015). In this sense, I contend that Snapchat is a field in which teenagers perform certain activities and behaviours (i.e. the “rules of the game”) to achieve social capital. Fields are maintained by the interest of those who occupy the field (Bourdieu 1998). By using Snapchat frequently, if not constantly, young people are shaping the rules of the field which they abide by while using the app. In this study, participants described several “rules of the field” on Snapchat. Below, I elaborate on how these activities are associated with teenagers’ prosocial and antisocial strategies for acquiring and maintaining social capital.
First, the results from this study align with others who have found that teenagers use social media to expand their social networks (i.e., Marwick and boyd 2014; Gleason 2016; Yau and Reich 2019). Namely, Marwick and boyd (2014: 1195) reported that “in virtually every town where [they] conducted fieldwork, it was typical for teens to ‘friend’ everyone in their class or school.” Similarly, participants in this study reported that they and their classmates use the Quick Add feature to add others on Snapchat they knew vaguely but did not hang out with regularly. Participants specified that they use the Quick Add feature to create instant connections with other students they saw in their school hallway or at a neighbouring school’s football game. From a Bourdieuian perspective, using the Quick Add feature exemplifies a “rule of the field” teenagers deploy to augment their bridging social capital by establishing many weak social ties. Weak social ties refer to relationships such as friends-of-friends or acquaintances that foster bridging social capital, a resourceful relationship in which individuals know each other personally, but are not deeply invested in the relationship (Putnam 2000; Ahn 2012). Given the sporadic and superficial nature of using Quick Add, as well participants admitting they do not talk to the majority of their Snapchat contacts regularly, it is safe to assume that most teenagers’ Snapchat contacts are weak social ties. Thus, young people use Snapchat’s Quick Add feature to maximize their social network by accumulating many weak social ties, which ultimately leverages more opportunities to build their social capital (Bourdieu 1986).

The Quick Add feature aids teenagers in maximizing their opportunity to achieve social capital. However, Bourdieu (1986) states that social capital requires constant, mutual recognition of the relationship between individuals. As such, participants described maintaining streaks as a thoughtless obligation that teenagers endure with their peers. Young people feel compelled to
continue streaks despite the mundane and light-hearted nature of these snaps. Additionally, participants described maintaining streaks as an activity they engage in both with people they do not associate with often (i.e., weak social ties) and/or their closest friends (i.e., strong social ties). Based on these results, maintaining streaks can be interpreted as a rule of the field that, when followed, exemplifies a symbolic exchange between two individuals that provides the constant, mutual recognition required to maintain either bridging or bonding social capital.

Further, participants in this study indicated that they prefer Snapchat to other social media platforms to maintain bonding social capital. Bonding social capital revolves around companionship and support and is therefore often cited between family members or close friends among other exclusive groups (Calridge 2018; Aldrich 2013). With this in mind, most participants reported downloading Snapchat because their friends were already using it. Like most youth social media research, this suggests that Snapchat is a youth-specific space where teenagers migrate primarily to maintain contact with their offline friends (boyd 2007; Lee 2009; Pfeil et al. 2009; Billet 2011; Tomai et al. 2010; Ahn 2012; Marwick and boyd 2014; Vidales-Bolaños and Sádaba-Chalezquer 2017).

Moreover, participants in this study identified some of Snapchat’s distinct features that are more appealing for keeping in touch with their friends than other social media platforms. Many of these features were cited by past scholars demonstrating how Snapchat use fosters bonding social capital among adult samples. For example, similar to Jeong and Lee (2017) and Wadell (2016), my results indicate that Snapchat’s audio-visual nature allows teenagers to feel present when they are communicating through the app, and consequently alleviates the feeling of missing out (“FoMO”) when they cannot be physically present among their friends. Additionally, consistent with Piwek and Joinson’s (2017) findings, participants in this study described how
Snapchat’s dual function as a social media platform and instant messaging service makes it more convenient for socializing with their friends than having to use a separate application for texting.

In addition to maintaining bonding social capital, my findings harmonize with scholars who described social media as a starting point for teenagers to build deeper connections with acquaintances (e.g., boyd 2014; Gleason 2016; Yau and Reich 2019). In this study, participants reported cases in which they or their peers used Snapchat to create friendships or introduce themselves to love interests. Similar to how the findings from Gleason’s (2016) study suggest teenagers user Twitter to build connections with their classmates, participants in this study described how their peers used Snapchat to “break the ice” with each other by either 1) posting a story captioned “who wants to hang?” or “someone Snap,” or 2) sending a direct snap to a particular individual to develop a relationship.

However, the relationship between Snapchat use and what type of bonding social capital teenagers seek on the app may differ based on age. Participants reported that younger teenagers are more inclined to create meaningful friendships on Snapchat, whereas older teenagers are more prone to use Snapchat to build romantic relationships. Perhaps younger teenagers use Snapchat to build new friendships as they enter and familiarize themselves in a high school environment, whereas older teenagers who are more adjusted to this environment seek out romantic relationships with individuals with whom they have become acquainted. Nevertheless, these findings complement past research indicating that Snapchat use is associated with creating and maintaining bonding social capital (Wadell 2016; Liu, Ainsworth, and Baumeister 2016; Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017; Piwek and Joinson 2017).

To conclude, the clear role fostering weak and strong social ties has on how teenagers use Snapchat highlights how the app serves as a field in which young people compete for social
capital. Although past scholars distinguish Snapchat from other social media platforms as more favourable for bonding social capital than bridging social capital (Wadell 2016; Liu, Ainsworth, and Baumeister 2016; Phua, Jin, and Kim 2017; Piwek and Joinson 2017), I argue this claim is questionable in the context of teenagers. All participants in this study described Snapchat a resource for accumulating a large social network of weak social ties and as a platform that fosters more intimate, meaningful connections. Unlike past scholars using an adult sample, participants in this study listed strategies teenagers use to accumulate weak social ties on Snapchat. Therefore, my findings suggest that teenagers, like adults, use Snapchat to enhance their social capital. Unlike adults, the “rules of the game” teenagers create and abide by include strategies for both bridging social capital and bonding social capital.

6.1.2 Status Achievement on Snapchat

Individuals who are well-known and approved of by their peers possess social status. Status is a key indicator of social capital and is described by scholars as a central priority for most young people (Milner Jr. 2006; Sijtsema et al. 2009; Miller et al. 2009; Salmivalli 2010; Li and Wright 2012; boyd 2014; Abeele et al. 2014). Considering the large network of peers that teenagers tend to build on social media platforms, scholars agree that social media is an ideal space for young people to deploy strategies for status achievement (boyd 2014; Chua and Chang 2016; Charoensukmongkol 2018).

My findings support the notion that teenagers use Snapchat to achieve status amongst their peers. Participants in this study admitted that teenagers post stories on Snapchat to showcase “cool” things such as attending parties, travelling, and receiving impressive gifts over the holidays. In other words, teenagers use Snapchat to display their status criteria, which is comparable to the positive self-presentation strategies teenagers engage in on Instagram and
Facebook (Rui and Stefanone 2013; Seidman 2013; Moon et al. 2016; Sheldon and Bryant 2016; Yau and Reich 2018). All participants also described watching stories as a normal activity that teenagers do on Snapchat. Therefore, broadcasting a story may be a simple and efficient way for a teenager to maximize their visibility to others in the field. Considering that social status relies on peer approval in a large network, and teenagers tend to expand their social network on Snapchat, the act of broadcasting the more favourable facets of their daily lives as stories serves as a strategy for teenagers jockeying for social status on Snapchat.

The emphasis participants in this study put on posting stories when they are with their friends suggests teenagers use this feature as a tool for social grooming. Social grooming is a status strategy that involves individuals sharing public displays of socializing online with the intention of others seeing these interactions (Tufecki 2008). As a result of displaying their social ties through stories, young people may be perceived as popular by their peers. Altogether, if a person’s social status is a measure of their social capital, and teenagers strive for status achievement on Snapchat, then the self-presentation strategies young people described in this study exhibit how teenagers use Snapchat as a platform to elevate their social capital.

6.1.3 Exploitative Behaviours and Social Capital on Snapchat

Participants in this study described many experiences in which teenagers exploited their peers on Snapchat to achieve social capital. In particular, cyberbullying and non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit or suggestive content were discussed at length by participants. Mainly, these behaviours were described by participants as 1) activities in which friends bonded over targeting a victim together privately (i.e. bonding social capital) or 2) strategies to gain status by tarnishing the victim’s reputation in front of a large audience.
Several participants reported cases in which bullies used public stories to humiliate the victim in front of a large audience. Typically, perpetrators snapped a picture or video to make fun of something the victim was doing in person and broadcasted the video or picture as a public Snapchat story. In all of these cases, participants described the victims as having low social status. Given the rule that public stories are typically reserved for displaying status criteria, posting a public story that exploits others may enhance the perpetrator’s social status if the target already suffers from peer disapproval. This finding aligns with Nilan et al.’s (2015) claim that teenagers exploit their peers with low social status as a strategy to enhance their own social capital.

Other participants reported that teenagers use the “private” story feature – stories that are only visible by a selected group of contacts – to gossip or speak negatively about others. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the private story feature is used for strengthening bonding social capital and acquiring status. With regard to strengthening bonding social capital, the selected group of friends allotted to view the story creates exclusivity; only some individuals are selected to view the story. Moreover, Tina’s description of what individuals post on a private story suggests a sense of trust exists between the person posting a private story and the viewers they selected that to watch it:

> Yeah, like your private story is more like you’re complaining. I find them most people’s private stories are people complaining about stuff, or hating on something, or talking about someone or something like that. *Whereas a main story, you don't obviously do that cause everyone in your contact list can see it. So on your main story, it's more stuff that you would want people to see.* (emphasis added)

Tina succinctly highlights the contrast between how teenagers use public and private stories. Whereas teenagers post public stories with content intended for peer approval, Tina’s description suggests that the content of private stories may be subject to peer disapproval if it were
broadcasted outside of the selected viewers. Thus, the exclusivity and trust associated with posting a private story demonstrate how teenagers use Snapchat to foster bonding social capital. Additionally, this example demonstrates how teenagers navigate opposing rules across multiple fields on Snapchat. The content an individual publishes on a private story may result in peer disapproval and status loss if broadcasted to the larger field of Snapchat contacts. However, the attention Tina craved from a posting negative content in her private story to select individuals exemplifies a quest for peer approval. Therefore, posting private stories on Snapchat is a strategy that teenagers deploy to achieve social capital among one social field (i.e., a close group of friends) without risking status loss within another social field (i.e., larger network of Snapchat contacts).

Further, participants described cases in which their peers were victimized as a consequence of violating the rules of the field on Snapchat. For example, some participants referenced a cyberbullying case in which two girls were condemned by their classmates for posting a sexually suggestive “selfie” to their Snapchat story. Alexis described this incident as a misunderstanding of what to post to look “cool” on Snapchat. Alexis’ rationale for the victims’ behaviour aligns with the dilemma cited in previous literature: women experience conflicting norms with regards to displaying or sending sexually suggestive or explicit content (Thomas 2013; Ringrose and Renold 2013). Beyond this case, teenaged girls were almost always the victim in cases of exploitation on Snapchat and, often, these cases were described by participants as girls being condemned or teased by their peers with regards to their sexuality or their physical appearance, which are two prominent attributes related to status achievement amongst girls (Milner et al. 2006; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2006). From a Bourdieusian perspective, these girls misunderstood the gender rules of the field, received disapproval from their peers for violating
these rules, and, consequently, faced status loss expressed through cyberbullying. Moreover, these cases provide insight into the risks associated with pursuing social capital on Snapchat. As a platform where many teenagers converge, individuals may be subject to peer disapproval quickly and intensely if they do not follow the rules of the field. Altogether, Snapchat is a field where teenagers invoke strategies to pursue social capital but are also at risk of losing social capital.

In agreeance with Ouytsel et al. (2017), the results from this study reveal that teenagers “send nudes” (i.e., participate in sexting) on Snapchat. However, these results raise concerns as they suggest teenagers share sexual images or messages non-consensually as a strategy for social capital on Snapchat. Multiple cases in this study were reported in which a young woman’s “nudes” were revealed to others without her consent. To emphasize, Tina stated, “if you send nudes on Snapchat or any social platform, they're probably going to be screen-shotted or screen recorded.” In this regard, the rules of the field teenagers set forth around sexting on Snapchat may be gendered. For boys, using the screen-shot or screen record function is a means of manipulating the field to achieve status in their peer groups. Complimenting Bates’ (2017) claim, young women may be at risk of losing status from sexting, whereas young men recognize the status potential for sharing these messages.

However, since Tina and the other young women in this study who reported cases of sexting were all aware of this strategy deployed by young men, I found myself asking after data collection was complete: why do girls engage in sexting despite knowing the social risks? Bridget’s and Tina’s emphasis on Snapchat as a platform for dating relationships may help explain why cases of sexting and exploitation are prominent. To elaborate, participants described most cases of non-consensually sharing nudes described occurring after a relationship had ended.
Therefore, it is likely that these young women held a sense of trust with their partner when they sent these images. As such, at the time sending nudes on Snapchat may have been intended to intensify bonding social capital between two partners. This may also be true for young men; however, the result of this study primarily align with past scholars reporting that boys treat nudes as a social currency they exchange for social status (boyd 2014; Outytsel et al. 2017). Therefore, I contend the gendered dynamic between the rules of the field on Snapchat with regards to sexting may be a result of contrasting social capital strategies between romantic partners at different stages in their relationship.

Additionally, teenagers experience revenge porn through Snapchat. Although some cases of non-consensual intimate photo-sharing are centred around status gain, revenge porn involves malicious intent to humiliate the victim and thus centres around status loss. Like past research, the cases of revenge porn reported in this study were narrated by participants as an individual trying to tarnish a young woman’s status for revenge after a relationship (Ouytsel et al. 2017; Bates 2017; Thomas 2018; De Ridder 2019). However, unique from past research, I discovered a case in which a girl sought revenge on another young woman (who were not romantic partners) by sharing her nudes with their classmates. Thus, teenagers use revenge porn as a strategy to provoke humiliation and status loss among another individual beyond the context of dating relationships. Although sexting may be a strategy for bonding social capital between romantic or sexual partners, participants described sexting on Snapchat – and its possible repercussions – as a gender-biased strategy for status in which young men are more likely to increase social capital by sexting, and young women’s social capital may be at risk from sexting.

In sum, as an online field in which young people compete for status and foster social ties, Snapchat use is clearly associated with teenagers’ social capital. Although most of the data
drawn from this study indicate that teenagers use Snapchat to enhance or maintain their social capital, some data demonstrates how violating the rules of the field, or disobeying the status quo with regards to Snapchat use, can lead to a decrease in social capital as well. Additionally, behaviours such as cyberbullying and revenge porn were described by participants as behaviour they or their peers performed to gain attention from their classmates, bond with their friends, or damage someone’s reputation. Collectively, the motives for these antisocial behaviours demonstrate how some teenagers exploit their peers to build their social capital, destroy another’s social capital, or both.

6.2 Limitations of the Research

This study provides an introduction to how teenagers use Snapchat for social capital. However, there are some limitations to the current study worth addressing. First, the small sample size of this study (n=7) allows for the possibility that other “rules of the game” on Snapchat are omitted from this study. Given that social fields are practically limitless, different peer groups may occupy different fields on Snapchat. This notion was exemplified in the data in which a few cases demonstrated how age differences impact Snapchat use. Nonetheless, participants in this study represented all four high-school grade levels, were drawn from unique classes, and include the perception of teenage boys and teenage girls. Thus, it is likely that multiple fields of peer groups and their rules for Snapchat were represented in this study.

Additionally, given the exploratory nature of this thesis, alongside my position as an adult interviewing teenagers, interviews evolved as I learned more about how teenagers behave on Snapchat. Consequently, some facets of Snapchat use (i.e., streaks, screen-recording, bitmojis) may be under-reported or neglected completely. Nevertheless, the results presented in this thesis are key themes that were described by multiple participants who I reassured
individually that they were in a safe, trustworthy, and non-judgemental environment immediately before the interview began.

Lastly, demographic information regarding race/ethnicity and sexual orientation was not collected in this study. This is especially problematic in the context of exploitative behaviours, considering populations such as LGBTQ+ individuals or visible minorities are often cited as at greater risk of victimization than their heterosexual and white peers. Originally, this information was included in a survey component of this thesis that was removed due to the low response rate during participant recruitment. Certainly, future research surrounding how teenagers use Snapchat, or any social media platform, for social capital purposes should consider how demographic information factors into the analysis.

6.3 Practical Implications

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results of this study provide practical implications for scholars interpreting social capital theory in the context of young people. So far, most research exploring this context fails to consider how teenagers maintain and acquire social capital. As my findings demonstrate, young people’s dependency on Snapchat to foster social ties and enhance their social status with their peers exemplify one youth-specific field in which teenagers shape the norms and values that foster a struggle for social capital. Although I selected Snapchat for this study due to its popularity among young people and the lack of research on how teenagers use Snapchat, this app exemplifies just one of the many fields that teenagers occupy outside of adult supervision. Therefore, I encourage future researchers interested in the study of young people’s social capital to follow in the footsteps of Schaefer-McDaniel (2004) Weller (2006), Billet (2011, 2012) and Schmeichel Hughes, and Jutner (2018) who provided a
foundation for acknowledging young people’s agency, autonomy and unique lived experiences when studying their social capital.

Further, I encourage future researchers to include social media practices and status achievement as strategies and indicators for social capital, respectively. First, the findings from this study complement the consensus in the literature that social media serves teenagers as an extension for offline relationships, interests, and experiences (boyd 2014). Considering Snapchat is just one of multiple social media platforms teenagers are using to stay connected with their peers, other online fields, and rules of these fields are likely associated with teenagers’ social capital. Accordingly, future scholars exploring teenagers’ social capital may want to consider a similar approach as Phua, Jin, and Kim (2017) and Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid (2016) who compared how young adults use different social media platforms in the context of achieving social capital. Secondly, despite past research indicating that teenagers prioritize social status more than any other age group (Milner Jr. 2006; LaFontana and Cillessen 2010) and Bourdieu (1986) identifying status as a key measure for social capital, few scholars have considered status achievement in the context of youth social capital. As my findings demonstrate, achieving and maintaining status is a prominent component of how teenagers interact with one another. Thus, to gather a more fruitful understanding of teenagers’ social capital, status achievement should be considered in future research studying this topic.

Beyond researchers, this study helps parents and teachers understand the value young people put on using social media. Namely, young people in this study demonstrate how using Snapchat helps teenagers foster friendships, develop new relationships, and keep up with the status quo. Although the anti-social behaviours discussed in this study are concerning and worthy of further research, this insight should not overlook the positive relationship building among
teenagers that occurs on Snapchat. At times, parents or other authority figures may be tempted to take away technology as a means of punishment or harm prevention. On the basis of my findings, I suggest this approach may be counterproductive – taking away teenagers’ access to social media inhibits their opportunity to build healthy, meaningful relationships. Thus, I encourage adults concerned about the well-being of young people to discuss the positive and negative aspects of Snapchat and other social media platform use with them. Then, adults should use this insight to promote pro-social behaviour, rather than limit online access or instigate panic.

In sum, to accurately educate and protect young people from online harm, we must enter youth-specific spaces willing to understand how young people behave online from the standpoint of young people.

6.4 Concluding Thoughts

I began this thesis by describing how social media impacted my life as a teenager. Although the platforms I used, and to what extent I used them, differ significantly from present-day teenagers, our reasons for using social media are the same: to communicate with peers, broadcast the “cool” and “fun” things we did, and document the memories we shared. As this study demonstrates, the first two reasons correlate with acquiring and maintaining social capital. Thus, it is reasonable to suspect that if teenagers have been using social media to enhance their social capital for at least ten years, they will continue to do so in the future.

To conclude, boyd (2014) described the study of social media as a moving landscape; by the time research on one platform is published, it runs the risk of being outdated. When I began this project in 2017, TikTok, a video-based social media platform where users create and share short lip-synced videos, had just been released to markets outside of China. Now, TikTok has
over 500 million active users worldwide and 41% of these users are between the ages of 16 and 24 (Meola 2020). With this in mind, I feel compelled to quote boyd (2014: 27) one last time:

…many of the services that I reference throughout this book may or may not survive. But the ability to navigate one’s social relationships, communicate asynchronously, and search for information online is here to stay. Don’t let my reference to outdated services distract you from the arguments in this book. The examples may feel antiquated, but the core principles and practices I’m trying to describe are likely to persist long after this book is published.

It is undoubtful that at some point, future generations will replace Snapchat with some new form of social media or technology to communicate with each other, broadcast the “cool” and “fun” things they do, and document the memories they create. Nevertheless, this thesis exemplifies how despite these changes, teenagers will likely continue to navigate these networked technologies, shape them into youth-specific fields, and play the rules of the game to acquire and maintain social capital, so long as we live in a networked era.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction
1. Why did you download Snapchat?
   a. What were your initial thoughts with it?
   b. What do you think about it now?

Snapchat’s Popularity
1. How often do you use Snapchat?
   a. How many Snaps do you send/receive in a day? How often do you post a story?
   b. How does Snapchat compare with other social media that you use?
   c. What makes Snapchat more appealing? Less appealing?

Negative Aspects on Snapchat
1. Are there any benefits or positive aspects of Snapchat?
   a. Does this effect your Snapchat use? How?
2. Are there any risks or negative aspects of Snapchat?
   a. Does this effect your Snapchat use? How?
   b. Why might the time-limited messages be problematic?

Guardianship
1. Do your parents/guardians know you use Snapchat?
   a. What do they think about it?
   b. What were their thoughts towards you participating in this project?
2. Do your parents have any rules in place for using Snapchat?
   a. Do you follow these rules?

Cyberbullying on Snapchat
1. How do you define cyberbullying?
   a. Based on your definition, do you think cyberbullying occurs on Snapchat?
   b. Why?
   c. Can you tell me about a time you witnessed or experienced cyberbullying on Snapchat?

Conclusion
1. Is there anything else you want to share about Snapchat?