Real Friends

The dictionary defines 'Friend' as a person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection; why does that definition dramatically change when 'internet friends' are involved. From a young age we are always taught that we should fear people on the internet, to never talk to people we don’t know and that anyone and everyone is a middle aged man just waiting to pounce.

However using websites such as Twitter and Tumblr make it easy to share your interests, hobbies, opinions and thoughts with people from all over the globe and in return find and discover people who in fact have the same feelings as you do, all through the simple touch of a keyboard. Using Twitter I have personally been able to connect with many people my age from all over the world who share the same love for bands and music and interest in social issues. This gives me the chance to talk about and discuss the things I love and care about with people who feel exactly the same way without being judged on your appearance instead of your personality. This is not always the case with real life friends who don’t always share the same interests and are not as accepting of my opinions.

Unfortunately not everyone has a positive outlook on internet friends and I am constantly having to defend my internet friendships to friends and family who often make comments when I explain that I met them through the internet.

"How can they be your friend if you've never met?"

"How do you know they're not lying about who they are?"

"Were you never taught about stranger danger?"

A stream of seemingly endless questions are thrown my way with a snide undertone; it seems that family members have a hard time comprehending that anyone on the internet could be a) real b) a true friend c) is free of serial killer tendencies (no mum not everyone on the internet is preying on the young and vulnerable). I understand that there can be an element of danger when talking to strangers on the internet but you can still get to know them without revealing too much personal information about yourself. All of those stranger danger talks did actually teach me something.

Adults are always so quick to judge Internet friendships labelling them as 'not real friends' or 'strangers' when in numerous ways, this is the new generation of pen pals. Parents constantly talk about how they had a pen pal and it was such a great experience to have a friend from another country. Internet friends are exactly the same, minus the 6 month postal lag. Children were encouraged to have a pen pal as it was seen to help teach you about the world and different cultures while making new friends. It seems that our generation is being shamed for doing the same thing by using technology.

No matter the opinion of others internet friends have been there to talk to, joke with and even provide a shoulder to cry on, no matter how far away that shoulder is.