

Guard your privacy in age of social media

BY ERIN ANDREWS, Π
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Alpha Psi Chapter members (University of Missouri) meet Erin Andrews on the set of College GameDay at Mizzou in October.

Erin Andrews' private world became very public in 2009. An insurance executive had stalked the ESPN sideline reporter across the country, videotaping her through the peep hole in at least three hotel rooms. He posted the videos online and attempted to sell them to Internet news sites. In March 2010, he pled guilty to interstate stalking and was sentenced to 27 months in jail.

Later that spring, Erin kept her commitment to compete in ABC TV's "Dancing with the Stars," wanting use the show as a way to recover from the trauma and to put a public face on the psychological effects of stalking. She advanced to the show's finals, and along the way, gained millions of new female fans and new alliances in the entertainment world. Those associations led to her testifying on Capitol Hill in July 2010 on behalf of stronger stalking laws.

Erin signed a new contract with ESPN that includes co-hosting the network's popular "College GameDay" show during football season and working as a correspondent for ABC's "Good Morning America." She has achieved great success in broadcasting; however, she knows that every day, anyone can watch videos of her, naked in her private hotel room, online. She recently talked by phone with Themis Editor-in-Chief Christy Marx Barber and offered her ZTA sisters this first-hand knowledge about the dangers of the Internet and social media.

Say where you've been, not where you are going.

I am somebody who likes to be friendly and be out there like the girl next door. Now I am very guarded. I have changed how I travel and the way I conduct business. I don't tweet or post when I'm coming to a town. Except for where we go for "College GameDay," it's not necessary for people to know where I've been until I'm gone. Everyone should be that careful.

Don't blink.

Camera phones have been the death of privacy. We (the GameDay crew) can be at a restaurant or out anywhere at night. If someone takes a picture of us and we are blinking, the picture can look like we are out of control. The photos get posted online and misrepresent what we were doing. There are no laws to protect anyone against it happening. There is nothing you can do to clear your name. Your reputation is damaged forever.

Don't think it can't happen to you.

I met a young woman on a college campus who had been with her boyfriend for six years. After they broke up, he posted horrible pictures of her on Facebook. You have to be so careful even with people that you trust. Unless you have lived through an invasion of privacy, you can't know how dangerous the Internet can be. School teachers, law enforcement officials, everyone has to be careful what they post and who is taking pictures of them. That's how much social media has changed everything in professional life.

Throw away the keys, camera, cell phone and computer.

My advice to college women is: if you are going to partake in activities like tailgating, you need to be extremely careful what you text, what pictures you take or have taken of you, what you post on Twitter and Facebook. You can't take it down. Even if you delete it, it's still out there. People say to throw away your car keys if you are going to a party. Well, I'd add to throw away your camera, your phone and your computer as well so you don't regret what you post online. The last thing you want is for a boss or potential boss to say they can't keep you or hire you because of what they found online about you.

Think of your family.

My family was not immune from my pain. The stalking shook my world. My dad is my best friend. Imagine being a parent and having naked images of your daughter posted online. Every day my parents had to go online and look for more places that the video was posted to send the links to the FBI and our lawyers to get them down. It put my family in a position they never asked to be in.

Become an advocate for change.

Instead of running away from what happened to me, I've taken an advocacy position. Before I was stalked, I wasn't well versed in social media law. But I do know that it's a choice. Websites have a choice. They can choose to take down images and videos if they want to. But there is no policing. "Dancing with the Stars" allowed me a platform, a way to put a face on stalking. That led to talk shows where I could be a voice. This is a crime. Laws need to be stronger. I'm not backing down. 🙌