TRUST PASSING

Volume 2

Insecurity is Good Business

This work was supported by a Societal Impact Seed Grant from the Office of the Vice-President, Research, McMaster University.

Research Project Lead

Andrea Zeffiro, Department of Communication Studies and Media Arts, Faculty of Humanities, McMaster University

Community Partner Lead

Jelena Vermilion, Executive Director, SWAP Hamilton

McMaster University Research Team

Alexis-Carlota Cochrane (Workshop Facilitation)

Natasha Malik (Asset Digitization)

Kathryn Waring (Rapid Literature Review)

Project Supporters

YWCA Hamilton

The Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship, McMaster University

The Office of Community Engagement, McMaster University

Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts, McMaster University

Cite This Zine

Trustpassing. Volume 2: Insecurity is Good Business. [Zine]. Data analysis, curation and design, Andrea Zeffiro. McMaster University. Hamilton, Ontario, 2025.

not matter what your level of education is or where you are in life! Everyone matters. Participants passed their trust when they allowed their personal experiences to be curated into a collective narrative to be shared publicly. *I want all of Hamilton to read this, and maybe they will really understand how much we need more people to support our community.*

As communicated through the zines, the stories and insights about digital vulnerabilities are inseparable from access to material forms of security and safety. The zines provide insights rooted in the local context of Hamilton, Ontario, regarding how digital (in)securities and vulnerabilities are interconnected with material ones, including but not limited to emergency housing, sex workers' rights, job security, food security, childcare, services for migrants, newcomers and immigrants, access to mental health care and services, substance abuse and addiction support, policing and law enforcement, and access to safe spaces.

Trustpassing provides a starting point for formulating crucial questions about how end-users who already face social stigmas are included in digital security and safety frameworks, while also acknowledging how these folks become targets of invasive and unwarranted surveillance, often under the guise of security. The zines advocate for a community-centred approach to understanding and documenting (digital) risks, threats and harms as contextual, local and inseparable from material (in)securities.

To this end, *Trustpassing* amplifies the voices that are often excluded from or overlooked in dominant discussions that shape the criteria for digital harms, as experts equipped with the knowledge to reshape mainstream digital safety and security frameworks. *We are all survivors, surviving together. We are the life force*.

We extend our deep gratitude to the project participants for generously sharing their time, perspectives and experiences with us. Your contributions were invaluable, and this project would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your collaboration, insights and trust.

- Andrea Zeffiro

Trustpassing, as a concept, conveys the intricate interplay between safety and security that unfolds when determining whether to place trust in a person or entity. Often, we pass our trust to others knowingly and with active, ongoing consent. At other times, passing trust becomes necessary for participating in or accessing services. In such situations, we may find ourselves taking a leap of faith, as is often the case with social services and big tech companies. *How can you keep yourself safe from something you cannot see?* When we pass trust to someone or something, ideally, we are met with a sense of confidence and reliability. That person or entity will uphold a certain standard, remain dependable and act as expected. Trust-passing, in this sense, enables us to feel safe and secure even when we are vulnerable.

At the same time, trustpassing is a play on 'trespassing'. It signifies committing an offence against trust, breaking someone's trust. *I don't understand how security and safety work because they have never worked for me.* When our trust is broken, it can be a profoundly emotional experience. We can feel betrayed, powerless, angry, disappointed, and doubtful. *I worry that if the readers of the zines know the participants are accessing the YWCA then maybe they will respect the content less.* A breach of trust can impact our willingness to trust again. How do we collectively regain and repair trust? *These kinds of projects are important because I believe that everyone has a right to be heard, accepted, understood, recognized and treated with respect.*

In the context of this project, trustpassing carries several meanings. In the workshops, being together in a shared space and feeling comfortable in the company of others requires a certain level of trust. *Community is important. We feel connected to one another in this space.* Trust was exchanged among the participants and the research team through the sharing of individual narratives and experiences of negotiating safety and security in digital spaces. *I think it's important for people to hear honest truths that not everyone is aware of.* How do researchers establish and sustain trust with research participants? How can researchers balance data collection with fostering spaces of mutual care and trust? *It does*

Trustpassing is the culmination of a year-long research partnership between researchers at McMaster University and the Sex Workers' Action Program (SWAP) Hamilton. The aim of the project was to develop a zine-based workshop model to document and share insights from equity-deserving communities frequently left out of dominant discussions about digital harms and vulnerabilities.

Mainstream cybersecurity frameworks often perceive end-users in a generic way. We all encounter common threats, risks, and harms. By maintaining good 'cyber hygiene' we strengthen that first line of defence and ensure our safety. In this model, digital risks and threats are often framed as individual choices, placing the burden on end-users. You either failed to protect yourself adequately, made a mistake, were a willing participant, or even deserved the exploitation

This project takes a step back from viewing cybersecurity as a universal resource that benefits everyone equally, aiming to examine the cyber insecurities that are overlooked by mainstream models. How do cybersecurity frameworks identify and account for end-users who experience social stigmas? What are the varied impacts of digital safety and security across different social contexts? In what ways are digital (in)securities related to material security and access to basic necessities?

From January to May 2025, we hosted 11 workshops on Thursday evenings at the YWCA in downtown Hamilton, attracting around 220 participants. Most participants were accessing services at the YWCA for diverse personal needs. The first set of workshops concentrated on content generation through techniques such as collage and block-out poetry. In the second set, we worked with rough drafts of the zines, soliciting participants' feedback on content and other essential aspects, including intended audiences, outreach strategies, and dissemination plans.

This collaborative effort led to the creation of *Trustpassing,* a series of four zines that remix and curate personal reflections into collective narratives exploring the intersection of digital security, safety and broader social issues. The zines strive to make this shared knowledge more recognized, widely circulated, and integrated into mainstream discussions that shape our understanding of digital harms and vulnerabilities.

Insecurity is good business.

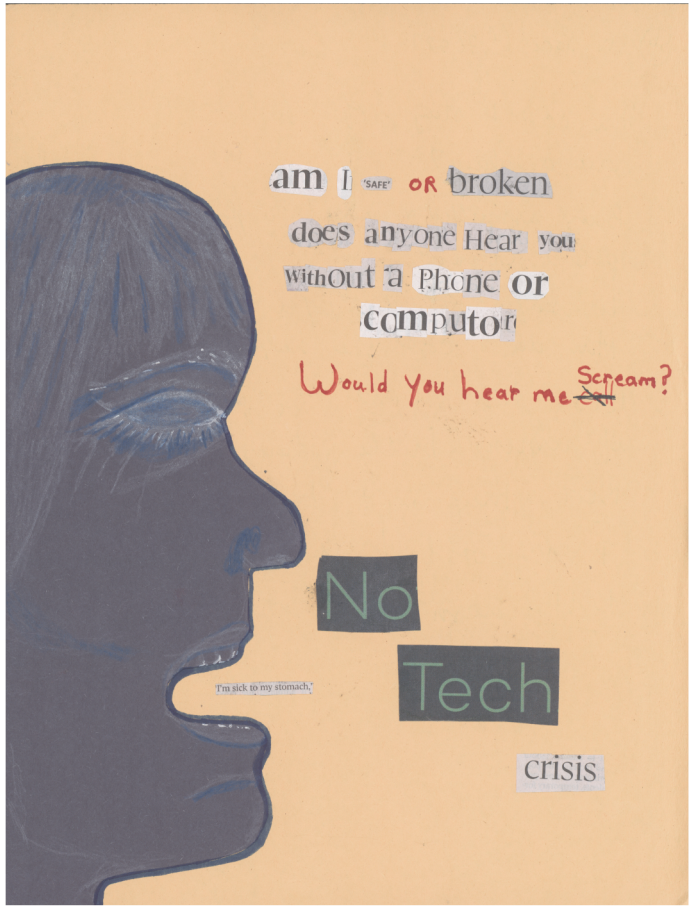
Government officials and expert groups advise us to be aware of our surroundings. Passwords or codes are supposed to keep us safe.

In my own words, cybersecurity means feeling safe on devices, such as computers, laptops, iPads, iPhones, etc. If I'm on devices, I sometimes feel secure.

I go online for banking and to keep connected to my emergency contacts. I use Gmail to contact my daughter and son, and I only interact with people I know.

I was scammed through my bank, and it wasn't only about the money. They wanted information, including my accounts and my SIN. I had to call the bank, which forced me to reveal my identity and predicament. We are not protected every-where we go online, not even by email.

It costs money for businesses and people to protect themselves.

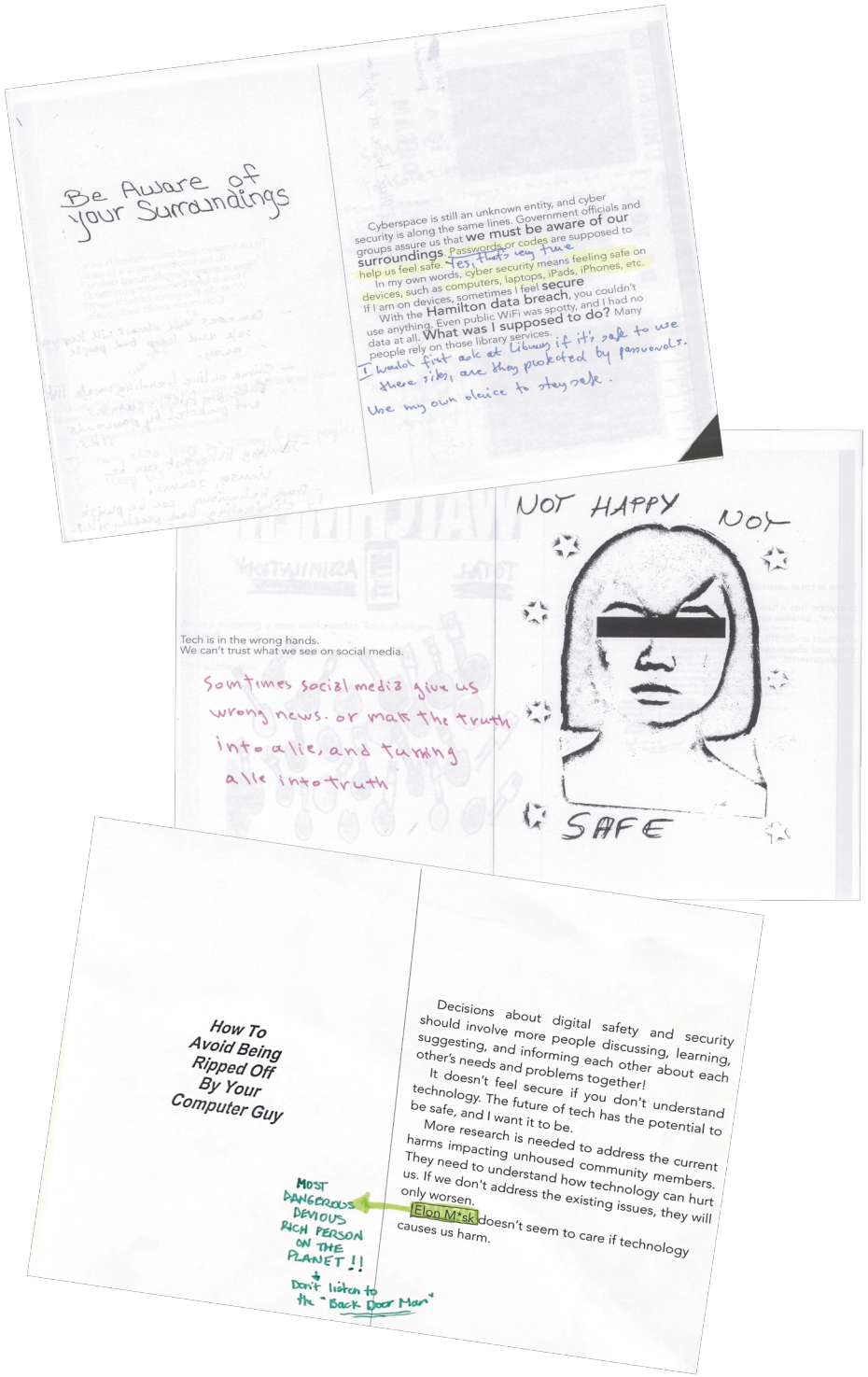


The cell phone is at the centre of it all. Everyone has a handheld computer connected to the Internet, and we are being watched and tracked. The computers we carry in our pockets (cell phones) can provide safety. Surveillance is a scary comfort.

Security and surveillance go hand in hand.

We must understand what we are signing up for and stay informed about technology usage and new developments. It doesn't feel secure if you don't understand technology.

The future of tech has the potential to be safe, and I want it to be. Some of us are in the process of recreating ourselves and reaffirming our self-esteem. Does technology build self-esteem? It does and does not. Technology is good when it works, but it doesn't always work.



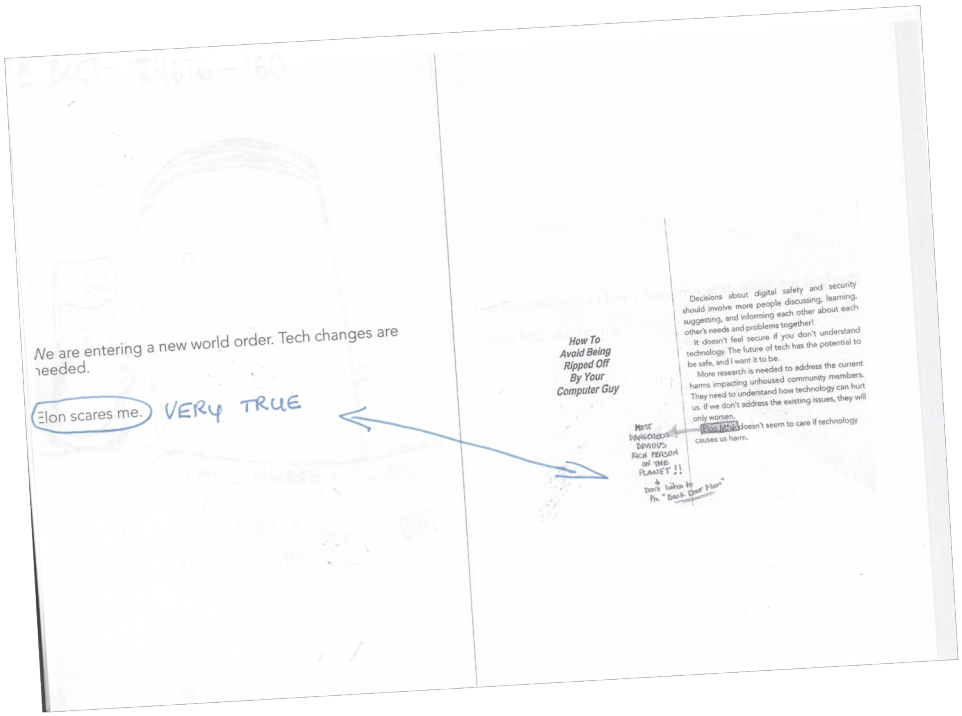
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.

I have devised my security measures alone. I got a flip phone. First because of the cost. I wasn't locked into a plan or provider, and I paid $30/ month.

They told me, "You can break up with us anytime."

Second, I got one because of security. It feels more secure because I'm not instantly connected. I don't have to deal with all of those extras. I've never received a telemarketer call. I feel more in control.

Third, I chose a flip phone because I didn't want to be distracted. With a smartphone, I would constantly be distracted by the internet, games, phone calls, and watching videos. It feels like a hive or mothership is on the other side. Other than having it for emergencies, I could leave my phone behind.



Accessing security is hard.

In the past, when my cellphone account was hacked, I contacted the cell phone provider but was told nothing could be done. Why the fuck am I paying you to protect my phone? I rely on myself to stay safe. No one else.

They can take all my data and info but can't tell me who's been calling to harass me for 15 years? Oh, fuck off. What is digital safety and security? It's a scam!

How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
How can I stay safe If I don't have a phone?
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
I was instructed to call the police if my abuser showed up,
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
In an unsafe situation without a phone, how can I call for help?
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
I was assaulted and asked to file a police report online,
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.
but I don't have a phone.

People understand security differently. Posting personal pictures on social media and letting people know things about you, like photos of kids or vacations. Is this security if strangers know things about you?

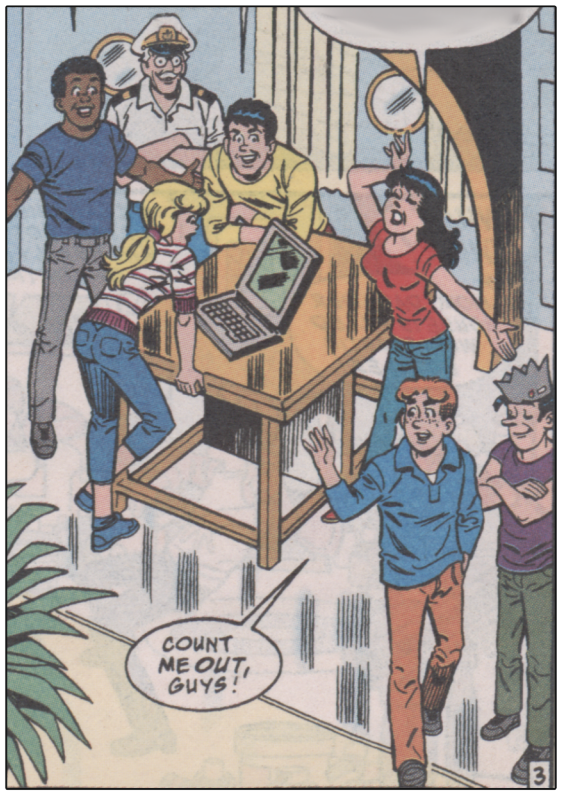
I stopped using social media due to substance use triggers from advertisements in my feeds. I had no control over the reception of these ads and had to remove or block content to avoid triggers.

"You're just an object.
Buy our object."

Despite certain advantages to using social media for building a popular account, it was easier for me to stop using it. I wish there were more non-tech options for similar activities. Balancing the benefits of social media with the challenges of avoiding potential triggers is hard.

I feel uneasy about technology because it seems necessary for everything, and there are few, if any, options to opt out of. I fear having my identity stolen, being stalked, and having others misuse my information to harm me. Due to these risks, I have restricted my use of digital tech—social media and more—even though I want to engage with people and content more.

Spyware, targeted ads, and cookies. We don't want it!



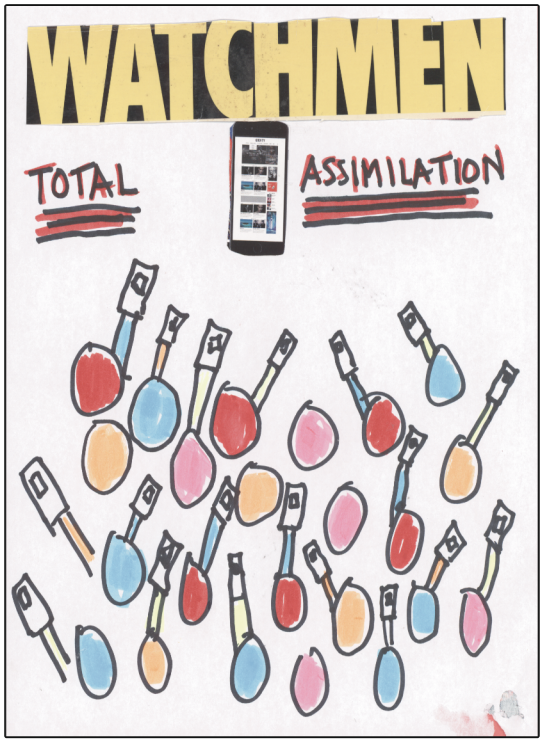
I primarily use my phone for texting and calling, and some socials. The phone feels more leaky, like I'm being monitored—for example, targeted ads. I was looking up something for my brother, and suddenly, I saw that thing advertised everywhere.

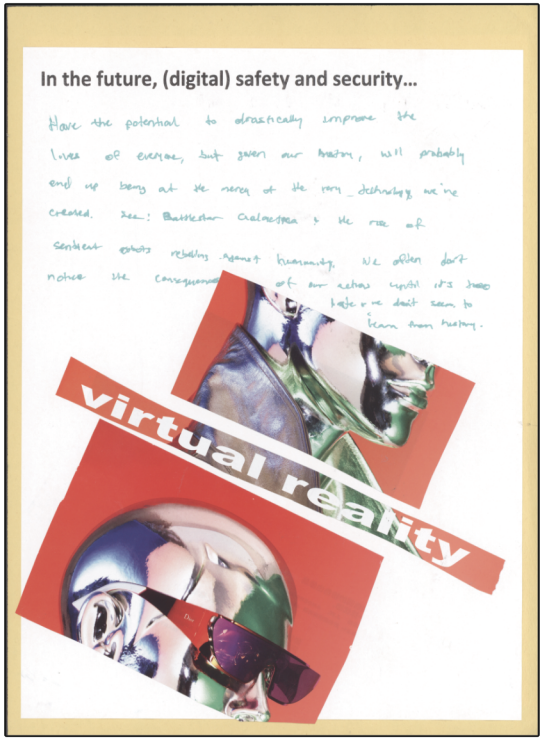
Anything I look up on my phone pops up on Facebook or in my Google app. Facebook asks questions like: What year were you born? What month? It turns collecting personal information into a game, encouraging us to post memories, asking about birthstones. When I saved pictures of two old friends and my contacts from my old phone, those files automatically transferred to my new phone.

My phone displays pop-ups like "You have memories/ pictures from 8-14 years ago." I trust a community computer more than my new phone. They have access to all my pictures and memories, as well as anything I research.

I feel there is almost no security with digital devices. I feel I have no privacy anywhere. Trust is difficult nowadays. It's a shame because we have to navigate life digitally now.

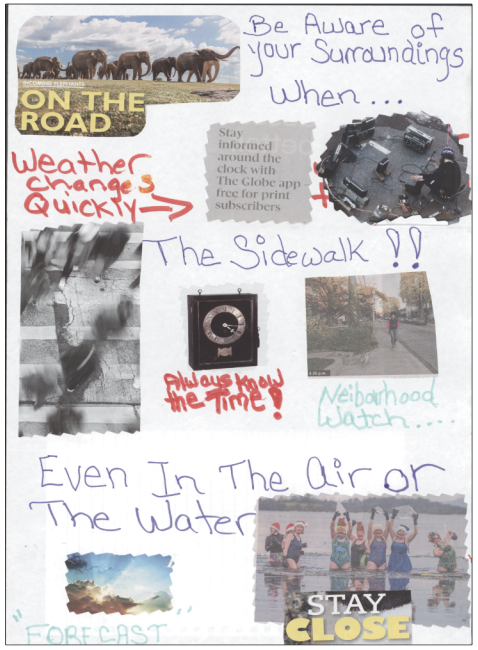
Platforms are using sneaky ways to get more information from me.



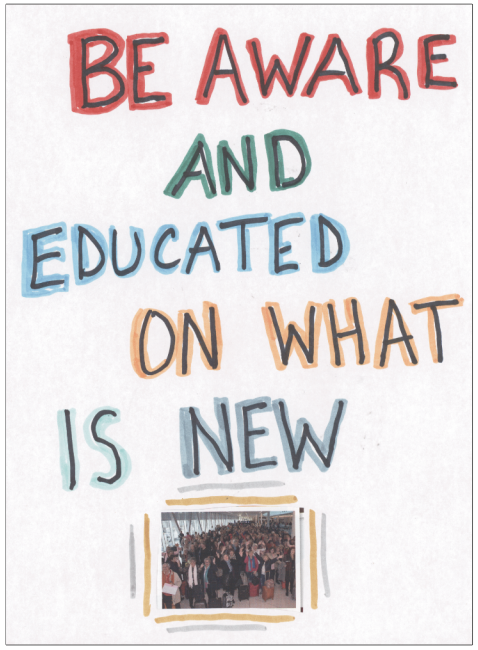


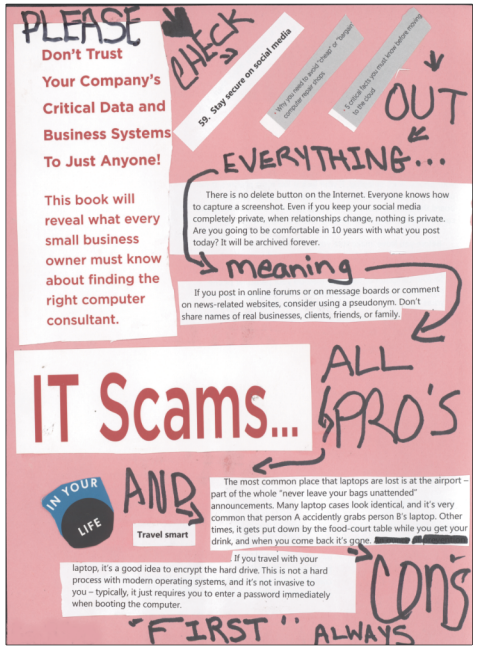

WISH YOU WERE HERE...
IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?


INFORMATION
THEN AND NOW
Legacy
spended Silence
AI-Human
Romance


Be Aware of your Surroundings When ...
ON THE ROAD
Stay informed around the clock with The Globe app free for print subscribers
Weather changes Quickly
The Sidewalk !!
Always know the time!
Neibarhood Watch....
Even In The Air or The Water
STAY CLOSE
FORECAST


we are cool kids!


BE AWARE AND EDUCATED ON WHAT IS NEW


PLEASE
Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data and Business Systems To Just Anyone!
This book will reveal what every small business owner must know about finding the right computer consultant.
CHECK
59. Stay secure on social media
OUT
EVERYTHING...
There is no delete button on the Internet. Everyone knows how to capture a screenshot. Even if you keep your social media completely private, when relationships change, nothing is private. Are you going to be comfortable in 10 years with what you post today? It will be archived forever.
meaning
If you post in online forums or on message boards or comment on news-related websites, consider using a pseudonym. Don't share names of real businesses, clients, friends, or family.
IT Scams...
ALL $PRO'S
IN YOUR LIFE
AND
Travel smart
The most common place that laptops are lost is at the airport – part of the whole "never leave your bags unattended" announcements. Many laptop cases look identical, and it's very common that person A accidently grabs person B's laptop. Other times, it gets put down by the food-court table while you get your drink, and when you come back it's gone.
If you travel with your laptop, it's a good idea to encrypt the hard drive. This is not a hard process with modern operating systems, and it's not invasive to you – typically, it just requires you to enter a password immediately when booting the computer.
CONS
"FIRST" ALWAYS


SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN
SEE-THROUGH BRAIN
Most People Have Some Type Of Technology!
What Would Happen If It All Disappeared?


I WILL SAVE THE DAY
I think less being heard by who ever is out there we need
MORE RULES