

# High school confessions Twitter account raises concerns

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Debate is raging over what should be done in the wake of a police investigation into a lurid teenage confessions Twitter account that York Region District School Board wants shut down.

@GTAConfession — a Twitter feed that asks secondary school students from across the GTA to post anonymous confessions for the world to see — has attracted plenty of attention for months from students in York Region.

Since a story was posted on yorkregion.com Tuesday night, the manager of the feed has been busy defending the account via tweets from parents and educators who insist it solicits explicit, degrading, inappropriate, crude and, in some cases, bullying tweets from high school students in York Region and across the GTA.

Based on information in some of the tweets, it wouldn't be difficult to identify unnamed individuals, especially in smaller schools, said Licinio Miguelo, senior communications manager at York Region District School Board.

He added he has spoken to the principals at the board's 31 high schools, along with York Regional Police, about the feed.

One Newmarket woman, who works with at-risk youth, said the school board's tactics are too aggressive, adding it shows parents need to do a better job reinforcing their children's morals, ethics, social boundaries and the value of privacy.

"Some of it is filth, but some of it's not. It's not about being punitive or shutting down the site, because another one will just pop up," said Gillian Barker, a mother of three. "I think we have to teach our children about privacy, respect and boundaries. We (parents) have to try harder to advocate for a social fabric."

Raveena Sidhu, who graduated from Woodbridge College in June, said Twitter and social media have quickly morphed from a way to interact with friends, meet new people and keep up with daily news into a bully pulpit, where girls are shamed by males and females.

"Even if these tweets are anonymous, if you're a student you know about the girl that does all that (sexual) stuff," said the 19-year-old who is heavily engaged in social media.

"It's not hard to figure out who it is when you see a tweet and the school named beside it. Social media is there to bully and make fun of people, that's all it is these days. It's driving people to suicide, people

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think because they are behind a screen they can say anything."

The Twitter account, which has almost 16,000 followers, lists countless details about what appears to be rampant sexual activity and drug use from students at a number of the region's public and Catholic high schools.

Although the tweets are anonymous, each one includes either the name of a town or a school.

The schools listed include Country Day School, a private school, Stouffville District Secondary, Stephen Lewis Secondary, Richmond Green Secondary, Bill Crothers Secondary, Huron Heights Secondary and Milliken Mills, among many more.

Locations include Aurora, Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, King, Newmarket, Stouffville and Keswick.

Although a number of GTA areas are listed, including Durham, Mississauga, Oakville and Scarborough, most of the tweets are about schools in York Region.

Many of the tweets are explicit in both nature and language, such as, "I (had sex with) all my best friends boyfriends. She doesn't know," from SLSS (Stephen Lewis Secondary School).

Others are, "I've had sex with almost everyone in my grade but I asked them all to keep it a secret so no one knows they've all slept with me." cds (Country Day School) and, "Aurora seems to like to play this game called: let's see how many drugs we can do at raves without dying".

There is evidence followers of @GTAConfession have been able to decipher who is being referred to in the tweets, while others write that names have appeared in some tweets.

One tweet reads: "I've seen numerous names being called out on this page it might be time to find something new to do u (expletive) loser."

Mr. Miguelo said school staff is counselling a number of people who have been victimized by the account.

He said the board has contacted York Regional Police, which "took the necessary steps", as well as principals, so they could be aware of the situation, monitor it and support any victims who have been identi-

fied.

Police said that while the force investigates claims of this nature, no laws have been broken.

"We are aware of this Twitter account and we have looked into it," said Const. Andy Pattenden. "There's obviously some material on there that could be offensive to some, but there's lots of that on the Internet. At this time, we have not received any complaints about criminal activity."

He added that of the two laws — online threats and harassment — that could conceivably be broken, neither has been identified.

The account administrator refused to speak by telephone to yorkregion.com, but did respond to queries via email.

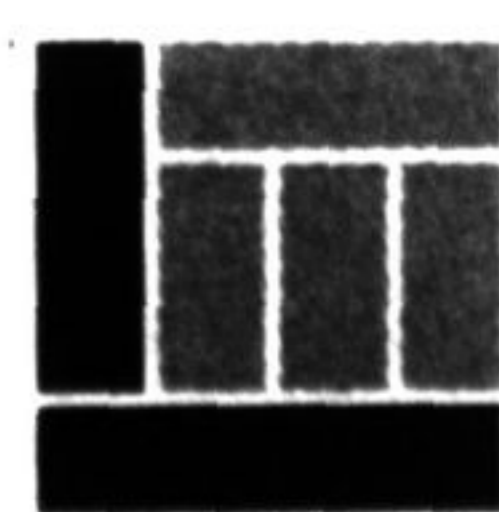
In an email, the account administrator relayed concern about police involvement, adding there are other similar accounts out there for young people, including @collegefessions, which started in the United States and now has more than 300,000 followers worldwide.

A Twitter spokesperson said the company does not comment on individual accounts for privacy and security reasons, adding information about safety tips for teens, families and teachers is provided on the the Twitter support website.

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