

“Sharing, Not Showing Off”:

How **BeReal** Approaches Authentic Self-Presentation on Social Media Through Its Design



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Our relationships are essential to our health and well-being.

Learn more at
SurgeonGeneral.gov/Connect2Heal



Office of the
U.S. Surgeon General

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community

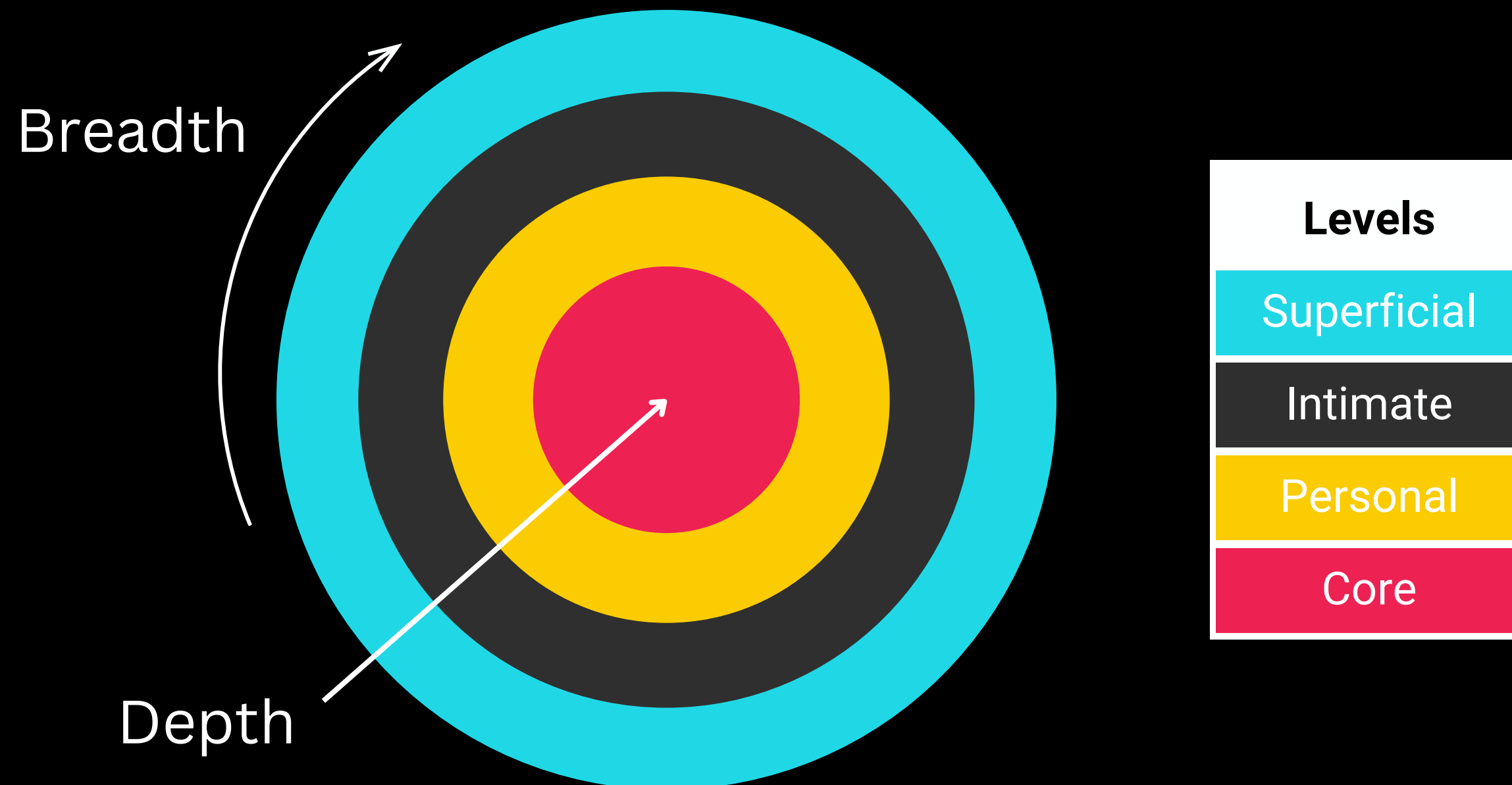




NAVIGATING FRIENDSHIPS

**IMPORTANCE OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS
DURING ADOLESCENCE**

Authentic self-disclosure is the basis of relationship development.



(Social Penetration Theory, Altman & Taylor)



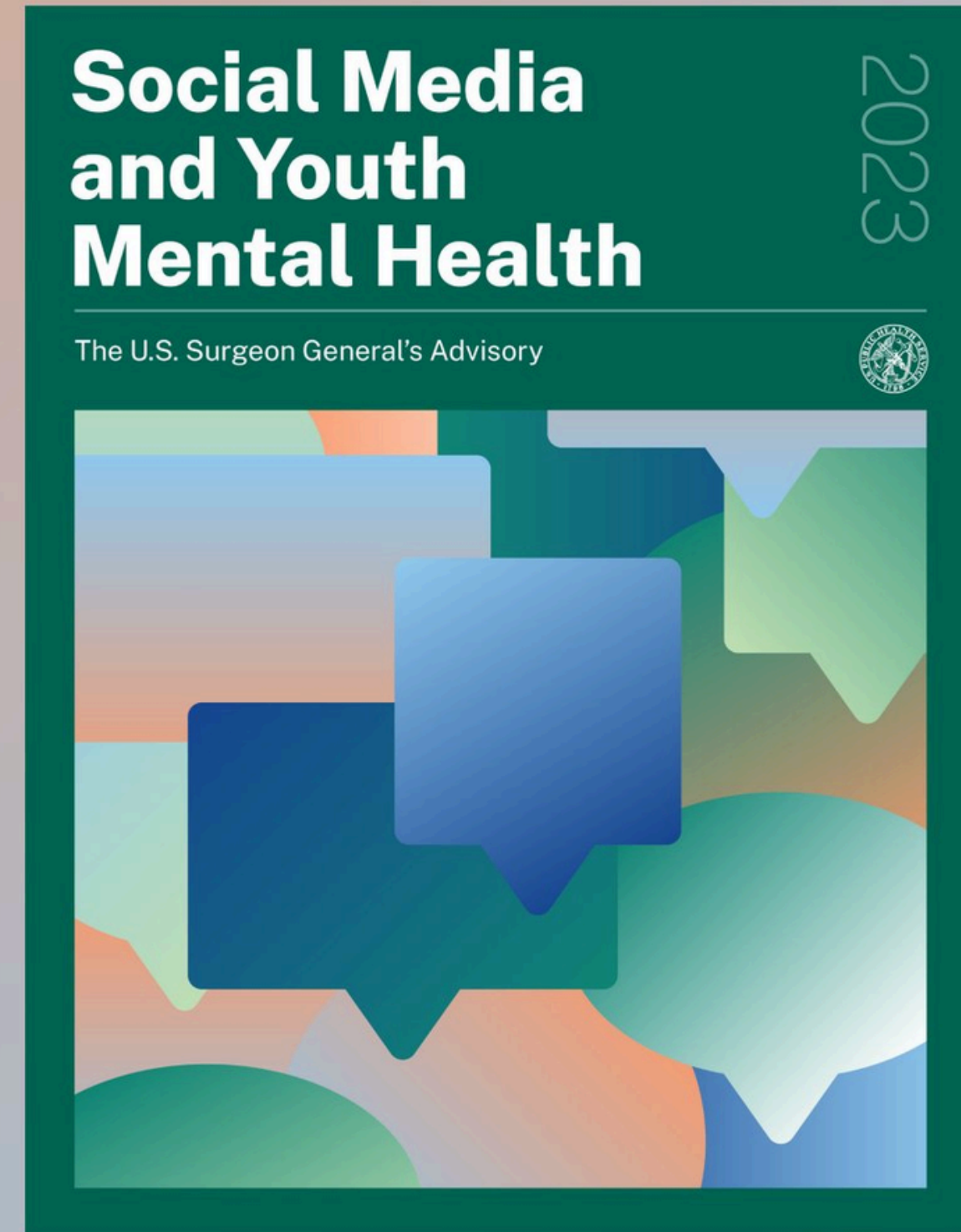
Teens crave **authentic** connections online,
but social media often **falls short**.

Social media use by youth is nearly universal, and while some uses are beneficial, there is a meaningful risk of harm to children.

Read the advisory and learn more at:
surgeongeneral.gov/ymh-social-media

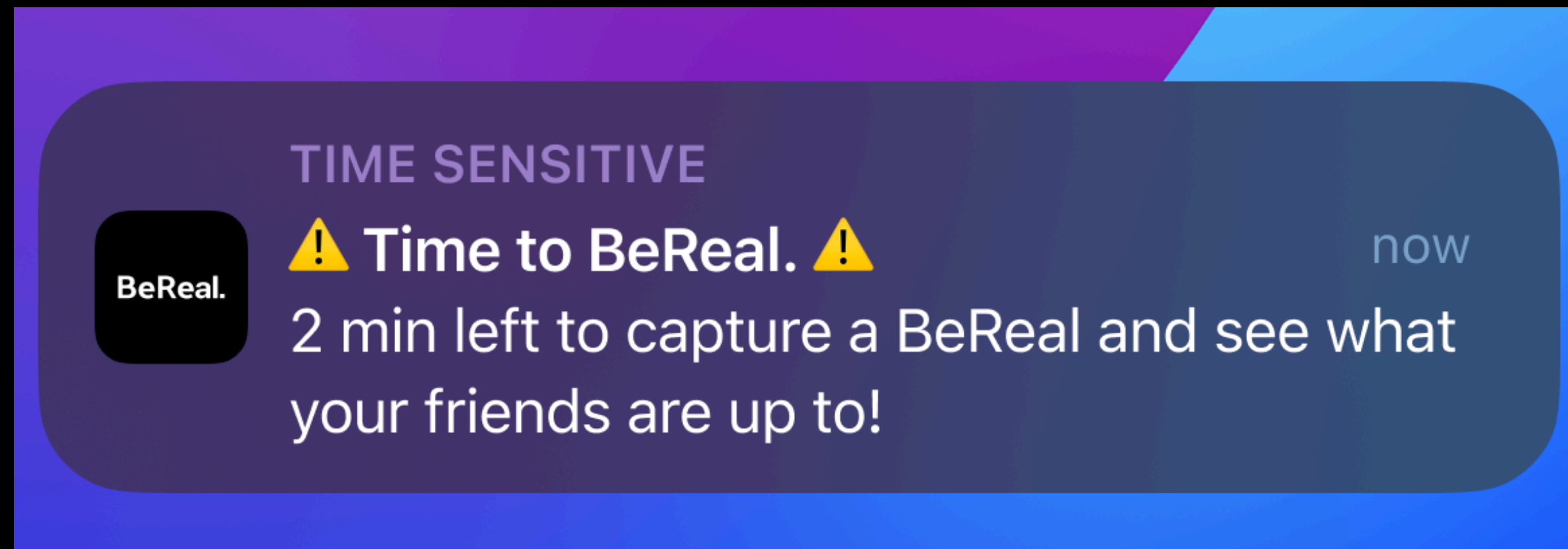


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Introducing BeReal:

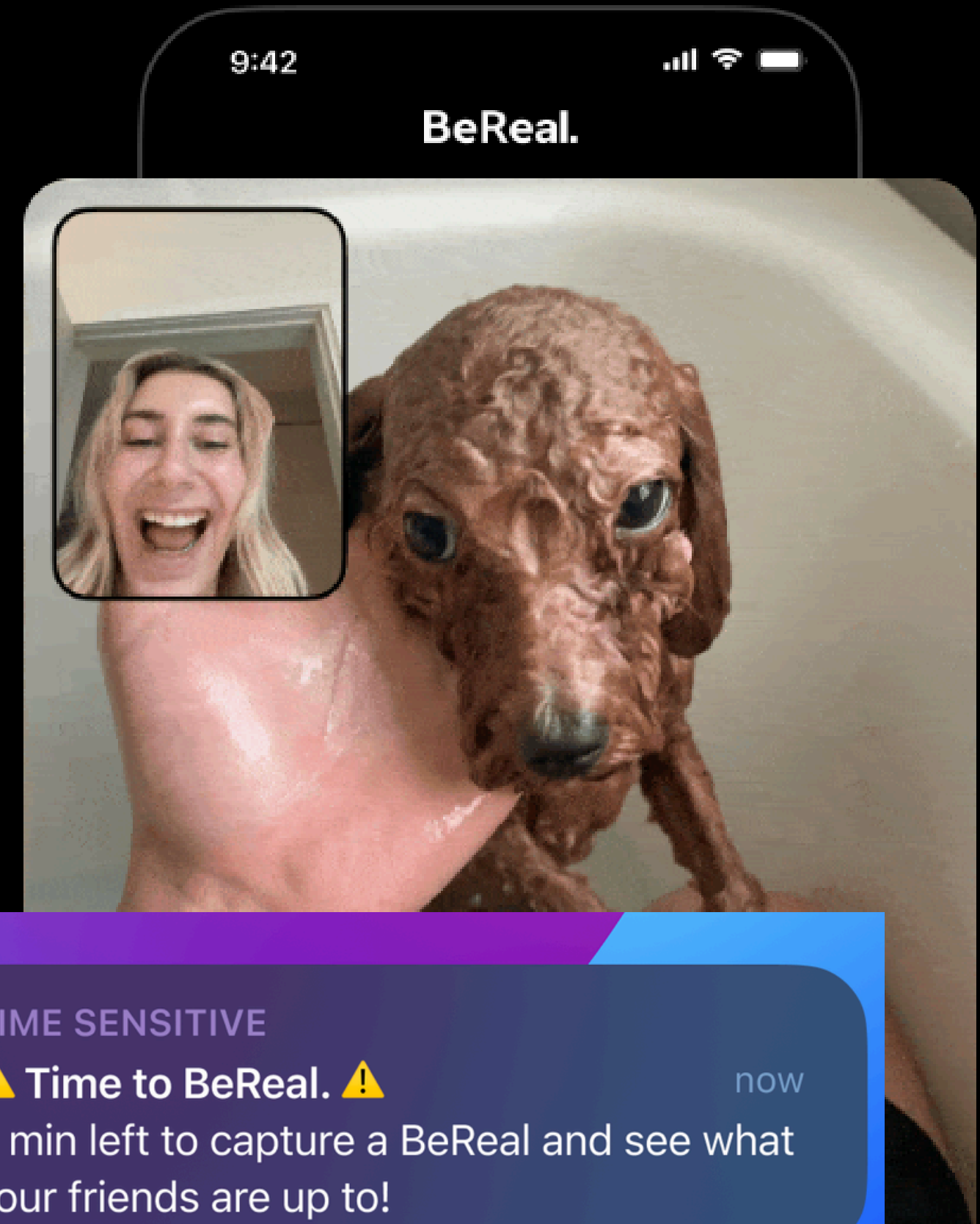
A Platform Designed for Authentic Sharing.



Your daily dose of real life.


- 😊 Meaningful connections
- ⚠️ Spontaneous moments
- 👉 Authentic real life

Everyday get a notification to share a genuine glimpse into your real life with the people you care most about.



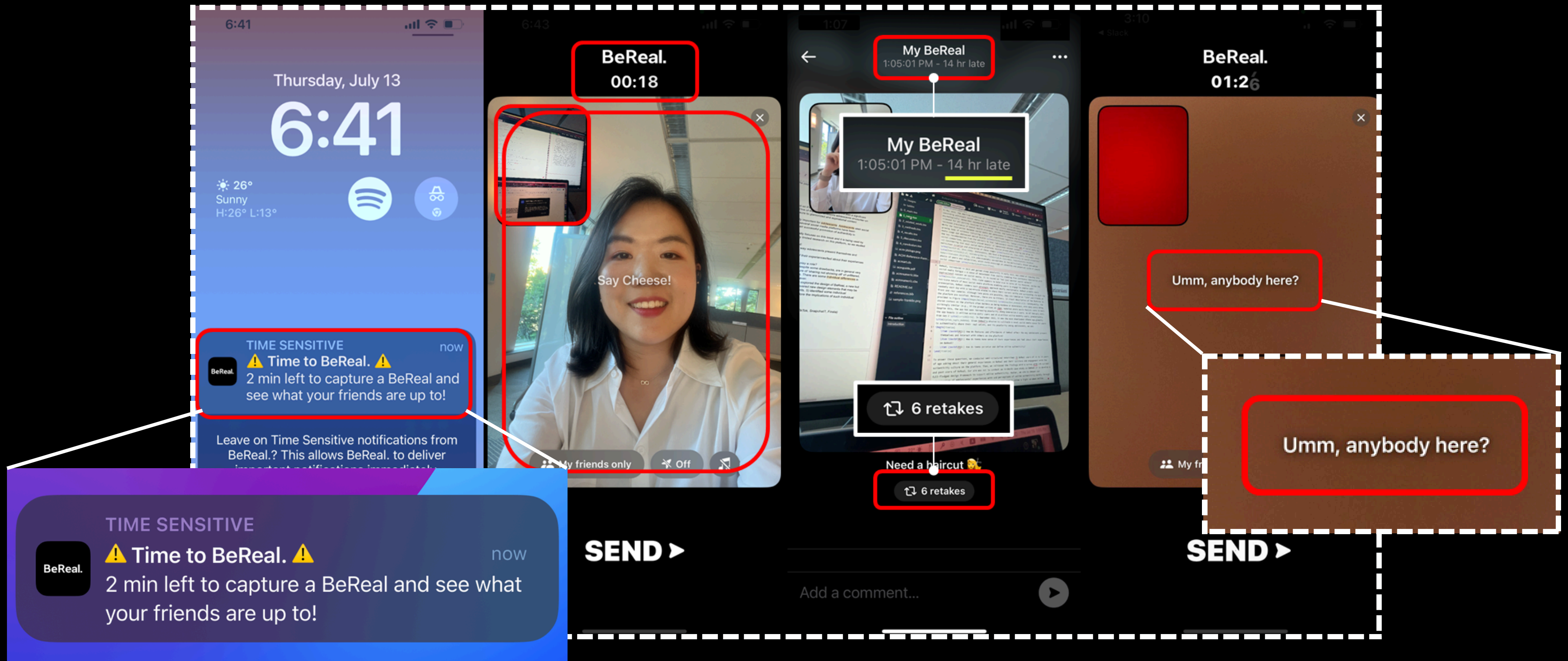


We conducted 29 semi-structured
interviews with teens **13-18**.

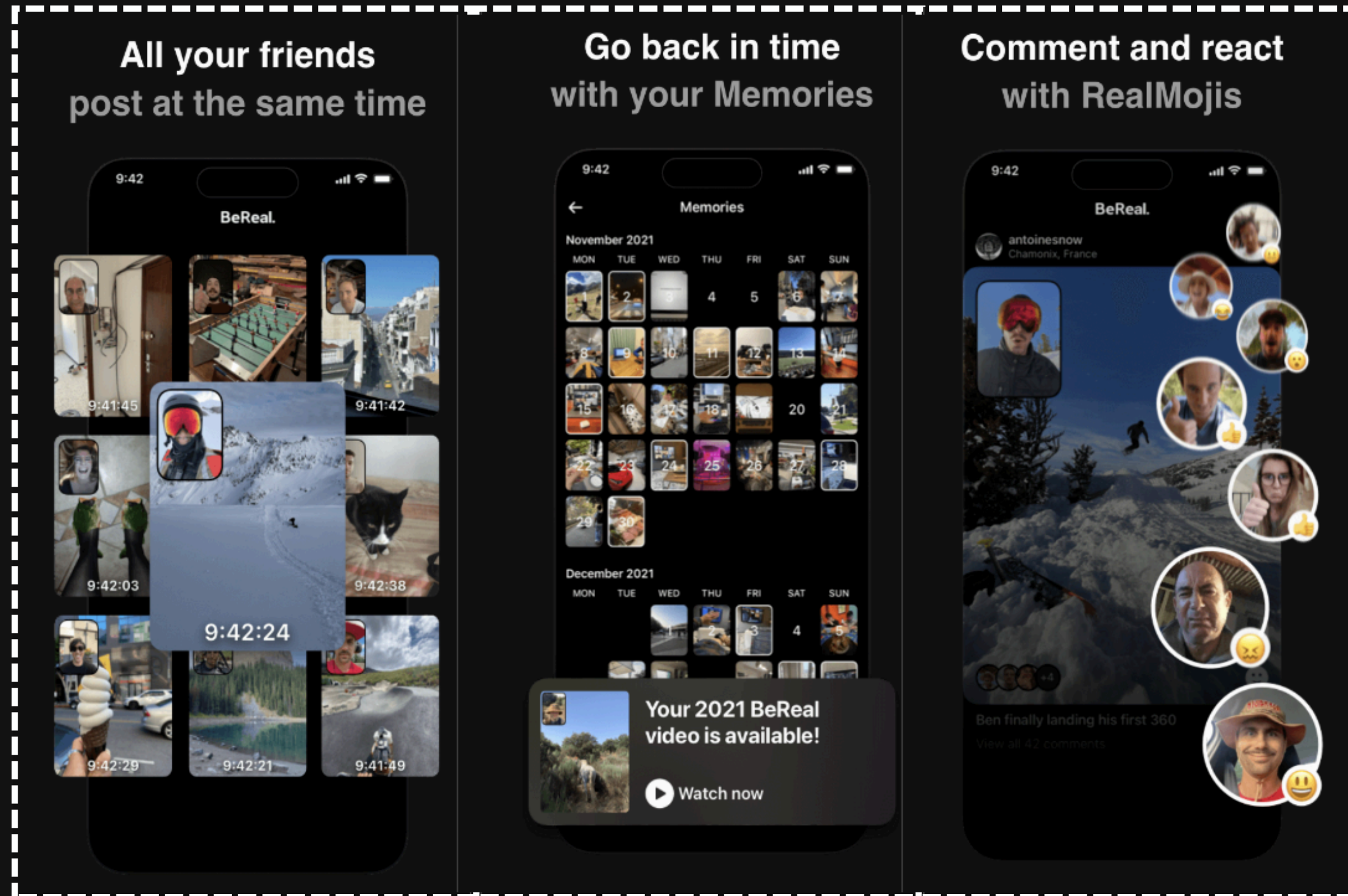


RQ1. How, if at all, does the **design** of BeReal **influence** users' self-presentation on the platform?

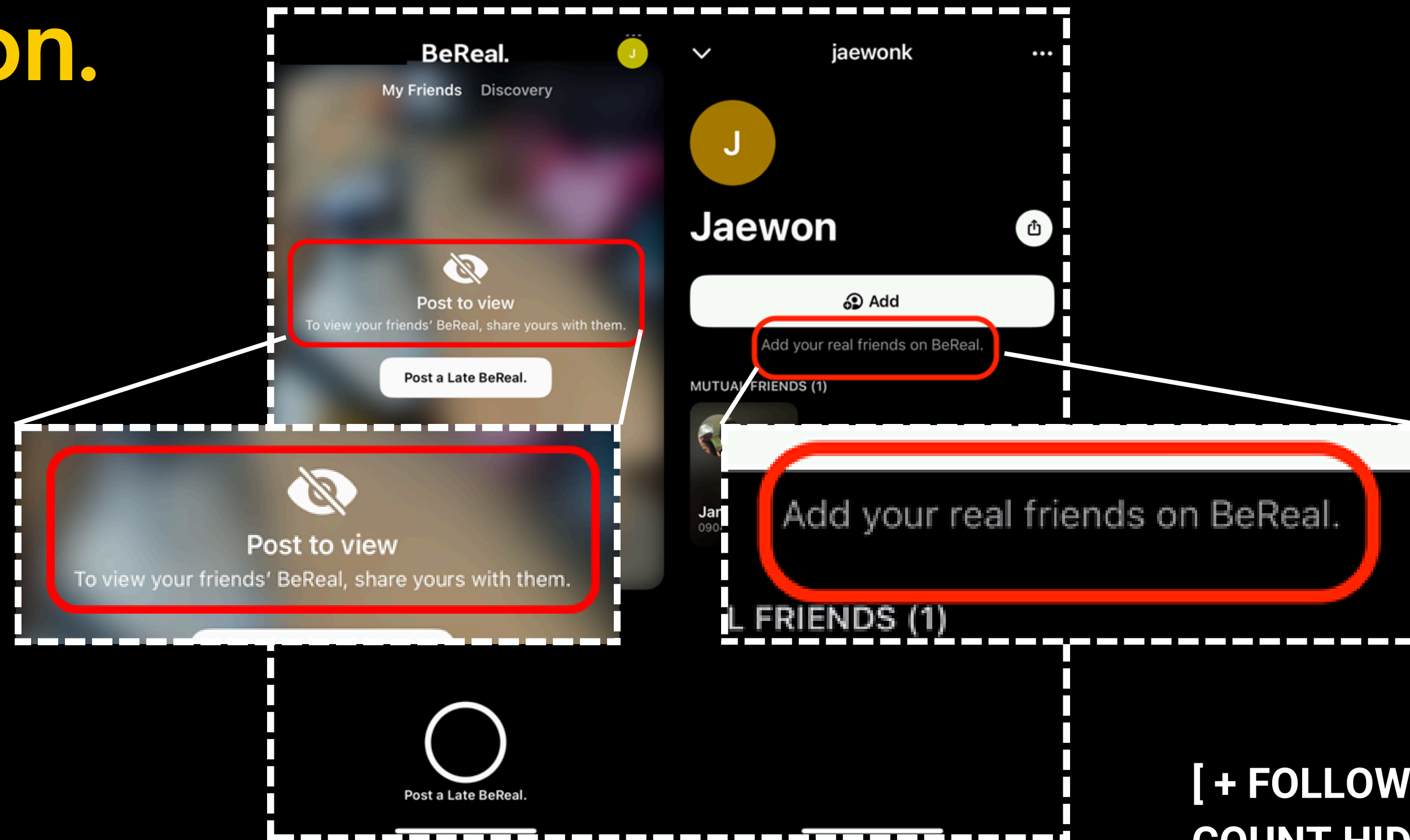
1. Designs that discourage staging



2. Designs that **take pressure off posting.**



3. Designs that encourage **audience curation.**



[+ FOLLOWER
COUNT HIDDEN]

4. Design that **focuses** on a single purpose.

vs. TikTok Now, which has the same functionalities as BeReal:

*“[TikTok **doesn’t**] talk as much about being real, that’s not really their focus the same way that it is with the BeReal app” - P08*

*“I feel like most **people know TikTok for those short 15-second videos...** so to merge [Now into TikTok] ... **just doesn’t feel as real as BeReal**” - P25*

*“TikTok **has more functions**, and I guess that you **can’t really curate the friends** that you interact with on TikTok as much as you can with BeReal.” - P24*

A background illustration in a dark grey, sketchy style. It depicts a group of stylized human figures in a social setting. Some figures are standing and talking, while others are seated at a table. There are musical notes floating in the air, suggesting a party or a social gathering. The overall tone is casual and social.

LEARNING TO BE VULNERABLE

Teens appreciated
BeReal's attempt at
authentic sharing.

COMMUNAL FEELING WITH
FRIENDS ON THE PLATFORM

SIMPLICITY PREVENTS TOXICITY

 However... 



RQ2. How do teens feel about authentic self-presentation on BeReal?

Two simple, dark grey cartoon figures are positioned on either side of a large, horizontal sign. The figures are drawn with thick, sketchy lines. Each figure has a round head with a few lines for facial features, a torso, and two legs. They are both holding the sign with their hands. The sign itself is a long, horizontal rectangle with a slightly wavy, hand-drawn appearance. It contains text in white and yellow. The background is a solid dark grey.

BeReal's definition of authentic sharing
often **clashed** with **how teens defined it.**

Feeling “Forced” to Be Real

“I definitely feel like I am forced... sometimes there are times where I don’t have makeup on or I don’t look my best ... so it makes me feel a little stressed out... [but] I get curious, and then I end up posting anyways to see what's going on...” - P25

“You just get so demotivated from feeling like you have to be real, where you’re just like, ‘Well, I don’t even want to touch the app at all.’” - P19

“Being Real” Becomes a Competition

“I'll hear my sister... talking with their friends about, ‘oh my gosh this person retook their BeReal this many times and I only did it this many times can you believe it?’” - P12

“Realness” Only at the Surface-Level

“I feel like my energetic style or my talkative style probably isn't expressed on BeReal because [in BeReal posts] I'm always doing my homework.” - P28

“It's just a picture, so I feel like I wouldn't really be able to learn anything new about [my friends]” - P15

DISCUSSION

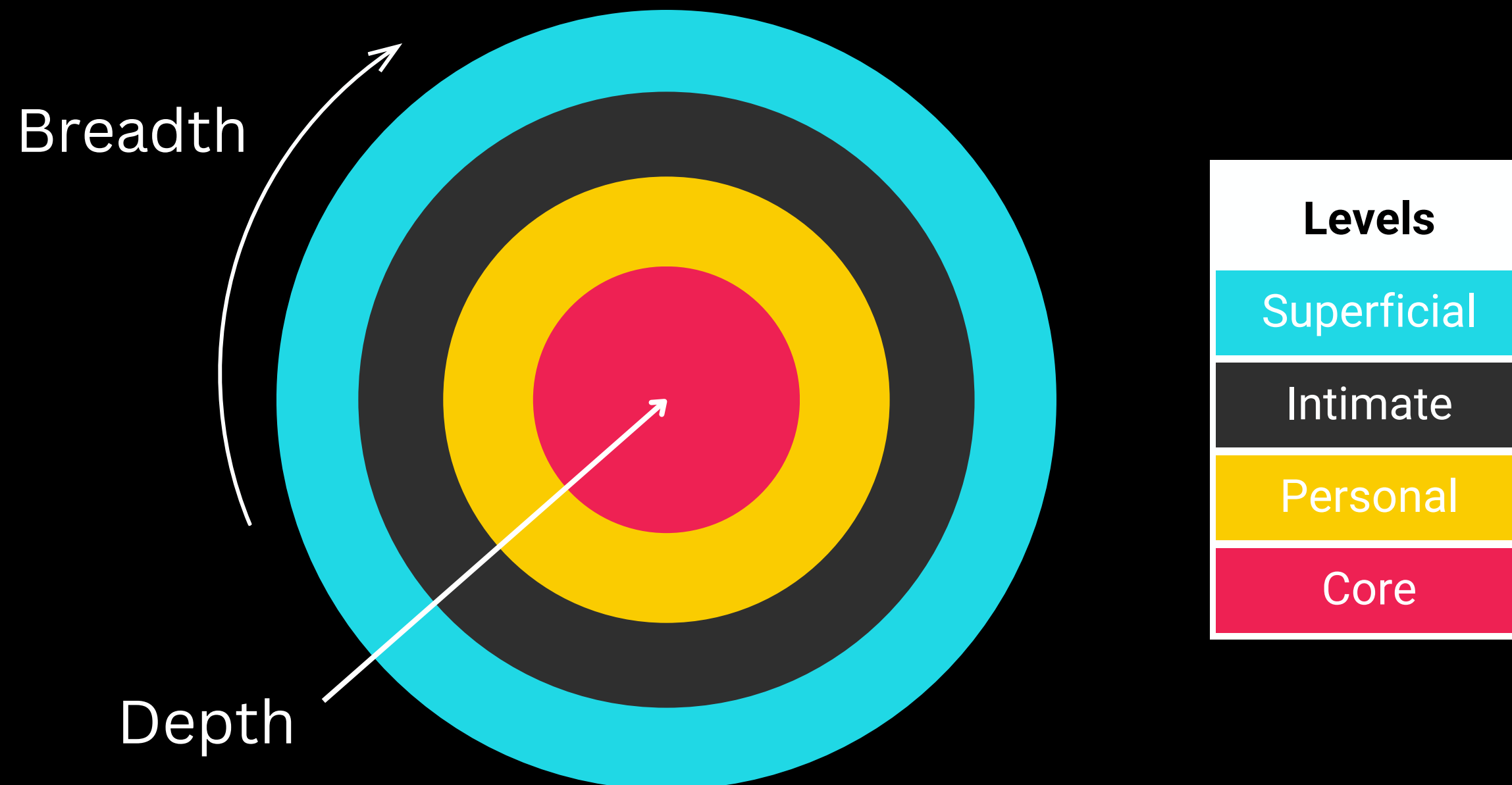
How might we rethink the nuances of designing for authentic sharing, given the **critical importance of peer relationship building** amongst teens?



Main Design Considerations



#1 Breadth and depth of self-disclosure matter



(Social Penetration Theory, Altman & Taylor) 23

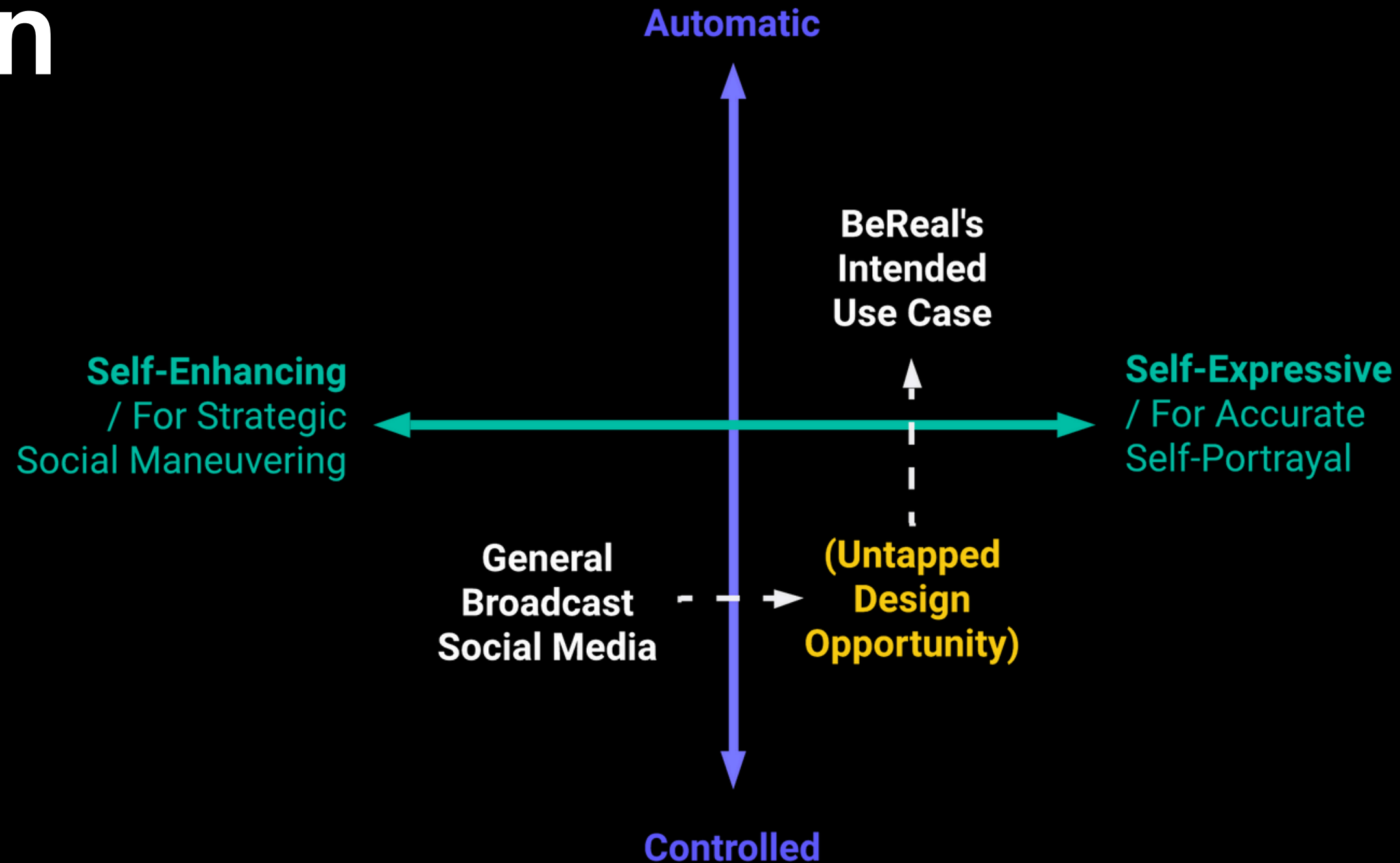
#2 Authenticity sometimes comes from curation

“the most important thing is that someone has to be comfortable with [sharing their BeReal posts]... if you’re uncomfortable with something, then you’re not being real, per se...”

*If you are holding a post and you choose to post later... I think to me [that] is authentic. That shows that this was something important to you... **I think it has to mean something to you first, to be authentic.**”*

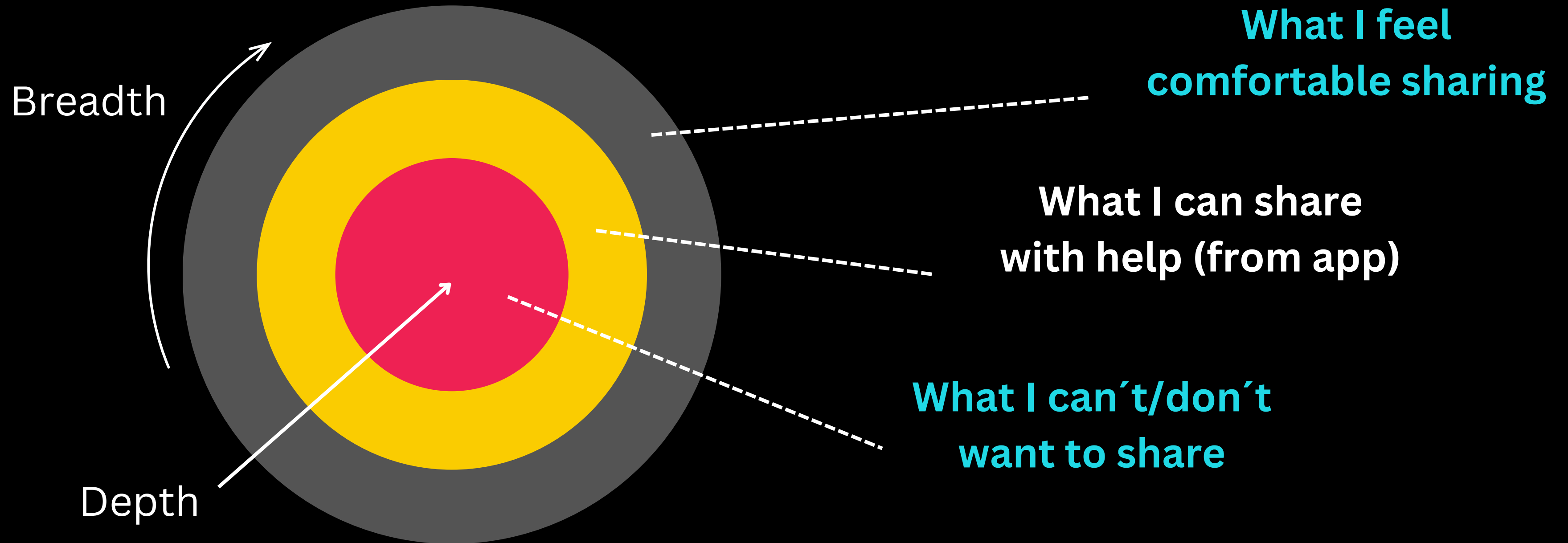
- P29

#2 Authenticity sometimes comes from curation



(The Social Media Self-Presentation Matrix;
please check out our paper for more information!)

#3 Stages in Friendship and Individual Differences Matter



(Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky)

+ QUANTIFYING ACTIONS MAY FOSTER COMPARISON.

Is BeReal “Real?”



Takeaways

Where BeReal was effective:

- scaffolding users toward authentic sharing by making each post more **low-stakes through shared vulnerability and frequent posting**
- supporting audience curation
- having a clear, focused design

However, unfiltered, spontaneous photo sharing can be

- 1) **too surface level** for meaningful social connections, and
- 2) **too intrusive** to be practical, depending on the individual

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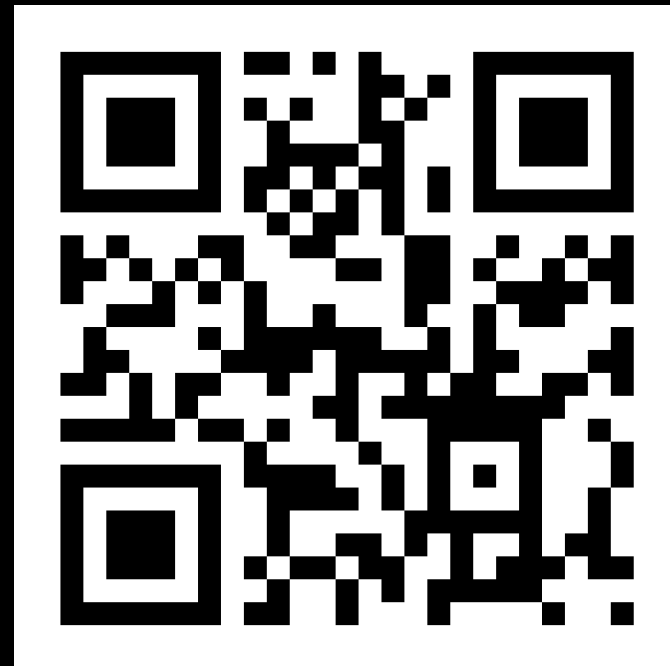
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Scan for **full paper**:



Scan for **contact**:



CSCW 2024

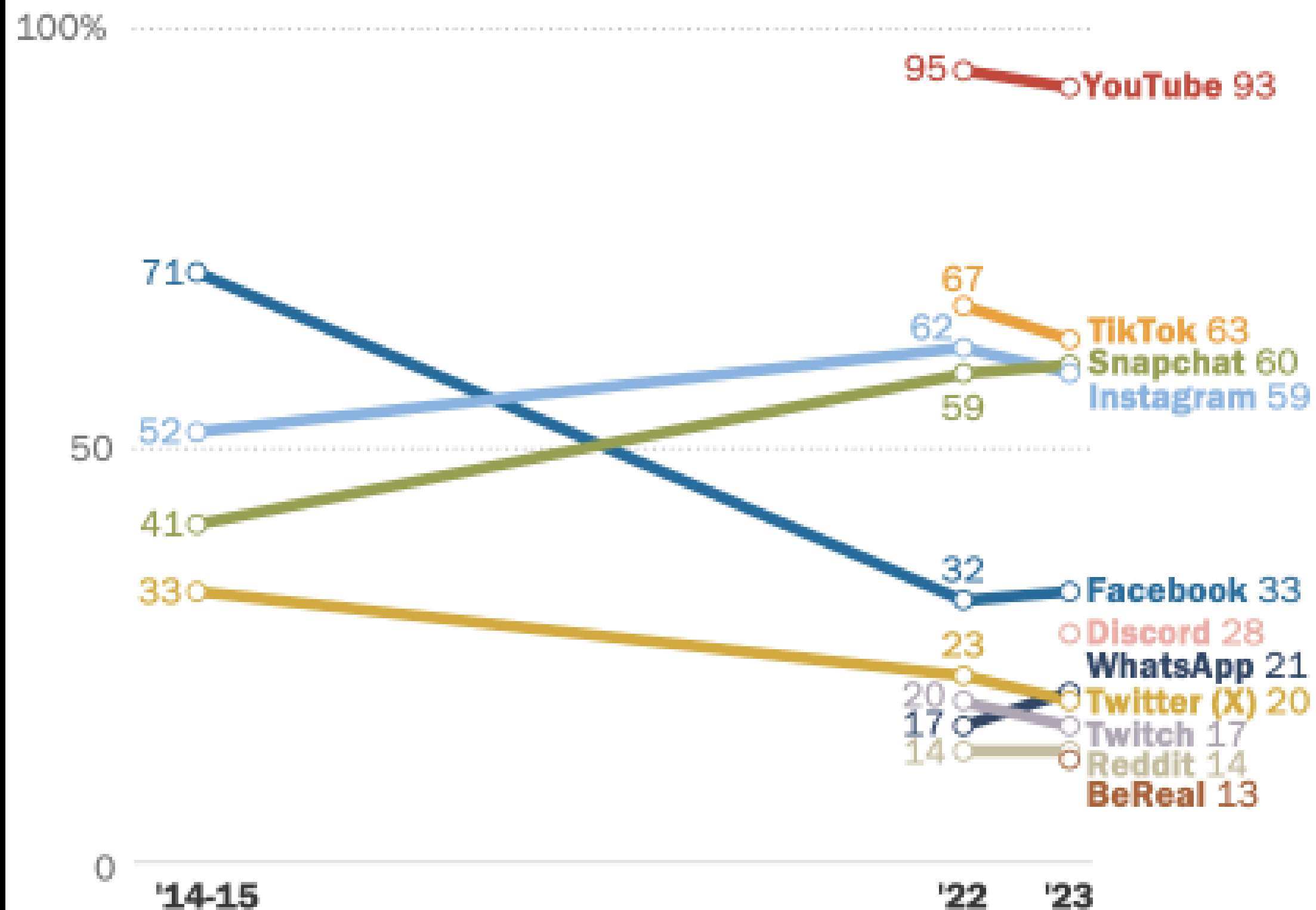
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% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they ever use the following apps or sites



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 26-Oct. 23, 2023.

"Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER