The Impact of Social Media on Adolescents

by

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Abstract

With the advancements of technology and smartphones, social media has become an important part of many individuals' lives. The impact of social media on adolescents has become a hot button issue for many different studies and works of academic writing. Social media offers something for everyone, both positive and negative. There is mixed evidence in the literature as to how adolescents handle the growing control that social media seems to have over their lives. The impacts of social media on adolescent constructed place, relationships and mental health, depends very much on the individual who accesses it. The effects of social media on individuals has many educational, developmental, and counseling implications are highlighted. Lastly, clinicians, counsellors, teachers, parents, and adolescents should work together on promoting healthier social media use. Additional longitudinal research as well as the creation and implementation of more school-based programs should be made a priority so as to further develop the accessible body of knowledge surrounding social media and how it impacts adolescents.

Keywords: Social media, adolescents, mental health, constructed place, relationships, novel experiences, traditional

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Adolescence is a turbulent time. The last 15 years have seen an increasingly worrying climb in the amount of anxious and depressive symptoms which correlates with the rise and popularity in social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. With the advent of such powerful social tools and constantly upgraded technology, it is not a surprise to find out that adolescents spend a large portion of their day online in one way or another. It has been found that up to 97% of adolescents use social media as of 2016 (Woods & Scott, 2016, as cited in O'Reilly et al., 2018), while a 2015 student of American teenagers found that 57% of US teens had started relationships online and 50% having reached out to someone on social media to let them know that they are interested in a romantic relationship (O'Reilly et al., 2018). The changing landscape of social media on adolescent identity and social skills is growing more obvious and apparent to the world at large. A 2018 U.K. study found "Online harassment, sleep hours, latency and disruption, self-esteem happiness with appearance and body weight satisfaction were all strongly associated with depressive symptom scores as were internalizing symptoms from earlier in adolescence for girls and boys" (Kelly et al., 2018, p. 63).

Since the rise of social media (Myspace, Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat etc.) there has been the creation of a fast-changing landscape as to how adolescents interact with their world, their relationships and their constructed space. In the beginning, the internet was a place that limited face-to-face contact, created social isolation, stress, depression and sleep deprivation. While this has been disproven to a point, specifically that as internet beginners learn the skills necessary to

navigate the pitfalls of the web, there are also many who are looking at the numbers and seeing a very worrying trend. Social media is very appealing to adolescents during this development period since they are susceptible to new opportunities and the risks of new technologies. An adolescent brain is more sensitive to social information, social rewards and concern over peer evaluation (Nesi, 2020). In reaction to this there has been a rise of anxious, depressed adolescents and a fearful increase in the fear of missing out (FoMO). Social media directly impacts adolescents' abilities to interact with the world and may have long term consequences on their abilities to manage their identities, their mental health, and personal interactions and relationships with others.

Statement of the Problem

Social media is an everchanging part of the online landscape that we have barely begun to scratch the surface of realizing the positive and negative impacts that it will have on adolescents. Being that it is so recent a phenomenon, there is a lack of longitudinal research as well as educational programming around how social media and the internet impacts adolescents. At this point, it is quite established in the literature that social media can be problematic for a variety of reasons (Nesi et al., 2018a), although there is a growing body of literature that states that social media has many positive uses and impacts as well (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014).

Since the inception of social media, there have been significant changes that have happened to our understanding of boundaries, privacy and the digital footprint that we are creating for ourselves. The change to traditional adolescence due to the internet and social media has shown that there is a distinct lack of research into how pervasive social media is on a teenage life and what kind of long-term consequences that it can have on the formation of identity, how we relate to our family, friends, and partners, as well as how it can lessen, create, or worsen

potential mental health concerns that may or may not already exist. To help prepare for this future, more research and educational programs are necessary to help mitigate some of the negative symptoms that we are seeing in teens today.

Purpose of the Paper

Social media has seemingly taken over the adolescent brain. It is difficult to ignore the impact that it has on people, more particularly, teenagers. The growing body of knowledge that exists around this topic shows that there are very big implications, both positive and negative, around the daily interaction with social media. As counsellors, teachers, administrators, parents and students, we cannot afford to ignore what has been happening when we interact with social media. By completing this research, I intend to share the potential impacts and concerns that should be raised when learning about social media and how it has changed how adolescents feel, how they think of each other and how they connect with each other.

The question that this paper aims to answer is what changes have occurred in constructed place, adolescent relationships, and mental health in correlation with the rise of internet and social media?

Significance of the Study

As an adult professional working five days a week with adolescents, I have seen the positive and negative side effects of the high use of social media. The advent of social media may have started off small, connecting adolescents with people they already knew but it has since grown to connect the world in its entirety. What started out as internet with singular use has become the world wide web that encompasses everything from medicine to pornography. The rules of the internet and social media are constantly changing, making this topic all the more pressing and important for those who see the impact that it has on the youth of today.

There are many stakeholders in the mystery of social media and adolescents. Parents, teachers, counsellors, administrators and even those who do not work with or live with adolescents on a daily basis. The literature review is the compilation and synthesis of academic material in a format that makes it potentially more accessible to a wider variety of people, to know what is happening in academia but also to know that it is being taken seriously in academic realms. The sharing of information around this topic makes responsible adults more knowledgeable on the topic and better able to face what is potentially happening in the world of youth today. It has the potential to be beneficial to a wide variety of individuals.

Potential implications for this capstone on counselling and education is that not only is the material relevant to today's world, but much of the research has also been done recently and is still relevant to what is happening in schools. This research is a steppingstone to bigger questions and more detailed research that could be done. Not only reading the research but potentially having student involvement in the research and managing how we communicate that with them. This capstone research also helps with the potential development and refinement of an academic curriculum program that could be constructed to help teachers, students and counsellors be able to understand the positive and negative risks that come with the use of the internet and social media. Communicating the results in this capstone will have shared value for anyone who works with youth, giving people a common vocabulary to use.

Self-Positioning Statement

In conducting the research for this project, I realized that I needed to reflect on how I must review the literature. I had to consider that there is a significant chance that my own experiences, perspectives, biases, and opinions might influence my ability to fully and accurately present the results. I had to take this very seriously since my biases have the potential to make

me look for things and interpret material in certain or specific ways. A person without my background or experiences might develop a different understanding of the literature.

I chose to study this topic since it is both an area of interest in my career and something that I have been witness to in my life. During my youth, I remember the emergence of the internet as a new tool for communication with MySpace, online chat rooms and the like. I remember seeing the emergence of current social media platforms and while I enjoyed participating in these platforms, I started to notice my mood after using social media, and how it was changing the way that people around me communicated with each other.

It was not difficult to notice that many of my friends of the same age experience similar reactions when they were teens. I have seen the rise of perceived social media addiction in peers, I have seen relationships start and end on social media and how many of my peers cannot seem to go anywhere without their phones or feeling the compulsive need to check the different platforms that they use. The dependence on likes to feel seen or adequate started to erode even the most confident peers.

As a secondary school teacher, all the behaviours and emotions that came with social media in my youth have started to show a growing impact on the youth of today. I see the struggles that students have with not being able to keep up with everything that everyone is doing, when they struggle to understand why their friends would post something that could be easily misunderstood by so many other students, and how their online reputation impacts their real-life reputations as well. All of these thoughts and reactions made me curious about whether social media might be more harmful than not.

This curiosity and knowledge of adolescents led me to continue my work in counselling youth. It is not difficult to see how intensely this age group experiences their lives and how

much support they need to get through it. I found myself more and more curious about how much social media impacts their day to day lives to better provide me with additional tools to be able to support them.

As I researched, I was mindful of the differences in opinion that I had with the different authors. While I did not always agree with the academic works I read, I recognized that I needed to pay attention to all the findings, not just the ones that supported my expectations. As I came across differing opinions, I made sure to document them the same as I did the others.

I also performed personal reflection to remind myself that not all the results that I come across might not align with my beliefs and expectations. My experiences with social media in my younger years does not always equate to the same experiences that my peers had or how adolescents are experiencing now. Individual experiences are an important part of learning about something new and I was reminded frequently that there are a great many possibilities as to what adolescents generally experience using social media.

While I remind myself that my interpretations of how my peers experienced social media, it may not be the reality of what was actually happening. I do not know the entirety of their experiences, just like I do not know the all-encompassing nature that social media has over adolescents now. I am aware that I must not generalize the adolescent experience.

Awareness of these biases and experiences made the research process more impartial and more open. Although my own experiences and curiosity added to my desire to complete this project, I needed to be open to the possibility that my research would not match up to what my expectations were. The conclusions might push against my hopes and expectations but that does not mean that this topic is any less valuable to me as a counsellor or to the research community as a whole.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The potential of literary sources surrounding the subject of social media and youth is varied, often being produced/researched for a multitude of reasons. Technological journals focus on how the media is changing while psychological journals focus on how social media is changing us both long term and short term. As much as different journals and authors will focus on different sides of the same coin, the results are often very similar or connected.

It is clear from the literature that social media has had a massive impact on the growth, development, and general social skills of adolescents today. As social media is so prevalent in today's world, research is also abundant in this area. Due to the ever-changing nature of this topic, it will likely continue to be a popular research topic and discussion, creating the want and need for more research in the future.

Social media is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as video). Since academic literature dealing with the topic is recent (being more prominent in the last 15 years or so), it is interesting to see the structure of how researchers and professionals approach this topic. Three major themes that can be found within the research with ease are; the ways that adolescents construct their presence online, how social media impacts their relationships online and offline and how adolescents or young adults interact with social media around their mental health.

Review of Research Literature

Using qualitative and quantitative academic journal articles, a view into the massively popular topic of adolescents and social media is attained. Three major themes will be discussed throughout the literature review. The first is adolescence in constructed place and social media which will look at the defining qualities in personal development as they relate to or have been changed through social media. The second is relationships and social media as they relate to friendships and relationships among teens. The third theme is the most controversial of the three, mental health and how it has been changed and/or impacted by social media, with a specific focus on depression and anxiety.

Constructed Place and Social Media

Allen et al. did a thorough investigation of the literature around constructed place or identity development in 2014. They looked at social media use and social connectedness in adolescents, and at both the positive and negative impacts that it could have on current and future adolescents. Allen et al. focused greatly on the sharing of information, establishing and maintaining positive self-images and expressing sexuality in terms of adolescent use of social media. They stated that the ease of which information is shared on social media could have a protective role in helping adolescents understand what it means to be themselves and create their unique identity. It could also have terribly negative impacts such as the exposure of private information, increased exposure to rumour and gossip (Allen et al., 2014).

Two major thoughts came out of this article. The first, that adolescents who communicated with their friends would have a more well-defined sense of self that would be consistent across several situations (in-person and online), and secondly, that while the adolescent brain was still developing and learning to master tasks like impulse control and

emotional regulation, sexual relationships and romantic relationships were often shared on social media to both celebration and acceptance but also hurtful and detrimental comments. Allen et al. also made mention in their conclusions and limitations that there was little information that would show us the long-term effects of social media usage on adolescent development. They suggested the creation of several well-designed longitudinal studies to discover this information.

Shapiro and Margolin looked at a variety of subjects that surrounded the use of social networking sites and adolescent development in 2014. Their literature review focused on adolescent social development and identity development. While they focused on their two main subjects, notes were made around cyber-bullying, parent-child relations, internet addiction, sleep disturbance and academic disturbances and how each of these subjects could easily become their own reviews.

According to the article, social networking sites had multiple ways of fostering identity development in adolescents. The first was that social networking sites gave opportunity for self-disclosure and in some cases required self-disclosure which played a role in adolescent development. How adolescents identified themselves, the feedback they received for their decisions and how they viewed their own profile or identity in comparison to others were potential factors in individual identity. The second is that the internet and social networking sites made it possible for adolescents to come together with likeminded individuals when opportunities for face-to-face interactions were not possible. The internet made it possible for them to expand and explore their ideas and interests by communicating with others from more diverse backgrounds (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014).

Shapiro and Margolin discussed the sharing of personally relevant information and receiving feedback as being central to identity formation. Social networking sites took this

process and put it on the public stage. Some adolescents used social media to share personal information about upcoming events, birthdays, information about relationship status and the like to keep people informed on their lives, while others felt that social media was a sort of dress rehearsal for potential face-to-face disclosure. Adolescents were able to control the narrative and information that they shared through social networking profiles. Not only were they able to control the information but they were also able to alter of highlight different aspects of themselves that were expressed.

While they may be able to control the narrative, Shapiro and Margolin talked about how adolescents were very likely to engage in social comparison of positive or negative fashions and how they could have a strong impact on their self-esteem. Many types of comparison exist such as emotional comparison where adolescents will feel happier or unhappy after looking at other peoples' profiles. Another type of comparison was physical attractiveness, with female adolescents reporting negative body image after looking at perceived beautiful versus less attractive pictures in social networking profiles. Accomplishment is another point of online comparison, with males who viewed successful male profiles felt that they were further from their ideal futures (Hafercamp & Kramer, 2011 as cited in Shapiro and Margolin, 2014).

Social networking sites offered adolescents the opportunity to develop their sense of selves through their relationships with others and the connections that they made with peers and other members of their community. Some adolescents liked to learn about people and relationships that are beyond the comfort of their daily interactions. Some adolescents were disenfranchised in their face-to-face interactions or might seek out the anonymity of those who they might not interact with on a daily basis.

Shapiro and Margolin made special mention of adolescents who were ethnic minorities and sexual minorities in that social networking sites offered ways in which to engage with people who have similar backgrounds and provided a bridge beyond the local community. Ethnic minority individuals tended to highlight their culture in their self-disclosures and self-narratives and offered opportunities for more positive self-portraits which may have contributed to more positive self-concept (Grasmuck et al., 2009, as cited in Shapiro and Margolin, 2014). LGBTQ+ adolescents found social networking sites to be useful when expressing their sexual orientation more comfortably than in-person and connected with their peers. There was also a note made around social networking sites being a potential tool to be able to reach LGBTQ+ youth who might be at risk for self-harm or suicide.

In 2018, Nesi et al. published what they would refer to as the transformation framework. According to the authors, a great amount of the previous work on peer experiences in the age of social media followed the mirroring framework, which explained that the experiences that adolescents were having are based on, or reflected, their offline experiences. This line of thinking implied that adolescents' online behaviours and peer interactions were the same as those performed offline, simply in a new environment. With this as a primary framework though, too little attention was being paid to the differences between online and offline environments. The transformation framework did not make claims labelling things as positive, negative or neutral, but rather it suggested that adolescents' peer experiences are fundamentally different in the context of social media. According to this framework, they addressed five different conceptual categories including changing the frequency or immediacy of experiences, amplifying experiences, altering the qualitative nature of interactions, offering new opportunities for compensatory behaviour and creating all new behaviours (Nesi et al., 2018a).

Asynchronicity played an important part of the traditional written communication (which was more common in social media than oral communication). Social media varied the amount of time that passes between parts of a conversation. With video communication tools, there was a high amount of synchronicity which was similar to in-person interactions, whereas email had high levels of asynchronicity, allowing for more time to read and construct responses. Chat and instant messages, had been argued to be both synchronous and asynchronous since they could be both instantaneous but also offered a certain amount of revision and rehearsability. Due to asynchonicity, adolescents could be engaged in multiple conversations with peers simultaneously and still be able to work on careful self-presentation within messages and photographs (Nesi et al., 2018a).

Permanence was another important aspect that has started changing with the rise of social media and its implications on adolescents in the future. Some adolescents were aware of the degree of permanence before posting written, visual or video content. On some social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, a post could be easily found years later with a simple search. Other platforms such as Snapchat who claimed that content disappeared soon after being shared did not seem to be permanent in their original forms, although it could be easily captured and copied by peers of followers through screenshots or photographs. This is important since adolescents were more likely to post or share content impulsively and without thought to the long-term consequences that might come with it.

Publicness and availability were also a big part of the framework, in that adolescents were now able to communicate with public audiences of peers, adults and even strangers in ways that were not available to them offline. The publicness of social media could create an actual audience that fulfilled an egocentric void that often happened during adolescence. The access

and availability of social media made it very appealing to adolescents when peer interactions became increasingly desired and central to one's sense of self (Hartup, 1996, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018a). A consequence of availability was the speed which adolescents can access and share content on social media.

Cue absence was an important part of the transformation framework and was described the lack of interpersonal cues such as vocal tone, physical touch, gestures, and facial expression. Although according to Nesi et al., previous scholars emphasized the anonymity of social media, there was a growing number who were taking a more nuanced approach. Valkenberg and Pewter (2011) for example, differentiated between "source anonymity", where the communicator was unknown and "audiovisual anonymity", where visual or auditory cues might be lacking or reduced (Nesi et al., 2018a).

Quantifiability was the extent to which social media allowed for numerical social metrics in a way that could never been seen offline. It was easily noted that adolescents were highly aware of and influenced by the metrics of social media. Visualness, something that had not been previously noted in prior research, was something that Nesi et al. stated was to include the capability of social media to allow for a greater emphasis on visually pleasing, shocking, or humorous photograph compositions, as well as the application of appearance enhancing filters (Nesi et al., 2018a). When mixed with the importance of social media metrics, it was easy to see how adolescents were allowing social media to permanently change the way in which they related to each other via social media.

Each of the previous pieces of the transformation framework impacted the way that adolescents interacted with each other due to social media. Asynchronicity and cue absence in social media might have altered the qualitative nature of communication processes, as well as the

quality of relationships and social support. Availability, publicness and cue absence in social media could create new friendship opportunities for adolescents, that might have been difficult or impossible offline. Availability, publicness, and permanence of social media might have also increased the frequency and immediacy of receiving social support, which then enhanced friendship quality. Publicness, permanence, and availability might have also amplified expectations and demands within a relationship such as relational maintenance and always feeling tethered to one's device. Availability might have changed the adolescent friendship experience through expectations of constant accessibility, but the publicness and permanence of it could create new and novel friendship behaviours, most notably the quantifiable public categorization into "top friends" or "best friends" lists, not finding yourself in these lists has had a tendency to cause drama within different relationships. While this was very important especially in romantic relationships, the quantifiable nature of social media made it more likely to occur within all adolescent relationships, therefore having been critical to constructed space in adolescent life.

According to Nesi et al. in a follow up article, the transformation framework noted previously was applied to three domains of peer relations and adolescent development: peer victimization, peer status and peer influence due to social media's potential way in shaping these group-based peer processes. Their approach was not to look only at the online realm but to compare as well to the offline realm of influence.

With the rise of adolescent interactions happening online, a growing interest had begun to appear in that peer victimization had not only continued in this new context but that it had also changed in how it was perceived. Online victimization (cyberbullying, cyber aggression or

cyber victimization) had captured the general public's attention through a variety of outlets, but more specifically around teen suicide.

Victimization changed how an adolescent would view themselves for the long term and how they interacted with their environments. The availability of social media meant that adolescents could never really escape victimization, leading to feelings of powerlessness (Dooley et al., 2009, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). Traditional bullying or victimization experiences occurred during school hours, whereas cyberbullying was more like to happen outside of school. This has led to the conclusion that while the home may have once been a safe space or sanctuary from bullying, the availability of social media meant that this was no longer the case.

Many things transformed victimization in the digital age. Social media might have also changed the experiences that victimization creates, being that it could be perceived to be harsher and more uncontrollable by victims and more rewarding to perpetrators. Due to the asynchronicity and cue absence of social media, it could also encourage harsher forms of victimization, giving people the permission to be able to say or do things that they would not likely say in the offline world. Due to the lack of immediate feedback, perpetrators might engage in more extreme or aggressive forms of victimization. Many adolescents saw entertainment as a key motivator for cyberbullies, who may lack concern about their actions due to a lack of empathy inducing cues from victims (Smith et al., 2008, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). The victim might experience a brand-new set of qualitative experiences with greater feelings of hopelessness and fear, knowing that anyone could potentially be the perpetrator.

New behaviours were also starting to appear in relation to victimization experiences. The lack of identity sharing on social media has made it more likely for there to be interpersonal conflict or drama, which could be related to cyber victimization. According to a study done by

Marwick and Boyd, motivations that adolescents gave for engaging in social media conflict were that it created entertainment, attention and heightened impact. It could be noted that adolescents publicly shared disagreements or aired grievances to get attention or support. Peers who would not normally be involved in the situation could then weigh in and take sides, therefore creating more conflict or drama. Note that the publicness of these events, and the availability of social media made this more impactful and devastating for the victim (Nesi et al., 2018b).

Adolescents put a great deal of themselves online, often flirting with a complete lack of privacy in their profiles to garner attention and support. New areas of cyber victimization were completely novel to the online environment, never having been seen in the offline version. Impersonation of an individual on social media to gain information or post damaging messages (called hacking by some) or publicly sharing photographs or messages that had been shared privately between the victim and perpetrator were novel to social media. Using the transformation framework, cue absence and permanence allowed for the impersonation of a victim, while the availability and publicness of social media allowed for the information to be shared quickly and with a large audience.

Traditional bullying could create lasting harm, but the experience of it was often temporary. On the majority of social media sites though, content was permanently on display, even the cyberbullying which was available indefinitely. Even social media sites that allowed individuals to delete unwanted material from their own profiles, content was often rapidly spread and permanently made available through other channels, profiles, or sites. Further complicating adolescent dynamics, a peer or stranger could digitally alter a teen's text or photo before sharing it, thereby creating false but permanent content that could be both embarrassing and harmful (White et al., 2016 as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). According to a variety of studies, it was

suggested that cyber victimization was viewed as more severe than traditional victimization, noted to be around the publicness, and anonymity, but not the method or medium (Sticca and Perren, 2013, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b).

Not only had the victim vs. perpetrator piece of victimization changed, but the bystander intervention had also shifted along with the shift to cyber victimization. The unique characteristic of a large audience of peers and the quantifiable number of likes or other indications made the role of bystander complex. On one hand, the number of bystanders having been so large meant that there were a larger number of individuals who could intervene, on the other hand, there was a sense of anonymity that decreased each bystander's likelihood of intervention.

While cyber victimization was a pressing issue, peer status was known to be have been of significant importance on adolescent adjustment and development. There were two types of peer status; likeability and peer-perceived popularity. The second, peer perceived popularity, was especially important during adolescence, when young people were particularly influenced by peer feedback and status (Harter et al., 1996 as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). Social media made adolescents experience heightened awareness of their own and others' popularity, as well as concerns about their own status among peers. The quantifiability of social media's likes and views made for easy counting and comparison. The publicness and availability also created opportunities to view the status indicators of a wide variety of their peers, with cue absence providing the invisibility cloak from which to view their high-status peers. (Marwick, 2012, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). Another complexity was the potential for any one user to gather thousands or millions of followers, although it was uncommon, the possibility encouraged

practices of self-branding or attracting attention through the use or creation of viral trends or the use of consumer brand techniques.

With an amplified importance on the possibilities for status and rejection, demands around peer relationships might also be amplified. Young people felt tethered or tied to their phones so that they could deal with the pressure of managing social connections and keep up with relationships. In addition to this, there could also be pressure to stay in the loop with what people were doing. Adolescents were engaging in increased peer surveillance and monitoring behaviours so they didn't miss out on any social information, events, or gossip.

The visualness of many social media platforms had a tendency to amplify the social comparison that focused on physical appearance, particularly among girls. Many adolescents engaged in appearance-based upward comparisons with popular peers and felt the need to match the appearance standards in order to maintain their own status. Adolescent girls were highly aware of their peers' appearances in photographs and videos, some might have used the quantifiable metrics as measures of comparison for their own attractiveness (Chua and Chang, 2016, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b). Appearance comparisons might have had a unique impact on negative outcomes, including appearance dissatisfaction and negative mood. Where some photographs or posts could increase a person's perceived attractiveness, moving away from socially acceptable online behaviour might have negative repercussions for an adolescent's status.

Connection between adolescents were sometimes haphazard. With the advent of social media and studies done around how adolescents connect with each other, it has been noted that popular adolescents have opportunities to connect with peers and amplify their own high social status. Low or rejected youth have more compensatory opportunities to communicate more

anonymously and safely. Cue absence and asynchronicity of social media platforms made them safer and more comfortable. Adolescents with interpersonal difficulties found that social media allowed for more controllability over what, when, and how they communicated and that it allowed for greater responsiveness from those they communicated with. This also led adolescents to engage in higher-level disclosure, in that adolescents who suffered from anxiety found it easier to communicate about secrets and feelings online (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007, as cited in Nesi et al., 2018b).

Identity development at the adolescent stage involved more than just peer approval or connection. Peer influence played a big part in the exploration of identity and novel behaviours. Research showed that adolescents tended to choose friends who were like themselves in behaviour and attitude (Nesi et al., 2018b). In terms of social media, the features of it might amplify the speed, volume and scale with which peer influence could happen. The publicness of social media increased the size of the network that materials were shared with, the availability of it allowed the material to be accessed anywhere at any time and with the permanence to be accessed repeatedly and shared over an extended period of time. A great deal of the peer influence conversation went towards the focus on risky behaviours but it should be noted that the same processes that exist could be used to aid in the spread of health promotion and risk prevention behaviours.

Adolescent Relationships and the Impact of Social Media

Adolescence was often considered to be a pivotal time in relationship and identity building, as young people explored who they wanted to be in the world and the different ways to present themselves. Due to the increasing use of internet applications such as social media, and video games, technology-based forms of communication and smartphones had become an

essential part of the everyday lives of adolescents. Technology-based forms of communication had changed the methods that adolescents used to interact with each other. Whether through the creation and maintenance of friendships, or through the types of connections held in a romantic relationship, how we interacted with each other was very different than how it used to be.

A Pew Research study done in 2015 looked very closely at the realm of teens (between the ages of 13 to 17), technology and friendships and the different roles that video games, social media and mobile phones played in how teens met and interacted with each other. Information was gathered through in-person focus groups, online focus groups and online surveys.

The report was broken into multiple chapters, the first being around the role of digital technology in teen friendships. Findings in this area showed that boys were more likely to make friends online than girls, even more specifically, older teens were more likely to have made friends online than younger teens. In some cases, teens maintained the digital friendship while others met offline and continued their friendship there. Different platforms lent themselves to helping teens make friends more easily. This could be seen in those who played online games. Among those who played games online, 74% have made friends online and 37% have made more than five friends online. Social media users were also well known for making friends online, but was often correlated with making a large number of friends online (Lenhart et al., 2015). For girls, social media sites were the method of choice for meeting friends online. Boys tended to make more friends through gaming than through social media. The report stated that while many teens made friends with people online, only 20% of them had actually met their online friends in person.

While teens had taken to social media like a fish to water, text messaging was still the dominant form of communication for them. Virtually all teenagers say that they spent time with

friends in person outside of school but not always on a daily basis, about 19% of the teens

surveyed said that they called their friends every day, while more than 55% said that they texted

their friends on a daily basis, making it the most popular option for daily communication

(Lenhart et al., 2015). In terms of texting, girls were significantly more likely to say that texting

was their first choice in communicating with their closest friend.

The second chapter in the study dealt with how teens stayed in touch with their closest

friends. For the purposes of this study, closest friend was defined as someone that you could talk

to about things that were really important to you, who was not your girlfriend or boyfriend.

When looking at where teenagers spent time with their friends, the top location would naturally

have been at school. Other than school though, 58% of teens said that they spent time at

someone's house while more than half (55%) spent time with their closest friend online, like

playing video games or interacting on social media (Lenhart et al., 2015). While it does not

mean that a teen's best friend was an online friend, it suggested that there was a certain comfort

with interacting with friends and peers in an online space.

The third chapter considered the importance of video games as key elements in

friendships for many boys. Video games, for many teenagers was not simply entertaining media,

it offered lots of opportunities for socializing for teens with new friends and old. Many teens

played video games daily as part of in-person friendships, while over 50% played with people

that they do not consider to be friends. While many played games to be able to maintain

relationships with those that they knew in-person, some teens noted that they enjoyed playing

with people who were not their friends. For some it was the chance to get to know someone, for

others it was the unknown competitive aspect that drove them to seek out new people to play

with. Playing video games could instigate a wide range of emotions and reactions. Emotions could range from happy and relaxed to angry and frustrated.

The final chapter in the Pew Research Center's study spoke specifically to social media and its connection with friendships. Social media in this study was credited with being a critical platform for making and staying in touch with friends. Armed with this information and the frequency in which teens use social media, it was not surprising that teens reported that social media made them feel more connected to their friends' feelings and to information about what was going on in their friends' lives, girls having felt this more acutely than boys. While connection was very important to teens, it was also noted in the study that teens reported that sometimes that they felt too connected to their peers and that 88% of participants felt that people shared too much information about themselves on social media. Interestingly enough, teens from rural areas were more likely to strongly agree that people shared too much about themselves on social media than their urban counterparts (Lenhart et al., 2015).

An important facet of teenagers and social media use was the number of teens that used social media support from friends to get them through tough times. Girls were slightly more likely to report receiving support on social media than boys. While support was one part of the social media puzzle, one must look at the negative side effects as well, or the negative feelings from viewing social media. According to the Pew Research study, the same positive sharing and support that was given on social media could also give way to negative comments, revealing events and activities to which teens weren't invited and ultimately could lead to negative comparisons between their lives and the lives of those they were connected with on social media. Social media exposed teens to a great deal of information about the lives of their friends, with a fair number of profiles offering the highlight reel of a person's individual life, rather than a full

picture of the ups and downs that they would have to handle. While some youth felt worse about their own lives through social media viewing, it was with some surprise that the majority of teens did not report feeling badly about their lives based on what they saw on these platforms. About 78% of teens did not feel worse about their own lives, while 21% of teens said that they did (Lenhart et al., 2015).

Eleuteri et al.'s 2017 research stated that adolescence was considered a pivotal time where young people explored different ways to present themselves and exist in the world. Young people actively searched for their role, took time to contemplate their strengths and weaknesses and learned how to make meaning of the lives and experiences. Adolescence was a time characterized by hit and miss decision making capabilities, and risky behaviours.   This was also a phase of increased emotional reactivity, where the social environment was changing at an ever-increasing pace.

Adolescents had many pieces working inside the brain when it came to making good decisions and building good relationships. These pieces included cognitive, psychological, social, cultural, and societal factors. It could be suggested that adolescents found it more difficult to control impulsive thoughts, decisions, and behaviours if they were with their peers or if high emotions were involved. As adolescents aged, so did their brains, therefore gaining control over their cognitive and emotional regulation (Eleuteri et al., 2017).

When looking at adolescence as a period of development, it should be noted that there were two fundamentals to this time; relationships and socialization. With the popularity of the Internet and social media, there were many accessible ways to discover and explore different relationships and human sexuality without restrictive standards.

Speaking specifically concerning online sexual activities, some scholars hypothesized that specific adolescent traits such as lack of control and sensation-seeking facilitated the risky use of cybersex and other online sexual activities because adolescents do not have enough understanding and development to distinguish from healthy and unhealthy relationships and sexual relationships (Freeman-Longo, 2000, as cited in Eleuteri et al., 2017). Interactions in cyberspace often lowered inhibitions, accelerated intimacy and produced an identity that was not always in line with one's real self. Adolescents often disclosed and shared far more quickly when using digital communication, therefore they often experienced an accelerated process of intimacy.

Communication has changed drastically with the rise of electronic media technologies. Teens often felt less close to their instant messaging partners than to their partners in phone or face-to-face interactions. Teens also found instant messaging less enjoyable than, but just as supportive as, computer or face-to-face interactions (Lengacher, 2015; Tang & Hew, 2017, as cited in Eleuteri et al., 2017). Teens had fully embraced instant messaging, even with its limitations, because it satisfied two important needs in adolescents. The first was connecting with peers, the second, was enhancing one's group identity. Both happened through enabling teens to join peers or crowds online and offline without strict social rules. By changing the way that teenagers interacted with each other, it had given those who were distant, friends or couples, or complete strangers, the opportunity to converse in ways that could have been seen as risky or disadvantageous.

Not only has social media and technological communication impacted the individual adolescent, it also impacted the family dynamic and relationship as well. It has become more and more difficult to control and relate to adolescents who are closed and evasive about their

leisure time management. Hikikomori syndrome was a Japan specific event that saw a decrease in school performance and attendance, less discussion and disclosure with family members, emotional distance, and sleep problems (De Luca, 2017, as cited in Eleuteri et al., 2017). With this fugue-state, their identity is fragmented, but they had difficulty becoming independent and lost a sense of connecting to their own life systems.

In the past, teenagers had to include their family, peers, and school in their developmental process. In the present and future, cyberspace must also be included in the developmental process, where it could be more difficult to find oneself and where there is risk of losing oneself as well. Social media also gave us the impression that we have an audience, although with the lack of privacy that an audience brings, it has the potential to break the boundaries between teens and others, even if the relationships were already more superficial and less intimate.

Social networks have become more and more like the real world, often using the same networks to connect with in-person friends and family as you would strangers on the other side of the world. With the lack of boundaries between the real world and cyberspace, sexting had become one of the modern ways for teenagers to experiment with identity, specifically sexual identity. There were mixed opinions on whether adolescents agreed that it was acceptable to send or receive pictures of themselves or others, whether they should be the one to send pictures first, respond to the pictures or to send pictures at all. One important fact that was noted in Eleuteri et al.'s research was that adolescents felt that sexting could lead to a great many legal implications around sexting which included but was not limited to cyberstalking, child pornography charges, sexual coercion, cyberbullying, and sexual violence. Technology and social networks had also provided new ways for sexually aggressive behaviours like revenge pornography and grooming to take place in an almost insane rate. Sexual relationships that

occurred through social networking sites were never private. Often pictures shared between two individuals had the potential to cause great trouble if the relationship ended or the account was shared or hacked.

In a 2016 study by Nesi, Widman, Choukas-Bradley and Prinstein, 487 participants were asked to complete two different measures. The first measure was the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ; Buhrmester et al., 1988, as cited in Nesi et al., 2016) to measure interpersonal competencies within romantic relationships, and the second, a pilot sample and focus group created measure using a 9-point scale to measure the proportion of technology-based versus traditional communication with a partner. Information was gathered after informed assent was given. Surveys were administered in classrooms via computer-assisted self-interviews. All points were measured once a year over two years.

The purpose of this study was to gather information around the potential gender differences and the role of technology in the development of interpersonal competencies. Long-standing work indicated that relationship skills differed between genders, with girls reporting higher levels of intimacy, self-disclosure, and positive conflict-resolution strategies within friendships beginning in childhood. Therefore, it could be assumed that girls might then enter romantic relationships better prepared for intimacy and conflict (Maccoby, 1998, as cited in Nesi et al., 2016). Due to this previous study, it could also be assumed that the rise in technology-based communication could be more detrimental to boys' development of romantic relationship competencies, as girls might have already developed stronger relationship skills through childhood friendships. The study hypothesized that greater levels of technology-based communication (e.g., text, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) versus traditional forms of communication (e.g., face-to-face or phone calls) would be negatively associated with

interpersonal competencies over time. It was also hypothesized that this association would be stronger in boys.

The results of the study (noted in the article to be preliminary at the time) suggested that adolescents who engaged in significantly more technology-based communication with partners exhibited lower levels of interpersonal competencies (negative assertion and conflict management) within romantic relationships; this association was somewhat stronger for boys. These findings are also in line with the idea that the more technology-based communication you use, the less satisfaction, and higher avoidance there would be in young adults' romantic relationships.

The study found that both girls and boys had similar patterns of results, technology-based communication significantly predicted deficits in conflict management for boys though. Based on previous childhood experiences, it could be assumed that girls entered romantic relationships better equipped with interpersonal skills. Romantic relationships for boys might provide a unique experience where they could develop these skills. Conflict management could be developed specifically since romantic relationships provided specific context for boys to develop compromise strategies, which was a departure from the more confrontational strategies that were common with male same-sex friendships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011, as cited in Nesi et al., 2016).

The article listed many limitations and future areas of research in their conclusions. Many of the recommendations suggested that a variety of social competencies be investigated over longer periods of time. Other suggestions spoke about investigating the different types of romantic relationships of varying duration, intimacy, as well as friendships. There were also recommendations to look at researching technology-based communication among adolescents

with different in-person access to peers with rural vs. urban environments being given as an example.

Savci and Aysan discovered that problematic internet use and social media use by socially anxious adolescents had both positive and negative effects on peer relations and social connectedness. Their study of 991 adolescents concluded that internet addiction (also including social media and instant messaging) caused the social functioning of individuals to deteriorate and that they were then isolated from the social point of view. It was also noted that socially anxious individuals tended to be afraid and avoided their normal social environments and situations, making it difficult for them to interact with their peers. They tended to see online environments as more secure and were less afraid of being negatively judged on the internet or on social media. Socially anxious adolescents were often lonely due to their fear and avoidance behaviours in social environments, therefore they turned to online environments to satisfy their sense of loneliness. Real world social opportunities offered the opportunity of positive peer relationships and that facilitated the solving of their loneliness and increase their sense of belonging, emotional closeness and social support (Savci & Aysan, 2019).

Savci and Aysan noted that there are both positives and negatives to the internet and social media. It had the potential to positively strengthen friendship relationships and allowed new social networks to develop. It also had the potential to negatively impact social connectedness, while the internet and social media facilitated social communication and information access, online environments lacked real interpersonal relationships.

With the rise of social networking sites and new technological communication devices, everyday behaviours had started to shift and changed to reflect the new ways of communication. Leaving people 'on read' because you were annoyed or wanted to teach them a lesson, blocking

a previous romantic partner or unfollowing someone's social media profile because you did not agree with what they were posting, has now become the new norm for adolescents to try to navigate (Savci & Aysan, 2019).

Balta et al. conducted an interesting study in Turkey that looked specifically at "phubbing" which was an emerging phenomenon concerning smart phone use. Phubbing derives from the words "phone" and "snubbing" and referred to individuals checking their smartphone in the middle of real-life conversations and escaping from interpersonal communication (Karadag et al., 2015, as cited in Balta et al., 2020). It was often considered to be disrespectful behaviour towards others and led to damage in real-life relationships. It could also have an indirect impact on life satisfaction and depression via relationship satisfaction (Balta et al., 2020).

According to Balta et al., gender had been shown to be a moderating variable with females engaging with phubbing more so than males and that phubbing could become more of a social norm as time goes on. Also, phubbing had been assumed and speculated to come from fear of missing out (FoMO), although there was no empirical evidence to support this claim.

Using 423 Instagram users between the ages of 12-21 years old, Balta et al. looked to find out where phubbing came from and how it would impact young people. The only inclusion criterion to enter the study was that the participants had to have an active Instagram account. Many measures were used such as the Social Media Use Questionnaire (SMUQ) (Xanidia and Brignell, 2016, as cited in Balta et al., 2020), the Fear of Missing out Scale (FoMOS) (Wegmann et al., 2017, as cited in Balta et al., 2020), The Phubbing Scale (TPS) (Karadag et al., 2015 as cited in Balta et al., 2020), and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Short Form (STAI-6) (Marteau and Bekker, 1992, as cited in Balta et al., 2020).

The study variables differed significantly between female and male adolescents and emerging adults. Females had higher levels of phubbing, problematic Instagram use, trait-FoMO, neuroticism and trait anxiety scores compared to males. Specific notice was given to the unstable and impatient nature of neurotics that might have led them to get angry quickly and perceive life negatively. This might put them at heightened risk of experiencing problematic real-life relationships and becoming more dependent on excessive online use. According to Kircaburun and Griffiths (2018), Instagram is a great fit for people to spend excessive amounts of time looking at a constant flow of photos and videos (as cited in Balta et al., 2020).

Adolescent Mental Health and Social Media

Social media had taken over the world since the late 90's. It was where people turned to stay in touch with friends and family, to make money by running businesses or share information with the world. Everyone had their own reasons to participate in the practice and upkeep of social media. Many generations (Generation X and elder millennials) grew up in the advent of the digital age. Their childhood was a mix of outside playtime and MySpace, the implications of the rising global connectivity going unrecognized for some time.

In the last fifteen years, there had been a major uptick and recognition globally that social media had been having a major impact on the youth of today. There was a great need to gain a better understanding of the impact of social media on adolescents' well-being with the simultaneous use of social media and the increase in mental health problems. According to the World Health Organization, it was reported that 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide experienced mental health problems (2017, as cited in Keles et al., 2020). It was estimated that 50% of all mental disorders were established between the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 18 (Kessler et al., 2007; Kim-Cohen et al., 2003, as cited in Keles et al., 2020). The most common

disorders were generalized anxiety disorder and depression (Mental Health Foundation, 2018; Stansfeld et al., 2016, as cited in Keles et al., 2020).

The term 'social media' referred to the variety of internet-based networks that gave users the opportunity to interact with others, verbally and visually (Carr & Hayes, 2015, as cited in Keles et al., 2020). According to the Pew Research Centre (2015), at least 92% of teenagers were active on social media, 13-17 year olds were found to be the heaviest users of social media. 87% of adolescents who used social media had access to a computer, while 58% used a tablet device. Seventy-five percent of adolescents aged 15 to 17 used a smartphone while 68% of those aged 13 to 14 used one (Lenhart et al., 2015). These statistics might have drastically changed in the age of COVID; it could be reasonably assumed that adolescents have taken a more active role in social media and access it whenever possible.

Problematic behaviours involving social media and the internet are often described as addiction and some activity in younger people could be perceived as abnormal. Social norms that now exist such as selfies and influencers would originally have been seen as narcissistic in their inception (Mccrae et al., 2017). While we looked for a link between social media and mental health problems, it was not as straightforward as we would like. There were often many contributing factors such as impaired sleep and sedentary behaviour which could raise the risk of health problems (Iannotti et al., 2009). Social media could be problematic, but there could also be positive factors.

Emotional regulation served as a psychological variable that potentially fueled varying trajectories between psychologically and non-psychologically healthy people in the "rich get richer, poor get poorer model" (Elhai et al., 2018). This model explained that people with increased resources (economic, health, social capital etc.) were better able to acquire more of

these resources. Those without these resources or reduced amount were trapped in a vicious cycle where they struggled to obtain the same resources. This model has been applied to study problematic technology use (Kraut et al., 2002; Elhai et al., 2017, as cited in Elhai et al., 2018). For example, where psychologically healthy individuals could reap the benefits of technology use, those with little or low resources would be disadvantaged in using technology and/or over use it in negative ways (Kraut et al., 2002, as cited in Elhai et al., 2018).

There was a major connection made between social media and mental health; social support. According to the 2011 report published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, social media gave the opportunity for adolescents to strengthen bonds between their existing friends and to form solid new friendships online. Social media gave the opportunity to reduce social isolation and loneliness and therefore indirectly improved mental health (O'Keefe et al., 2011, as cited in Keles et al., 2020). Levels of social support directly impacted how likely someone was to suffer from mental health problems. Those with low social supports were more likely to suffer while those with high social supports (such as family, friends, and even neighbours) suffered less from mental health problems (Klineberg et al., 2006; Maulik, Eaton, & Bradshaw, 2011, as cited in Keles et al., 2020).

Many youth and adolescents had functional social media use, although there was a growing number that were experiencing negative consequences due to problematic social media use (PMSU, Shensa et al., 2017). PMSU was most often characterized by excessive worry or concern about social media, motivation to use social media, and devoting so much time to social media that it limits other social activities, studies, interpersonal relationships, mental health and well-being. There was a growing base of scientific evidence that suggested that PMSU could

lead to symptoms normally associated with substance-related addictions (Andreassen et al., 2015, as cited in Elhai et al., 2018).

According to Hwang and colleagues (2009) there was a significant relationship between online communication and depressed mood (Hwang et al., 2009, as cited in Mccrae et al., 2017). Their study showed that adolescent participants who self-reported depressive moods were more likely to use the internet to create and maintain friendships and to express feelings and thoughts. Adolescents with lower quality friendships or who were using the internet for purposes other than communication were more likely to become depressed or socially anxious.

Another study addressed the concept of problematic social media use, where it negatively impacted other aspects of life such as recreational activities, school work and relationships as well as overall well-being (Shensa et al., 2017). Using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS; Andreassen et al., 2016), they assessed whether the adolescent was experiencing addiction to social media by evaluating a variety of factors. Time spent thinking about social media, intent to change their mood, presence of negative symptoms, conflict as a result of use, and attempts to live without social media were some of the factors evaluated in the study (Andreassen et al., 2016). The results of the study showed that adolescent girls who rated higher on the BSMAS or with more problematic social media use indicated stronger, more frequent depressive symptoms.

Adding to the previous study, Nesi and Prinstein (2015) noted that there were sometimes specific behaviours that led to the increase in the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms. Some of these behaviours were the extent that adolescents compared themselves to others or aimed to be given feedback by their peers (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). The results of this study showed that there was a stronger correlation between these behaviours and depressive symptoms

being stronger for females. The impact of the negative messages might also be compromised by the overlap of online and offline networks. Social media had a habit of triggering narcissistic behaviour, as suggested by the amount of "selfies" posted on the different platforms and the emphasis on the presentation of self. An indication made by the researchers in this study suggested that more study and time should be put into understanding the ways that adolescents with depression interact interpersonally and how that translates to the online setting (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Negative social media experiences could be highly impactful on those with good and bad mental health. Rosenthal et al. (2016) looked at the negative experiences that adolescents had specifically had on Facebook. The participants reported interactions that ranged from bullying, full arguments all the way to misunderstandings. This study went on to report that each negative interaction on Facebook was met with measures of depression. Even when accounting for demographic factors, the amount and level of support the adolescent had in their life, and previous psychological distress, the results were consistent. It was obvious in this study that when negative things happened on social media, it had potentially devastating impacts on the mood and psychological well-being of adolescents (Rosenthal et al., 2016).

Some adolescents not only reported depressive symptoms based on their social media experience but also feelings of envy. Tandoc et al. (2015) took items from previous studies and created a scale specifically for Facebook envy. Researchers questioned participants about how much they agreed with various statements related to this construct. According to the results, when feelings of envy arose, it was more likely that adolescents would experience depressive symptoms. One of the fascinating results of this study was that contrary to the evidence of depression with social media use, there were indications that the correlation would not exist

without the presence of envy (Tandoc et al., 2015). Due to the strong evidence of this, the researchers went on and controlled for Facebook envy and found that adolescents experienced fewer episodes of depressive symptoms. This result then brought forward the idea that Facebook may have some positive impact on mental health, so long as the adolescent was not struggling with feelings of envy. Facebook is a platform of many activities, and it would bear examination to see which activities on Facebook led to which mental health outcomes (Tandoc et al., 2015).

A study done in the United Kingdom by O'Reilly et al. (2018) worked with a wide variety of focus groups where adolescents expressed their beliefs, knowledge and understanding around the relationships between social media and mental health. According to the research, several themes were discovered. First, that the adolescents surveyed felt that social media was harmful to mental health, and that many felt that using social media caused mood disorders. There were important discoveries that they felt that depressive symptoms were more likely the result of being passively or actively involved in the comment sections of a variety of platforms. The participants explained that this was where personal views were shared, which could then lead to lowered mood when involved.

An interesting realization around this study was that the participants often did not speak from their own personal experience but were more likely to make sweeping generalizations around what they had heard from others or in the media. They expressed how they felt about the situations and topics they were being asked about, though rarely making it personal to themselves. One topic that showed this was the discussion around suicide. There was a consensus amongst the adolescents that social media had a direct role in the case of suicide amongst people their own age (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

Literature talking about social media and anxiety indicated that social media directly impacted adolescent anxiety levels. The research indicates different forms of anxiety, including pressure, social anxiety and general anxiety (Barry et al. 2017; Durak, 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2018).

According to adolescents who had been surveyed around their feelings of social media, they felt that while their use of social media was high, they also tended to believe that it led to feelings of anxiety (O'Reilly, 2020). This belief was evident in the findings of one study, which indicated that a higher number of social media accounts were consistent with parental reports of high anxiety in their children (Barry et al., 2017). Adolescents tended to agree with this finding. Adolescents surveyed in this study said that they felt the need to be on these sites to stay connected while often experiencing pressure while using them. There was an expectation to perform on social media and receive as many "likes" on their posts (videos, photos or other) as possible. When their posts did not receive the hoped for "likes", adolescents thought that they were potentially going to feel anxious (O'Reilly, 2020). Durak (2018) supported these connections but also made connections between anxiety and problematic social media use. Problematic social media use differed from average social media use in that it implied addiction to the site instead of average use. Durak (2018) related the significant correlation between problematic social media use and social anxiety to previous research done by Alkis et al. (2017). This research stated that adolescents had a tendency to use social media to isolate themselves from real-world interactions. There was an assumption that this would help them avoid the negative criticism that could happen in face-to-face interactions (Alkis et al., 2017). According to another study, adolescents also stated that they also used social media to be more social, maintain friendships and relieve stress (O'Reilly, 2020).

It was hard to ignore the correlation between increased social media use and depressive and anxious behaviour or symptoms. There was caution to be raised for how we go about looking for solutions or therapies to help. Greater fears around the use of social media might be stoked by greater public awareness and concern about mental health problems in young people. According to McCrae et al. (2017) whether the incidence of worsening mental health issues had increased or not is a moot point. There must be awareness around the material gains in the expansion of detection and treatment of mental health problems in the child and adolescent populations, sometimes known as disease mongering. Moynihan and Henry (2006) defined disease mongering as "the selling of sickness that widens the boundaries of illness and grows the markets for those who sell and deliver treatments" (Mccrae et al., 2017). This was very noticeable in mental health, an example of which was O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson's (2011) proposed "Facebook Depression" as a specific illness, it was heavily criticized by scholars who argued that there was a need for hypothesis-driven research questions and robust scientific investigation (Mccrae et al., 2017).

Summary of the Literature

There are several conclusions that can be made based on review of the literature in the area of adolescents and how their use of social media impacts their constructed place, their relationships and their mental health. It is clear from all the research that has been done so far on this topic in academia that there is one major thing in common, that we are still learning and that we have a long way to go before we can begin to fully comprehend the lasting impact that social media will have upon future generations of youth. Many studies examined the negative impact that social media can have, including the potential of depression, anxiety, FoMO, problematic behaviours, lack of censorship, risky relationships, and cyberbullying. The studies also stated

that these impacts are never as cut and dry as they sound, that there are many variables that can cause greater or smaller impact on youth. The frequency of social media use, the addictive nature of social media, the purpose of connection or use, the adolescents' pre-existing level of mental health, past experiences, and the like. Every adolescent will interact with social media in different ways, we cannot use the same brush to paint a detailed picture of how social media will impact them.

The studies also mentioned the positives that come from social media use such as interconnectedness for struggling youth, access to resources that would have previously been hidden and the exploration of self by encountering a wider variety of people and groups. While there are positive outcomes for social media, because of the unknown factor, they are often overlooked. The positive factors are growing though as social media becomes less of a mystery and young people are beginning to use it for more than the original connection tool that was so popular in the past.

In general, it appears as though the original thinking that the online world is just an extension of the real world is slowly disappearing. The positive and negative impacts of social media on adolescents are more distinguishable to just the online realm now, with novel behaviours and feelings coming from online use (Nesi et al., 2018a). Based on the above assessment of the literature in this area, it is clear that the impacts of adolescent social media engagement are varied. This research and findings generated are essential for parents, teachers, counsellors, administration and even adolescents themselves since they have implications on their everyday lives.

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

Summary

While trying to address the importance and safety surrounding social media and its impact on youth in the current age, we must also be very aware that the people who are creating programs, running pro-d and offering workshops are often those who may not have the greatest understanding of the importance that they attach to their online presence and the new relationships that they form. We must tread carefully when explaining how social media can and will impact them in the future, we do not want to invalidate their experiences or their own perception of themselves while trying to be 'real' with them. While there are many perceived negatives to social media on the young, we must also be aware and present information around the idea that there are also noted benefits to specific groups of adolescents that access social media.

Recommendations

This Chapter begins with a restatement of the problem and the purpose or aims of your Capstone. The Summary is used to analyze/discuss the main themes found in your literature review. This section ends with any limitations in the literature review that provides opportunities for recommendations/implementations.

The rise of social media and the internet in adolescent life has taken the world by surprise. It is easy seen in the world around us and cannot be ignored. The reason for this Capstone was to look at the impact that social media and the internet have had on adolescents' constructed place, their relationships and their mental health and not only what has been seen so far but what also might come in the future.

There is a level of importance that needs to be noted when talking about this subject matter. Often times we see in the media the negative impacts that social media has had on youth, whether it is cyberbullying (a common topic) or even teen suicide, there are often positive things that have come out of the rise of social media as well. A potential issue with the way that social media is presented is that it does not offer any sort of help with the growing divide between the older generation and the youth of today.

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter suggested a great many things. One thing that came up in quite a bit of the literature was that there wasn't enough long-term analysis done. I agree with this statement. Short term analysis of social media's impacts is easy, long-term studies are short in supply and are sometimes so narrow in their focus that they gloss over questions or subjects that get brought up as a consequence of their study. Another thing that came up in the studies was that since social media is constantly changing, it is difficult to stay on top of it. One last major piece that showed up in the studies was the question of how we can not only better understand the new online landscape that is developing around youth since it can be noted that many of the behaviours that are not presenting themselves online are no longer the immediate copying of in-person behaviours but instead novel experiences and behaviours that are specific to the online context, but also to share information with all stakeholders in this new world so that the pros and cons can be shared in interesting and legitimizing ways.

Since the internet became rather popular in the late 1990's, there has been a big push to teach young people how to adapt to their new online situation, how do we manage private information, what websites are safe, the legality of creative work on the internet, and the like. I propose a five year program for grades 8 to 12 at the secondary level with three lessons per year. Not only would there be a student component for this subject matter, there would also be parent

or community workshops offered as well, once a year. Teachers should receive specific training on this new program, not unlike EASE or First Aid.

Stakeholders that would be involved in this process would include: school administration, counselors, teachers, parents and adolescents. Each group brings with it a level of responsibility to the program. Programs of this sort that are brought into a school usually go through a process where the administration would investigate and potentially vet the program. They have a responsibility to make sure that all students in each grade get the material, if there were concerns around it being taught in class and felt that it would be better as a grade group assembly, lessons could be adapted to match that. Administration, counselors and teachers would have the task of making sure that this material is presented in an unbiased way, that there are supports in place in case of emotional or psychological responses and that all material is shared not only with the students but also the school community as a whole. This might mean that administration and counsellors could offer an evening presentation for parents to explain and share the material that is being covered. It would be beneficial for the community to have access to this information and would likely be taken very seriously since social media is often referred to in the media in a negative light and it is often a cause of stress within the familial household.

The adolescent portion of this recommendation is rather complicated. Often times teenagers feel that they know more about social media than their older counterparts and have a tendency to get defensive if negative words are brought up against what they might feel is a good thing in their lives. The program would need to be interactive and offer concrete examples of the topics that are being discussed. Just like how teachers go to professional development expecting to come out with reasonable and useable material, students feel the same when they are brought into programs that are not a part of the usual curriculum.

Breaking down the lessons per year, the grade 8 students would receive lessons around subjects such as the digital footprints that we leave online, online hate speech and protecting individual privacy when posting online. The grade 9 year would include subjects such as the role that social media has in their lives, relationship red flags and how sexting can be dangerous, and empathy and positivity while online. The grade 10 year would include subjects such as possible uses for social media, curated social media presence, and how we can make sure that relationships are positive and healthy. The grade 11 year would look at how online disinhibition sometimes lead to cyberbullying, can media be addictive, and who is looking at your digital footprint. The final year of the program would look at subjects like online censorship, who should have access to social media data, and how you are presenting yourself online (Common Sense Education, 2021).

Information for these lessons would come from peer-reviewed academic sources, government programming (such as ERASE), for profit companies such as Safer Schools Tomorrow, and non-profit organizations such as Common Sense Education.

Below, I will provide the outlines for 1 lesson per grade of the program as well as one of the parent and community workshops. Many of the titles would scaffold from year to year to provide continuity within the program as well and continued discussion of important and relevant topics. The lessons below will focus on the digital footprint, and safe relationships.

Each lesson will contain core competencies (as required by the Ministry of Education of British Columbia), learning objectives, key vocabulary, required resources and a lesson plan in three parts. In a full program, powerpoint and videos may also be added to each lesson. For the purposes of this Capstone, only the lessons will be provided.

Grade 8: What are you looking at? Your world and your digital footprint

Core Competencies:
- I communicate clearly and purposefully, using a variety of forms appropriately.
- I can confidently interact and build relationships with other group members to further shared goals.
- I can ask questions and consider options. I can use my observations, experience and imagination to draw conclusions and make judgements.
- I can make choices that help me meet my wants and needs and increase my feelings of well-being. I take responsibility for my actions.

Learning Objectives:
- I can identify and understand reasons for using social media and the supports and challenges that comes along with it.
- I can reflect on my responsibilities that are related to mine and others' digital footprint.
- I can identify ways to make the most of social media while still being aware of mine and others' digital footprint.

Key Vocabulary:
- Digital Footprint: all of the information online about an individual person, ported by that person or others, intentionally or unintentionally.
- Oversharing: Sharing personal feelings information, or experiences that later make someone feel uncomfortable or regretful.

Required Resources:
blank paper, white board and accessories or smartboard

Lesson Plan:

Warm Up:
- Students have all had experiences with social media at some point in their lives. Have students answer the follow question on their blank piece of paper. How would you describe your experiences with social media, either for yourself or for people you know? Good, bad, or in the middle? Why? After giving them about 2 minutes, ask students to share out their experiences.
- Once students have finished sharing their experiences, have them give suggestions as to what the benefits and drawbacks are for sharing on social media.

- Here are some suggestions:
- Benefits:
  o Communication- it's a way to stay in touch with friends and family
  o Expression- You can post your opinions and ideas about important subjects
  o Entertainment- It's fun to share things you're interested in
  o Future- It's an opportunity to share a curated version of yourself for the public or for colleges and employers.
- Drawbacks:
  o Oversharing- when people share something that they later regret
  o Social pressure- when everyone else is posting, you feel pressure to participate
  o Life balance- managing multiple platforms and accounts requires a lot of time.
  o Permanence- embarrassing or other posts, including those that 'disappear', become part of your digital footprint, which might have a negative impact (a digital footprint is all the information online about a person that is posted either by that person or others, intentionally or unintentionally.

Discussion:
- Have students form a circle with their chairs. Make sure that they can see each other.
- Explain that how you use social media has a big impact on both your digital footprint and those of others.
- Using the rings of responsibility, tell the students that having 'responsibilities to' someone means that you think about how their actions impact them.
- Looking at the students, ask them to answer the following question: What responsibilities do you have to your **self** when you use social media? How can you be responsible for your own digital footprint? Giving the students a few moments to think about the answer, have their write their answer on the piece of paper from before. They are then invited to share their answer with the group, they should be encouraged to speak one at a time and to share when it is their turn.
- Once students have all had a chance to answer the question aloud with the group, students can be invited to respond to each other's comments.
  - Here are some questions that you can ask to get discussion going:
  - What comments from other students do you agree with? Which would you want to challenge?
    - What comments stand out or surprise you? Why?
    - Are there any comments that you have questions about?
- Repeat the same steps as before with a new question: What responsibilities do you have to **others** when using social media? How can you be responsible for others' digital footprints? An important note to make when using the circles of responsibility is that community includes people that you know and interact with personally while

your world includes people you don't know but who may see your social media posts or be affected by them.

Wrap Up:
- Have students write down their thoughts on the following statement. Write down one example you would like to use in your own life around being responsible for your own digital footprint … or the footprints of others.   Collect them to assess student learning.

Other resources to share and consider:
- Telus Wise Footprint Challenge: https://www.telus.com/en/wise/kids/footprint-challenge
- Common Sense Media- Grade 6-12 Responsibility Tips: https://www.commonsense.org/education/family-tips/6-12-digital-footprint-and-identity

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Grade 9- Red Flags and Online Relationships

Core Competencies:
- I understand that my identity is influenced by many aspects of my life. I am aware that my values shape my choices and contribute to making me a unique individual.
- I can interact with others and the environment respectfully and thoughtfully.
- I recognize my value and advocate for my rights. I take responsibility for my choices, my actions, and my achievements.

Learning Objectives:
- I can identify the types of messages that might cause a red flag feeling for someone.
- I can use the Feelings and Options thinking routine to analyze and respond to a situation involving a red flag feeling.

Key Vocabulary:
- Grooming (online)- when someone older uses chatting/messaging to befriend and manipulate someone much younger into an in-person meeting for the purpose of sexual abuse or sex trafficking.
- Red flag feeling- when something happens that makes you feel uncomfortable, worried, sad or anxious.

Required Resources:
Blank paper, individual devices (phones with internet access, tablet), projector with connected computer with internet access, whiteboard and accessories, Sheyna's Situation Handout

Lesson Plan:

Warm Up:
- Think-Pair-Share their response to the warm-up question: Think about what you share through digital media: text messages, social media, messaging apps, etc. How much of the real you comes through? How is the *you* that you present through digital media different from the *you* face-to-face? Have students share out if comfortable, try to

highlight the ways that people present themselves differently through social media than in real life.
- Using mentimeter.com, Google JamBoard or polleverywhere.com, create an online opportunity to reflect on who students present themselves as, and who they talk to online.

Discussion:
- Explain that chatting with strangers is not the only type of situation that can bring about red flag feelings. Red flag feelings happen when something occurs that makes you feel uncomfortable, worried, sad or anxious. Chatting with strangers is not the only situation where you might have red flag feelings. Sometimes you may have these feelings with someone who is closer in age or possibly even people you know in real life.
- When you are having a red flag feeling, it is best to slow down, pause and think about how you are feeling. Here is the Feeling and Options thinking routine that supports social skills and thoughtful decision-making.

Identify. Who are the different people involved in the scenario? What dilemma or challenge are they facing?

Feel. What do you think each person in the dilemma is feeling? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for each of them?

Imagine. Imagine options for how the situation could be handled. Come up with as many ideas as possible. Then, choose which option might lead to the most positive outcome, where most people feel good or taken care of.

Say. Thinking more about the idea you chose for handling the situation, what could the people involved say? Be as specific as possible.

Using the example of Sheyna, discuss the questions that follow. A handout with the following information should be handed out to the class or projected for them to be able to read.

Sheyna's Situation:

Sheyna just started her freshman year of high school and has recently started exchanging messages with Nick, who is the assistant director at the day camp she attended over the summer. He just graduated from college and lives a few hours away.

Sheyna messages about how much she misses camp and how she's frustrated with her friends. Nick is funny, flirty, and great at giving advice. "Those girls sound so immature," he tells her. "You might as well be in college. Seriously. You act way cooler than any 14-year-old I know."

One day Sheyna and Nick have the following exchange (CIT stands for "counselor in training"):
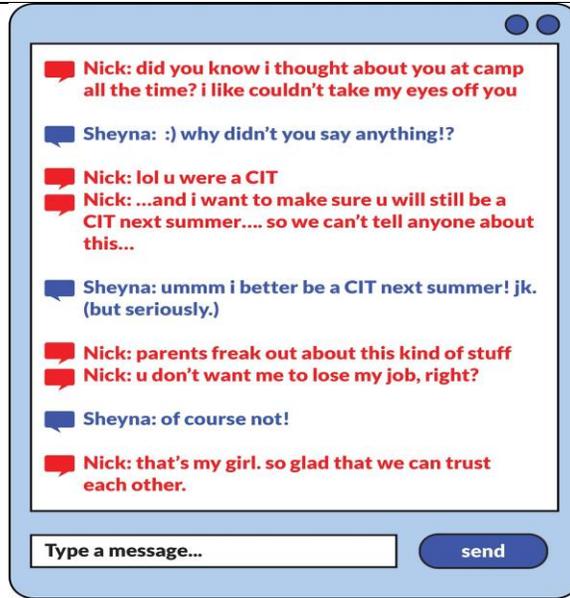
Nick then asks Sheyna to send him some pictures of her in her bathing suit at camp. Sheyna is flattered, but it makes her feel a little uncomfortable. Nick always talks about how mature she seems. She doesn't want to make him think otherwise.

Together or in small groups, answer the questions below (potential responses are in italics)

Who are the different people involved in this scenario? What dilemma or challenge are they facing?

- *Nick and Sheyna are the two people involved.*

- *Nick likes Sheyna and wants her to send a pic of her in a bathing suit while she was at camp.*

- *Sheyna is flattered by Nick's interest in her. She wants to be a counselor in training next summer. So she doesn't want to do something that will impact that. Sheyna feels uncomfortable about Nick's request for pictures, but also wants to impress him.*

What do you think Sheyna is feeling? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for her?

- *Answers will vary.*
- *She may be feeling uncomfortable or conflicted.*
- *She might be feeling embarrassed.*
- *She might be feeling pressured.*
- *The situation is hard for Sheyna because she might want to work at the camp again next summer. She might also be conflicted because she might want to impress him. Nick also asks Sheyna to keep this a secret and seems to be demonstrating a power dynamic by mentioning the CIT position and not wanting to lose his job.*

Imagine how Sheyna could handle the situation? Come up with as many ideas as possible. There is no "right" answer. Then, circle which option might lead to the most positive outcome.

- *Sheyna could say no to sending the picture.*
- *She could make a joke or try to change the subject and see if he stops asking her.*
- *She could send the picture to him.*
- *She could try ignoring or not responding to other messages Nick sends.*
- *She could tell Nick that she does not feel the same way about him.*
- *She could tell Nick she is not comfortable having this type of conversation.*

Thinking more about the idea you chose for handling the situation, what could Sheyna say? Write out the conversation.
Answers will vary.
"Hmm, maybe some day :)"
"I just had the most frustrating day at school."
"I don't really feel comfortable doing that given the whole CIT thing. I just want to make sure neither of us gets in trouble."
"I actually can't even find one! But here's a selfie of me and my friend on the bus today."

Encourage students to consider whether they would use the dialogue they came up with in real life with a friend or peer. Ask: "Do you think Sheyna would really say that?" or "Could you see yourself actually saying/sending a message like this, if you were the person in the scenario? Why or why not?"

Wrap Up:
- With students in small groups, have them discuss one or more of the follow scenarios. Giving groups 5 or so minutes, have groups share out a brief summary of the conversation or how their perspectives may have changed.
- *What if Sheyna tries to change the subject to avoid sending a picture, but Nick keeps bringing it up?*
- *What if Nick threatens to sabotage Sheyna's chances of becoming a CIT if she doesn't share a picture?*
- *What if Sheyna sends a picture to Nick, and Nick ends up showing it to other people?*
- *What if Sheyna ignores Nick, but Nick keeps finding ways to communicate with Sheyna?*

Other resources to share and consider:
- Cybertip Canada (reporting the online sexual exploitation of children)
  https://www.cybertip.ca/en/
- ERASE- https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase

Grade10: Who am I, really?

Core Competencies:

- I can examine evidence from various perspectives to analyze and make well-supported judgments about and interpretations of complex issues.
- I communicate confidently, using forms and strategies that show attention to my audience and purpose.
- I can recognize my strengths and take responsibility for using strategies to focus, manage stress, and accomplish my goals.

Learning Objectives:
- I can describe how my curated self may or may not represent my real self.
- I can analyze the benefits and drawbacks of representing different parts of my real self online.
- I can create an avatar that both represents their real and curated lives.

Key Vocabulary:
- Curate- selecting, organizing, and looking after a collection of photos, writings and other artifacts

Required Resources:
Blank paper, personal device with internet capabilities (phone, tablet or laptop)

Lesson Plan:

Pre-Planning: Please see the list of online resources that may need to be accessed during this lesson. Make sure that they are not blocked by your district's filter. Some resources may be better suited to some students over others and could be recommended for use during the lesson.

Discussion:
- In partners, have students discuss the following question: Is the you that people see online the real you? Why or Why not?
- Other questions to consider while answering may include: Is there a part of who you are that doesn't change? Your personality, your family role, etc? Are there parts of you that can change? Due to circumstances, who's around you, etc?

- Once students share out potential answers to these questions, explain that both online and in real life, that we show different sides of ourselves at different times. Being online and using social media gives us the opportunity to curate what we share with people. We do this online when we choose what photos, videos, posts, and details we choose to make public or share with specific groups of people. Everyone's decisions about curation are potentially very different.

- Staying in partners or moving into groups of 3 or 4, ask students to answer one of the three questions below and share out any answers they feel comfortable sharing:
- How much do you feel influenced by what you see online? From your friends? From 'influencers'?
- How much of what you post and share online do you feel represents a core or essential part of who you are?
- How much of you use your online presence to explore new things or 'try on' different ways of being?

Digital Selves:
Using the three resources listed below and on the Exploring Digital Selves Handout, students in groups should choose two of the resources below to review. As you review them, track what each says about people's *real* and *curated* selves. Capture your thoughts on your blank piece of paper. Review additional resources as time allows.

Watch: **Are You Living an Insta Lie? Social Media Vs. Reality**

DITCHTHELABEL, UPLOADED TO YOUTUBE.COM, 2/20/2017 (3 MINS.)

Read: **I Have 2 Million Followers but No Friends**

HANNAH SPARKS, NYPOST.COM, 10/24/2018 (7 MINS.)

Watch: **Our Digital Selves Official Teaser #4**

TOM BOELLSTORFF AND DONNA ZIMMERMAN DAVIS, DRAXTOR DESPRES, YOUTUBE.COM,
4/17/2018 (3 MINS.)

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Create: My Avatar:
- Give the class 10-15 minutes to create their avatar using a site like https://avachara.com/avatar/ . If students do not have access to technology, they can draw theirs instead. Students can share their avatar with their small group or write down a few sentences about why they represented themselves this way.

Other resources to share and consider:
- WebWise- Myth v. Reality- https://www.webwise.ie/trending/myth-v-reality/

Grade 11- Who's Got Eyes on Your Digital Footprint?

Core Competencies:
- I recognize my value and advocate for my rights. I take responsibility for my choices, my actions, and my achievements.
- I can identify how my life experiences have contributed to who I am; I recognize the continuous and evolving nature of my identity.
- I can advocate and take action for my communities and the natural world. I expect to make a difference.

Learning Objectives:
- I can learn that I have a public presence online called a digital footprint.
- I can recognize that any information that I post online can help or hurt my future opportunities (post-secondary admission, employment, etc.).

- I can create a vignette that shows how a positive digital footprint can help me take advantage of an opportunity.

Key Vocabulary:
- Digital Footprint- all the information online about a person either prost by the person or others, intentionally or unintentionally.
- Personal Branding- the practice of marketing yourself to the public using social media, a personal website, advertisements, or other non-digital tools
- Rescinded- to take away or cancel

Required Resources:
Blank paper, personal device with internet capabilities (phone, tablet or laptop), Future Tracks handout (digital)

Lesson Plan:

Consider:
- With students sitting in groups, discuss as a class the last time that they Googled themselves. If they haven't or can't remember, ask them what information they think might come up. If they have and remember the experience, ask students to share what came up in their search and if they were surprised at all with the results. These results are all a part of the digital footprint.
- Important and key aspects of the digital footprint are:
    1. It's growing, your footprint grows as your information is copied and passed on, making it easier to find and more viewable to a large invisible audience.
    2. It's not just up to you. When other people like your friends, companies, or groups you belong to- track, post, or share information about you, it becomes part of your footprint.
    3. It's permanent because it is archived in a variety of ways and passed on by others, but never goes away.

Explore:
- Students may not realize how far reaching their digital footprint is. News media shares often about politicians having made comments on their Twitter account 10 years ago, or people in positions of authority sending inappropriate messages to members of the community. While the digital footprint can lead to negative consequences, it can also work for you instead of against you. Although not everything about our footprint is controlled by us, there are steps that we can take to make the footprint a help rather than a thorn in our side. Using the links listed below and on the Future Tracks digital handout, have students access at least two of the resources and answer the two questions listed below for each.

As you review them, consider the question: *How can my digital footprint affect my future opportunities? Do you agree with the message in this resource? Why, or why not?*

Read: **How Colleges Use Kids' Social Media Feeds**

CAROLINE KNORR, COMMONSENSEMEDIA.ORG, 3/11/2019 (4 MINS.)

Listen: **Using Social Media, Students Aspire to Become "Influencers"**

COREY TAKAHASHI, NPR NEWS, 1/7/2017 (3 MINS.)

Read: **The Case Against Personal Brands**

JESSICA HOLLAND, BBC.COM, 7/23/2017 (8 MINS.)

Watch: **Top Tips: Social Media**

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD CAREERS SERVICE, UPLOADED TO YOUTUBE.COM, 1/6/2017 (3 MINS.)

- Once students have completed the task, ask groups to share their responses to the questions.

Create:
- Using the Future Tracks digital handout, have students read the vignette from *True Connections*. While reading, think about the impact that someone's digital footprint can have on future opportunities.

Read: **Haunting Picture**

JAZLYN MOSES, *TRUE CONNECTIONS: TEEN-TO-TEEN ADVICE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DIGITAL WORLD* (826 BOOKS, 2019), PP. 37–39.https://826digital.com/writing/haunting-picture/

- Once they are done reading, have students think of a time where someone's digital footprint had a positive impact on their future opportunities. It could be fiction or nonfiction.

Other resources to share and consider:
- Need Help Now- https://www.needhelpnow.ca/app/en/
- Get Cyber Safe- https://www.getcybersafe.gc.ca/en

Grade 12- Consequences and You: Hate Speech

Core Competencies:

Learning Objectives:
- Reflect on whether hate speech is considered free speech
- Identify the reasons for an against regulating online hate speech

- Use the Take a Stand thinking routine to consider the potential consequences of online hate speech.

Key Vocabulary:
- Freedom of expression- the right to state one's opinions and ideas without being stopped or punished
- Hate speech- an attack using any form of communication targeting a person or people because of a group that they belong to- race, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, etc.

Required Resources:
Admissions Dilemma text, blank paper, whiteboard and accessories, projector and technology to type

Lesson Plan:

Consider:
- Have students sitting in small groups to encourage discussion.
- Ask students if they are familiar with the term "hate speech", if not, what do they think it means, and if yes, can they think of any examples that they could share with the class. Give groups a chance to discuss, share answers as a class.
- Ask students if they feel that hate speech should be regulated or not. Have them write down reasons for both. Share the responses with the class, capture their responses either on the whiteboard or on a typed document that is projected for all to see.

Explore:
- Engage students with the following statement: There is no single right or wrong way to address online hate speech. Private organizations like social media apps and even post-secondary institutions have to create their own rules for deciding how to respond and what the potential consequences might be. Because there are no universal rules around addressing hate speech, it is important to consider if and how people who spread hateful content online should be held accountable for their actions.
- Using the Admissions Dilemma handout, have students read the following text:
Alex was recently accepted to a prestigious college and joined a private online group made up of other accepted students. In the group, students were exchanging inappropriate jokes. Some jokes were hateful toward certain groups of people. Alex was taken aback by what the other students were sharing, but also unsure of what college would be like and anxious to make new friends. After reading some of the other students' posts, Alex contributed a joke that mocked a minority group. A few weeks later, the college's admissions team learned about the online group and decided to take back admission offers from students who contributed hateful content, including Alex. Alex was no longer welcome to attend the university.

Do you agree with the college's decision to take back Alex's admission offer? Why or why not?

- Once they have completed the reading, give them a moment to think about the question at the end.
- Using the Take a Stand thinking routine, have students go through the steps together, they should note anything that stands out to them on their piece of paper.

On your own	**TAKE A STAND** What do you think? Explain your perspective.
As a group	**STAND BACK** Where do your classmates stand? Listen to their perspectives.
On your own	**LOOK AGAIN** Look again at your original response. What had you <u>not</u> considered that other people brought up? (Maybe you changed your mind, maybe you didn't -- that's OK! Either way, you heard other views. How has your thinking shifted after hearing your classmates' perspectives, even if you haven't changed your mind?)
As a group	**LOOK BEYOND** Look beyond this specific case. How does this dilemma remind you of other situations we've explored in class or that you've seen, heard about, or experienced?

- Once you have gone through the thinking routine, remind students that the aim of this activity was not to find the "right" answer but to slow down our reactions, take the time to listen to other perspectives, and be reflective about the stance that we have taken about this dilemma.

Reflect:
- Students should look to answer one of the following questions:
- What if Alex was a member of the minority group that he mocked?
- What if the joke was shared in a private text rather than in an online group?
- What if Alex made the joke after he had already started college?

- Have students share out their answers and ask any questions that they might have around hate speech and its impact on our lives.

Other resources to share and consider:
- Media Smarts- https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/online-hate/online-hate-canadian-law
- Council on Foreign Relations- https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hate-speech-social-media-global-comparisons

Conclusions

Social media has a massive presence in our lives. For so many, it is a part of everyday life, whether they are checking text messages, reading something that someone has posted on Facebook, scrolling their Instagram feed, or filming a TikTok. It has changed the way that we communicate, how we construct our own unique identity and how we relate to one another.

Considering how much social media has changed our lives, it is easy to consider how much it has changed how we see our overall well-being.

Adolescents frequently engage in social media, it is a large part of their social world. It is difficult for previous generations to understand the gravity of the situation since they themselves did not grow up in the world of social media. The effects on young people, as this population is still in the stage of development, cannot be understated. The effects on them have the potential to be long lasting, permanent and even harmful. However, with potentially positive outcomes, it could also have implications for positive growth, identity development and healthy relationships. Having now read some the research, it is easy to see how all of these pieces are connected together.

The adolescent drive for connection is prone to problems, that teenagers will do almost anything to be connected with one another, including risky behaviours. The new environment that social media has created cannot be confused as a continuation of their real-world lives, it has to be addressed as separate, as different. A new environment means that there are new concerns around victimization and the creation of a digital footprint. The perceived audience that social media gives us forces us to really consider the kind of self-representation that we put out in the world. It forces teens to consider status more frequently and comparisons to run wild. The gender differences between male and female youth in terms of social media are staggering. The creation of relationships online is also prone to its own potential issues, like sexting and risky relationships with near strangers.

While a great many things about social media impacts adolescents in a negative way, we also need to be reminded that there are positive things happening as well. The potential connections that teenagers create with likeminded people to be able to expand their social circle

has the potential to be very helpful with those who are shy or anxious of in person social situations. Social media offers a place for youth to access potential supports and share valuable information that they might not have known otherwise. It offers LGBTQ2S+ youth a place to express themselves freely, without needing to be mindful of strict social constructs.

The material and conclusions generated in this research were never meant to be for one stakeholder. It has become clear that we still have a long way to go to be able to understand the complexities of how social media, which is still in its own infancy, will change or impact adolescents in the future. There is much more work that can be done and should be done. Many of the articles suggested more longitudinal research studies, it is easy to agree with those authors. Until then though, education is the first line of defense against what could turn out to be a negative experience.

It appears that there has been a lot of growth in the field of social media's implications on adolescent constructed place, relationships and mental health. Social media is presented as both a positive and negative experience. To achieve positive outcomes and experiences, it would be beneficial for adolescents to have an opportunity to formally learn about some of the consequences of use or reliance on social media. More research is always a good idea, but education on the matter is a step in the right direction.

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