

**Forever Evolving Technology:
A Study of Social Media and How It Affects Our Youth**

**By
Kimberly Rodriguez**

Submitted to the Board of Study in Sociology
School of Natural and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York
December 2019

Accepted:

_____, Sponsor
Chrys Ingraham

_____, Second Reader
Kristen Karlberg

Abstract

This analysis examines how adolescents are affected by their use of social media, especially when it is not age appropriate. Large numbers of research studies conclude that overuse of social media leads adolescents into social situations with consequences for their self-esteem. This literature examines what teenagers do on social media and what platforms they use but does not provide adequate explanations on how this usage affects their social development. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does social media use negatively affect the way young adults view the social world and themselves? (2) How does the structure of social media platforms play a role in cyberbullying and adolescents negative experiences overall? Using content analysis of YouTube videos where adolescents going through related scenarios and experiences talk about how they feel, this study explores patterns of social media overuse. The limitations of this research using YouTube is selection bias, not every adolescent feels comfortable enough to speak on a social media platform like YouTube and those who do may have already worked through their issues.

Introduction

Social media is defined as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.” Social media has become a significant part of many people’s daily lives, but what happens when it is a significant part of a young developing and vulnerable adolescent’s life? Adolescence is a vulnerable stage of life, individuals aged 13-19 are going through puberty transitioning from child to adult. At this stage, they can be very susceptible and easily be influenced by many things. What effect will being constantly connected have on his or her well-being or worldview?

Per Statista.com, in 2018 77% of the U.S. population had social media profiles. Per a Pew Research Center survey, in 2018 95% of adolescents had access to a smartphone and 45% of them admitted they were online almost constantly. The technological landscape for adolescents has evolved and will continue to do so. Times have changed, but the question remains, is it for the better? Is it detrimental to them to be so connected at such early stages of life? Adolescence is a life stage where one experiences emotional, physical, and social development as preparation to become an adult. Per previous studies, research shows that adolescents on social media often try to post an image of themselves that they are not to fit in, their goal is to match what’s being praised on social media (Chua and Chang 2016). Research also shows that adolescents often face cyber bullying, the more time they spend online the more susceptible they’ll be to face an online attack (Underwood & Ehrenreich 2017). It’s imperative to understand how adolescents’ views of the social world are shaped by social media. How does the structure of social media platforms aid in causing cyberbullying?

Being constantly connected to social media can negatively impact young adults in some aspects, being their emotional well-being, their views on the world and how they view

themselves. Certain events that can occur on these platforms whether it's cyber-bullying or social exclusion can negatively impact an adolescent's emotional development. For example, if teenagers feel left out or excluded online, they can also feel like they cannot socialize because they are not accepted or wanted in the real world, which could potentially impair their social development and world view. Additional problems that can arise from the constant use of social media within young adults include self-esteem and confidence issues, isolation, body issues, and even a devaluation of their self-worth. Feeling this way at such a young age and continuously throughout the years could potentially create long-term problems for these adolescents.

I analyze and introduce content from several academic journals that highlight the negative outcomes of social media use in adolescents but also mention the positive aspects of social media. Then, through content analysis on several YouTube videos this study aims to uncover and explore the experiences of several young adults who have gone through social media and cyberbullying attacks. Specifically, I will examine how it affected them and what happened after the experience. How did it shape their view on social media? There is a selection effect of using YouTube for my information because these adolescents are choosing to speak on the platform. I do acknowledge the fact that adolescents may find support and encouragement on several social platforms, some may use social media as an outlet for their troubles. Nevertheless, the issue of cyberbullying and isolation continue to be major risks for today's adolescents. I plan to gather enough information to bring light to the topic that there is indeed a risk to the way adolescents feel about themselves and how they view the world when they are constantly using social media, and that overall several problems can arise from the constant use of it.

Literature Review

The Presentation of Self in Social Media and the Risks Attached

The “Presentation of Self” is a theory by Erving Goffman (1954). This theory describes how social life is like a theatre. He compares individuals to actors who are presenting a performance. These individuals take on certain roles to present themselves in a particular way they want to be perceived by others whether or not that presentation accurately reflects their authentic selves. The “actor” reacts to how the “audience” perceives him or her and per what the reaction is the actor will alter their performance and or identity. Individuals create a front by manipulating the setting they ‘perform’ in, as well as their appearance, and their manner. The Presentation of Self may occur regularly on social media, as people post pictures and content that portray themselves in a certain light, whether or not that content truly portrays the big picture of what is going on in their lives. For example, an adolescent could post a picture of herself looking happy at a party when in reality she is suffering from depression. The false presentation of self can cause consequences like body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem issues. It can also cause teenagers to believe this is what the social world is all about: having the perfect life, profile, a lot of followers and likes. They might start to believe being well liked online is the goal. On social media, adolescents post photographs and or videos of themselves and view the same of others. Physical appearance plays an important role in these activities. Authors Chua and Chang conducted a study that consisted of 24 in-depth interviews that examined secondary school girls’ self-presentation. It included peer comparison behaviors on social network sites where the girls posted self-portrait photographs or “selfies” and collected peer feedback in the forms of “likes,” “followers,” and comments. In the study, they argue that adolescents report that they experience

pressure to “look perfect” on social media and carefully select and edit their posts to do so. Like Goffman's theory states, these girls felt they were not getting the reactions they craved from the audience, being their peers. Therefore, they acted upon this and altered their content to receive the praise they desire. “In these transitory years’ girls’ self-presentation of beauty and concern about other people’s perceptions of them play critical roles in developing their identities and self-esteem” (Chua and Chang 2016). Authors De Vries, Vossen and Van der Boom created a study exploring the impact of positive parent-adolescent relationships and how these relationships are associated with outcome of young adolescents and their social media use. Their study consisted of a survey that was conducted among 440 adolescents aged 12-19 years old. The results show that the pressure to lose weight or gain muscle that adolescents experience from parents, peers, and the media is positively related to their own body dissatisfaction (de Vries, Vossen, and Van der Boom 2018). As such, the findings suggest that our comments, even the ones from our parents, can be taken into the wrong context, which can result in adolescents’ body dissatisfaction. So, what happens when these teenagers can’t fit in to what they’re seeing on these social media platforms, or what they’re posting isn’t what they’re like in real-life? This can result in a devaluation of self-worth and a greater focus on the negative influences of social media. Emily Tanner (2015), wrote an academic journal regarding eating disorders and how they are often portrayed on social media. She analyzes the images being posted and identifies patterns in identity of the profiles that host these images. Eating disorders and addictions of all kinds are often being displayed among popular social networks and are giving the wrong message to adolescents that these types of negative lifestyles are acceptable. (Tanner, 2015). It can also negatively affect their self-esteem if they can’t portray themselves the way they want to and therefore don’t fit in, which increased the risk of negative impacting their emotional

development. We must understand that looking perfect, being pretty, nice features, slim bodies, and lavish items are all examples of what is being portrayed on social media to be the goal. If being praised is the goal and these are the characteristics needed, many individuals who have not yet gone through the process of finding themselves and loving themselves might fall into this trap of thinking ‘this is what is needed to be wanted and liked’.

Structure and Function of Social Media Platforms

The way social media platforms are structured and set up starts a pathway for adolescents to compare themselves with each other. Authors Schmeichel, Hughes and Kutner (2018) created a literature review of educational researchers published work in relation to young people’s social media use. They argue that social media sites contribute to the production of neoliberal subjects, and we draw on Foucauldian discourse theories, which are theories that primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. And understanding how researchers explain topics and concepts produces particular ways of thinking about the world while excluding others. “The intentional design of these platforms, is intended to capture and maintain attention through, for example, a variable reward structure (e.g., checking for “likes” and “retweets”) that keeps users engaged and online” (Schmeichel, Hughes, and Kutner). The constant viewing of other people getting numerous amounts of ‘likes’ and ‘retweets’ can negatively affect how some individuals feel about themselves. Adolescents are falling into these dark stages of life and are often blamed for spending so much time on their phone or spending so much time online in general, but not enough blame is put on the social media platforms themselves that constantly pull young adolescents to use them. With every new social media app update, there’s a new feature where an

individual can get more feedback from his or her 'followers' or audience. Now people can tune in to what someone is doing live, people can ask that person anonymous questions, and that person can post the answers for everyone to see. An individual can even turn on his or her notifications for a specific person in order to get an alert each time that person of his or her choosing is posting online content. With each new feature, social media platforms run the risk of becoming more and more addictive, and with this addiction several thoughts can be attached. "Why don't I have as many likes? Why did he/she like his/her picture but not mine? Am I not pretty/good-looking enough? What must I do to be like him/her? It could also be negative if it was the opposite type of scenario, adolescents who do get a lot of attention and likes on these social platforms could develop narcissism and or an over inflated sense of self. "For example, attending to the design of platforms in the analysis might acknowledge that the design of social media platforms drives users to pursue "likes," which not only shapes how people interact on the platform, but is used as a metric through which to assess ourselves and others" (Schmeichel, Hughes, and Kutner). There's also a problem with age when it comes to social media platforms. "Instagram does not allow anyone under the age of thirteen to use its app. However, it takes no more effort than lying about one's birth-year to get around this restriction. Although nearly all social media companies place age restrictions on who can use their platform, these numbers become arbitrary to any young person on a mission to be included in digital social spaces" (Tanner, 2015). This is also a negative of the structure of social media platforms in that anyone with an email can sign up to these sites. Creating an email address can take approximately 3 to 5 minutes. Taking a profile picture can also take about 10 seconds. The problem with this is how easily accessible it is for younger children to reach these sites, lie about their age, and create their own account. Social network site-using teens are twice as likely as non-users to say they

misrepresent their age online in order to gain access to websites and online services (Lenhart 2011). Upon creating this account there's so much content available on several social networking sites that isn't suitable for children, adolescents, or teenagers. Many questions might arise due to what they come across but who can they ask for clarity? These platforms are setup and induce personal comparison, social exclusion, and constantly display perfect ideals of people that these adolescents often idolize. The structure and function of these social media platforms play a huge role in how teenagers become addicted to being online, and how they see the social world.

There are arguments that counter what I believe and support the idea that social media and its structure is not the cause, and is more often used for positive as opposed to negative. The article "Friending, IMing, and hanging out face-to-face: Overlap in adolescents' online and offline social networks" goes into depth towards the overlap of offline and online relationships in young adults. Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza (2012) conducted a survey-based study to examine.... achieve their results which consisted of 251 high school students and an in-person survey, and out of the 251, 126 students completed an additional online survey about how and why they use the internet, their activities on these sites, their reasons for participation and how they perceive these online spaces to impact their friendships. Their results revealed that adolescents mainly use these networking sites to connect with people known from offline contexts. Their study found there is a mild overlap between teens closest online and offline friends, and the pattern found suggested that they mostly use these online platforms to strengthen their offline relationships. Do I agree? Yes, because I don't think every single adolescent is having traumatic experiences on social media. But, this was one study, at one school, in one neighborhood. Therefore, there is a concern about the extent to which the findings of this study generalize to other students, schools, and neighborhoods. It could be a fact that this town was

small, and most of the children grew up together moving up from elementary, to middle school to high school. Ultimately, social media does have positives and negatives, but my goal is to highlight the negative impacts because often these are often not taken as seriously as they should. Without empirical research to show the negative impacts of social media use on adolescents, it is impossible to determine the true extent to which social media is harmful to youth's social development and worldviews.

Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying:” the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature” is often happening on social media. Whether its name calling, rumor spreading, posting explicit pictures of others without the owner of the pictures consent and even physical threats. Author Monica Anderson from Pew Research Center wrote an article containing several facts informing the public about teenagers and how most them have suffered cyber bullying. The survey finds that 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced at least one of six types of abusive online behaviors (Anderson, 2018). Research shows the more online a teen is the more the risk of them facing abusive behavior. Approximately 45% of teens admit they are online almost constantly, and the constant users are more likely to face online harassment (Anderson, 2018). Amanda Lenhart also conducted a study focusing on how American teens navigate the world of “digital citizenship”, her study conducted of a survey consisting of 799 teens aged 12-17 given in English and Spanish and lasted from April through July 2011. Among social media users, 88% of teens experience someone behaving in a mean or cruel manner on a social network site (Lenhart, 2011). Teenagers are putting themselves in vulnerable situations while on social media, but they are also putting themselves in

danger to use it and most don't even realize it. Approximately 44% of online teens admit to lying about their age so they could access a website or sign up for an online account. It is important to emphasize how it could be especially harmful for children who are younger than the sign-up age to use social media. They come across content they shouldn't be and feeling cyber-attacks at young ages can cause a detrimental effect on their well-being. Adolescents can go through victimization, feeling fear of being singled out for cruel treatment by only one single episode of cyberbullying. Another study focused on how teenagers interact with social media, including the positives and negatives. They find adolescents can also feel pain from social exclusion and comparison resulting from the number of hours they spend on social media feeds (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). The positives being adolescents can often also find support from social media, teenagers that come to a platform to tell their story. Therefore, others who have also gone through this sort of connect and help one another when they feel they cannot go to anyone else. Social media can also be a source of support for many adolescents when that feel attacked or hurt, and it can help them connect with others who have gone through the same or similar experiences. This activity can help mend and heal things for many individuals. But, it must be recognized that social media was a platform for the hate and cruelty to happen in the first place with very little restrictions and guidelines, and not everyone who goes through something finds the courage to come out publicly and try to heal.

Boyd goes into explaining the current exploration and struggles with identity that teenagers face. She also elaborates on how they also face other conflicts with privacy, addiction, bullying, risk taking, literacy, inequalities, and being public which are similar to the processes that we witnessed before there was digital media (Boyd, 2014). Before digital media, sharing nude photos of others and embarrassing videos was a bit more restricted when it comes to an

audience. The risk of this type of bullying and harassment is compounded by social media because of the ability to reach so many more people. When something happened back then for example a fight at school, more students might have been prone to look for help or stop it, now everyone stops and records. These types of events happen so often in our society now, Instagram profiles being created just for posting and exposing women, brutal fights and acts being recorded and posted as opposed to getting help. The reality of it is that these events have the potential to scar a victim for life, or even worse, commit a mistake they cannot come back from. Once a picture and or video is sent out or posted there's no telling where the content will end. Past generations have saved themselves from a lot of online embarrassment, online ridicule and invasion of personal privacy.

Cyber bullying is serious and more attention should be brought to it. Schools, lawmakers and parents should all take more action. Cyber bullying attacks can cause great pain to young adolescents, which can affect their emotional well-being and scar them into adulthood. "Technology makes the struggles youth face visible but it neither creates nor prevents harmful things from happening even if it can be a tool for both. It simply mirrors and magnifies many aspects of everyday life, good and bad" (p. 212, Boyd 2014). Boyd voices how it is more important to push support and understanding rather than panic when it comes to social media. How she believes technology is not aiding in the negative things these adolescents are going through which might be correct for some individuals, but not all. Even though not all adolescents experience problems with social media, efforts need to be made to protect those who are most at risk for the negative effects of cyber bullying and harassment. What adolescents are most at risk? For Instance, LGBTQ's, and students with disabilities. Why? Because bullies might feel they are the most vulnerable, and vulnerability is key when choosing a victim to bully. Per Pacer's

national bullying prevention center, the percentage of students with disabilities who get bullied vary due to the type of disability they have. Researchers discovered that students with disabilities were more worried about school safety and being injured or harassed by other peers compared to students without a disability. (Saylor & Leach, 2009). 74.1% of LGBT students were verbally bullied (e.g., called names, threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression (National School Climate Survey, 2013). 49% of LGBT students experienced cyberbullying in the past year (National School Climate Survey, 2013). There are less rates of LGBTQ bullying in schools with clear bullying policies that are inclusive of LGBTQ students (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2012). Teenagers are facing a time where popularity is everything, and everything must be recorded for the world to see. From my perspective, this type of mindset can be very detrimental. It might cause individuals to take risky measures for the benefits of getting praised on social media. Bullying someone and recording it, being part of a fight or starting one and recording it, even committing illegal deeds just to be seen on any social networking platform.

Method

How does social media use negatively affect the way young adults view the social world and themselves? How does the structure of social media platforms play a role in cyberbullying and adolescents negative experiences overall? For this study, I plan to use content analysis to gather my findings to support my argument. This method is the best fit for my project because it allows me to branch out and find various videos on this topic, which would mean much more information and different views to back up my argument. My study focuses on how social media platforms affect adolescent's views of the social world and how their structure can aid in

cyberbullying, and can also affect how they feel about themselves. I want to look at the experiences they've had, if they feel scarred and or changed their way of thinking. I also plan to look at the individuals who sought social media out for support if any, did it help them overcome things? Did turning to the platform for support, that caused them pain in the first place aid them in finding relief? These negative experiences have a way of changing an individual's self-worth and view of the world and that's what I am trying to shed light on. I plan on focusing on finding videos of individuals aged 10-18.

I am going to use YouTube as my main resource because it's known for being a platform where individuals could upload their thoughts and feelings. There are several videos of young adults expressing themselves about how they feel when it comes to social media and any situations they have had while using the platform whether negative or positive. There are a wide variety of videos of interviews already available and accessible on the platform. I plan on choosing 15 YouTube videos of teenagers expressing themselves in any way regarding their feelings towards social media and any experiences they've had whether good or bad to aid in my comparison. In my analysis, I plan to compare the thoughts of the individuals in the 15 videos, quote their thoughts, the thoughts related to their experiences, their self-esteem and worldview and record if there are any differences between how an individual feels about social media due to age, sex, and or race. If their experiences were majorly different and if so, why?

Findings

The goal of my research paper is to examine and address how social media and bullying can negatively affect adolescents and their worldview. I have broken up my findings

into three groups: gender, body image, and isolation. I feel these were the most prominent themes in the videos I chose to analyze.

Gender

A majority of the teenagers interviewed in these videos were females, and the few males that were interviewed some admitted to being bullied but most admitted that they weren't often bullied and they saw social media as a platform to just talk to people and they truly enjoyed it. Within watching the videos I chose and analyzing what I recorded, I found gender plays a role in the effects of cyber bullying and or bullying in general. From my perspective, in some circumstances it could be easier for a girl to be targeted or attacked. Girls might also be more emotionally vulnerable where as a boy might brush something off with much more facility. In one of the videos titled "Social Media, Social Life: Teens Reveal Their Experiences" a male teenager states:

"I never really feel depressed or anything like that, just because there's always somebody to talk to and always somebody that's there for you that's kind of a good thing about social media."

In another YouTube video titled "My story- Teen Bullying" is about a girl going through her past and how all throughout her education she remembered being bullied. It all started in the fifth grade, and never stopped till graduation of high school. She transferred between 8 schools since her fifth-grade year until her senior year in high school, all because of how she would be bullied and physically attacked, for her skin tone, her upbringing, her looks and her body structure. She admitted she felt she was an easy target because she was a female, many other female classmates would make up rumors and stories about her and due to this, other girls would go after her.

She felt targeted and isolated, she became friends with the wrong people and began heavily using drugs: marihuana, cocaine, alcohol. All of this even led to her being hospitalized once for attempting suicide. After high school, she was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and often suffered depressive episodes. Currently on medication, and she can't even think of starting her family until she is off her medication. She blames all of this on her bullying experiences from elementary to high school, bullying changed her worldview and affects her still. This is a prime example of how bullying experiences can scar you for life, and affect you even way after the fact.

Body Image:

In Several videos the idea of one's body image was often very prominent. In a video titled "Teen girls open up about the 'constant pressure' of social media" a group of five girls aged 15-17 all talk about how they feel when it comes to social media. Destiny Mateo, aged 15 says:

"I've been so focused on not eating past 7 and only drinking water. On Instagram, I follow people like Kendall Jenner and Kylie Jenner and they all have this time measure body image that everyone is expecting from this generation."

All the girls in the video seemed to agree to what Destiny said, portraying that there is in fact an ideal type of body that they feel is expected of them, and pressure if they do not have it. Another girl states:

"I've seen a lot of bullying happen especially on Snapchat to be exact with some of my friends, some people calling them fat, even me. Talking about body image, and how we look, it's all criticized online."

When asked who they looked up to on social media, one teenager said “The Kardashians” and the group agreed. They connected the words, “perfect, natural, beautiful” to the Kardashians. The celebrities these young girls look up to who are wealthy, beauty moguls who have admitted to getting plastic surgery and these girls connect the word natural to them is shocking. They want to look like these women who have gotten work done and this may lead to these girls trying things to change their body, diets and different fads.

In another video titled “Girls aged 6-18 Talk About Body Image” it opens with a girl named Savannah aged 17 stating:

“Among my friends, the biggest insecurity is probably what their body looks like. Not too much their face, but what their body is like they always complain like ‘oh I’m too chubby’ or ‘oh why do I look like this’.”

Another girl named Rachel aged 14 states:

“I have struggled with my body, yeah sometimes I feel really insecure in my own skin. My legs for instance, there’s that whole entire trend in the media about the thigh gap, like I don’t have that, that makes me not normal, that makes me not beautiful.”

The content on social media has convinced Rachel that if you do not have a thigh gap you’re not beautiful and she believes this. At such young ages the mind can be vulnerable and it could be detrimental to their self-confidence and self-worth. Izzi, aged 10 says:

” I have this friend who’s like super skinny because she’s always dancing and I feel like I wish that my mom says I’m skinny or something, but not all the time that makes you really think that you’re actually skinny, cause it’s from your mom or dad and they

just tell you the best things about you. Maybe it's true, maybe it's not, and so, I always wear black leggings because I feel they make me look small or skinnier. “

It is astonishing to know that a child as young as ten is worrying about how skinny she is and her body image, limiting herself to what to wear to achieve looking slimmer. At the age of 10, I would hope young girls would be enjoying their youth not thinking about these types of things but kids are getting more access to the media at younger ages, and their minds are more susceptible to become influenced by what they see. The structure of these social media sites aids in these events happening, anyone can sign up for any platform just by lying about your age. Once you're signed up you have access to everything just like everyone else. Chloe, aged 16 says:

“The other day this girl I know posted on her finsta saying “people that don't look good in bikinis shouldn't go out in public in bikinis.” And it started this whole big thing on Instagram, and it hurt a lot of my own friend's feelings.” Another girl said, “The other day actually, I saw a comment on of my really good friends picture, it was saying ‘you're so fat, you need to lose weight’.

This group of girls are all different races, ages, body types and they seem to all have shown some type of effect to what they see on social media, what's praised in school, the cyber bullying comments and it just shows that these situations are more detrimental than one would think. These girls can grow up grade by grade thinking they need to look a certain way to fit in or to be liked, or to even feel confident and beautiful. Mia, is aged 11 and says:

“honestly I just really don't feel comfortable in my own skin sometimes, I just don't look in the mirror often and just call it a day. I don't feel comfortable about my height,

how my face structure is, sometimes the nose and I don't know. I just avoid looking in the mirror because if I do I'll just think about how I want to be, but if I don't I'll just think hey this is how I am, let's just deal with it."

Another young girl who has gone as far as avoiding looking in the mirror because they are that unhappy with how they look. This type of behavior isn't normal, and if attention isn't brought to it or they aren't receiving support it could develop into lifelong behavior. In another video titled, "Teens Discuss Pressures of Social Media" a group of teens express their thoughts on social media. A girl states:

"my life would be better without social media in the sense that first of all it wouldn't take up so much of my time, if you're posting something there's always a ritual beforehand where you might ask your friends like can I post this? Do I look good enough to post this?"

This is something that you can even relate back to Goffman's theory "The Presentation of Self" because she admits she constantly asks her friends for confirmation that she should post a picture on her social media prior to posting, because what she wants to receive is praise and likes. Whether that's her true self or not is irrelevant as long as the picture is well liked. Social media allows you to become an alternative to the real you. If you're unhappy with your true self, then social media platforms make it simple for you to portray the ideal you, the version of yourself you might wish you would be. A boy in the same video states:

"Social media Pressures me every day, because I want to make sure I look my best when I post something on Instagram or Facebook. I don't want something going online

that could be embarrassing. When someone posts something mean on my Instagram, it doesn't make me feel good, it just puts me down and I don't really need that in my life."

So, body image is a topic that can in fact affect girls and boys, and it seems like a prominent theme where these adolescents stress what to post on social media, they stress what others might think of them due to their posts. This can relate back to Chua and Chang's study, where they interviewed 24 girls in regards to their self-presentation on social media. They argued that adolescents report that they experience pressure to "look perfect" on social media and carefully select and edit their posts to do so, which was a common claim in several of the videos I chose. In a video titled "Teen Talk on Cyberbullying" and they admit that social media should be used for positive but often now it's used for negative, and when it comes to body image on social media, it's difficult to feel comfortable in one's own skin when you're often being criticized for what you post online.

In the video "Social Media and Teenage Self-Esteem" a teenager named Celeste talks about her feelings in regards to social media.

"when posting something there's always the hope of getting the likes you wish, and to get supportive comments. If we don't get enough likes or wonderful comments you sometimes feel like you have to delete the post. The question I like to ask is why do we always have to post pictures of ourselves? Mostly expressing the prettiest or best version of ourselves. It's because of validation."

This is a common act on social media in regards to adolescents, craving this feeling of validation and praise. Relating back to Goffman's theory of the presentation of self, many adolescents posting whatever they think will get them the most likes and comments, if the praise isn't

received you delete the post, alter yourself and try again. Being well liked is a common goal for adolescents, but trying to achieve this goal can be detrimental to one's wellbeing and self-confidence.

Isolation:

Isolation has been a common feeling between several adolescents in the videos. In "The bullying stories and experiences and impact of young people cyberbullying" there is a group of boys and girls in high school explaining their experiences with bullying. The producers of the video surveyed 5,399 young people about bullying. 87% admit to being verbally abused, 37% said they have been physically abused, 23% said they had been cyber bullied. In the video a young girl states:

"Well, let's be truthful I went home crying everyday cause I didn't know what to do about it or how to deal with it. my mom always used to ask me what was wrong and how I got those bruises on my legs and all that. I would just tell her I fell over in the playground because I was embarrassed to talk about it with anyone."

She seemed to be around 10/11 years old, and she didn't feel comfortable confiding in her mom about the bullying that was resulting in bruises that was happening at school. Another young boy said:

"my cousin he killed himself, because he never told no one. His mom was there for him but he just didn't talk or tell me or anyone else"

This young boy's cousin felt so alone and isolated that unfortunately he committed something he couldn't come back from due to bullying. Another girl, stated:

“feeling alone, feeling like you’re not good enough for something or good enough for someone. You feel like people be ashamed to be seen with you or feeling so down, and then you start thinking of all the things you could do to end it.”

Watching these videos of adolescents of all these different ages, races and locations is disheartening because you don’t often get to hear kids expressing how they really feel. To think so many of them feel so alone and have these negative thoughts than can often consume you.

Another young girl talks about her experience with cyberbullying:

“I was bullied and it was cyber bullying, and even though people think it’s not a big deal, and I’ll just get over it, it’s really not as easy as people make it seem. The worst part was going home and seeing what all these people said about me, it’s not like I could just go home and come back to it tomorrow when I go out to school, but it was my reality, it was my life at one point. It’s actually really hard because you can’t escape it whatsoever. Even if you’re not online, it’s the only thing you can think about.”

It can be rather difficult to be battling these things alone, feeling like you have no one to turn to and that you’re not enough. Growing up with these types of mindsets can be detrimental to how one might emotionally develop over the years.

“Bullying makes you feel like you’ve got no one to turn to, makes you feel quite alone, like you’re in a crowd but no one can hear you.”

Another young girl said, and within all the participants in the video it seems that this feeling of aloneness was very prominent, feeling isolated, no support. In the video “Social Media, Social Life: Teens Reveal Their Experiences” the opening statement from a girl is:

“I have definitely been emotionally affected by social media, maybe even depressed.”

Another girl right after states:

“sometimes when I’m sad, I like to communicate with my friends through social media and that really makes me feel less lonely.”

Different people go through different experiences and it’s important to point out how many people enjoy social media just as much as people have negative experiences due to it. The problem arises when the individuals who are suffering don’t have the support they need to overcome these negative experiences. It all gets masked in with the good. In the video “Mayo Clinic Minute: Is a rise in teen depression linked to technology, social media?” Dr. Mattke who studied pediatric and adolescent medicine states kids learn to become passive engagers:

“they’re watching everyone else’s Instagram but they’re not engaging, so they’re losing out on that social connection. The more technology teens consume the more we see increased rates of depression.”

Therefore, I feel there should be more attention brought to the topic of the technological dependence that adolescents seem to have now and all the repercussions from it.

Discussion

In this paper, I have examined how social media affects adolescents by asking the following research questions: How does social media use negatively affect the way young adults view the social world and themselves? How does the structure of social media platforms play a role in cyberbullying and adolescents negative experiences overall? By using content analysis with the YouTube videos, I found that adolescents can in fact be negatively affected by constant

social media use and that the structure of these social media platforms create the perfect environment for these negative experiences to occur. The main themes I found while analyzing the YouTube videos were: gender, body image and isolation.

My findings relate to the several studies and the theory mentioned above. The Presentation of Self by Erving Goffman is a theory that describes how social life is like a theatre. He compares individuals to actors who are presenting a performance, who ultimately are just looking to be praised. If they do not receive the attention they desire, they alter themselves and try again. This is relatable to several of the feelings many of the adolescents in the YouTube videos had. Whether they had problems with their body image and altered themselves to get the likes and comments they wanted, or had problems with their self-confidence because they felt they weren't enough no matter what they changed or tried.

“The intentional design of these platforms, is intended to capture and maintain attention through, for example, a variable reward structure (e.g., checking for “likes” and “retweets”) that keeps users engaged and online” (Schmeichel, Hughes, and Kutner). This was a common concept within my findings, the idea of posting what was necessary to get the ‘reward’. If it wasn't received some individuals were emotionally affected, some would delete and try again. Several admitted this was the goal though, posting content on these social media platforms was not so much to showcase your life or what you're interested in. The goal is to post what is in, what is well liked, what could get you social recognition.

Previous research states that “Instagram does not allow anyone under the age of thirteen to use its app. However, it takes no more effort than lying about one's birth-year to get around this restriction. Although nearly all social media companies place age restrictions on who can use

their platform, these numbers become arbitrary to any young person on a mission to be included in digital social spaces” (Tanner, 2015). This can be related to the 10 & 11-year-old adolescents that express hardships on the social media platforms. If there were more strict requirements and guidelines towards creating a profile certain situations could be avoided. To have an 11 year old wearing clothes to appear slimmer because of what they see online, or avoiding the mirror because they don’t look like what they see praised online is a major problem.

An unanticipated finding was that although several adolescents felt these negative feelings towards social media and the experiences that they have had, they all kept using the platform. None admitted to deleting their profiles, or not using their phones to avoid these situations to begin with. It’s as if they felt a technological dependence to their phones, to social media. When one adolescent was asked what she would do without social media she stated:

“if I didn’t have social media I wouldn’t know what to do every day, I would have nothing to look at, I’d be bored all day”

Several others admitted they woke up and looked at their phone, used it at school and home, it was a constant need to go on Instagram, Snapchat and or Facebook. These social media sites have an addictive property to them and to a vulnerable mind it’s easy to fall into the circle of that dependence with technology regardless if your experience is positive and or negative.

Conclusion

Adolescent's worldview and their self-perception can indeed be negatively affected by the use of social media. My findings revealed key themes that surround the idea of an adolescent being negatively affected by using social media. Gender, body image, isolation and cyber bullying are all things that I found that contribute to these negative effects. Not every adolescent who uses social media will experience a negative experience, but just because the majority do not, does not mean we mustn't shed light and put our focus on the ones who do experience something negative due to them. Conducting a content analysis on fifteen YouTube videos gave me insight into the struggles that adolescents face every day when they use social media. How they cope and manage and how often many feel like they have nobody to turn to in their times of distress. My findings are important because they support the broader knowledge that social media structures should be looked over. Parents should pay more attention to their children and look for warning signs of distress and social media use or technology use in general should be limited and age should always be taken into consideration.

References

- Schmeichel, Mardi; Hughes, Hilary E.; and Kutner, Mel (2018) "Qualitative Research on Youths' Social Media Use: A review of the literature," *Middle Grades Review*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 4. Available at:
<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/mgreview/vol4/iss2/4>
- Boyd, D. (2014). *Its Complicated - The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven: YALE University Press.
- Underwood, M. K., & Ehrenreich, S. E. (2017). The Power and The Pain of Adolescents' Digital Communication: Cyber victimization and The Perils of Lurking. *American Psychologist*, 72(2), 144-158.
<http://ezproxy.purchase.edu:2111/10.1037/a0040429>
- de Vries, D. A., Vossen, H. G. M., & van der Kolk - van der Boom, P. (2019). Social Media and Body Dissatisfaction: Investigating the Attenuating Role of Positive Parent-Adolescent Relationships. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 48(3), 527-527-536.
- Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Random House.
- Pew Research Center, September (2018), "A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"
- Tanner, Emily (2015) "Girls, Instagram, and the Glamorization of Self-loathing," *Dissenting Voices*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 10. Available at:
<http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dissentingvoices/vol4/iss1/10>

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Smith, A., Purcell, K., Zickuhr, K., Rainie, L., & Pew Internet & American Life Project. (2011). *Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites: How American Teens Navigate the New World of “Digital Citizenship.”* Pew Internet & American Life Project. Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Retrieved from

<http://ezproxy.purchase.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED537516&site=eds-live>

Chua, T. H. H., & Chang, L. (2016). Full length article: Follow me and like my beautiful selfies: Singapore teenage girls’ engagement in self-presentation and peer comparison on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55(Part A), 190–197.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.09.011>

Reich, S. M., Subrahmanyam, K., & Espinoza, G. (2012). Friending, IMing, and hanging out face-to-face: Overlap in adolescents' online and offline social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(2), 356-368.

<http://ezproxy.purchase.edu:2111/10.1037/a0026980>