

**The Price That Comes Along With Social Media and Mental Health**

by

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### **The Price That Comes Along With Social Media and Mental Health**

Since the early 2000's a new era was beginning to emerge. Little did anyone know that the technology of the internet could be an actual major help but also a major demise to society. Giving people public social platforms of themselves would be detrimental to many people's mental overall health. People would still be normal, but with a different personality, lifestyle, and mental space than in past generations. Since the emergence of social media there has been a parallel and significant rise in mental illnesses such as, Depression, Anxiety, Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), Narcissism, Selfie Addiction Disorder, and Internet Addiction Disorder. Is there a way we can prevent or at least improve the way people think and feel? Is there a behavioral stance that could be taken to mitigate the increase in mental illnesses that are being created by social media? Who would want to live in a world with people that can't feel real emotions, whom aren't empathetic or sympathetic? I doubt that the future generations would want to walk around like robots. We need a solution to this epidemic before it is too late. I think it's time for our world community to take a conscious effort to live more in reality rather than people spending countless time on their phones. Supervising a child's online behavior and building flourishing face to face social connections and routines would be ideal in healthy development of personality. Future generations would benefit from balancing online life from real life. Living a predominantly online life would lead to social isolation and many other issues.

It is no secret that social media has caused people to be more anxiety ridden and depressed than ever. Anxiety and depression most of the time go hand in hand and as it also goes

hand in hand with time spent on social media use. Adolescents are the main age group who are affected mostly because they are attached to their phones persistently. The constant usage of social medias by adolescents contributes to the rise in these mental disorders. “The odds of adolescents suffering from clinical depression grew by 37 percent between 2005 and 2014, according to a study by Ramin Mojtabai, a professor at John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health” (Sugarman 1). Another important aspect of social media and depression is the rise of Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has become an epidemic that has resulted in major depression and even suicide. People can create imposter profiles to harass their victim by spreading rumors and personal information which causes major depression and anxiety in the person they are victimizing. “The hyperconnectivity of today’s teenagers- nearly 80 percent of them have cellphones- means that school-day dramas play out in real time. Every embarrassing moment, every snippet of gossip, has the potential to be recorded, posted, and commented upon”(Sugarman 5). Bullying has always been around but social media has given bullying a new platform for people to hide behind a screen to torture their peers. One other important issue that is overlooked which contributes to anxiety and depression is sleep deprivation. Hours and hours of time can be spent at night browsing through other people’s profiles. All of sudden a person can be up until the wee hours in the morning. When we really think about the tremendous rise in clinical depression and the specific years many prevalent social media platforms launched have been pretty much exactly that time frame from 2005-2014. What feels like not even too long ago the generation that graduated high school in 2003 and before didn’t have social media to worry about. According to Wikipedia, these social media platforms began to emerge around 2003 and on: MySpace started August 1, 2003, Facebook started February 2004, Twitter on March 21,

2006, and Instagram launched July 16, 2010. If you were in high school before that year it was about texting, paging someone on their beeper, or passing notes in the hallway. There was no worrying about an online profile that mostly everyone puts their best looking photos on and that has their ideal persona on their page.

People who have not yet discovered their own identities tend to try to emulate how others present themselves on social media by modifying their own profiles. Also, there are many people that don't look like their pictures when seen in person. What many girls do is compare themselves to others who don't really look like how they do in their edited photos online. Young women need to be taught to be comfortable in their own skin and that looks are not everything, especially not something to get sick from obsessing about. "Eiser, a prominent generations researcher, has expressed concern that the combined prevalence of smartphones and social media throughout society has created substantial negative effects on today's youth. She correlates the rise in depression and anxiety with the rise in smartphone and social media use, citing a trend that shows without exception, the more time spent on screen activities, the more likely one will be unhappy"(Cain 738). We as a society can't take everything someone else posts on their profile for face value. An example would be, when someone posts a photo album with their significant other on a cruise to the Caribbean and the person looking at it thinks and feels like the couple must be perfectly happy together. Little does the person know that the couple argues all of the time when they are home or even in public. There is much more to the truth than what photos can portray. Adolescents will surely look at their peers profiles and compare themselves and their lives to others and this is where the anxiety and depression stem from.

In the recent years terms like “Facebook Depression” and “Facebook Envy” have been coined. “Facebook depression” and Facebook envy” consider the impact of social media use and mental health. The concept of “Facebook depression” was first developed in 2011 and is defined as depression that begins with an extreme amount of social media usage and subsequent development of the classic symptoms of depression. “Facebook envy’ develops as users compare themselves with others and can lead to a damaging life satisfaction among adolescents”(Guinta 197). In earlier generations teens saw their peers in class, the hallway, special school events, etc. Outside of school peers could naturally wonder what is that pretty and popular girl like or the same for who their boy crush is. People used to hope to walk passed their crush in the hallway and hope maybe one day they would be able to talk to them. Now teenagers don’t have much to leave to the imagination anymore because they could just look at all of their peers profiles and get a glimpse into everybody in their age groups lives. The social interaction among people has become less because it has been replaced with people focusing on others profiles instead of interacting outside of their social media. People are warping their social skills as a result of this. Leaving nothing to the imagination kills the enjoyment of really getting to know someone personally. As a society we tend to post our good hair days and most appealing selfies. Trailing after what someone perceives to be an attractive photo what is expected are many likes. Frequently, if a photo does not acquire many likes, the person who posted the selfie will feel discouraged and remove the photo. According to Newsweek Magazine, “some Instagram users on Twitter were saying they would like it if the likes were gone from the app, and that it could result in better or more genuine posts overall. They also thought it would be an opportunity to take some of the pressure off of posting and lessen the anxiety around the app. Other people said

it would probably impact the self-esteem of those who use their Instagram likes as a booster for their confidence”. Since people are now so concentrated on how they look and what their profiles portray, they are now becoming more self-absorbed and narcissistic. Individuals initial depression is causing them to become more vain and self-centered which is inducing narcissistic traits within themselves.

Social networking is an excellent environment for a narcissist to reach a wider audience to control their self-presentation, it is a gateway for self-promotion and pursuing multiple shallow relationships. Narcissistic individuals can create an identity in which they can present an unrealistic charming image of them self, falsely boosting self-esteem. Typically, these individuals with self-centered behavior tend to care about themselves more than other people. Their needs and wants come first instead of trying to understand others or be empathic.

We live in a day and age where self-validation is very prominent in not just the American culture but many cultures around the world. Smartphones have taken over and people more than ever are attached to their phones and social medias. When people post a photo online they are usually looking for external validation from other individuals. Self validation is connected with one's self-esteem. When a narcissistic person is feeling stressed, they are more prone to post something so they can feel support and external validation to make themselves feel better. Self validation is healthier than external validation because a person has their own self-esteem without obsessing about what others think. External validation relies on what someone thinks others feel about them. Narcissistic people usually spend more time on social media, post more “selfies” more frequently, have more “friends”, update their status etc. A lot of the time people that are Facebook friends or followers are not usually true friends or even someone that they

have met in person. These so called friends are people who hit like or comment under their page which makes the narcissist feel validated when they get likes and comments. Friendships in their mind are broken down into who messages them or who shows love under their posts online.

With their need for self-validation often they self-enhance photos and spend much time on their own pages to self-reflect on what they have posted. These relationships that they form are superficial because they are based off someone pressing a button which boosts their self-esteem for the time being. No depth is formed, just minor conversations as the narcissist tends to have many backup conversations and “friends” just in case one doesn’t work out. When people have face to face conversations rather than online there are more emotional cues that people can pick up on along with a person’s energy. When people have in person friendships they tend to have a closer and deeper relationship that is most likely going to be a more valuable and long lasting friendship than people that meet online and only have an online relationship. There are much more tendencies for problematic social media use because their ego is on the line so it becomes a time-consuming addiction to post what they feel will fulfill their need to be accepted and great. These shallow relationships online instead of real relationships in the real world decreases the quality of their well-being. The reason they tend to form these types of relationships is because usually narcissists have a persona online that they can not attain in real life so relationships tend to be brief and virtually empty of any true value. This type of person usually only shows a filtered version of themselves which only exaggerates their best self. These shallow relationships usually have sexual involvement and very little other activities that are shared together especially if they met on a social media dating site. The depth of conversation and a true connection is never reached, not because of the other person but because a narcissist cannot offer what they

don't have. When you can't form a true bond with another person the other person is just invested in an uninvested human being. They may act like a normal person, but it is a façade that is put on which is just act. Their main fear is social rejection.

Similarly, as with narcissism, Body Dysmorphic disorder shares in common the fact that self-presentation is an obsession within both disorders. Body Dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a distinct mental disorder in which a person is preoccupied with an imagined physical defect that others often cannot see. Body shape and weight has been a major issue with adolescent girls more now because of social media. Self-esteem can hit an all-time low because of the comparing girls can do with other girl's pages. For example, if a photo is posted online and it does not receive the amount of likes that the person is content with, this may make them feel socially rejected. Some girls might transition their low self-esteem to in turn try to look a certain way and then look for reassurance online. Other adolescent girls can end up with a disorder that has them seeing and feeling extremely unattractive where they can become mentally ill or start suffering with an eating disorder.. BDD shares some features with eating disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder. "The effects of social media may be more potent than those of traditional forms of media (e.g. television and magazines) due to its continual availability (e.g. smartphones), heightened salience from interacting with a similar peer group (similar in age, location, interests, etc.), and in-built real-time evaluative components (e.g., "liking" a photo)"(Griffiths 149). Two famous people that were reported to most likely have this same disorder was Michael Jackson and Marilyn Monroe but it was never confirmed. Both of these celebrities were known to have cosmetic surgery to attain the look they desired. Now,

adolescents are trying to keep up with the image that is idealized on many profiles. There has been a trend of people obsessing over fitness and beauty, fitness, and body image.

The increase in cosmetic surgeries is now being linked to social media. “Social network sites may form a new appearance pressure, because evaluating one’s own and others’ physical attractiveness is an important part of social network use. In line with this notion, evidence has started to emerge that suggests that social network site use may be associated with body image and appearance-changing strategies” (Vries 284). Online, people never know how someone may be altering their photos with technological software on applications. Young women are now undergoing unnecessary multiple surgical procedures to enhance their looks based on photos they have seen online. Once someone experiences a high after seeing the results of their surgery they tend to go back for more. Usually, the cosmetic surgeries become an addiction. Women don’t realize that the photos of other women that they are basing their own beauty on are edited and polished. Social media is dictating what beauty should look like. Just how girls used to look at magazines when they were young and compared themselves to the models in them, the girls in this generation barely pick up a magazine. Instead of looking at a magazine adolescent girls are glued to their phones and social media comparing themselves to other girls their age or who may look in their age range. Smartphones are way more prevalent now than magazines were so more girls now than ever are looking at many profiles and doing comparisons on themselves. The online world has been taking over in the recent years and it wouldn’t be surprising if magazines started to dwindle out of existence just like newspapers have. All we have to do now is go online to read or view the most current media news. Comparing profiles and lives can be detrimental to someone who already has issues with their self-image. Many girls at this time period in life are

trying to find themselves and social media can be a significant hindrance. A term has been coined called “Fitspiration also known as “Fitspo” aims to inspire individuals to exercise and be healthy, but emerging research indicates exposure can negatively impact female body image”(ER 95). In hindsight, social media platforms are fairly new to the public and these latest generations growing up and going to school deal with this totally new way of life online that is very impressionable. Now, all adolescents do is go straight to their phone when they are released from school. At home, instead of being able to think about things, time is just spent on the phone scrolling through Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat etc. It seems like this is stunting the ways adolescents are finding themselves. It is hard enough to figure out who you are growing up, but when you have the distraction of social media that is like throwing a wrench in this process of self-actualization. Self-actualization is defined as the realization or fulfillment of one’s talents and potentialities, especially considered as a drive or need present in everyone. It is hard to find yourself when you are constantly absorbed into an online world and other people's lives.

“Furthermore, sexual minority men experience elevated rates of psychiatric disorders for which body dissatisfaction is a central component, including eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder. Thus, there is a need to examine, in sexual minority men, potential risk factors for body dissatisfaction, inclusive of social media use (Griffiths 150). The underlying factor why people are becoming so obsessed with their image is because they want to be able to take an attractive selfie of themselves.

A huge trend that has evolved in the past years is the selfie movement. “Selfie is defined as a self-portrait photograph of oneself (or of oneself and other people), taken with a camera or a camera phone held arm’s length or pointed at a mirror, that is usually shared through social

media” (Kaur 1149). Self-portrait aka selfie has become a worldwide phenomenon and people are becoming obsessed with selfies. Everywhere you go it seems like someone is off in the corner or out in the open smiling at their phone or tilting their head to get the perfect angle shot for a selfie. If you are out at a club or lounge you can see a person dancing, not with another person but with their phone acting like they are having a great time. At a bar two friends can sit side by side for an hour with a drink and on their phones not talking to one another and then all of a sudden they pick their heads up and smile for each others smartphone camera. Once they are done taking their selfies they go right back to not speaking to one another. This seems to be a lot of what goes on now especially in the world of millenials. Since people are more often doing this they are losing their connections with one another and they are more focused on themselves. By being connected to their social medias they aren’t creating true friendships and they are not focused on what is going on around them. This type of behavior can cause the emergence of mental disorders caused by the addiction to social media. The term selfie never even existed until the year 2013. “Australia has proudly laid claim to inventing the term “selfie”- named 2013 word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries- after its first know use was revealed to be by an Australian describing a photograph taken while drunk at a 21st birthday party” (Pearlman 1). To think that only about 6 years ago this term has surfaced but took the world over by its’ existence. Something called a selfie stick has even been invented to satisfy those who love to take selfies but want to take their photos a bit further from their body then their arm can stretch. ”The Psychiatric Association (APA) during its annual board of directors meeting in Chicago (2014) coined a term ‘Selfitis’, which is defined as the obsessive compulsive desire to take photos of one’s self and post them on social media as a way to make up for the lack of self-esteem and to

fill a gap in intimacy”(Kaur 1149). There are levels of Selfitis like Borderline Selfitis, Acute Selfitis, and Chronic Selfitis. If a picture does not receive the amount of likes or comments the person desires this may lower their self-esteem or even make them depressed. Now instead of just a regular photo people can add all types of filters to make themselves more attractive. There are apps that can even brighten the color of your teeth or smooth out lines or acne on top of a filter that has already been applied to the photo. This can affect a user’s self-esteem by making them feel less than they are because many people are polishing up their images and self-presentation online. Many people are becoming so addicted to what they look like in their pictures and the content they put on social platforms that they barely live a life off of their phones. They are so consumed by social media that their relationships with friends and family suffer. At this point they start becoming very self-conscious and narcissistic. People more now than ever are getting more and more cosmetic surgeries because of social media.

“Internet addicts are unable to limit their Internet use; they continue to use the Internet despite problems they face both academically and socially due to their excessive Internet use, and feel anxious when their Internet access is limited”(Osman 158). Back in the 90’s AOL had AIM which was an instant messenger. This I believe was the precursor to the future online sites. You could communicate with people via typing on a computer. There were even chat rooms on AOL/AIM that were made specific for people’s personalities or desires. This seemed to be a perfect forum for individuals with pre-existing mental disorders, for example (pedophiles, kidnappers etc.) which made for easy access to contact potential victims. The profiles were only words and you could email a person a photo if it came to that point of interest. Often, people hide

behind their profiles and they usually aren't who they portray themselves to be. Even then, anyone could send a photo that was not of themselves.

There is no doubt that in the 1990's internet addiction truly began for the masses. "Internet addiction (IA) is an actual addiction like substance addiction and other forms of dependence. It is a pervasive, chronic, an recurrent phenomenon correlated with serious family, and social, physical, financial, and psychological injuries. The addicted persons experience a significant drop in interpersonal and social functions. Many studies have reported associations among internet addiction, psychiatric symptoms, and depression among adolescents"(Farahani 105). Now instead of having to be at home to be on your computer virtually almost everybody is walking around with a mini computer in their hand held phone. Not until around 2009 did people really start browsing the internet from their phone and apps become popular. The Iphone began the pathway for the smartphone frenzy. Before the Iphone came out the BlackBerry and Motorola phones were popular but browsing the internet with them was slow and data charges were so high that phone bills would be extremely expensive. Even texting was being charged if you went over your plan until unlimited messaging became an across the board rivalry between cellular companies. Now more than ever before, internet addiction is more prevalent because the phone never leaves peoples hands it seems. Many addictions that we are seeing now are connected to people's social media platforms. One specific example would be how people have used Instagram to make money. Companies pay those who have many followers to sponsor their products. Since people witness other individuals that personally get "Insta-famous", they also believe they could obtain the same popularity and status. This is one way that people become obsessed with checking online profiles constantly. They themselves, along with their looks and

in what ways they can gain followers. This connects to the mental health disorders mentioned previously because it involves looks being a top priority and the need to constantly check phones for notifications. If the amount of likes and comments received do not meet the person's expectations they become anxious and also depressed. The world and the future of it is seeming like everything points to online life. People online date, online shop, online bank etc. Even if a person didn't want to convert to a smartphone now in 2019, it is difficult to hold on to an outdated phone such as a flip phone for example. Cell phone companies don't even seem to carry older phones anymore so they are forcing a smartphone into the hands of someone who may not have wanted to have switched to a smartphone in the first place.

Internet addiction is not only affecting adolescents (which is the main group affected) it now impacts older generations. About a decade ago, you could barely catch someone who was of older age on Facebook. Only the younger generations really were using it from around adolescence to people in their early 30's. Now you will see people in their 40's, 50's, 60's, and even 70's with a Facebook profile. The younger generations tend to gear away from the social networking sites that their parents and grandparents use so Instagram and Snapchat are youngsters main social media sites of choice. No matter what age people are it seems they are glued to their phone or at least checking it constantly. "Increased withdrawal could be positively related to the so-called "Fear of Missing out (FoMo)": the fear to miss important social information and to lose popularity, often described by Facebook users when they are unable to use the Social Networking Site as often as desired which then in turn makes people constantly checking their social media. FoMo had been found to positively mediate the relationship of the motive need to belong and the motive need for popularity with Facebook use"(Margraf 8).

Another term that has popped up is called Nomophobia which is when anxiety and uneasiness is experienced due to a person not having access to a device that they can post and retrieve their content on their social media platform. Over the years there has been several terms to go along with what people are experiencing with all the technology around us. “An expert is warning about a modern-day phenomenon called phantom vibration syndrome, where people think their mobile phone is ringing or vibrating when it’s not” (Locke 1). This seems to resemble FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Long gone are the days when people called from a house phone to call another person at their home to let them know that they are leaving their residence to meet up with them. Home phone numbers were more personal to give out than cell phone numbers because a home phone number was connected to someone’s personal space. At this point, hardly anyone pays for a landline in their home because the cell phone is all they seem to need. Now that landlines have been ditched, people have also ditched their ability to connect on a more personal level. The internet has taken over and people have their heads constantly buried in their internet site of choice right at the palm of their hands everywhere they go. We are almost brainwashed as a nation here in the United States to care about what is going on in other people’s lives. The amount of reality shows that have sprung up is living proof of how interested people have become in watching how other people function. People with Internet Addiction practically live online most of their hours awake. “Internet Addiction is not currently categorized by the DSM-5 as a formal psychiatric disorder, but it is listed in Section 3 in a modified form, Internet Gaming Disorder as a disorder requiring further research. Individuals with internet addiction typically spend 40-80 hours per week online, spend more time on the internet for nonessential

use (i.e., pleasure, hobby, or personal use), and report a variety of problems associated with their internet use”(Farahani 105).

The power of the social media is undeniable. It has begun to take over what’s left of the world we once knew without the chaos and confusion of what we have been introduced to as social media platforms. Social media before was known as video games and television. The difference between the old social media and the new social media is that the outside world stayed outside. People did not take their video games and television outdoors with them. Television was addictive also but it was not a social media platform where you can interact with others. Now, instead people are interacting with others on their smartphones which was impossible in the past. Smartphone availability is always around. We are living in an age where we are transitioning as a world that once functioned without the internet into a world where we cannot function without the internet. People can’t catch up mentally with all the changes that technology is bringing to us at a fast pace. Once we think we have figured out one thing the next is coming out for people to have to assimilate their lives to. Behaviorally, the human mind and emotions are adapting as much to the changes as possible, but the answers to all the questions aren’t there yet because not enough time has passed for social media and the human mind to live harmoniously. Boundaries need to be set by adults for themselves with their social media and undoubtedly parents need to monitor their children’s time online. It is crucial that parents do this because children’s minds are still forming. What these social media companies should do is take some responsibility in remedying possible areas they could tweak to help society’s overall mental health. It would be a sad world if we let future generations along with this generation of kids to grow up with their face glued to their phone not knowing how to be social and not enjoying the life there is outside

around them. Some people are beginning to realize that social media isn't so great for their mental health. Constantly being online can surely cause feelings of loneliness and isolation. We as a society do not have to totally cut out the use of social media but we must decrease the amount of time we spend on it for our overall well being.

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