

The Effects of Social Media on Adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

With technology constantly improving and society becoming consistently more dependent on it, social media is rising in significance, specifically within the United States. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, to name a few, are a vital part of the lives of adolescents. The reliance on these media platforms is negatively impacting users in more ways than one. Social media can influence sleep schedules, and has a direct correlation with cases of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (De Choudhury, 2013). Society is becoming extremely reliant on social media, and its effects on the health of young people are becoming increasingly detrimental with time.

EFFECTS ON SLEEP

The average person needs a required nine hours of sleep each night. With the increased use of social media, this amount of sleep can be drastically decreased. Jessica Levenson (2016) states that greater social media use is significantly associated with disturbed sleep. Not only does it make you go to bed later, but it impacts how deep you sleep each night as well. A restless night of sleep can decrease average sleep amount drastically if it gets too extreme. A child can be mindlessly scrolling through their phone for what feels like twenty minutes, and then suddenly check the time and find that it has actually been three hours. An increased use of social media allows adolescents to focus less on their school work and go on their phones more instead. In turn, this makes them stay up later at night to complete homework and other tasks that could have been completed earlier. Overall, this lack of sleep can have major impacts on academic performance, willingness to do activities, and overall mood.

EFFECTS ON WOMEN AND BODY IMAGE

Along with effects on sleep, social media has very impactful effects on body image and how people view themselves, specifically for women. Richard M. Perloff (2014) states that, “Many cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys have found that media exposure predicts body dissatisfaction, thin body ideals, and eating disorder symptomatology among preadolescent girls and young women.” The presence of celebrities and “social media influencers” cause for young girls to create unrealistic standards for themselves and how they should look. These standards are entirely based on images of women with many followers that typically have been photoshopped or physically enhanced in some way. Young women are getting a false sense of what “pretty” is, because of the constant feeding of information telling them that the only way to be beautiful is to look like someone that never truly existed. Perloff (2014) states that this increased use of social media in society today causes young women to focus more on physical appearance rather than who they are as a person. The high expectations of young women to look and act like celebrities they see on social media platforms can cause them to be depressed because of these unachievable body standards (Perloff, 2014).

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Despite photoshop and body image being specifically targeted towards women, social media has a great impact on cases of depression for both males and females. Munmun De Choudhury (2013) states that “social media provides a means for capturing behavioral attributes that are relevant to an individual’s thinking, mood, communication, activities, and socialization.”

The use of social media has a great influence on many aspects of an adolescent's life. Such influence can be dangerous to the development of these adolescents and how they interact with others. A teen could miss out on amazing opportunities to make new friends or spend time with old friends simply because they prefer to be on their phone. This can have an impact on social development and how they grow into an adult (De Choudhury, 2013).

CYBERBULLYING AND SUICIDE

De Choudhury (2013) also states that depression sufferers often withdraw from social situations and activities. This can later cause anxiety and other mental health issues. Furthermore, teen suicides have increased due to this growing use of social media. (Luxton, 2012). A test was run to see how many prosuicide sites were a result of a single google search involving suicide. Luxton (2012) explains that the first ten sites to show up were all prosuicide. This idea of cyberbullying has extremely negative impacts on the mental health and feelings of adolescents, and although it is difficult to confirm completely, these suicide attempts show very likely evidence that social media is the root cause of these attempts, as well as depression in general (Luxton, 2012). With social media use constantly increasing in our ever-changing technological world, one can expect these suicides to continue to increase alongside the growing amount of social media being used in our society.

CONCLUSION

Mental illness and depression are constantly increasing in this day and age. Although increased social media use leads to cases of suicide and poor body image, social media can often

connect people together in ways they do not expect. Despite all the negativity online every day, a solution to this issue of mental health is to empower each other through these means of communication (Naslund, 2016). Empowerment can solve this issue of negativity through the online world, and can establish that not every aspect of social media is bad. Further research on this topic can include the effects of social media on adults, or other demographics within our society. It could also be beneficial to provide further research on adolescents and other aspects of these effects that social media causes or contributes to. The differences in ages most likely have many variations in results. The effects on social media on teens in this day and age is very important to both address and discuss, because it shapes the future of our world, as well as how society chooses to use such impactful technology. With the right care and effort, social media use can be transformed into a positive experience, full of empowerment and happiness.

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