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The Effects of Social Media on Internalizing Disorders in Adolescents

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The Effects of Social Media on Internalizing Disorders in Adolescents

Deziree Wiegmann

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Science Degree in
Counselor Education at
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College of Education
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

The Effects of Social Media on Internalizing Disorders in Adolescents

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Deziree Wiegmann


Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

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Abstract

This capstone project paper is about the effects that social media or advanced technology platforms has on young individuals. Many articles were reviewed, which included research studies on the prevalence of social media usage by adolescents, along with its negative and positive effects on their development. This topic is important for counselors to review in order to treat young clients that struggle with depression, anxiety, self-esteem issues, etc. For counselors and other professionals who work with adolescents, it would be important to look at the data, which has helped derive what treatment approaches may be the most effective and how best to set up these clients for success moving forward. This research may also inform advocacy efforts to encourage social media companies to make decisions that prioritize the health and well-being of children and adolescents in the future. There can then be a reciprocated action for accountability of these companies with the goal of empowering people and giving them a sense of relatability or community with other people around the world through social media platforms.

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The Effects of Social Media on Overall Health in Adolescents and Young Adults

How long has the internet and social media been accessible and in what ways has it impacted us as a society, and more specifically how is it currently affecting Generation Z? The World Wide Web (WWW) was created in 1989 and the first website emerged in 1991, and since then we have seen astronomical advancement in technology and social media (CERN, n.d.). These technological advancements have become a crucial part of our daily lives whether it is in the workplace, in our social lives, or at a local restaurant to order food. While there are many positives to the increase of technology, there are also some negatives, especially for the generation born into it. It is important to know how social media affects adolescents' and young adults' mental health in order to recognize what is going well and what may need change. The first smart phone was introduced in 1992, and the first known social media platform was introduced in 1997, which was only within the last 30 years (Samur, 2018).

Media usage

Statistics are important to consider in order to put issues like this into perspective such as its prevalence and different ways social media may be used by its consumers. About 72% of Americans utilize some type of social media platform (Pew Research Center, 2021). In 2005, only about 5% of the American population were using at least one social media platform (Pew Research Center). This shows how much social media has increased in a short period of time. Generation Z is the first generation to be birthed into the advanced technology and social media era of society. Those around the age of 18 use social media more than any other older age group (Pew Research Center). Adults are using social media more over time, but usage is still more frequent in adolescents. Research statistics show that in 2018, teenagers 13-17 years old were online around 9 hours per day recreationally (American Academy of Child and Adolescent

Psychiatry, 2018). This data shows adolescents and young adults are increasingly spending more time on social media platforms as the years' progress. The numbers continue to incline and does not seem to plateau or decline in regard to ongoing research trends. It is also beneficial to know that students use the internet even more when doing homework or working at a job. Adolescents spend more time on the internet than any other point in time in our current society.

Prevalence of depression and anxiety

Coincidentally, along with the rise of social media and technological advancements, there have also been more depression and anxiety symptoms reported in adolescents and young adults. Researching the relationship between depressive and anxiety disorders and social media would help families, educators, and mental health providers to create developmentally appropriate guidelines for social media use, as well as to understand the effects to develop better therapeutic treatments. It would also be beneficial to know what it is about social media platforms makes them helpful and what makes them harmful and how we can improve this phenomena.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on individuals under 18 years old, 9.8% of the population was diagnosed with anxiety and 4.4% diagnosed with depression from 2016-2019 (CDC, 2022). Along with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, these were the most diagnosed mental disorders found in children (CDC). This has increased over time; in 2003, only 5.4% of the children population were diagnosed with depression or anxiety (CDC). In 2019, 70% of teenagers reported anxiety and depression being a major problem, 26% reported it being a minor problem (Pew Research Center). This shows that depression and anxiety have become a major, if not the biggest, concern that adolescents and young adults are facing increasingly within the last couple of years. These two diagnoses are known to be a leading factor for suicidal ideations, attempts, or completions. In 2020, suicide

was the second leading cause of death among those aged 10-24 and 25-34 (United Health Foundation, 2019). Because the prevalence of depression and anxiety and suicidality in adolescents seems to be increasing simultaneously with the increased amount of social media usage each year, it may be prudent to determine if there is a connection between these two issues in adolescents. It is important to consider how social media contributes to these disorders, if it does, for the sake of considering how fragile and sensitive individuals in this age range are and how mental health can seriously affect them in the long term.

Sensitive Age Group and Developmental Theory

Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, note increased reporting of depression and anxiety due to several potential contributing factors (Woods & Scott, 2016). At this stage in life as they transition to adulthood, these individuals are becoming who they are, finding out what they like and do not like, and figuring out how to express themselves and their individuality (Sigelman & Rider, 2012). Puberty also can affect the way that these individuals interact with the world and the emotions that they experience (Sigelman & Rider). Adolescents and young adults are in a stage of development where their attention span is becoming longer, and they have the ability to focus on tasks despite distractions (Sigelman & Rider). Social media can be deemed as a large distraction, but adolescents and young adults do have the ability to divert their attention if they make the conscious decision to do so (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020). This is shown in the way that if they have an actual task to complete, they can accomplish that task regardless of any present distractions. That could then mean that social media is used to purposefully distract oneself when there is not a specific task to be completed or to cure boredom with entertainment. Erik Erikson's developmental theory can also help to explain some of the developmental processes that adolescents are learning to navigate.

According to Erikson's developmental theory (Erikson, 1958), adolescents are in the identity versus role confusion stage (Sigelman & Rider). These individuals are exploring their independence and developing a sense of self. This helps them to figure out where they fit into society and what direction that they want to go with their lives. At this stage, adolescents are exploring different roles, and are practicing them in order to further explore one's options and preferences within work, family, and interpersonal relationships. Social media can have a large influence on this stage of development as occupations, people, behaviors, etc. can be explored and tested on these platforms. This can be very beneficial, or it can be very overwhelming based on each individual and their experience.

Review of Literature

Anxiety and Depression

Around the world, anxiety and depression levels have been increasing in our recent history (Pew Research Center). After the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers report higher levels of mental health issues across various populations in society. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) specifically describes anxiety as excessive worry and apprehensive expectations, occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities, such as work or school performance (Arnold, 2022). This becomes a diagnosable disorder when it begins to impair daily life functioning such as work, school, interpersonal relationships, etc. According to Mayo Clinic (2022), depression is defined as a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. The following discussion will summarize research articles to explain how depression and anxiety impacts adolescents.

According to the study by Stein and colleagues conducted in 2018, adolescents' self-reported increased problem behaviors in relation to depression and anxiety. Self-reports were

derived from adolescents and corroborated from the parents' perspectives in order to track congruency. Representative numbers of male and female participants and multicultural populations were taken into consideration in order to increase validity of the study. Some of these problem behaviors these participants identified include substance abuse, aggression, self-harm, and participation in illegal activities. High significance was found as those reporting high depression symptoms, as they were much more likely to engage in the negative behaviors listed previously. Researchers noted that a strained relationship with parents at this age can contribute to anxiety or depressive symptoms (Stein, et al., 2018). Vidal et al. (2020) also mention that the parent-child relationship can have an influence on adolescents; it is also a sensitive developmental time for mood regulation. This is important to understand, because in this age group, individuals are becoming more independent and learning more about who they are as an individual.

Prevalence and Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

Social Media. There seems to be differences of opinions in the research about the relationship between social media and depression. A study conducted by Jenelchick, et al. (2012) showed that at the time there was no significant evidence for social networking sites causing depression in adolescents. In this study they used the *Patient Health Questionnaire 9* (PHQ-9, Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002) in order to help assist with determining depression symptoms. They did find that more than 70% of adolescents who were studied were using *Facebook*, and most of their time spent on the Internet was through social media sites. It is important to keep in mind that this was a study from ten years ago when social media was still climbing in popularity.

Social media may be useful in identifying depression in adolescents. Another study conducted in 2016 focused on proposing early detection of depression based on social media

posts (Ophir, et al., 2016). Mental health experts were used to scale the level of depression detected in the status updates of the adolescents involved in the study. The authors found that in 2015, 1490 million accounts on *Facebook* were registered with 89% being active and used for about two hours per day. They also found that most people used it for self-presentation, emotional self-disclosure, and to socially connect with others (Ophir, et al.). A key finding of this study was that psychological depression symptoms seemed to be affected, but physical (e.g., loss of sleep, little appetite, etc.) were not impacted as much. Overall, this study was influential in helping identify warning signs for depression and suicidal ideation in social media posts. Another article by Vidal and colleagues also suggests that social media can be used in order to track and predict depression symptoms in adolescent's posts' (Vidal, et al., 2020). As mentioned previously, depression is associated with increased suicide ideations, attempts, and completions based on research findings. Suicide is reported to be the second leading cause of death in adolescents aged 10-24. Finding some causes for suicidality as well as protective factors can be important to learn how to combat this form of tragedy.

Benefits of Social Media to Adolescents Overall Wellbeing

Social Connection on Social Media. There are a few drawbacks to social media, but there are also quite a few benefits that it provides to adolescents and young adults as well. Many adolescents explain that social media makes them happy in some ways. Liu and colleagues (2022) explain that social media can be used for good in the way that it helps people stay connected with others who may be difficult to see in person. Social media lets people share with others their thoughts and feelings in order to make relational connections. In a way it can help people feel less lonely and less like they may be missing out on someone's life, events, news, etc. Parents may have an easier time being away from their children because they can connect to

them via social media, and can count on their children being near their phone to call them at any time. An article by Vidal and colleagues (2020) explains that internet and social media can be beneficial because of increased access to information. This is extremely important to mention, because access to information is quick and helpful in all areas of life. Having the ability to make phone calls to others is lifesaving when in a dangerous or life-threatening situations. The Internet and social media applications can even be helpful when determining whether one should go to the doctor for abnormal symptoms can be helpful or even what doctor to go to within the area (Vidal, et al). It is even convenient, entertaining, and educational to be able to *Google* a random question, learn about a topic of interest, connect with others on that topic, and find answers for homework assignments (Vidal, et al).

Networking. An article and study conducted by Bekalu, et al. (2019) found that for college students, social media is beneficial in helping them network with others. This not only helps college students connect with others in their classes to understand homework to advance in academics, but also to find potential jobs in order to earn money post-graduation. Social media makes this much more accessible and less time consuming to achieve this form of connectedness with others. Because there is only so much time to talk to others and network in person during a class or even before or after the class meets, using social media to speak with other students outside of the classroom helps to work together on assignments and achieve success through mutual understanding of the content.

Additionally, social media can support professional and career-related connections. For example, there is a social media app used specifically for networking for jobs called *Linked In*. It is a quick and simple way to find a job and get to know other people within one's desired profession. This provides opportunities that either would be hard to access or achieve or would

take a lot of time just to speak to someone for the time that they would be available. Even those already employed can find better opportunities by networking online and meeting new people in this way.

Social Media as a Coping Method. Radovic, et al. (2017) found that some adolescents already diagnosed with depression reported enjoying social media for a couple of different reasons. One main reason is to distract themselves from their depressive thoughts and to replace them by viewing posts which involve humor or entertainment (Radovic, et al.). Some participants also explained that they liked being able to keep up with news on their friends or celebrities. In relation to celebrities, tv shows, common likes, etc., they also really enjoyed being in a group with others who shared similar interests in order to feel social connectedness. Participants also mentioned that it was easier to plan future events or enjoyable to view art made by others via photos posted online (Radovic, et al.).

Researchers found that a huge positive of social media usage is the ability for adolescents and young adults to express themselves freely (Vaingankar et al., 2022). This is important for these individuals at a critical developmental period in their lives. Through free self-expression, social media sites have the potential to increase close connected bonds with others who are similar. Social media or the internet may be the only way that some adolescents would have had the ability to meet. Many friendships start online and then meeting one another in person comes later. Sense of belongingness and a sense of purpose in life can also be achieved in these people with the help of social media (Vaingankar, et al).

Self-esteem was increased when an individual received positive social feedback from others on social media (Vaingankar, et al). This feedback helps with the feeling of relatability with others, as you are not the only one experiencing or feeling certain things. A clear self-

concept can be associated with knowing one's self better, to set personal goals, and develop compatible relationships (Vaingankar, et al). Individuals also have the ability to see things that they enjoy viewing and reading on their home pages of social media sites. These could consist of anything such as baby animals, inspirational quotes, sports updates, celebrity news, and so much more. Viewing these things alone can improve mental health and provide more positive feelings of happiness.

Social media can also be beneficial in a way when it comes to motivation for physical exercise. In an article and study conducted by Gilbert and colleagues (2021), they found that gain messages and loss messages about weight and muscle mass to individuals equally increased motivation for physical exercise. For example, when these individuals received either negative messages about loss of muscle or positive messages such as gaining muscle, both were motivating and beneficial. Actual activity of increased physical exercise was not detected, but motivation was increased. The motivation alone could improve actions and effort to work toward mental health goals, even though physicality may not change.

Information Access on Social Media. An article by Vidal and colleagues (2020) explains that internet and social media can be beneficial because of increased access to information. This is extremely important to mention, because access to information is quick and helpful in all areas of life. Having the ability to make phone calls to others is lifesaving when in a dangerous or life-threatening situation. Looking up information to determine when one should go to the doctor for abnormal symptoms can be helpful or even to search for a doctor to go to within the area.

An article by Wang and colleagues (2022) explains that the Internet has benefited society in the way that it has increased access to health information and healthcare support. An article and study conducted by O'Reilly and colleagues (2019) suggests social media can be used for

good in regard to providing beneficial information to its consumers, and promotion of the importance of mental health. It can be helpful to talk openly on social media about mental health issues in order to end the stigma around this topic and normalize engaging in counseling for mental health issues. With this young population in mind, schools may consider initiating mental health promotions on their social media sites to connect to students and families. Referring them to resources via social media would also be helpful by encouraging them to talk about their struggles and seek support for their mental health concerns.

Drawbacks of Social Media to Overall Wellbeing

There are many benefits of adolescents utilizing social media, but inversely, there are many drawbacks as well. Woods and Scott (2016) found that adolescents who used social media more and those who were more emotionally invested in it experienced poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and depression. In this study, 467 adolescents with daytime social media use and nighttime social media use were compared. Nighttime usage showed poorer sleep quality even after controlling for feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, etc. Sleep is an important aspect of life to highlight for this age group especially. Adolescents need more hours of sleep per night than adults in order to function at a high level. For depressed adolescents, daytime functioning may be difficult already, but losing sleep as well will only make things worse. This study is significant in differentiating the effects of social media sites specifically rather than computer or Internet use in general. More research is needed to decipher and be specific about the effects of social media, because it is beneficial to know how it may or may not affect adolescents' development, such as the effect on depression symptoms.

Social media negatively impacts adolescents when it comes to stress, because it may make them feel like they need to be available at all times or social pressure to respond

immediately (Woods & Scott, 2016). An article by Pagnotta and colleagues (2018) explains that adolescents are stressed and anxious about previous negative experiences that they have experienced online rather than the social media platform itself. Some adolescents also may fall victim to posting inappropriate things online, lying about their age, talking to potentially dangerous strangers, etc.

A meta-analysis by Liu and colleagues (2022) found that adolescents who spent more time on social media have an increased risk for depression. This is important to know in the social media debate of its positive or negative effects on adolescents. Harassment is much more prevalent on social media apps (Vidal et al., 2022). This same article mentions cyberbullying and how it's easy access and prevalence increases depression in adolescents (Vidal, et al). They also found that increased use of social media can result in increased risk of suicidality. Further, while social connectedness is a benefit of social media, excessive reliance on online communication and support can be problematic (Vidal et al.). This is good to be informed of, because this can delay social skills development in adolescence which may impair them to work a job, go to school, or go out in public, etc. These instances in turn can add to isolating behaviors, anxiety, depression, and loneliness, especially when humans are social beings.

In an article and study conducted by Radovic, Stein, and Miller (2017), participants discussed the negative issue of comparing themselves to others and being insecure about follower count. Social media reinforces users to want even more approval from others and may increase insecure tendencies (e.g., the number of likes on their posts) as well (Radovic, et al.). This would definitely have a negative effect on the self-esteem of adolescents where they may already be struggling to find friends. Cyberbullying was also mentioned as a social media issue that decreases self-esteem (Vidal et al.) Other researchers found that lack of physical activity in

relation to time spent on social media could be a contributor to increased depression in female adolescents (Barthorpe, et al., 2020). An article by Lee and colleagues (2022) also found that the more time spent on social media, the more likely someone is to have depression and anxiety symptoms. An article and study conducted by Paulich and colleagues (2021) found that social media use in adolescents, worsened mental health, increased behavioral issues, decreased academic performance, and led to poorer sleep patterns. More time spent on social media meant less time interacting with real life, people, and social events. The distraction of social media can have a very negative impact on development when it comes to schoolwork. Social media can easily add to the decrease in motivation to do things because it can be entertaining and a form of procrastination.

In addition, an article by Wang and colleagues (2022) explains that social media has the ability to spread misinformation and rumors related to health causing distrust and other challenges for public health efforts. Social media can also overemphasize information in regard to health causing fear and panic, especially when it is widespread on numerous apps or sites.

COVID-19 Pandemic Findings

In regard to COVID-19 and social media usage, it is important in receiving timely health information during the pandemic (Wang, et al., 2022). This study focused on pregnant women, and they found that they were more likely to have depression symptoms during the pandemic which may be due to social media usage. For these research participants, increased usage of social media, led to higher the levels of worry and anxiety. Posts on social media apps with a variety of information, not all of which has been vetted, can be easily made up or misconstrued. Similar to the game called *Telephone*, where a comment is passed along from person to person through whispers, each person hears the comment differently. By the end of the line of people,

the original message could be something completely different than intended, but unintentionally changed. Access to a whole lot of information is beneficial, but then there is more work in doing research and finding the most accurate information.

Capasso and colleagues (2021) found that some people with anxiety and depression developed a drinking problem during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because many people were unemployed, they may have spent much more time on social media. This could have also had something to do with the increased amounts of drinking alcohol. In this study they also found that older adolescents may have been impacted the most (Capasso, et al.). The stress of the pandemic and the unknown may have exacerbated the drinking issue as well as unemployment. The pandemic made it so that physical and social interaction was extremely limited. Evidence of schools going to classes being completely online was a brand new issue for families in our society to navigate. Now, these young adolescents were also not able to hang out with friends; in return, causing more social media usage. COVID-19 may have also caused physical social interactions to become less frequent from the anxiety caused by the pandemic. Now children may feel more awkward to have conversations with others in real life verses texting on an app. Also, as adolescents have begun coming out of the pandemic recently, it is important to continue to assess alcohol usage as individuals may be utilizing it in order to be social with others in person.

Valdez and colleagues (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic increased social media use, which for some may be a coping mechanism to combat feelings of isolation that in turn relate to long-term social distancing. Also, the negative effect of social media usage may further exacerbate long term negative feelings. Within four months, from when this article was written, 45% of Americans reported the pandemic influencing negative mental health symptoms (Valdez

et al., 2020). This explains how the pandemic was overall a negative experience for most people in a variety of different ways. Most likely the anxious feelings of not knowing what to do or what was actually going on was problematic; additionally, pandemic restrictions put life to a halting stop and increased feelings of anxiety. An article by Lee and colleagues (2022) also found that the more time spent on social media during COVID-19, the more likely someone was to have depression and anxiety symptoms. Quarantine had a lot to do with increased social media usage considering social distancing was the best way to stop the spread of the virus. While humans could not be social in real life, connecting with others online or through social media was an alternative. This was a gift, but also a curse in numerous different ways. In one study, researchers found that adolescents had the hardest time with heightened feelings of depression and anxiety during the pandemic (Lee et al., 2022). The force of social distancing impacted adolescents who preferred online interactions instead of in-person interactions, which could be due to the social distancing or fear of getting the virus.

In a meta-analysis by Lui and colleagues (2022), they found that females are more impacted than males in relation to time spent on social media sites. They found that this may be due to females placing social connectedness higher in importance than their male counterparts. Barthorpe and colleagues (2020) also found in their study that as females spent more time on social media, and so, they saw increased self-harm, self-esteem, and depression. Females tend to report that they spend longer periods of time on social media than what males report for time spent on social media. In other research, women were once again more worried or concerned with social media causing elevated stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wang et al., 2022). Pregnant women were found to be even more anxious and worried about their health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was further increased the more time that

they spent on social media gathering information which can be even more so for pregnant adolescent or young adult females.

In a study conducted by Martin and colleagues (2022), they found that brief social contact-based videos proved effective in reducing depression symptoms in adolescence of racially stigmatized groups. They mention in the article that black youth are twice as likely to die by suicide compared to their white peers. They concluded that black adolescent girls were more likely to seek help for depressive symptoms after watching a video of a black girl talking about her feelings of internalized racism. If they watched a video of white people, they did not receive as significant of a response from the participants. This is important to know, because relating to others with the same ethnic background socially makes a positive impact whether online or in real life. Representation is influential when it comes to guidance, relatability, and comfortability (Martin et al).

Craig and colleagues (2021) found that LGBTQ+ members have critical opportunities on social media to explore their identities, connecting with peers, and accessing resources to increase overall wellbeing. They mention that previous research has suggested that those in the community use social media more than those not in the community. They may be seeking guidance from others on their identity and sexual preferences. As postulated in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), watching others and learning about others helps one to understand oneself better. Cyberbullying was found to be more prevalent with LGBTQ+ members resulting in adverse mental health (Vidal, et al., 2022). Craig and colleagues also did find that social comparison and cyberbullying is a negative experience for this community too. Overall, the LGBTQ+ population has more of a positive experience online and can find a close social circle on social media platforms than their heterosexual counterparts. They are able to seek advice and

talk about related struggles that not everyone can. Online they are able to seek further resources for a sense of community and social connectedness (Craig, et al.).

In a study conducted by Gillespie-Smith and colleagues (2021), they determined adolescents with autism find social media beneficial as well. This is because they find social interaction easier online than it would be in real life considering those with autism find this to be one of their biggest struggles and evidence for the diagnosis. Due to this ability to connect with others, they may spend even more time online than others do, but it helps them to combat loneliness and isolation. They also mentioned that young people with autism need to be aware of the risks that are online more than the neurotypical person may need. Those with autism may be a more vulnerable population so parents and educators should help monitor their social media usage. This would also assist in risk reduction to avoid cyberbullying or exploitation (Gillespie-Smith, et al).

Counselor's Role and Treatment Options

While there are pros and cons of social media usage, there are quite a few different strategies that counselors can do in order to help clients be more mindful of social media use and ways to cope and achieve higher life satisfaction. One major intervention that counselors can do is to encourage clients to limit notifications on their phone in order to ensure better sleep quality, so they are not being woken up all hours of the night (Woods & Scott, 2016). It can be so important to teach clients to not only set boundaries with people in our lives in order to teach self-preservation, but also to set boundaries with our technology. For example, many smart phones have a 'Do not disturb' option that can be utilized in order to silence calls or texts, so as to not be woken up. Notifications can still appear, but then be addressed when it is a good time. In addition to improving physical health, these types of boundaries may also improve mental

health. Sleep has continuously been researched as a major factor with adolescent depression, anxiety, stress, etc. At this critical developmental period in life, it is extremely important to adolescents' physical and mental health to be getting an adequate amount of sleep, in order to function most effectively throughout the day.

Pagnotta and colleagues (2018) explain that when counseling adolescent clients, the counselor should be informed about cultural norms related to social media use to accurately assess normative usage versus problematic behaviors. Normative examples would be prosocial communication with other peers and problematic behaviors would be cyberbullying or internet addiction. The authors also mention that counselors should be multiculturally competent and aware of cultural differences for different groups of people that use social media. This is important in order to acknowledge that not everyone's experiences are the same when it comes to their social media usage. Counselors should continuously learn about social media and encourage open dialogue to consider ways that social media impact values, lifestyle choices, and concerns (Pagnotta et al.). Competency of social media can facilitate more personalized, culturally sensitive interventions to build therapeutic alliances and enhance treatment outcomes. All of this information is really important, because it is true that in order for counselors to help with social media concerns, it is best they are knowledgeable about apps or websites being used by clients. Therefore, counselors must take some responsibility in doing their own research or participating in trainings on them.

Another valuable psychoeducational intervention that counselors can do is to explain to clients the best websites to gain accurate information when searching the Internet (Wang, et al., 2022). This references the previous point in regard to counselor's needing to be knowledgeable and do their own research to inform clients of websites with accurate information. That way,

clients may feel less anxiety about potential misinformation, especially physical health, and mental health related concerns. Also, encouraging them to look for support or ask questions when deciphering information that they may have read. Counselors should inform their clients to speak to their doctor specifically about health concerns and their counselor or psychiatrist about mental health concerns. Working on negative thought patterns and increasing self-esteem would be very beneficial to teach clients. Empowerment can be a useful tool in order to help clients be confident in finding accurate information on social media sites or in doing their own independent research on any topic. Not only is it important for clients to feel capable in their abilities to navigate social media in a positive way, but additionally, what to do if they find themselves struggling to interpret information as accurate or inaccurate.

Counselors can assist in encouraging parents and guardians to monitor their child's screen time and the content they are consuming on their social media device (Paulich et al., 2021). Since these are younger children in a sensitive and developing age group, they need help coming back to reality. It is easy for them to be consumed with social media and using it as a distraction from real life things such as sleep, academic performance, ideal behaviors, etc. While school personnel should consider the pros and cons of cell phone access in schools, counselors can help explain and spread word of the negative effects that social media has if consumed for long periods of time (Gajdics & Jagodics, 2022). At this age, adolescents and young adults are already easily distracted and like to be entertained. Social media is good for social connections, but connections in real life are important as well. It is critical developmentally for adolescents to be able to socialize in face-to-face interactions. Preferring online communication may be detrimental to development and increase social isolation in the physical world. Counselors can talk with parents and encourage adolescents to seek out social engagement offline as well as

online. Clients could benefit from spending more time being face-to-face in social or other productive ways throughout their lives to feel a sense of meaning or purpose in the world around them.

Conclusion

The internet has been around for about 20 years (CERN, n.d.). and social media has been used for around 25 years (Samur, 2018). Since then, the usage of these two online services have been heavily increasing each year and now the majority of the United States population has access to them. Simultaneously, anxiety and depression numbers have been increasing in this country. While researchers are still studying the relationship between these two variables, adolescents and young adults have lived constantly in a world with this advanced technology. This is a sensitive age group in regard to development of self-identity and self-expression; yet, the developmental effects of long-term social media use are still being examined. Thus, it will be necessary to look at the biological implications of social media on anxiety and depression, as the frontal lobe in the brain does not fully develop until around the age of 25. The frontal lobe is responsible for memory, judgment, abstract thought, motor tasks, and social appropriateness. Thus, social media may have a developmental impact on the frontal lobe, and thereby, these other mental processes. Therefore, further study on technological interactions and the effects on the brain and mental health is warranted.

Contrary to popular belief, there are quite a few benefits to adolescents having access to social media platforms. The main benefit is that individuals have the ability to find a sense of belonging or connectedness with others online, even if it is not in person. Social media is also a popular source for pure entertainment and makes a lot of people happy to view and engage with various forms of entertainment that they enjoy. It also helps in instilling motivation in others and

finding things that interest them, that they may have no exposure to otherwise. Social media can help one learn how to cook, learn current fashion trends, how to fix a computer, etc. It is very helpful to have a device that can assist individuals in learning and to have access to information almost at all times. Social media has also been found to help individuals get motivated to engage in physical exercise and eat nutritionally; it can also help individuals study and pass academic classes. There are quite a few positives to social media, but consumers should be also aware of some negative aspects.

Research has found that as people become more emotionally invested in social media, individuals experience poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and depression. Having the ability to see what everyone is doing at all times, can create a space in which one is regularly comparing oneself to others which may contribute to lower self-esteem. It can also be stressful to have access to these apps at all times because it puts on pressure on individuals to respond as quickly as possible. This can easily contribute to symptoms of anxiety or stress on top of other responsibilities in life. Loss of sleep is widely prevalent in adolescents because they may be on their devices all night and being distracted rather than allowing themselves to fall asleep naturally. Cyberbullying is also more likely to take place, because people have the ability to hide behind anonymous platforms or are much bolder to bully online through a screen. Misinformation can also be easily spread throughout social media sites and that can be harmful to those that do not take the responsibility of doing their own research. Lastly, excessive social media use can contribute to decreased health by not exercising or taking the time to cook healthy meals. COVID-19 has also had a large impact on depression and anxiety and causing increased usage of social media, although we cannot be sure if these are correlated with one another.

COVID-19 research has suggested that people find it even more difficult than before to be social with others in in-person interactions (Lee, et al., 2022). Quarantine contributed to increasing the issue of being social with others in real life and knowing how to use social and conversational skills. It was also found that drinking increased over the pandemic which may contribute to increased depression and anxiety diagnoses. Prolonged time periods of self-isolation quickly led to negative outcomes due to the fact that humans are social beings by nature (Valdez et al., 2020). The pandemic also made it even harder to trust health information that was being shared online and not being able to go anywhere. That presented an even more increased responsibility of doing independent research and knowing who to trust and who not to trust in order to be healthy. All of these issues affect adolescents use of social media in ways that promote wellness.

Counselors should also review multicultural considerations regarding social media usage. Multicultural considerations by demographic groups are very important to examine as the research is very helpful to support a variety of clients. Specifically, authors of numerous articles note that females look more for social connectedness in social media usage (Lui et al., 2022). Further, the LGBTQ+ community is also most likely to experience cyberbullying online although they are avid users in order to connect with their community (Craig, et al., 2021). Individuals with autism actually enjoy social media and to be able to connect with others in that way since they struggle to connect with others socially in real life (Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021).

Thus, this review of the literature underscores the need for counselors to be knowledgeable about social media. It will help with open discussion, understanding, and improve how to go about treatment for adolescent clients experiencing anxiety and depression. Counselors can provide psychoeducation about the pros and cons of social media, and help

clients set treatment goals based on their prosocial or detrimental use of this technology. They can also encourage parents and educators to work with children to find balance in using social media tools.

Future Research Directions

Future directions of research would be to learn more about differences in race and how social media impacts depression or anxiety related symptoms. It would be beneficial to know more about certain social media platforms and which ones may cause individuals to experience higher levels of depression or anxiety, or which ones reduce these symptoms. It would also be interesting to learn which platforms have the most engagement, why that would be, and if it adds to or reduces individuals' depression or anxiety. Longitudinal studies would also be interesting to see how social media impacts an individual throughout their lifespan. These kinds of studies could also research if anxiety and depression persist throughout the lifespan in relation to social media usage or if it alleviates it over time. It is a high possibility that social media usage may fluctuate depending on the age of the individual.

Applications to Clinical Settings

This topic applies to the counseling field in many different ways when it comes to working with young clients. It may give counselors more insight into why these individuals may experience lower self-esteem, comorbid mental disorders, and self-isolation. Knowing this information may assist counselors with diagnosing depression and anxiety and considering further treatment options. While we still do not know how social media affects internalizing mental health disorders, counselors should consider current studies suggesting it may be an underlying, subconscious issue that contributes to various mental disorders. This literature review also provides good information to develop treatment plans for individual clients. This is

further helped if the counselor does their part to research social media platforms and how they may have an impact on the user, whether positively or negatively.

Author's Note

I went into the topic of this paper with an open mind, although I was under the impression that social media would be more detrimental to adolescent development. Looking into both sides of the research is extremely enlightening and helpful to consider differing perspectives. Everyone is different, so perception plays a large role in each individual's experience. Through this research, I have learned that social media and technology have many benefits as well. I also found that there are many different factors and variables at play which involves the nature vs. nurture perspective. Biological traits can play a role as well as personality traits and the environments that we grow up in. We as humans are evolutionarily social beings so the social aspect of social media is a major factor of its success. The main takeaway for me is that, just like most things, moderation is key. Balance in life is very important and too much of anything can develop into a problem. Some other practical examples could be eating too many sweets, sleeping excessively, frequent drinking, self-isolation, etc. For me personally, the research is valuable because it is beneficial to know that social media can be leaned on for being social when in-person is not available. I also believe it is beneficial to know that it should not be used as a replacement and ironically enough it could possibly lead to real life self-isolation. As a professional this research and information is beneficial for many reasons. Treatment of anxiety and depression can be helped, and it can be used for mindfulness and grounding techniques, focusing on the here and now. Learning to not compare oneself to others is crucial as well and knowing that most people's social media is essentially a highlight reel. As social media and

technology continues to increase and be more popular, it is so important to be aware of past and current research to compare to the future.

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