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The Impact of Social Media on the Self-Esteem of Youth 10–17 Years Old: A Review of the Literature

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The Impact of Social Media on the Self-Esteem of Youth 10–17 Years Old: A Review of
the Literature

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A Clinical Research Project submitted to the faculty of The Illinois School of Professional Psychology at National Louis University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology.

Chicago, Illinois
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The Doctorate Program in Clinical Psychology
The Illinois School of Professional Psychology at National Louis University
Chicago, Illinois

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Clinical Research Project

The Impact of Social Media on the Self-Esteem of Youth 10-17 Years Old: A Review of the Literature

This is to certify that the Clinical Research Project of

Jasmine M. Daniels, M.A.

has been approved by the CRP Committee on July 28, 2020
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Abstract

The world of technology has expanded quickly and vastly since its inception. The creation of social media sites and applications has changed the ways in which youth interact, connect, and share with one another. As the number of social media sites and applications increases, so does their use by adolescents. During adolescence, youth are undergoing the process of identity development and self-esteem is an important part of this development. During this developmental period, adolescents' self-esteem is likely to be affected by the feedback they receive online through social media sites. There is limited research available that specifically evaluated the impact of social media on adolescents' developing self-esteem. Of the articles available that investigated the relationship between these two constructs, some were published 8 years ago or more (i.e., 2012 or earlier) and the social media platforms adolescents use have changed. The focus of this theoretical clinical research project was to review the research and data available on the impact of social media use on the self-esteem of youth, present the clinical implications of the current research, and provide suggestions for the need and direction for future research. The chosen studies included participants between the ages of 10 and 17 years old who used various social media platforms. The existing research demonstrated both positive and negative correlations between social media use and self-esteem. Increases and decreases in adolescents' levels of self-esteem are influenced by different factors, such as feedback, their investment in social media, and reason for use. The varying results provide support for the need for additional research on the relationship between these two constructs as social media continues to change.

Introduction

The world of technology is an ever-evolving industry, as there is always a new website, application (app), or device that changes the way people send and receive information or generally communicate with others. This digital world is all the current generation of children and adolescents have grown up knowing and a large part of their social interaction occurs online via different social media platforms.

Media becomes integrated into the everyday lives of children and adolescents early on and provides an ongoing backdrop for their development (Calvert & Valkenburg, 2013). Children and adolescents have the capability to use media in their homes, in restaurants, in cars, on planes, while walking down the street—almost anywhere. As the world of media evolves, the type of media accessible to children and adolescents increases.

Media and technology are integrated into the lives of children and adolescents for two reasons. The first is that they choose to use media, known as foreground or active exposure. When children are inadvertently exposed to media because others are using it around them, this is called background or passive exposure (Huston, Wright, Rice, Kerkman, & St. Peters, 1990). Engaging in media is enjoyable for many adolescents, making foreground exposure the most common among children and adolescents. The use of different media interfaces such as mobile phones, the Internet, and online gaming engages children and adolescents in observational learning of how to interact with others and in actual social interactions with others (Calvert, 2015).

Different forms of media expose children to a wide variety of content, some good and some bad. Media can serve as a platform for educational lessons, but also violent

behavior and sexual expression. Both foreground media exposure and background media exposure can be harmful to the development of children and adolescents. Media has been shown to be distracting, an interruption to daily activities and concentration, and a constant stream of stimulation (Calvert, 2015).

The effect of media use in its many forms, on children and adolescents, has been evaluated from a few key theoretical perspectives. One is the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), which looks at the social relationships that influence children's behavior as well as how children learn through role models and friendships they develop with media characters. The psychoanalytic theory has been used to explain the influence of media on aggression, sexuality, and the development of identity (Calvert, 2015).

Since its inception in the 1990s, the Internet has provided the opportunity for adolescents to get online, and changes in Internet speed and the introduction of social networks have enabled adolescents to engage in interactions online with friends rather than strangers (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Social media such as MySpace, FaceTime, Friendster, Twitter, and Facebook enable adolescents to connect with their friends and families rather than strangers (Calvert, 2015). Valkenburg, Peter, and Walther (2016) made a similar point, stating that with the introduction of Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, also social media sites, adolescents are introduced to more diversified online communication than before with more expansive audiovisual platforms designed to encourage communication with others and maintain existing friendships.

With the convenience and constant access provided by mobile devices, particularly smartphones, 92% of teens ages 13 to 17 report going online daily, including

56% reporting they go online several times a day and 24% stating they go online “almost constantly” (Lenhart, 2015a). Interestingly, Internet use via smartphones or a mobile device by teens differs racially among African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian teens as reported by the Pew Research Center in (Lenhart, 2015a). Results showed that among African American and Hispanic youth, 34% and 32%, respectively, reported going online “almost constantly,” whereas 19% of Caucasian teens reported going online that often (Lenhart, 2015a). When a similar survey was conducted just 3 years later, also by the Pew Research Center, the results showed 95% of adolescents age 13 to 17 had a smartphone or access to one and 45% reported being online near constantly, which was almost double the results for constant use in 2015 (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). With the increasing development of electronic mobile devices such as tablets, smartphones, and musical devices, the digital media environment available to adolescents online expands to enable them to listen to music, text, call, stream a television program, watch a movie or video online, record and upload their videos, or play a mobile app.

With the rapid and extensive evolution of media, the type of media available to children is vast and quickly growing and is having a dramatic effect on adolescents and how they develop and interact with peers during a critical developmental period in their lives. It is important to remember that even though technologies are quickly changing, the developmental needs of children remain the same (Calvert & Wartella, 2014). Therefore, the focus of this review was on social media sites and their influence on adolescents.

Social media sites are considered to be any websites that allow social interaction, including the social networking sites mentioned previously, as well as video sites, such as YouTube, gaming sites and virtual worlds, and blogs (O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, &

Council on Communications and Media, 2011). Social media sites enable individuals to create personal electronic profiles. These sites allow users to leave residues of their presence to others on the site through posts, friends lists, and being a part of specific groups, as well as to make observations of others' lives. This fulfills adolescents' need to belong, plan social events, and express their beliefs and emotions (Calvert, 2015).

Changes in the way adolescents socially interact have made face-to-face interactions less prominent in everyday life. Present technology allows adolescents to interact socially with one another through texting and by connecting through a variety of social media sites. These interactions are considered to be mediated communications in contrast to face-to-face communication (Calvert, 2015). In 2011, a total of 80% of U.S. adolescents used at least one social media platform (Lenhart et al., 2011), and only a few years later in 2015, only 71% of American teens reported using more than one social media platform (Lenhart, 2015a). This indicates teens are diversifying their social media site use, allowing them to interact with the same or different groups of people, both known or unknown, across multiple platforms.

Adolescents use multiple social media sites daily that allow them to upload and disseminate different types of information about themselves. Teens spend over half of their time online using social media sites (Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). They create an online identity and virtual presence on these sites. Facebook used to be a social media site widely used by teens. In 2015, a total of 71% of teens used Facebook, as Instagram use fell just above 50% and Snapchat use fell just under 50% (Lenhart, 2015a). A new survey of American teenagers conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2018 showed only 51% of teens age 13 to 17 use Facebook, whereas social media platforms such as YouTube

(85%), Instagram (72%; a video, and photo-sharing application), and Snapchat (69%; an application enabling users to share short-lived image and video narratives and messages) were used by a majority of the teens surveyed (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

When posting on social media platforms, youth have control over what they share and can carefully choose what information to put forward while keeping more intrinsic responses that might come out in face-to-face communication hidden (Boyd, 2008). A large majority of teens who use social media admit that people get to show different sides of themselves on social media that they cannot show offline (Lenhart, 2015b). Though teens consider the ability to share parts of themselves on social media they feel uncomfortable sharing in person as a positive aspect of social media, many of these same teens feel people are less authentic and real on social media than they are offline (Lenhart, 2015b).

As social media use continues to increase and shape and change peer interactions between youth, research investigating social media's impact on adolescents has begun to surface. The available research has contained a focus on the relationships between social media use and mental health issues, well-being, and self-esteem. Research has shown the developing self-esteem of adolescents is influenced and affected by peers and they seek their approval in various ways (Harter, 2012).

This understanding and awareness that adolescents are using social media at a high rate makes it appropriate to explore the possible relationship between social media and self-esteem. However, the available research on this topic is limited in number and some studies are were published in 2012 or earlier and much advancement has been made on social media platforms in that time.

With this in mind, the specific focus of this theoretical clinical research project was to evaluate the available research and data on the impact of social media use on the self-esteem of youth, provide suggestions for the direction of future research as social media expands and the age of social media users decreases, and to garner a greater understanding of the need for programs and interventions for treating this population that is so heavily influenced by social media.

Review of Literature

Self-Esteem

Individuals undergo many different changes during the development of the “self,” which involves several different self-processes. For this literature review, the focus is on the developmental changes that occur during the process of developing self-esteem from the ages of 10 to 17 years old. *Self-esteem* is defined as a positive or negative attitude toward the self that endures across time and situation (J. D. Brown & Marshall, 2006; Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is important during adolescence, as individuals are undergoing the process of identity development (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015) during a time in which feedback on the self is likely to affect self-esteem (Erol & Orth, 2011; Valkenburg, Koutamanis, & Vossen, 2017). Harter (2012) posited that from the standpoint of cognitive development, emerging cognitive abilities across the course of development enable individuals to construct “higher-order generalizations about the self” (p. 10) and to develop a concept of worth as a person.

Interactionists such as James Baldwin, Charles Cooley, and George Mead viewed the “self” as socially constructed and attributed the opinions of others as playing a role in shaping the self through social interactions. The socialization experiences in which an individual is involved have the potential to greatly affect the valence of self-attributes leading to both positive and negative evaluations. Approval from others (e.g., peers, caregivers) is internalized as acceptance of self, but if peers or caregivers are rejecting, punitive, or neglectful, the opposite is internalized (Harter, 2012). Cooley presented the concept of a looking-glass self-model of self-esteem in which the internalization of significant others’ opinions works to inform the level of global self-esteem as it emerges

in middle childhood (Harter, 2012). However, if the construction of self is highly dependent on the internalization of the opinions of others, it can morph into the creation of a false self that is not authentic to one's true experience, which social media platform provides an easy-open door for an individual to create. The following sections illustrate the development of self-esteem from middle childhood through adolescence.

Middle to late childhood (ages 8 to 10). Research has demonstrated an individual's ability to verbalize a sense of his or her overall worth as a person emerges at the age of 8 years, considered to be middle childhood (Harter, 2012). Mruk (2006) suggested this time period is the most crucial in the development of self-esteem. His reasoning behind this was that during this stage children begin to discover their abilities and characteristics and begin their evolution into being known by and identifying with what they have discovered about themselves. Children in mid to late childhood (i.e., ages 8–10) are able to understand that success in domains of personal importance promotes high self-esteem, whereas failure in these domains not only undermines their sense of competence, it takes a toll on self-esteem (Berzoff, 2016; Harter, 2012). Additionally, at this age children can recognize that the approval of both peers and caregivers contributes to their self-esteem, and adolescents at this age tend to overinterpret or misjudge the extent to which others are evaluating them, leading to a preoccupation with how they look in the eyes of others (Valkenburg et al., 2017).

In addition to socialization experiences, during this period, children are making cognitive strides that affect the development of their global self-esteem. Children between 8 and 10 years old are making a shift from domain-specific self-perceptions to a more integrated self-perception that encompasses their overall self-esteem. There are four

important cognitive skills acquired during this time that can lower a child's self-esteem by leading to more accurate but negative self-appraisals: appreciation for negative and positive attributes, the ability to use social comparison for the purpose of self-evaluation, the ability to differentiate real self-perceptions from ideal, and increases in social perspective-taking skills (Harter, 2012).

First of these skills is an appreciation for negative and positive attributes (Harter, 2012). As children develop a greater understanding of the positive and negative attributes they possess, their perceptions of themselves are more realistic and also have the potential to be more negative. As children begin to employ social comparisons, many fall short in their self-evaluations. The negative judgments these children give themselves when compared against another in areas they deem as important will begin to tear away at their self-esteem. A third cognitive skill developed during this period is the ability to differentiate between one's real and ideal self. Children begin to come to a cognitive realization as to whether they are or are not meeting the expectations they deem as important. A realization that they are not would lead to a lowering of their global self-esteem. The final cognitive ability developed in middle to late childhood that affects children's self-esteem is an increase in perspective-taking skills. Just as gaining an appreciation for one's positive and negative attributes leads to a more realistic view, so does an increase in the ability to understand the viewpoint of someone else. Children are better able to accurately assess the opinions others have about their specific characteristics. Additionally, because at this age children have a growing concern for how others view them, others' opinions tend to hold a significant level of importance toward the development of the self. As a result, this pragmatically leads many children to lower

their self-evaluations (Harter, 2012). As this stage of self-esteem development ends and individuals prepare to move into adolescence, they have a global level of self-esteem (Mruk, 2006).

Adolescence (ages 11–19). Between late childhood and early adolescence, Harter (2006) stated peer support and approval increase in their ability to predict self-esteem and parental approval continues to affect self-esteem, although it is not as influential as peer approval. Adolescents experience a major developmental transition during this period of their lives. In early adolescence, adolescents' understanding of self-esteem becomes differentiated from their own perceived self-esteem based on their relationships with others (e.g., parents, peers, teachers).

Individuals in early adolescence (i.e., ages 11 to 13) are beginning to understand and are trying to make meaning of the different self-characteristics they are receiving from many sources, including themselves, as well as using these different abstract attributes to define and describe “the self”—their “self.” During this time, self-esteem becomes a more prominent part of adolescents' vocabulary as they begin to understand and explore the link between peer approval and self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Adolescents during this period tend to be preoccupied with physical or perceived appearance and the opinions or approval of their peers affect their levels of self-esteem. Young adolescents who are affected by appearance and approval of peers report lower self-esteem.

As mentioned previously, during adolescence individuals become preoccupied with the approval of peers. As they enter middle to late adolescence (i.e., ages 14 to 16), the internalization of the opinions of peers and family becomes a major source of their self-esteem and increases greatly at age 15 (Harter, 2012; Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018).

Some studies have shown youth's self-esteem as a whole decreases between early and middle adolescence due in part to increased introspection focused on negative attributes and physical appearance/perceived attractiveness remaining of great importance (Harter, 2006), whereas others imply the self-esteem of individuals between the ages of 11 and 15 years old tends to stay steady (Orth et al., 2018). Self-esteem also tends to vary by gender with the largest difference occurring during adolescence, in which girls' self-esteem is lower than that of adolescent boys. Research has shown that as girls continue to progress through adolescence, their levels of self-esteem seem to progressively drop. The self-esteem of boys remains stable, only showing a moderate decline from 14 to 16 years old compared to the longer range of decline experienced by girls between the ages of 12 and 17 years old (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005).

However, as individuals start to enter late adolescence (i.e., ages 17 to 19), their self-esteem tends to increase. They are able to recognize their weaknesses in areas in which they do not feel adequate and still encompass higher self-esteem that is based on their strengths (Harter, 2006). Adolescents in this stage of development have greater freedom and autonomy to choose areas in which they are or feel competent, discover their own realm of success and acceptance in courses and extracurricular activities, and choose peer groups that will provide the approval and acceptance that have the potential to enhance self-esteem. During this period, adolescents also begin to move toward establishing self-esteem that is moderated less and less by the need to meet the expectations of others, whether it is peers or parents and family.

Social Media and Self-Esteem

Social media refers to “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” (“Social networking,” n.d.). Social networking sites are included under the umbrella of social media. Both *social networking sites* and *social media sites* provide a way to connect and share with others so these terms are often used interchangeably. The majority of sites and apps used by adolescents, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, are both social media and social networking sites.

Social media sites, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, have undeniably altered the landscape of teen interactions. These platforms play a critical role in connecting teens with new friends. With 64% of teens meeting new friends online and 62% of teens sharing social media usernames as a means to keep in touch, social media platforms have created a new way for teens to meet and get to know and learn more about each other (Lenhart, 2015b).

As the landscape of social interaction continues to change and social media continues to be a central part of how adolescents communicate, there are bound to be positive and negative impacts. Research exploring the impact of social media use on adolescents and children is still relatively new, and not much has been done specifically to understand how the developing self-esteem of this age group is affected by their social media use.

Studies of the relationship between youth’s self-esteem and social media use have focused on two different types of self-esteem: global self-esteem (Apaolaza, Hartmann,

Medina, Barrutia, & Echebarria, 2013; Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014) and social self-esteem (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2017). A large part of self-esteem is informed by interactions with close friends and peers and these interactions play an integral role in the development of both types of self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Research conducted on social media and self-esteem has demonstrated negative and positive associations.

Valkenburg et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study in which they sought to investigate the relationship between youth's use of social media sites and social self-esteem. In this study, they described *social self-esteem* as the degree to which adolescents "feel accepted and liked by their friends and peers and feel successful in forming and maintaining friendships" (p. 35). Results of Valkenburg et al.'s three-wave panel survey showed a positive relationship between adolescents' (i.e., between 10 and 15 years old) social self-esteem and social media use. There was no evidence that social media site use significantly increased their social self-esteem, as contrastingly, results from the study yielded support for the idea that higher social self-esteem among participants was correlated with an increase in the use of social media sites. Valkenburg et al. also studied the role of feedback from social media sites and found feedback from both close friends and acquaintances positively affected adolescents' social self-esteem seemingly in the short term as opposed to the long term. Other researchers evaluated the negative and positive impact of social media on adolescents and found the feedback received from peers on social media, whether positive or negative, has a significant impact on their self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). This might be explained by the nature of social media and the ability to provide *instant* positive feedback (e.g., likes, favorites, re-

posts), which may lead to instant or short-term increases in self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2017). Additionally, adolescents' ability to be selective in their self-presentation on different social media platforms, such as Facebook, and the relationships developed from this selective presentation have the potential to positively affect their evaluations of themselves and, in turn, their self-esteem (Pantic, 2014).

Other studies (Apaolaza et al., 2013) have shown adolescents socializing on certain social media sites demonstrated an increase in self-esteem and an enhancement in their subjective well-being. Their study of the use of a popular Spanish social media site among 12- to 17-year-olds provided support for the notion that connecting with peers online to maintain and strengthen social relationships with friends and receiving the approval and acceptance of others helps to increase self-esteem. Apaolaza et al. (2013) further posited that the well-being of adolescents depends directly on their self-esteem and loneliness.

Much of the research investigating social media and self-esteem among adults and adolescents included measurements of the frequency of social media use. Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) differentiated between the frequency of use and investment in social media sites. Frequency for this study was defined as how often the adolescent used social media and investment was defined as how important social media was to adolescents. Findings from this study illustrated frequency was not a significant predictor of self-esteem among adolescents age 12 to 17, but on the other hand investment was a significant negative predictor of self-esteem. Additionally, Blomfield Neira and Barber compared the levels of self-esteem of those with and without a social media profile and

found that females who had a social media site profile demonstrated lower self-esteem when compared to females who did not have a profile on a social media site.

Verduyn, Ybarry, Résibois, Jonides, and Kross (2017) suggested passive use is associated with lower subjective well-being and active use has a positive association with subjective well-being, including self-esteem. Additionally, the authors found cross-sectional studies showed varying results on the relationship between social media use and subjective well-being, including self-esteem. Longitudinal studies provided more concrete evidence of a negative impact on subjective well-being as a result of social media use.

However, social media sites are not exclusively used to meet new friends, they are also a major part of how teens interact with existing friends. Teens report feeling better connected to their friends' feelings and information about what is going on in their friends' lives through social media use, demonstrating teens have an opportunity for emotional relief and social integration on social media platforms (Lenhart, 2015b). In line with this sentiment, teens also report that social media provides a means for them to extend support to their friends during challenging or troubling times with 68% of social media using teens reporting they received support via social media during difficult times (Lenhart, 2015b). The benefits of the social support perceived by adolescents through social media sites are increased emotional support, self-disclosure, reduced social anxiety, and a sense of belongingness (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

The use of social media sites not only provides a new way to stay connected with friends and family, make new friends, and share and exchange ideas, pictures, and

information, it also creates an avenue for adolescents to explore and extend their sense of self, community, and the world. Social media platforms afford teens various opportunities to fundraise for charity, volunteer, and engage in individual and collective creativity and the expression of ideas creatively through images and videos. This generates a vast array of online connections through shared interest, creating connections with others from diverse backgrounds, and fostering individuality and unique social skills (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Teens’ social capital (i.e., wider social connections outside local networks) is extended, often creating offline gains. Many children and adolescents, with and without a helping adult or parental figure, have been discovered or noticed for their talents (e.g., musical, athletic, culinary, etc.) by celebrities and featured on television programs because of videos posted and shared on multiple social media sites.

With the growing number of adolescents identifying as sexually diverse or gender variant, social media sites provide support for this population and for identity experimentation among adolescents (Best et al., 2014). In an Australian study, 85% of participants used social media sites to explore their sexual or gender identity (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014). They described these sites as a place where they could find friends they trusted or a place where they felt accepted. Many adolescents who identify with this population use social media sites to connect with services for young people, chat with others in this population, find support for coming out, and engage with social and political issues (Robinson et al., 2014). The chance to feel more connected to peers, find support, make new friends, and get discovered or noticed presents the opportunity for positive feedback, which literature has shown has the

potential to enhance self-esteem at a time when peer and family opinions are a source for their self-esteem (Harter, 2012; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

There are also potential liabilities associated with the construction of a self that is so highly dependent upon social interactions with significant others (Harter, 2012).

Taking a look at the negative social outcomes that have arisen requires exploring a few key factors that can contribute to negative social interactions for peers with peers. One is the impact of cyberbullying. Nine percent of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 years report they have been affected by cyberbullying via social media sites or through other electronic forms (B. Brown & Marin, 2009). Cyberbullying is common on social media sites and can cause profound outcomes such as depression, anxiety, isolation, and suicide. The availability of information, the speed at which information is shared, and the permanence of the information that is used or created make cyberbullying very different from traditional bullying. With the pervasiveness of social media, rather than a small group of peers bearing witness to the teasing and ridicule to which youth can be subjected by their peers, the entire school has a front-row seat to the shame and embarrassment the victim experiences. This type of bullying does not stop when the victims have left school, gotten off the bus, or left the party, it follows them home because social media unlike a face-to-face bully is with them all the time (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015; Kersting, 2016). Victims of cyberbullying demonstrate lower levels of self-esteem, and some studies have revealed the same is true for perpetrators of cyberbullying (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015; Cènat et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Cyberbullying victims tend to experience lower self-esteem when compared to victims of other forms of bullying.

Self-esteem plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of mental health. Low self-esteem, as mentioned earlier, is associated with the pathology of several mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Nima, Rosenberg, Archer, & Garcia, 2013; Pantic, 2014; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Social media sites have also been found to relieve the social anxiety and isolation felt by some teens when online interactions take place between strangers or new friends. Online social interactions using social media sites have been shown to support introverted adolescents in learning how to socialize behind the safety of a screen, whether it is a smartphone or laptop (Rosen, 2011).

Additionally, research studies have shown social media use is impactful on adolescents' risk of developing anxiety and depression. Best et al. (2014) provided evidence from the literature of a link between a teen's preference for online social interaction and friendship formation and a decrease in well-being. The online profiles adolescents create on social media sites give them the feeling they need to perform a character. Price (2011) suggested "living on these sites" means individuals are performing their profile, or sometimes multiple profiles, constantly, which contributes to a state of performance anxiety.

Higher levels of anxiety and depression and lower self-esteem have been reported among adolescents who exhibit a greater use of social media sites as well as among those teens who demonstrate an emotional investment in social media sites (Woods & Scott, 2016). The relationship between emotional investment in social media platforms and anxiety and depression supports that adolescents who are more emotionally invested in these sites are at an increased risk because of the feelings of distress and isolation they

experience when they are not connected to social media, as they often fall prey to the social pressure to be constantly available. With regard to the associations found between lower self-esteem and social media, negative feedback and social comparisons to other profiles contribute to the diminishing of adolescents' self-worth (Woods & Scott, 2016).

Another phenomenon being researched is "Facebook depression," or feelings of depression that develop when individuals spend a large amount of time on social media sites and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Because acceptance by and contact with peers are important elements of adolescent life, as mentioned before, acceptance from peers in the online world is just as important as acceptance in the offline world. This acceptance or peer approval influences levels of self-esteem. The intensity of the online world is thought to contribute to this "Facebook depression" and puts adolescents at risk for participating in negative behaviors (O'Keeffe et al., 2011), although findings on this phenomenon vary. Although self-esteem was not explicitly measured by the researchers, low self-esteem is a negative attribute of depression.

Online versus face-to-face communication. Adolescents are beginning to prefer online communication to face-to-face communication. Adolescents receive constant and often immediate interpersonal feedback from content they post. Whether this online feedback is positive or negative, it is more public and visible than what is received in face-to-face communications, which may make younger adolescents more susceptible to online feedback (Valkenburg et al., 2017). Positive feedback from peers online is more common on social media, as it is typically designed to elicit this type of feedback via likes and comments and, in turn, serves to encourage self-esteem in youth. In the small

percentage of online cases where negative feedback is primarily received, research has shown adolescents' self-esteem suffers (Koutamanis, Vossen, & Valkenburg, 2015), making it more harmful than face-to-face feedback.

A positive relationship between a lack of social anxiety, defined as feeling comfortable talking with others in person, and making new friends was found in a study evaluating face-to-face communication and technological communication (Pierce, 2009). In contrast, a positive correlation was yielded between social anxiety, being uncomfortable talking with others face to face, and talking with others online (Pierce, 2009). In-person interaction or face-to-face communication provides an emotional closeness that cannot be achieved through electronic communication (Sherman, Michikyan, & Greenfield, 2013) and has been shown to protect against feelings of loneliness.

Being a part of a social media site or multiple social media sites provides the feeling that the individual is never and never has to be alone. The individual always has friends with him or her with whom the individual keeps in constant communication with a few swipes of the fingers or a few keystrokes. However, the question becomes whether in the process of being and staying connected people are setting themselves up to be isolated and unable to handle being alone.

In the book, *Alone Together*, Turkle (2011) explored the way in which social media culture is changing how adolescents relate to friends and parents. Online social interaction allows for situations for adolescents to be together while not really being together. A dramatic change is the ability to be what Turkle called "elsewhere" at any given time, avoiding a difficult or hard face-to-face or personal interaction, and going to a

place where it does not have to be dealt with (Price, 2011). When things become difficult or awkward at parties or other gatherings, instead of being present and learning to get along, adolescents now have the option to retreat to social media sites and “leave” the situation.

When studying in-person interaction along with social media interaction, research has shown adolescents who spend more time interacting with friends in person also spend more time on social media sites (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2018). Further, adolescents who spend less time in in-person communication but spend a significant amount of time on social media report the highest levels of depressive symptoms. In contrast, adolescents who engaged in face-to-face communication more often were not significantly affected (Twenge et al., 2018) but the same was not true for those who were high in in-person social interaction.

Gender similarities and differences. With the increase in the different types and access to social media sites, there are gender differences and similarities in the preference and use of these sites. For example, girls on average spend more time than boys on social media sites (Lenhart, 2015a). Another difference can be found in the reason adolescents use social media sites. Boys more often use these platforms to meet new people and make new friends. They are more often likely to identify with groups on social network sites that differ from their offline peer circles. In contrast, girls generally use them to communicate with peers and to reinforce preexisting relationships (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

Adolescents’ motivations to visit social media sites also vary by gender. Barker (2009) found communication with peer group members was the leading motivation factor

for social network site use among females and males. In conjunction, females more often reported high positive collective self-esteem, more overall use, and visited social media sites to communicate with peers. In contrast, males, more often than females, reported a negative collective self-esteem and visited social media sites for social compensation and social identity gratification.

Past research (Clay et al., 2005), before the culture of social media was developed, showed media in the form of magazines, TV, films, advertising, and music videos affected the self-worth and self-esteem of adolescents. Perceived appearance emerged as the strongest predictor of self-esteem among both male and female adolescents in these articles establishing a link between body image and self-esteem. Data from those studies showed adolescents, especially girls because of the images to which they are exposed through the media, believe their appearance is the basis on which they should evaluate themselves and be evaluated by others (Clay et al., 2005). With the creation of social media platforms, adolescents are provided with a constant opportunity to compare themselves to different pictures and videos of friends, celebrity figures, and social media influencers every moment of the day at a time in their development when their self-esteem is affected by their physical appearance or perceived attractiveness.

Selfies, likes, the pressure to post, and impact on self-esteem. Peer acceptance and interpersonal feedback are vital components of social media sites. Social media sites provide adolescents with the capability to post pictures and videos from anywhere at any time. With this constant connection to peers through social media, adolescents start to need other people to feel validated. People post “selfies” to enhance their self-esteem, which occurs through the number of likes the picture receives (Pounders, Kowalczyk, &

Stowers, 2016). Teens post pictures and videos with the intent of receiving attention in the form of likes and comments from peers, however, what happens when they do not receive the attention they hope for or want?

The type of feedback adolescents receive on social media profiles affects their self-esteem negatively or positively. Positive feedback can enhance self-esteem, whereas negative feedback can decrease self-esteem (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

Individuals with lower self-esteem and higher self-monitoring care more about receiving likes and view likes as a validation of their self-worth, implying their self-worth is at least in some part moderated by others (Scissors, Burke, & Wengrovitz, 2016). This presents a pronounced risk for adolescents who are in a developmental period in which identity formation is a critical task and self-image is influenced by peers. In fact, boys' and girls' visual self-presentation on social media sites is aimed at managing the impression they make on others, as well as to gain acceptance from their peers (Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jimenz, 2015). Conforming to beauty standards and peer convention is rewarded by likes, equaling peer validation and serving as a marker for popularity. Pictures that conform to a sexualized model, whether feminine or masculine beauty, are considered attractive for the purpose of getting attention. With 40% of teens reporting feeling pressure to post positive and attractive content about themselves (30% report feeling "a little" pressure 10% report feeling "a lot" of pressure), children and teens decide how to present themselves online through photos they are filtering through what is socially acceptable and what is considered appropriate in terms of gender and sexual identities, while also weighing what is viewed as less desirable by their peers (Lenhart, 2015b; Mascheroni et al., 2015). In addition to the pressure some teens feel to post content that makes them

look good, teens also feel pressure to post content that others will like and comment on. Similar to the percentage of teens who feel pressure to post content that makes them look good, 39% of teens on social media say they feel pressure to post content that will be popular and get lots of comments or likes (Lenhart, 2015b). However, there are no differences between boys and girls, younger and older teens, or those of different racial or ethnic backgrounds when it comes to feeling pressure around posting content that others will like or comment on (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015). If the attention they are seeking is not received, it degrades their self-esteem, possibly leading to the posting of riskier content (e.g., pictures, videos, etc.).

Adolescents growing up in the digital age often connect feeling good about themselves with how others perceive them. During a developmental period in their life in which they are defining who they are, the social comparison social media enables pushes them into a world of competition with other adolescents on who has the most likes and pushes them away from getting to know their true selves. They grow to believe the number of likes they receive is a reflection of who they are and a measure of their self-worth (Kersting, 2016).

Methodology

Research for this literature review involved using multiple databases and search descriptors in an attempt to discover all research that fit within the context of the literature review topic. The method for identifying and locating resources involved accessing the Argosy University (before its closure) and National Louis University library online cataloging systems. This allowed for a search of several online databases. The online databases used to locate numerous articles and books included EBSCOHost Academic Complete, PsycArticles, PsycInfo, ProQuest, EBSCOHost's eBook collection, and eBook academic collection, PsycBooks, and ProQuest's eBook Central. Google Scholar and Google Books were used to locate articles and books related to the topic that were accessible through a direct link or that could be searched via the online databases mentioned above. During the analysis of sources for this review, additional articles and books were identified by reviewing the reference lists of relevant articles. This enabled the researcher to conduct a search of referenced sources and additional works by experts and leaders on the topic.

The keywords and phrases used during the search were chosen to make sure all aspects of self-esteem as well as articles that used self-esteem and self-concept synonymously were captured. The descriptors used during the research included *social media and self-esteem*, *teens and social media*, *adolescents and social media and self-esteem*, *the impact of social media on adolescents*, *social media and adolescents' self-esteem*, *adolescents' self-esteem and social concept*, *self-esteem and children*, and *development of self-esteem*.

A resource was evaluated and included as a reference based on its relevance to the topic of the development of self-esteem and social media's impact on self-esteem, age of participants, and date of the article. The credibility and validity of all the sources were also considered for this literature review. The majority of the sources cited were published prior to the year 2013. A few sources were included from previous decades to establish foundational concepts from leaders in the topic area.

Discussion

There is limited research available on the impact of social media on the developing self-esteem of adolescents (Apaolaza et al., 2013; Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; O’Dea & Campbell, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 2017; Valkenburg et al., 2006). Most have evaluated the impact on social self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2017; Valkenburg et al., 2006) or global self-esteem (Apaolaza et al., 2013; Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; O’Dea & Campbell, 2011). The results from these studies have shown both positive and negative relationships between these two constructs or no correlation at all. Some researchers found adolescents’ social media use did not increase or predict social or global self-esteem (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2017), whereas other research provided evidence for adolescents exhibiting an increase or decrease in self-esteem with increased social media use (Apaolaza et al., 2013; O’Dea & Campbell, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 2006; Woods & Scott, 2016). Additionally, research has shown that when youth demonstrated higher social self-esteem, their social media use increased (Valkenburg et al., 2017).

Some researchers chose to differentiate between the way each adolescent interacts with social media. When frequency of use and investment were separated, the results showed the more invested in their social media adolescents were, the lower their self-esteem (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; Woods & Scott, 2016).

Studies have shown self-esteem helps with developing and maintaining mental health, and when self-esteem is lowered it has a negative impact on mental health and has been associated with depression and anxiety (Nima et al., 2013; Pantic, 2014; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). This makes research studying the relationship of social media and mental

health and well-being relevant, in many ways, to gaining further understanding of the impact of social media on self-esteem. Adolescents' online profiles on various social media sites can contribute to anxiety as a result of them feeling the need to "perform" or be a character while on these sites (Price, 2011). Additionally, just as social media investment and greater use play a role in lowering the self-esteem of adolescent users, they also have an impact on the development of anxiety and depression (Woods & Scott, 2016).

Adolescents use social media as a way to build connections and get support from their peers. They interact with peers away from school and social media allows peers to feel better connected and informed on what is going in the lives of their friends and extend support when needed (Lenhart, 2015b). Youth receive support during difficult or challenging periods in their life, for identity experimentation, or to display their skills and talent in the hopes of being discovered (Best et al., 2014; Lenhart, 2015b; O'Keeffe et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2014). This support and opportunity to explore various parts of their identities can help increase the self-esteem of adolescents or moderate the decrease in self-esteem.

Positive feedback received online has been shown to enhance self-esteem and negative feedback has been shown to have the reverse effect (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Cyberbullying can be classified as negative feedback and occurs on social media sites through posts and messaging. Studies evaluating the impact of cyberbullying and social media have shown victims as well as perpetrators of cyberbullying demonstrate lower levels of self-esteem (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015; Cènat et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010).

As the world of social media continues to evolve, individuals are afforded new ways to engage on these different platforms. The majority of the existing research available measuring self-esteem and social media use often included undergraduate students or adults. However, as this literature review has shown, adolescents as young as 10 years old use social media platforms with the same frequency, if not greater frequency, as adults, but the degree of research investigating the relationship between these social media and self-esteem and the younger population is disproportionate to the research available for adults.

Additionally, much of the research on the relationship between social media and self-esteem is quickly reaching 8 years or older (i.e., published in 2012 or earlier) and some studies have already surpassed that. Many of the social media sites previously studied (i.e., Facebook) are not used by adolescents as much as they have migrated to newer social media platforms (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Specific apps, such as Snapchat, Instagram, Kik, Musically, TikTok, and Triller, did not exist or were still in the infancy stages of popularity and use. The social media sites used by adolescents have changed with the addition of new features and ways in which children and adolescents can post content (e.g., going live, sharing stories and messages that disappear, posting anonymous messages), thereby increasing the need to research how the creation and use of new social media websites and apps affects today's adolescents. Because the number of social media sites available to youth continues to increase and the ways in which they can interact on these platforms continue to expand, it will be beneficial to have data with which to evaluate this relationship. The available research varies between measuring social or global self-esteem and in some instances both. Continuity in the constructs

measured could also help in the effort to use the data to develop positive ways to help reduce the risk to self-esteem.

Based on existing research assessing the impact of social media on self-esteem, future research with adolescents may require a multidimensional approach that weighs frequency and investment to provide a more accurate understanding of how social media affects self-esteem. Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) suggested evaluating investment would provide insight into the level of importance youth give to social media interactions because youth who are invested in social media are suspected to place a greater importance on frequent interactions. This difference could provide more information than what is already available about how self-esteem is affected, and whether one has a greater impact than the other.

As more research is conducted and more data are made available on the relationship between social media and self-esteem, a greater understanding can be garnered. This understanding can be used in the development of preventative or protective programs, therapeutic interventions, and parenting programs that focus on minimizing the impact and treating this population that is so heavily influenced by social media.

The available research has shown adolescents' engagement on social media can affect their self-esteem in positive or negative ways and is tempered by peer responses. This literature review illustrated that as a part of youth's self-esteem development, peer influence is monumental. With what is known about youth development of self-esteem and the role peers play in this evolution, one can see how the added challenges of navigating interactions on social media could complicate this for youth, for better or

worse, the worse often not revealing itself until adolescents have endured negative interactions alone or tried to overcome them without success for some time. Having interventions that focus on bolstering self-esteem and providing a framework and place for adolescents to normalize what they are feeling, experiencing, and thinking from online interactions, and allow them the opportunity to learn skills to navigate online interactions and be better prepared for negative interactions when or if they do occur online. Interventions of this type should take into consideration how self-esteem develops across the lifespan. As Harter (2012) illustrated, the development of self-esteem differs from childhood to adolescence so, although children and adolescents may interact on social media platforms in similar ways, where they are developmentally in the development of certain self constructs, such as self-esteem, is very different. Therefore, one-size-fits-all interventions would not be beneficial. Using Harter's (2012) age breakdown of how self-esteem develops could provide a solid foundation and understanding of specific cognitive developments and influences occurring at different stages that affect self-esteem development. This cognitive understanding of how children and adolescents view the "self," the opinions of others at different stages, and when perspective taking and self-evaluation begin to occur are important factors in understanding self-esteem and could be an essential tool in developing beneficial interventions. Harter's framework and timeline could be used as a guide in the creation of interventions that would be appropriate in helping children and adolescents follow a trajectory of positive self-esteem among social media use that mesh with their cognitive abilities from an identity perspective.

Research has shown feedback online from peers, whether positive, negative, or not at all, has an impact on the self-esteem of adolescents and the type of user they are (e.g., active, passive, invested) can moderate the impact of social media use on self-esteem. Therefore, when creating and implementing interventions and programs based on where adolescents are in their self-esteem development, social media engagement should be a component. For older adolescents, who have already had a significant amount and constant exposure to social media and are further along in their self-esteem development, this could mean engaging them in interventions that create awareness and mindfulness about themselves on social media, how feedback online or the presence of no feedback affects how they feel about themselves, evaluating what kind of user they are, and helping them to learn skills to positively moderate/mediate the negative. For younger adolescents and children who may have had a limited amount or not as consistent exposure and are in the beginning phases of self-esteem development, this could be more preparatory for interactions on social media with others that will promote positive esteem in themselves and others and help them learn how to manage negative feelings from online interactions.

Interventions focused on helping to promote positive self-esteem through social media use could be effective in school settings particularly because this is where many peer interactions online often bleed into in-person interactions at school. Additionally, these interventions would be beneficial in group therapy environments outside of the school. Both settings could also create an opportunity for adolescents to learn the skills associated with face-to-face communication and experience a sense of competency in this personal domain that is often stunted with online communication.

From a parental standpoint, it can be difficult to find a balance between mitigating the negative risks to adolescents' self-esteem that happen through engaging in social media and allowing them to engage on such platforms, especially when all their children want to do is be on these sites. This can often lead to arguments or parental guilt about their child being the outcast or "left behind" socially because he or she is not allowed to be on social media constantly. The research in this review provides many different parental takeaways. One is that when children are engaged on social media platforms positive impacts on self-esteem can occur—they feel a sense of connectedness and support. Second, based on their child's experiences online, a negative impact on self-esteem is possible, and that negative impact is not always caused by cyberbullying or a negative comment, but could be because the child does not receive the expected or desired feedback or feels a sense of pressure to "perform" or post content, the right content, for "friends." This is where the research by Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) provides an important implication for parents regarding the need to gain awareness of how their children are on social media and the level of importance their children place on social media interactions; how invested they are can be a telling factor into how these interactions are affecting their self-esteem.

Burrows and Rainone (2017), in their study of college-age students, found that a sense of purpose (i.e., having an ongoing motivation that is self-directed, oriented toward the future, and beneficial to others) acted as a moderator for the impact of feedback on social media on self-esteem. The results of this research provide support for the idea that if parents begin fostering the idea of a sense of purpose in older and younger adolescents through volunteering, sports, creative arts, clubs, or other activities as they are developing

self-esteem, this could potentially act as a moderator between self-esteem and engaging in social media in adulthood and possibly prove to affect them as they develop through adolescence.

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