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# The Effect of Social Media on the Physical, Social Emotional, and Cognitive Development of Adolescents

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The Effect of Social Media on the Physical, Social Emotional,  
and Cognitive Development of Adolescents

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### Abstract

This paper explores the possible problems that the usage of social media can have on the physical, social emotional, and cognitive development of adolescents. Adolescence is such a crucial and vulnerable stage in development, where teenagers begin to form their own identity and create meaningful relationships, but social media can have a profound effect on areas of their development. Social media offers new opportunities and challenges for adolescents more today as a generation than ever before. Issues regarding body image, academic achievement, and self-esteem and the connection to social media usage is reported. The issue of cyberbullying and its connection to social media is examined, and the importance of empowering adolescents who have been victimized through bullying is discussed. The paper presents a variety of social networking sites that put adolescents and their information in danger, and it concludes with possible recommendations that parents may utilize in order to be able to talk to their adolescents about social media usage and the possible detriments that can occur.

## **Context**

In today's society, media is connected to almost everything that humans interact with. It can be used in education, finance, entertainment, and for social interactions. Almost every week there is something new being discussed in the field of technological study field regarding media. Whether it is a new app, a new phone, or even a new song, media can have profound influences on people's attitudes and beliefs. One might argue that given the prominent role that technology plays in the 21st century, it is important to consider its effects on human development.

Technology gave birth to social media, which has been on the rise since its creation. Adolescents have become attached to smartphones in recent years, which can act as a gateway to social media and its many features. If that is the case, then precautions need to be taken and attention needs to be paid to social media and its use in order to understand the possible detriment that may occur to an adolescent's development.

The issue that can occur with the use of social media is that children can possibly start an account earlier than what the social networking site requires by just changing their birthday. Garber (2014) states that most social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat require that the users are 13 years old or older. Youtube requires that the account holders are 18 years old or older, but they also allow children as young as 13 to join as long as they have their parent's permission. The problem here is that there is a growing number of children signing up for social media at a younger age than what the sites require, with or without their parents knowing (Garber, 2014). It is important to emphasize the possible harm that may occur through the use of social media and if a child is using it at an age that is not even close to being appropriate, then that can be especially harmful. The Children's Online Privacy Protection

Act (COPPA) is a law that was passed in 1998 that protects every child under the age of 13 from having their personal information collected, and the operators of the websites and online services must provide notice and permission from parents if it was going to occur (Garber, 2014). This law can only protect children under 13, so if a child lies about their age on social media, then there is nothing that COPPA can protect. This can cause numerous ethical issues. Private information of the child is more vulnerable, research studies can be disrupted, and the companies themselves can be liable if anything serious occurs. Adolescence is the next step in the lifespan and that is when children will be able to think and reason more logically, which can avoid situations like this, but until then it is the parent's responsibility to monitor their children and assist them in understanding why they should not lie about their age on social media.

Adolescents are starting to figure themselves out and trying to explore their environment to form an identity. They are also undergoing major changes physically, cognitively, and socially. Media can influence some of these features of development since it changes the way people communicate and allows them to be connected at all times of day. As practitioners in the field of Psychology and Education, we need to make sure that the decisions we are making, in connection with media, are developmentally appropriate for adolescents. These developmentally appropriate decisions should take into account all of the developmental domains. If they do, then there needs to be a reexamination, so that a child may develop successfully in all aspects of their life.

### **Media**

Media is such a broad concept and encompasses so many instruments that we use in society, but the most prevalent would have to be computers and personal devices, such as

smartphones. The concepts for the computer began around 1801 in France, where Joseph Marie Jacquard invented a loom that uses punched wooden cards to automatically weave fabric designs. Almost every year there was new advancement in computers all the way until present day. Of course, today we have a lot more than just computers. Smartphones can do almost anything that a computer can do, if not more. They have more processing and computing power than any of the early models of computers even had available (Zimmermann, 2017). Personal devices, such as smartphones, allow society to compute on the go, but it also provides a source of communication. The communication features would lead to the birth of social media.

With the introduction of technology in society, social media and its use has been on a rise since its creation. Lenhart (2015) reports that 92% of adolescents report going on social media daily, while 24% of that statistic go online “almost constantly”. Only 12% of teenagers between 13 to 17 report that they have no type of cell phone. According to Lenhart (2015) the most popular social media platform for adolescents would be Facebook, followed by Instagram, and then Snapchat. Arguably, the popularity of these platforms have changed since these data were initially gathered. Among these teens about 71% use more than one social media site. Lenhart (2015) found that boys and older adolescents are more likely to report that they visit Facebook more often than the other social media platforms. Family income leads to an association among social media sites as well. For example, teenagers from more affluent families use Snapchat more, while teenagers from lower income families report using Facebook more. Social Media has become an enormous part of an adolescent’s everyday life and it is an astonishing development in society, but there can also be negative consequences that can impact development among adolescents in society.

### **Adolescent Development and Technology**

Computer use, social media, and adolescence seem to be intertwined these days. It is rare to see a teenager without a smartphone or a social media account. Social media offers adolescents new opportunities and challenges that were not there before. Most of the time, parents will have to ask their children for help with a new phone or creating a social media account. This is due to the fact that adolescents have grown up with technology and the technology is new to the parents. The children are digital natives, while the parents are digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001). Adolescents have grown up during the age of technology, while older adults have adopted many of the aspects of new technology within their life, and they had to learn to adapt to their new environment. A new challenge that has occurred would be the “language barrier” between the two populations. This can make it difficult for parents to know what is okay and what is not in terms of media use and technology. It is important for researchers and practitioners to stay up to date on all of the advantages and disadvantages of media use and technology, so that parents are able to understand the short term and long term effects. With the incorporation of technology in almost anything within society, it seems that the ‘digital immigrants’ are adapting, but they really do not have a choice (Prensky, 2001). Technology will be on the rise for a long time and people will have to keep adapting.

Media use in adolescence is centered around one common theme; staying connected at all times. Communication has undergone a complete transformation with the advent of social media. People can use social media to stay in touch with friends, make plans, get to know someone, and present themselves to the world. Shapiro & Margolin (2014) found that 73% or more of all adolescents use social media. They also believe this is an underestimate. The idea of social

media seems to be wonderful, but it is the constant use and psychological harm that makes social media use dangerous. On average, 11-18 years olds spend over 11 hours a day exposed to electronic media (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Social media can disrupt activities that are supposed to be solitary and even interrupt ongoing face to face personal interactions. For example, homework and studying are often interrupted by social media --- potentially impacting the quality of the work the child produces. Adolescence is a time for self-discovery and attempting new social skills, and establishing values and affiliations (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Social media can definitely promote these crucial aspects of adolescent development, but it can also expose adolescents to unhealthy aspects as well.

### **Physical Development and Social Media**

Social media can be used by adolescents to explore topics that interest them or to even seek friendship, through the use of the communicative features. This can be very valuable, but at the same time the content that the teens are viewing may impact important domains of their development. One of the domains that social media can hinder would be an adolescent's physical development, which would include any aspects of the human body that one can see. Body image is the dynamic perception of one's body. It includes how the body looks, feels, and moves, and is shaped by perception, emotions, physical sensations, and is not static, but can change in relation to mood, physical experience, and environment (Croll, 2005). Puberty leads to many physical changes during adolescence and that can influence the perceptions of the body. Adolescence is a vulnerable time due to all of these changes, which will easily allow perceptions of the body to impact confidence and self-esteem. Puberty for boys brings characteristics typically admired by society, such as height, speed, broadness, and strength, while puberty for girls can bring

increased body fat and a rounder appearance (Croll, 2005). Body dissatisfaction can lead to terrible health conditions that will take a toll on an adolescent's well-being. Social media is a tool where boys and girls can learn about beauty and body standards and ideals, especially ones within a certain culture, which can impact body image.

Body image and issues with appearance are not only an issue for adolescents, but for adults as well. Approximately 80% of U.S women do not like the way they look, while 34% of men are dissatisfied with their body. Over 50% of Americans are not happy with their current weight, and 70% of women, who are normal in terms of their weight, desire to be thinner. The problem here is that the body image concerns begin in adolescence and can continue into adulthood (Gallivan, PDF). 53% of 13 year old American girls are unhappy with their body, and this number will grow to 78% by the time they are 17. Even before high school, 40-70% of girls are dissatisfied with two or more parts of their body. Around 30% of early adolescents are actively dieting and their families are dieting as well (Gallivan, PDF). Over 50% of teen girls and 30% of teen boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives. Adolescent girls who diet frequently are 12 times as likely to binge eat as girls who do not diet (Gallivan, PDF). Behaviors because of body image can lead to an eating disorder that can severely impact a child's life. 2.7% of teens between the ages of 13-18 struggle with an eating disorder, which can be anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, or another.

The statistics seem to only show the body image concerns of adolescent girls, but boys are just as much likely to develop an issue with body image and it is worth noting. Male teen body image dissatisfaction has tripled in the last 25 years (Malcore, 2016). 18% of adolescent

boys are highly concerned about their weight and physique and 29% of adolescent boys think about their appearance more than 5 times a day. In terms of gaining muscle, 50% of adolescent boys want to gain muscle, 33% strive for both thinness and muscularity, but only 15% only care about thinness. When adolescent boys exercise, about 90% have the goal of bulking up (Malcore, 2016). Muscle dysmorphia is a pathological obsession with muscle building and extreme dieting, which is also known as bigorexia or reverse anorexia. Muscle dysmorphia is growing among adolescent boys and causing risky behaviors. 10.5% of adolescent boys acknowledged using muscle-enhancing substance, 6% have taken steroids without a doctor's prescription, and 5% admit to taking steroids (Malcore, 2016). In relation to eating disorders, males now account for 1 in 4 eating disorders. Binge eating, purging, or overeating were reported by 31% of adolescent boys. When asked what cause the body image issues among adolescent boys, 25% reported that they were teased about their weight, 33% reported that social media made them feel more self-conscious about their appearance, and 58.6% said that other boy's talk affected them negatively (Malcore, 2016).

Romo, Mireles-Rios, and Hurtado (2016) analyzed qualitative interviews from 27 Latina adolescent girls in order to see their perceptions on body shapes, sizes, and other teenager values in terms of appearance. They asked questions about perceptions of body as well as the source of these perceptions. The interviews showed that Latina girls expressed that body appearance standards in the Latino culture is different from those in the European American culture. About one-third of the girls in the study said that women who are considered to be overweight were attractive, whereas European American women who are considered to be overweight face social pressure to conform to the thin values, which can lead to rejection from their communities. The

results also showed the importance of media and how girls at this age get their beauty standards from media, and if you do not look like the pictures you see, then you are considered unattractive. In adolescence, peer acceptance and a sense of belonging are very important, and beauty standards in the media can negatively affect these psychological aspects.

There are concerns with specific social media sites, such as Facebook, and the impact of body image and eating pathology, since it is such a popular site among adolescent girls. Meier and Gray (2014) wanted to conduct a study that would test their hypothesis that a higher total Facebook usage would correlate with lower weight satisfaction, a desire to be thinner, and would self-objectify themselves. Researchers found that it was not the total time on Facebook that would lead to negative views of themselves, but it would be the time that is spent on viewing photos that would result in negative views (Meier and Gray, 2014). They suggest that teenage girls with high thin ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction are more likely to interact with photo related Facebook features, which will reinforce or worsen the existing body image issues that the adolescent has. Facebook use that focused on images was associated with self-objectification, which occurs in a two step process. The females see objectification of other females in the media, and begin to do this themselves, which can be an unconscious phenomenon. The girls will then objectify themselves when someone gives their perspective on their own appearance. Meier and Gray (2014) see this self-objectification occurring faster if the adolescent girls are interacting with the photo features on Facebook. They believe that the research in this study help to advance the ongoing data on body image media effects in association with social networking sites.

Further research performed by Prieler and Choi (2014) extends the research on the effects on body image concerns including social media. In addition to examining social media's effect on body image, researchers also argue that culture plays a very important and complex role in body image, which will help to further their understanding of the effects of social media exposure on body image. Prieler and Choi (2014) make the distinction between socialization and entertainment social media, such as Facebook or Youtube, with use that is driven by a specific need related to body image concerns, such as pro-eating disorder sites, which encourage eating disorders and provides strategies for achieving one. Researchers that there could be a slight association between the two though. For example, young women who have previously used Facebook for socializing can experience an increase in body dissatisfaction as a result of exposure to images of thin women posted by their peers can subsequently develop different needs for social media use. These women can seek information through social media that may lead to dietary or behavioral changes, which could possibly lead to the pro-eating disorder sites.

van den Berg, Paxton, Keery, Wall, Guo, & Neumark-Sztainer (2007) examined the role of media body comparison and the relationship to the desire to be thin and overall body dissatisfaction in both females and males. The results of their study show that media body comparison is associated with body dissatisfaction in adolescent females, which also acts as a mediator between self-esteem, depressive mood, body mass index, and body dissatisfaction. For males, depressive mood, certain types of message exposure, and weight teasing were associated with media body comparison (van den Berg, 2007). Even though there was an association, media body comparison was not associated with body dissatisfaction. Researchers find that their failure to find a relationship between media body image comparison and body dissatisfaction highlights

the importance of not assuming that research in females will generalize to males. There was a significant simple correlation between body comparison and body dissatisfaction in adolescent boys, but their study had a lower correlation in comparison to previous research (van den Berg, 2007). Researchers stress that body comparison with media may be more closely associated with body dissatisfaction during early adolescence, which would be a specific point of vulnerability. They also suggest that future studies test the invariance of the relationships across gender to help identify significant gender differences in the associations (van den Berg, 2007). More research needs to be done on the topic of body dissatisfaction in adolescent males because there are issues that stem from body image and specific disorders as well. It seems that research is only focusing on body image in adolescent girls, which is important, but the effects to boys can be just as severe.

### **Cognitive Development and Social Media**

Another domain that social media can affect would be cognitive development in adolescence. Jean Piaget is one of the most widely known theorists of adolescent cognitive development. He believes that they are actively constructing their own cognitive worlds and organizing their experiences (Santrock, 2015). Adolescents separate important ideas from less important ones and connect one idea to another. Piaget's theory is divided into stages, and adolescence is in the fourth and final stage of cognitive development. From the age of 11 to 15, adolescents begin to develop power of thought, which opens up new cognitive and social horizons. Santrock (2015) states that adolescents are able to reason in more abstract, idealistic, and logical ways, which will be able to enhance their learning. Social media can have a

detrimental impact on cognitive development among adolescents and one of the areas that can be hindered would be academic achievement.

Academic achievement can be very individualistic in adolescence, since some strive for the best grades, while others just slide on through middle and high school hoping that their grades are good enough. Since adolescent thinking is becoming more abstract and logical, the work that an adolescent must accomplish becomes more challenging as well. Social media can get in the way of an adolescent's learning and impact their academic achievement. There is less research on the effect of social media and academic achievement when compared to other aspects, such as psychological well-being. This is likely due to the fact that social media was not readily available to adolescents until recently. Additionally, the studies that do exist show conflicting data. Thus, more work is needed to determine the role social media plays on children's academic achievement (Ahn, 2011). One argument was made by Karpinski (2009) as cited in Ahn (2011), which describes Facebook users having a lower GPA than students who are not users. Researchers that perhaps these users spend too much time online and less time studying, but the research was not more in depth. The research was an exploratory and basic attempt at trying to understand the effect of social media on learning and academic achievement (Ahn, 2011). Researchers, such as Pasek, More, and Hargittai (2009), have noted important limitations of the Karpinski study and believe that Facebook usage has no significant relationship to GPA in any of the data that they collected. Since technology is being integrated so much in school, it is possible that research is focusing on the positive effects on learning rather than the negative, but it researchers still believe that it is an interesting and important relationship to

examine because it might shed light on more factors that can damage learning and academic achievement (Ahn, 2011).

In one study, researchers did examine social media use and academic achievement in adolescents, and even associated the two with loneliness. Neto, Golz, and Polega's (2015) study aimed to compare social media use and GPA using 345 urban high school students. Researchers emphasize the point that the correlation between academic achievement and social media use in adolescence remains unclear. The research on the correlation is usually performed with college students, which has demonstrated a negative relationship between the two subjects. Neto et al. (2015) found no relationship between loneliness and social media use, a negative correlation between loneliness and GPA, which means that the higher the loneliness the lower the GPA, and lack of relationship between social media use and GPA. All of their findings were inconsistent with previous studies, which they note. As far as the lack of relationships between social media use and GPA, Neto et al. (2015) believe that their problem was that they measured the number of times participants checked social media daily rather than the total time spent on the network. There are some important gender, age, and cultural differences that the study noted as well. Females reported higher levels of loneliness and checked social media more frequently than male, 9th graders reported higher GPAs than all other grade levels, and African Americans reported higher GPAs than Latinos.

Research regarding academic achievement in relation to social media usage in adolescence is scarce. There is more research available with college students than high school students, which is worth noting. One reason for this could be the ethical considerations mentioned earlier. Children are signing up for social media at an earlier age than they are

supposed to, which would make them ineligible as participants for research. Lau (2017) extended research on the relationship between social media and academic achievement from a sample of 348 undergraduate students from a university in Hong Kong through an online survey.

Researchers found that social media use for non academic performance significantly negatively predicted academic performance in students. There was a gender gap highlighted, showing that female students received a high cumulative GPA. Additionally, Lau (2017) found that social media multitasking significantly negatively predicted cumulative GPA due to the fact that students multitask on all of their social media accounts while studying. Since students use social media and the internet for sharing, discussing, and searching information, students were often distracted by the entertainment features of the sites allowing for diversion. Lau (2017) suggests that future research examine the individual differences and contextual factors that may contribute or moderate the negative effect on academic performance.

### **Social Emotional Development and Social Media**

The last dimension of adolescent development that will be discussed in this paper is social development. Social development in adolescence is best described in the contexts in which occurs. Social development occurs in relation to peers, family, school, work, and the community (American Psychological Association, 2002). The relationships that adolescents form during this time is very important, and if anything negative happens it can severely impact social development. The negative impacts can lead to issues regarding self-esteem, peer pressure, and cyberbullying, which can possibly lead to depression and suicide (APA, 2002). Social media can definitely exacerbate the issues revolving around social development. Teenagers are using social

media constantly and remaining in contact at all times, and adolescents can face peer victimization and rejection.

Schneider, Zwillich, Bindl, Hopp, Reich, and Vorderer (2017) looked at a construct called cyber-ostracism, which is the feeling of being ignored or excluded over the internet. This construct has become a threat to human needs, like belonging and self-esteem. The intended goal of social media is to connect people, so no one should ever be lonely or disconnected. The fact that it is occurring in our society is alarming and could potentially cause issues within social development. In this article, researchers discussed two different studies. The first study included 113 students who completed a questionnaire. They found that cyber-ostracism had a strong effect on belonging, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. They also found that cyber-ostracism had a strong effect on mood. The second study looked at a link between social media use and well-being, and found that cyber-ostracism on social media negatively affected emotional well-being. Due to the fact that cyber-ostracism impacts emotional well-being, researchers believe that it is possible to increase the range of aversive effect of cyber-ostracism to more than self-esteem and belonging. Researchers believe that their study shows that feeling excluded can threaten needs and states of being.

Koutamanis, Vossen, and Valkenburg's (2015) research examines the connection between social emotional development in adolescence to social media as well. They believe that negative feedback through social media is likely to occur, which can have negative effects on adolescent social development, since social acceptance and approval in a peer group is crucial in the development of an adolescent's self-concept. A small portion of adolescents receive mainly negative feedback on their online profiles and their self-esteem is targeted. Koutamanis et al.

(2015) surveyed 785 adolescents and measured adolescents' frequency of receiving negative online peer feedback. They found that adolescents who were described as having a riskier online behavior were more likely to receive negative feedback. They found a gender difference as well. Age was related to an increased online social exploration, which resulted into more negative feedback, but there was no relationship between age and risky online self-presentation, such as posting pictures while drinking or smoking. Koutamanis et al. (2015) believes that their study adds to the growing body of research and results dealing with internet use and negative feedback, while emphasizing that it is important to focus on the behavior and other individual aspects that may lead to negative feedback in adolescence.

Negative feedback and victimization are only a few of the negative consequences that social media can have on an adolescent's social emotional development. Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2016) conducted a study that focused on the interrelated roles of mass media and social media in adolescents' development of an objectified self-concept. Researchers also looked at body surveillance through social networking sites, and asked the participants how often they compare the looks with other people's looks and how often they worry about how they look to other people. The objectification theory suggests that individuals who experiences and/or observe circumstances where the body is valued for its use to others can possibly begin viewing their own value with this perspective (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2016) . During these instances, adolescents may internalize the standards that they are seeing, which would allow for more self-objectification to occur. Social media can allow this objectification to occur since most of the images on networking sites link sexual attractiveness to body attributes. These attributes include weight, sex appeal, physical looks, muscular strength, and particular

measurements. Vandebosch and Eggermont (2016) wanted to find the role of social media and social networking sites in the possible objectification of self-concept. Using a longitudinal study, researchers found that there was an association with sexualizing mass media and one's own ideals to pursue. In other words, social media is changing the way people view themselves, and that can be negative, especially if it is sexualized (Vandebosch & Eggermont, 2016).

Adolescents are being taught to use social media as a platform to treat individuals as bodies instead of individual personalities leading to objectification of not only that person, but of the self as well. If adolescents continue to see this objectification, then as they begin to develop identities, small changes in their levels of self-objectification and body surveillance may lead to the development of a more objectified identity.

### **Mental Health and Social Media Use**

Indeed, the misuse of social media could lead to potentially harmful effects on an adolescent's mental health. The psychological issues that come from social media are real and can be severe depending on the individual and the scenario. It is important to support the adolescent by any means necessary so that they are able to receive the best care possible. A large number of adolescents report using social media every day, which can be dozens or even hundreds of times (Filucci, 2016). This can be linked to a positive experience of staying connected with friends and the online community or it can be due to stress. Some teens experience anxiety from social media that has to do with the fear of missing out, which makes the teens try to respond and check all of their friend's post and messages constantly. The fear of missing out can also start to affect an adolescent's self-esteem and disturb an adolescent's sleep, which can lead to poor sleep quality, anxiety, and even depression (Filucci, 2016).

When adolescents become victimized through social media, it can cause profound effects on the individual. The victimization occurs through cyber bullying, which has become a phenomenon due to the integration of technology within society. Cyberbullying occurs when a person is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, or otherwise targeted by another using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, or cellular phones (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, and Niebergall, 2009). What once happened in the school halls can now take place at all times throughout the day. The effect of cyberbullying can range from lower academic achievements to mental health issues. Researchers have found that there is a correlation to the school climate and school performance.

### **Recommendations for Social Media Use in Adolescence**

Social media has a prominent role in society and has become popular with all generations. There are many of beneficial aspects of social media, including the ability to stay in touch with friends and family, learn about recent developments in the news, and connect with people from all over the world. Depending on a person's age, social media can also be a very hazardous tool that someone can use. An adolescent's social media use can be one of the instances where there can be negative consequences, which can lead to issues involving their development. Social media may affect an adolescent's development physically, cognitively, or socially, which can possibly lead to issues with their overall psychological well-being, such as stress, anxiety or depression. Adolescents are going to continue to use social media despite the warnings, since it can be accessed from the palm of their hands through their smartphone. Luckily, there are certain things that parents, guardians, and educators can do and be aware of when it comes to adolescents and social media use.

Before parents or guardians can guide their children to making the right decisions when it comes to social media usage, they must know how to talk to their child. Some parents struggle to communicate and effectively listen to their child during adolescence due to the fact that the child is beginning to form their own identities and to have a voice on their own (Ginsburg & Kinsman, 2015). Parents should listen to their child without judgement and reaction. There may be an instinctual alarm that parents have to immediately react and say something to end the conversation right away. This does not allow for a meaningful discussion on any topic that a child comes to inquire about. The parent has to be calm and rational in order for the child to receive advice on a topic that is truly concerning for them. Parents should definitely not make it seem worse because that can lead to the child feeling more anxious about their situation and most likely will not return for parental advice (Ginsburg & Kinsman, 2015). Parents may jump to a lecture that will be condescending and hostile. Adolescents are beginning to develop more abstract and logical thinking, but not all are at that level, which will cause the lecture to be irrelevant and the lessons and meaning of the lecture will be useless. An appropriate level of empathy is needed to carry a good discussion with your child. Over empathizing can lead to heightening the adolescent's emotions and also make you look naive and overly involved. As with any adult, opinions and values should not be shared with the teen in a way that makes the child feel judged (Ginsburg & Kinsman, 2015). Adolescents are beginning to form their identities and biased advice can be detrimental.

There can be some warning signs for parents when it comes to social media use. Some of the red flags may not signify that a child will automatically be affected by social media, but it may tell the parent to be more aware, which will help the child to avoid the dangers of social

media use (Elgersma, 2016). With certain sites like Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr, there are public default settings, which control who follows your child and what they are allowed to see. If a parent makes sure that the child is private, then it will be a lot easier to control what content they see and who sees personal information. The child's name, age, pictures, and posts are available if they are public. Elgersma (2016) emphasizes that the same apps have another feature for the user to share their location. It can be as broad as a city or town, but it can also be as specific as a city block or building and the posts that a child makes may include this location. Parents should turn off the location setting on their child's phone and the app, so that the location remains private from others. These tips are more geared toward a child's personal safety, but when it comes to social media there are some more hidden dangers. If a parent utilizes the location settings in order to keep track of their child and to make sure they safe at all times, then parents should keep the setting active on the phone, but remain cautious to makes sure social networking sites are not using personal information.

A parent should make sure that their child is viewing age appropriate content on whatever social media site they are using. Ask.fm and Tumblr are huge social media sites where there can be a potential for inappropriate content, especially sexting (Elgersma, 2016). Their friends may post explicit content, but there can also be user generated content that will not be appropriate either. A teen does not even have to follow a certain individual for this content to show up. Parents can ask their children about their followers and possibly ask what is being posted. If you familiarize yourself with the app beforehand, then you will be able to find what you are looking for more easily and see how easy it is to discover inappropriate content. Facebook and other apps have a feature of real time video streaming, which allows people to show others what they are

doing at that very moment and it may show something that was not meant to be shared (Elgersma, 2016). They can share information or other personal things without even knowing who is watching. The video may be temporary, but there are ways that people can capture specific moments and they are online forever. The key here for parents would be communication. Talking to the child about smart and thought out decisions when it comes to live videos, so that they know what to share and what not to share if they choose to use the feature. Elgersma (2016) describes temporary pictures and videos apps, such as Snapchat, as another social media red flag because they can have the same negative connotations as live videos, but share the same parental strategies as well. There can be compromising videos and pictures that can cause problems with everyone involved, and talking to the child to help them realize that will be the most beneficial.

In addition to these apps and websites that have various types of videos and photos, there are also certain social media sites that emphasize that whatever is posted is anonymous (Elgersma, 2016). This is where a lot of social media damage can occur. Some believe that their words do not result in consequences and they end up making really nasty comments to people, which can affect the social emotional and physical development of an adolescent, depending on the comments. Some teens may use these sites to vent their feelings and share their painful experiences, and they may face ridicule and victimization, which will have a profound effect on an individual. Parents should make sure that their child knows the appropriate steps to take if they experience or see someone harassing others on social media (Elgersma, 2016). If they are the one trying to vent anonymously, then a parent can offer opportunities to talk with a trusted adult, if they are not comfortable sharing with the parent. In addition, some may experience or see cyberbullying occurring on social media, which can also lead to the same results of the

anonymous comments. Elgersma (2016) believes that it is a parent's responsibility to keep an ear out for what other parents, teachers, and kids are talking out because cyberbullying can occur anywhere at anytime.

A parent must listen to their child about what they are experiencing and must not dismiss it. The more a parent can connect with the child, then the more they will open up about their fear of missing out and other topics later that come up. A parent should not judge their child's social media habits. Connecting with peers is a huge part of adolescence and social media is now a tool that is commonly used. Even if a parent does not agree with the social media habits, they can still try and encourage the teens to try out different activities to shift their focus off of social media and what their friends are posting (Filucci, 2016). After a parent is finished hearing their child out and understanding the predicament, then it is the parent's responsibility to try and set some limits on the use of their child's smartphone, so they can resist the urge to constantly keep checking social media. An adolescent's thinking is becoming more logical and abstract during this time in the lifespan, so possibly the best thing a parent can do is to simply ask a question. Filucci (2016) believes that the questions can be open ended, but the result would be helping their child to think about what is working and what is not working for them. Are there any habits you might want to change? What are the pros and cons of using Instagram and other social-networking apps? What would happen if you unfollowed or unfriended someone who was making you feel bad on social media? Do you notice that you have better or worse reactions to posts or messages depending on how you feel that day? Filucci (2016) emphasizes that these are only a few questions that parents can ask their children, which may result in the child possibly

coming up with their own strategies for handling their own situation and they can even realize that social media may not be the best thing after all.

So what can be done to ensure that students are learning in a positive and safe school environment? The most effective bullying prevention efforts build a culture of caring and respect throughout the community, rather than focusing attention only on children who bully and those who are bullied. If parents are involved in the school that can directly lead to a healthier school environment and better student outcomes (King & Reiney, 2014). Schools can build a team of students, teachers, community members, and parents to work together in improving school climate. Schools should assess the current school climate in order to gain a better understanding of the perspective of students, families, teachers, and other school personnel, and chart their progress over time. The school community should be engaged so that the students and the teachers are leaders are brought together to brainstorm ideas on ways to improve peer environments for students (King & Reiney, 2014). This will lead to the development of an action plan in order to create a plan that educates and empowers families, students, and the broader community about ways to create a positive school climate, which will be full of healthy and positive peer relationships. Lastly and possibly the most important, is to empower students, families, and the community. If the dialogue of bullying prevention is continued over time, then all of the parties involved will continue to be empowered to share their responsibility for a positive school climate and healthy relationships (King & Reiney, 2014). The empowering should not just end with bullying prevention, but it should be utilized for everything in an adolescent's life. Whatever the topic is, it needs to be treated with the seriousness of the subject. Parents and teachers play an important role in mentoring students to make positive changes to

the school, but also to their lives. The empowerment will lead to a positive experience for all of the students, and make communication about serious topics easier in the long run (King & Reiney, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Social media has become a part of everyday life. There are many advantages to its use and people utilize the functions each and every day. Society has become so fixated on social media that they do not fully understand what they are opening themselves up to. Parents, educators, and everyday social media users must understand and be aware of the positive and negative connotations of social media usage in order to promote the healthy development of the youth in society. Many people base their opinions on their own experience with social media and use that to guide their decisions. It is crucial that the opinions we make about an influential topic, such as social media usage, are researched and grounded on data. One social media site may not be harmful by itself, but the combination and prolonged use of social media can lead to harmful effects in development. Parents can utilize the strategies, as mentioned in the recommendations section, to talk with their children about social media usage, and to guide them to making the right decisions on the usage. Social media can have many positive aspects that keep users engaged and stimulated, but there can be many negative aspects as well that affect major dimensions of adolescent development, and it is very important to look at both in order to stay informed and aware of what can possibly happen.

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