Facebook and Young Women: The Social Isolation and the Health risks

Abstract
This paper explores Facebook as a social networking site that has allowed for communication among society but has also led to severe health risks among teenage girls such as social isolation, mental health and body image issues. The social networking site has become a large part of people's daily lives, particularly among young girls who are using the site in a problematic way, becoming dependent on the site to prove their self-worth. With these key issues occurring, it is imperative to look at the online community and other users on Facebook and how they interact on the site that could lead to such feelings among the younger generation. The younger generation is prone to developing these health risks, leading to detrimental impacts that could stay with them for years to come. It is also important to realise that the online community of Facebook could play a key role in helping these young girls if they were able to realise these issues were occurring.

Introduction

Thinking about social media in the sense of a community, it is a large online space where many will join to interact and connect amongst themselves. With an estimated 2.2 million young people in Australia using the internet to access social media in 2009 (Richards, Cladwell & Go, 2015) it proves to be a key tool in the way society communicates. It is an ever-growing community that holds a place in many people's lives, but there can be an extremely dark side to social media. Since the birth of social media, there has been an increase in mental health issues including anxiety, depression and body image issues, especially among teenage girls. According to Cain (2018) there has been recent research surrounding the implications that social media could be an underlaying factor within young people's mental health issues. Facebook has become a popular social media tool connecting the public through many aspects of the site. Tiggerman and Slater (2013) found that adolescent girls who were using Facebook were "more concerned with their body appearance and idealised thinness" when using the social networking sites. At such a young age, an influence from Facebook like that can have extreme consequences on later development of young girls. Kranzler and Bleakley (2019) discuss the "complex relationship" between social media and health risks among young people, as well as the exposure to certain elements on these sites also having a significant impact. With issues surrounding body image, mental health and even social isolation, social media sites prey on the innocent and influence their feelings and head space, dramatically. Key contributors to this problem faced by these young girls could be the use of Facebook. The online community within Facebook may be unaware of the health risk that are facing these younger users, leading to the continued problematic use of the site. Facebook has created a space that allows for the growth of health risks, including social isolation and mental health issues within the community among teenage girls.

Social Isolation and Mental Health Risks

Facebook has become a phenomenon among social media platforms and boasts more than 2.3 billion users monthly, as of December 2018 (Noyes, 2019). The platform allows the user to add friends, share status updates and post photos that include themselves and others. It is an innovative tool that can connect a community together all over the globe but can have dire effects on the health and well-being of the younger female demographic. Facebook has the ability to connect users all over the globe but using these platforms as a communicative tool has altered real life interactions (Joo & Teng, 2017). Makwana, Lee, Parkin and Farmer (2018) found that 71% of 13-to-17-year olds are now using Facebook to communicate with friends and family. Although Facebook has created a positive communication tool for people to connect with others online, many are becoming reliant on the site in order to communicate with others. Clark (2005) coined the term "constant contact generation" due to the fact that young girls on social media are always closely intertwined, even when they are away from one another. Although the internet is viewed as a "rapidly diffusing technology that extends social contact" (Joo & Teng, 2017), these young girls are failing to form real life connections and are lacking communicative skills used in the real world, which can lead to damaging effects in the future. Teenage girls are at a crucial age in their life which puts them in a higher risk category for experiencing or developing social isolation (Whaite, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz & Primack, 2018). The

increased use of Facebook by these young girls can have detrimental effects on both their happiness and self-esteem, which further leads to health hazards that include both social isolation and mental health issues.

Although young girls developing social isolation is dependent on their own personality and characteristic traits, as well as the time spent on these social media sites (Ilakkuvan, Johnson, Villanti, Evans & Turner, 2018), most young girls are exposed at a much earlier age to social media and the health risks it poses. Within the community aspect, social isolation on the digital sphere is a major problem. Turkle (2011) coined the phrase "alone together" in relation to how the technology of social media has destroyed relationships between one another. People are now spending majority of their time on Facebook, virtually connecting with people, however they are missing out on the real-life relationships. According to Shensa et al.'s study (2017) teenage girls are spending large amounts of their time on the internet and social media forming such relationships, as well as closing themselves off from the real world and placing themselves in this bubble of isolation. This use of social media becomes "problematic and is motivating girls to use Facebook's platform within an excessive nature" (Shensa, Escobar-Viera, Sidani, Bowman, Marshal & Primack, 2017). Using social media in an excessive fashion is a major problem not only affecting young girls, but the entirety of society. Using Facebook in such a way can "deteriorate interpersonal relationships in real-life and can lead to social isolation" (Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Facebook is damaging relationships one like at a time and continues to push social isolation further into the heads of young girls using the platform.

Social isolation can be detrimental to young girl's health and well-being and can also lead to other extreme health risks, such as mental and physical health problems. Social media has become the playing field for the youth of today (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014), it is where they can share and interact with peers about what's going on within their own lives and the lives of others. Social media has infiltrated young people's lives and has become a significant part of their daily routines. Young girls are spending majority of their free time on social media sites and it is allowing for them to develop health problems that not only include social isolation, but mental health risks relating to depression and body image issues. Cain (2018) explains that the rise in depression is without an exception due to social media use and "the more time spent on screen activities, the more likely one will be unhappy". Facebook can also be blamed for eating disorders on the basis that images posted by users of idealised physiques can motivate or force others to achieve the same slimness (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014). Social media environments are influencing teenage girls into comparison which is leading to feelings of poor self-esteem and harmful body image issues.

Facebook is a platform that enables people to post statuses and images, allowing for the sharing with their friends on the social networking site. However, too much exposure of content from others of these idealised lives can trigger others to compare themselves (Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Young girls find it hard to escape those influencers who are promoting these perfect lifestyles and body images, making it harder for them to exterminate these negative thoughts in their heads that they are not good enough for society's standards. Richards, Cladwell & Go (2015) state that the more time these young people spend on Facebook, the lower their self-esteem becomes, ultimately leading to a poor mental health. Facebook has created an atmosphere of teenagers promoting a self that is not entirely true (Charoensukmongkol, 2018), this may lead to other teenage girls to feel envious of this person's social persona and try to emulate it, which could lead to problematic health issues. Teenage girls are presenting more feelings of envy and neuroticism due to following others and viewing such idealised lives that are not always true to one's self on Facebook (Ozguven & Mucan, 2013).

The online community within Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites to date with over 864 million daily users on average as of 2015 (Stachi & Uysal, 2015). The online community within Facebook is large and far-reaching and the virtual community it has created can unite users together, wherever they may be located (Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Many people who are promoting the ideal life and body types explained earlier are not realising the harm that they may be inflicting on the teenage users of Facebook. Facebook offers a "collaborative space for social interaction" between large amounts of people (Makwana, Lee, Parkin & Farmer, 2018) but the online community within Facebook needs to be careful with how they may portray themselves as it is leading to issues surrounding young girls and unfortunately, the downside is that many parents may be unaware of the situation at hand and what is

occurring online (Guinta & John, 2018). This means that these girls may not be receiving any help to tackle their health issues. Facebook users can sometimes find it hard to control the time spent on the social networking site which can lead to problematic use (Satici & Uysal, 2015). Feelings of low self-esteem and severe depression are again linked to problematic Facebook use. Some online communities on Facebook are "known to break down barriers" to help those suffering with health problems (Owens, Sharkey, Smithson, Hewis, Emmens, Ford & Jones, 2012), but in this case many are not seeing a problem with problematic Facebook use by teenage girls and are ignoring the issue at hand. Facebook can seriously "impinge on an individual's well-being and mental health" (Frost & Rickwood, 2017) and teenage girls are at the most serious risk. Facebook is a key communicative tool, but in terms of helping those who are struggling, Facebook's online community "cannot replace face-to-face communication" ("Social media, screen time", 2019) among teenage girls.

The poor use of social media by teenage girls in today's society is presenting to be a prevalent issue that is not disappearing with the further development of technology. Teenagers are vulnerable and are at a higher risk to the effects of problematic social media use (Guinta & John, 2018) and are ultimately risking their health while using Facebook. With these problems beginning online, it can be hard to tackle the effects and impacts that these girls might be facing. The online community needs to start looking deeper into the root causes of these issues and tackle them head on. Closer inspection of young girls on social media by the online community can help with monitoring the impacts that may be occurring on their mental health. The advances in technology have affected the way human beings communicate effectively (L. Wankel & C. Wankel, 2012), but the online Facebook community can utilise the platform to help this group in certain ways to overcome mental health issues and those feelings of social isolation. The social media community is far reaching, containing millions of users worldwide, if the community works together to help reinforce positive social media use, young girls may experience less feelings of social isolation and mental health issues.

Conclusion

Facebook as a social media platform has proven to lead to poor health among young girls, their maturity levels mixed with the extensive use of the platform is allowing these health risks to grow (Guinta & John, 2018). Young girls are at a higher risk of developing social isolation and mental health risks with the continued use of Facebook. Facebook has given a new definition to what communicating means and provides people with online connections with other users, but these connections can be problematic and lead to greater issues among this large community. Younger Facebook users can find it hard to discern when problems may be occurring on the social media platforms, making it easier for them to develop such health issues. This social networking site has created an entirely new atmosphere among the younger community, which has allowed for them to communicate more easily but has allowed significant health risks to arise. There needs to be a greater awareness of the problems that these teenage girls are experiencing from both Facebook and the online community. Ensuring both the mental and physical health of our younger generation, especially young girls on a platform such as Facebook, can ensure the community is making the most of this social networking sites and looking out for those who might be feeling the negative effects of Facebook.

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