

Should Social Media be Banned for Those Who are 18 and Under?

Anonymous

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

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Christopher McCarthy

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Have you ever wondered why teenagers are so engaged on their cellphones? Many say it is because teens are teens, and that it is normal for kids to talk and text and avoid realities. But to be honest, there is a darker side to teenagers using cellphones now a days. Other than to talk, text, and make friends, there is harm and consequences that come with social media. Phones were meant to be used to communicate with society. Back when landline phones were used it was designed in a simple manner that all you would do on a phone is call. This meant there were no texts and social media entertainment for a person to spend hours on. Handheld smartphones have now included these factors for someone who is too young to have access to. But with this being accessed at such a young age alarming rates of body dysmorphia, depression, anxiety, suicide, pornography, and pedophilia have increased.

For example, body dysmorphia is a major problem in today's times for teenagers. In fact, it has become very common in today's society just like the diagnosis of depression and anxiety. Silva (2017) a scientist and relationship expert says, “60% of people using social media reported that it has impacted their self-esteem in a negative way.” This is because of the long hours of being exposed to apps and social media influencers. For example, social media influencers have a big impact on today's society. Not all influencers have content that is very age appropriate. The greatest trends today are showing off lots of skin and having unrealistic body goals to maintain as many views and likes as possible. Adolescents have body shamed and mentally put themselves down to gain these unnatural and unrealistic body images. Many have been exposed to keep up with societies beauty standards to be seen and loved and to be appreciated by others. And sadly, this starts from a very young age from being exposed to social media. The dangers of teens constantly comparing their bodies to others have been seen to worsen mental health. A licensed phycologist named Dr. Reynolds (2022) gathered studies and statistics “An

ExpressVPN survey of 1,500 Americans found that 86% of those ages 16 to 24 reported that social media directly negatively impacts their happiness.” And from this “85 percent reported negative effects on self-esteem.” And “85 percent reported negative effects on self-image.” Not many parents see the harm until their children start presenting with worrying mental health issues. This includes concerning eating disorders and as mentioned depression and anxiety in conjunction. These certain beauty standards are causing adolescents to feel peer pressured to expose and change their physiques to gain views from the world. Which can lead to our next set of issues being anxiety and depression.

In addition, you might know anxiety and depression are the number one diagnosed mental health disorder. Many mental health disorders are being seen in younger children, and the youngest being in elementary school. In relation to body image issues, depression and anxiety are coming at number one. Clark (2020) who is an author and writer says, “Between 2012 and 2015, depression in boys increased by 21% and in girls by 50%.” Social media has become so addictive that at this point we can say kids just aren’t kids anymore. There are constant late nights staring at screens, seeing the biggest trends that are happening, worrying about what friends are doing what, and where they are traveling. Social media is key to anxiety and depression. Teens tend to desire wanting things that are just not real because of negative social media influencers, there is so much pressure to needing and wanting to feel loved and appreciated, and sadly it is coming from technology use. The Newport Academy (2022) has provided evidence of studies that have been done “in a 2018 study, 14–17-year old’s who used social media seven hours per day were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with depression, treated by mental health professional, or taken medication for a psychological or

behavioral issue during the last year.” Now assuming that depression and anxiety are manageable, which they are based on treatments it is just not enough to keep kids safe.

Furthermore, accidents have been ranked the number one cause of death for kids, and suicide being the second in highest deaths in kids makes it very concerning. Clark (2020) says, Child suicide rates increased by up to 150%, and self-harm by girls ages 10 to 14 nearly tripled. These patterns point to social media.” More and more teens are committing suicide from graphic suicidal videos, trends that are costing kids’ lives, cyberbullying, and depression and anxiety. Social media has been dangerously exposing teens to graphic suicidal tendencies. These have come from uncensored videos or videos that aren’t appropriately taken down. Joe Gramigna (2022) a psychiatrist that specializes in neurology says “Digital experiences among adolescents may significantly impact their mental health and well-being, according to a presenter at the American Psychiatric Nurses Association Annual Conference. Jamie Zelazny, PhD, RN, assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, noted that suicide is the second-leading cause of death among individuals aged 10 to 24 years.” Social media trends are being taken to extreme measures. The most common trends that have cost many lives. To give a few examples were The Choking Game, The Penny Challenge, The Blackout Challenge, The Benadryl Challenge, and so on are done worldwide and are exposed to the world. There have been many videos leaked that are then seen by millions of people to even being exposed to people of all ages. (Gramigna, 2022) adds, “Zelazny said during the presentation. ‘Teens who reported using social media sites more than 2 hours a day were much more likely to report poor mental health outcomes like distress and suicidal ideation.’

For instance, as we get deeper into the realities of social media, it is sad to say that it is the biggest and easiest way to access pornography. A channel called Bark on YouTube educates parents on technology use and the dangers to look out for in their kids' lives, and they have collected statistics "20% of youth report that they came across it, children, you know, it was unwanted" (Bark, 2020). There is so much danger to a child being exposed to graphic content at such a young age. Those exposures can become traumatizing and can alter a child's behavior in the future. "The number one common denominator of those who abuse other kids is an early exposure to pornography. Because what they see, they feel neurologically compelled to do." (Bark, 2020). People like hackers usually want viruses on electronics to steal information or for blackmail. Many links today that are sent from unknown people are usually links to inappropriate websites, or even pictures that are not suitable for children. From this, children are at risk to unpredictable actions such as early intimacy, addiction, sexual aggression, violence, or even worse rape. With parents letting their children get a hold of any technology at a much younger age there is more danger to come.

However, pedophilia is a parents top worst nightmare, when it comes to teens owning an electronic device as a teenager, there is a lot of stalkers who will try getting in touch with young children. In today's society and the power of apps child abducting, raping, and trafficking are more common than ever. Bark (2020) adds, "Unfortunately, some of those were people who wanted to actually meet the child in person, which could have been just because they wanted to have sex with a minor. Sometimes we believe that it was because they might be part of a sex trafficking ring wanting to actually traffic the child." Kids are an easy access and are preyed on because of how vulnerable and underdeveloped they are. Teens who have social media can come across so many people worldwide and those who are at a much greater gap difference in age, and

with that said it is older men and women who like to pressure on young teens into very uncomfortable conversations or to perform inappropriate acts whether it is with threats or easy manipulation. (Bark, 2020) “So, in 1977 we had a guy come from Brentwood, Tennessee, drive up here to Naperville. Met a 13-year-old at the corner of her block. Took her to a hotel, raped her. Let her go back home. And she told her parents that she met him on this thing called America online.” And America Online was like a dating app back in the day, but let’s be clear back in the late 70s technology was at its lowest but at the same time technology was about to explode worldwide. Now with more time passing and technology is improving so much more. Making technology much more harmful than ever the children in the next coming generations.

Finally, social media has shown to cause alarming issues with body dysmorphia, depression, anxiety, suicide, pornography, and pedophilia. Social media is a very dangerous platform. As technology improves and the more kids get access to technology these statistics will increase, and mental health will decline severely. My experience with a cellphone at such a young age was horrible. I was never able to understand it at the time on how drastically a phone changed me until I saw my young sister’s world turn upside down and transformed her to a completely different person. It is why parents should take into consideration that maybe technology is not the best thing for a child especially at such a young age. Children should be children and should not have their innocence and imagination taken away. It is important that from this we don’t let teens slowly get sucked into the dark realities of social media.

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