

Scrolling to Belong

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Ever since I got a phone when I was a teenager, I was skeptical of social media. I did not understand how it worked and I thought it was silly. Later, I realized how big of an impact it has on teens. In the article “Should Social Media Be Banned for Under 18s?” from *The Badger*, Georgia Keetch (2020) talks about how social media can be harmful to people's mental and emotional health. Teens need to be more careful about what they are looking at on social media. I agree with Keetch (2020), that social media can be dangerous and toxic. But I disagree that it is only when you are under 18 that it is bad. No matter how old you are, social media can have a negative effect on anyone.

Keetch (2020) writes, “There is no doubt that social media can be a very unhealthy and dangerous place. Even as a 19-year-old, I sometimes find myself being negatively impacted by what I have seen online.” I very much agree with this. I think that social media has always left me feeling bad about myself no matter what I look at. There was a time when I was scrolling on Instagram, and nothing that I was looking at was particularly bad or negative, but when I went out of the app, I could not help but feel so sad. I only follow people I know, and or comedians. None of the people I follow should make me feel negative, but seeing friends hang out without me or seeing someone “look better than me” plays a big effect on my mental health. Instagram was made for the purpose of making teens addicted to the app. Often, when I would exit out of the app, I did not know how to process my feelings. I would easily criticize myself for how I looked, and I did not even realize it. Not only Instagram, but other social media apps also have the same effect of making teens feel the need to be connected online. Even though some teens know that social media is unhealthy for them personally, the weight of possibly missing out is greater. I think that is part of the reason why social media can be so toxic is because most social

media users feel that they are either missing out or love the attention that they are getting from other users.

Not only that, but social media makes people's insecurities skyrocket. Keetch (2020) says, "Even as an adult, I sometimes find myself struggling to detach and not compare myself to people I see on social media, even though I know that it is not truly real." Staring at a screen full of what looks like "perfect" people can be very damaging to anyone's mental health. One of the big reasons social media can be so toxic is because both girls and boys compare themselves to others online and often feel that they do not measure up to those standards. An issue with social media is that technology has evolved so much that you can change your face and your appearance with filters. How can anyone get to genuinely know someone online if that person is covered in filters? This also makes beauty standards impossible for both boys and girls to live up to. So many teens will look at models and others online and think "She is so pretty I could never look like that." There is partial truth to that. Yes, she is pretty and yes, you will not look like that, but that is because you are one of a kind and made unique from everyone else. What those teens do not realize is that the person that they think is so pretty, is covered in makeup and filters and photoshop. This has affected me personally; I find that it is so easy to compare myself to other girls online who I think that I should look like. Most of the time, social media was just feeding me lies. The biggest lie that I used to believe from Instagram was "You need smaller thighs, wider hips, and a snatched waist." When I looked at models with 24' waists and what appeared to be perfect thighs, saying that I needed to look just like them, was unbelievably toxic. Girls should not put themselves down because they do not look like the models on Instagram. They need to know that they are beautiful just the way they are and that no one looks like those Instagram models in person.

Along with that, Keetch (2020) says, "Every parent's worst nightmare of a stranger talking to their child online can be made possible with social media." Since anyone can add a filter to their appearance, social media can be very dangerous. Anyone can fake their identity

online and that can leave users to be in danger if they are not careful with who they interact with on social media. More teens do this than they would like to admit, but girls get excited when a stranger, who seems to be a 16-year-old boy, wants to talk to them online. I think it is safe to say that everyone wants to feel loved, acknowledged, and heard. So, it makes sense why so many teens talk to strangers online because it makes them feel good. But there are too many frightening real-life stories. CBS news (2022) says, “Alicia Kozak was 13 years old when she was kidnapped by an online predator. Her abduction triggered a nationwide manhunt.” This is terrifying. There is a great lack of policing online and predators are looking for young girls to continue to catch their “bait.” Although most parents talk to their teens about the dangers of online predators, they are very skilled at manipulation and can often overcome the warnings of parents. This is a strong argument for banning social media for teens.

Furthermore, social media can impact the mental health of people so intensely that some even consider drastic measures. According to the article “10 things to know about how social media affects teens’ brains” from *MPRnews*, Cory Turner (2023) says, “The statistics are sobering. Nearly 1 in 3 teen girls report having seriously considered suicide in the past year.” Social media can severely affect how boys and especially girls view themselves. Whether they got cyberbullied or because they felt too much social pressure, social media can cause them to feel that they have no options or nowhere to turn. This is unacceptable and should not be pushed away. Until a solution is found and changes are made, perhaps this above all is the strongest argument against social media use during the teenage years.

To wrap up, I felt a lot of pressure from my peers to use social media when I was a young teenager, and even though I had never used it before, I felt the negative effect of the app through my friends, and I did not like it. I resisted using any social media for quite some time. Then, when I did start using it, I realized that I was right. It was social media that changed my friend's attitude in a negative way. I saw my friends struggle with insecurities, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. Some became self-absorbed and borderline obsessed with their social

media status. I never realized how just the act of “scrolling” can change a person's attitude, mood, and personality, but it does. Personally, I limit how much I allow myself to go on social media because I noticed that it makes me feel insecure every time I log on. I use a feature on my phone that puts a five-minute time limit on Instagram that automatically logs me out when the time is up. I choose not to use any other social media platforms. Although I do feel I am missing out on some of the fun that goes on, I find much more personal benefit in restricting my social media use. After all, it is more important that I know my own worth rather than letting Instagram tell me what I am worth.

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