Youth and Technology: An Adlerian–based Analysis of Smartphones and the Impact of Social Media on Females Ages 12-17

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of smartphones by teenage girls ages 12 to 17. The preferred social media choices for teens are texting, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and Twitter. This paper uses an Adlerian approach and investigates the connection between social media use and the feeling of belonging and social interest. While compulsive use of smartphones by teenage girls affects school performance, academics, sleeping patterns, sexual activity, safety, and relationships with family and friends, this study more closely examines academics, sexual activity, and relationships with friends. There are reasons to argue that social media enhances teenage girls’ quality of life when used appropriately.
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Youth and Technology: An Adlerian–based Analysis of Smartphones and the Impact of Social Media on Females Ages 12-17

Teens passionately embrace the use of smartphones. Now, nearly instantly, we share every success and failure via social media. The increased access to social media by most people including teenage girls makes this an important time to talk about them both (Diaz, Evans & Gallagher, 2011). The teens of today cannot remember a time when they did not have access to the Internet. YouTube has always been as entertaining as broadcast television and they have never used a phone that did not send text messages (Oestreicher & McLane, 2012). Moreover, according to Stein (2013), teens love their phones but they hate talking on them.

The first part of the paper defines the key concepts discussed throughout the document. We put a focus on youth, specifically on female teenage girls – “digital natives” growing up with cell phones, fluent with texting, twitter, Facebook and the world of iPhone apps (Turkle, 2011). Looking through an Adlerian lens, part two investigates the possible correlation between belonging, social interest, and social media use by teenage girls. Part three provides an overview of current research on compulsive use of smartphones by teenagers and how that behavior affects school performance, sexual activity, and relationship with friends.

The terms adolescent girls, teenage girls, young females, and young women are used interchangeably and refer to females ages 12-17. “Millennials consist, depending on whom you ask, of people born from 1980 to 2000” (Stein, 2013, p. 28). This paper focuses on youth and technology that constantly evolve and change. We may be able to say that this is a paper about a moving target.

Stein (2013) found the following:
Each country’s millennials are different, but because of globalization, social media, the exporting of Western culture and the speed of change, millennials worldwide are similar to one another than the older generations within their nations. (p. 28)

Finally, this paper presents recent research that explores the negative and positive implications of social media use and how this behavior harms or enhances teenage girls’ quality of life. This study may contribute to a better understanding of teenage girls’ behavior that is helpful to parents and teachers.

**Key Concepts**

**Smartphone**

A smartphone is a device that combines a cellphone with a hand-held computer, typically offering Internet access, data storage, e-mail capability, etc. (Smartphone, n.d.). A cell-phone or mobile phone is any wireless telephone that operates over a relatively large area as a cellular phone (Mobile Phone, n.d.).

A smartphone has apps capability. An “app” is an application, typically a small, specialized program downloaded onto mobile devices (Apps, n.d.). An example of a very popular app among young women is Instagram, a free photo-sharing app.

**Social Media**

Social media are forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). For example, many businesses are utilizing social media to generate sales (Social Media, n.d.). As noted by Turkle (2011), terms such as the Net, the network, and connectivity refer to a world of online connections, from the experience of surfing the Web, to e-mail, texting, gaming, and social networking.
Texting and sexting. Texting, when used as a verb, refers to digital technology used to send a text message. A text message is an electronic message sent over a cellular network from one cell phone to another. For example, texting while driving is an accident asking to happen. “The only way I can ever reach her is to text her” (Text Message, n.d.). Texting is the dominant daily mode of communication between teens and all those whom they communicate (Lenhart, 2012, p. 2).

Sexting is the sending of sexually explicit photos, images, text messages, or e-mail by using a cell phone or other mobile device (Sexting, n.d.). Comparing texting to instant messaging, (IM) each is an electronic message sent in real time. However, an IM is sent via the Internet (Instant Message, n.d.).

Facebook. The word Facebook is a Trademark. Facebook is the name of a social-networking service and website launched in 2004. The word Facebook when used as a verb (used with an object) means to communicate with a person or search for information about a person by using Facebook. For example, my old friend just “facebooked me.”

Another example of the word Facebook used as a verb is “his future employer Facebooked him and decided to withdraw the job offer.” When we say, “To post on Facebook,” it means to write a message or upload pictures on a wall. For example, “I facebooked some photos of my cat.” “You should Facebook the event so more people will show up.” Facebook also can be used as a verb (used without an object), for example, “Does your mom Facebook?” (Facebook, n.d.).

Google. The word Google is a Trademark. Google refers to a brand name of a leading Internet search engine founded in 1998. The word Google, when used as a verb and used with an object, refers to the search of the Internet for information about a person, topic etc. For example,
“We Google the new applicants to check their background.” The word Google also means the use of a search engine to find information, a website address, etc., in the Internet (Google, n.d.).

**YouTube.** The word YouTube is a *Trademark*. YouTube is a website on which subscribers post video files. Subscribers can post, view, or share videos on the YouTube website (YouTube, n.d.).

**Twitter.** The word Twitter is a *Trademark*. Twitter in this study refers to the name of a social-network service and website that limits the length of messages one can post to a certain number of characters (Twitter, n.d.).

“When we tweet or write to hundreds of friends we treat them as a unit. Friends become fans” (Turkle, 2011, p. 168). Tweet means to post a message to the twitter on-line message service (Tweet, n.d.).

The following section of this paper gives an introduction to Adlerian concepts and looks through an Adlerian lens to investigate the possible connection between social media by teenage girls ages 12-17 and the feeling of belonging and social interest.

**Adlerian Concepts**

**An Adlerian Approach**

“The Adlerian approach is one that shows great respect for all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, behavior and so on” (Carlson, Watts & Maniacci, 2005, p.18). Adler highlighted the importance of understanding people within their social context. Everything they do pertains to their social context. Alfred Adler was a physician, psychiatrist, philosopher, humanitarian, best-selling author, and educator from Vienna.

Adler had a passionate concern for the common person and was outspoken about child-rearing practices, school reforms, and prejudices that resulted in conflict (Corey, 2009). We see

Principles of Adlerian Psychology (The E Team, n.d.).

1. People are social beings: they need to belong and to contribute.
2. People are whole beings: all aspects of life are interrelated.
3. Work, friendship, and intimacy are lifelong tasks.
4. Every person is equally deserving of dignity and respect.
5. All behavior has a purpose.
6. Positive change comes from encouragement, which focuses on strengths.
7. Children make meaning of their early experiences and act within this framework throughout their lives.
8. Personal freedom exists together with social responsibility.

Social interest and community feeling. “These two terms suggest to us what is possible in life, they form the basis for a moral and ethical code, and they call us to the goal of being more fully human” (Bitter, 2007, p. 13). Subsequently, social interest and community feeling can start in the family. Further, parents may model and encouraged cooperation in order to function more effectively first, as a family second, within the community. In short, in order to survive, we depend on each other.

Social interest is an English translation of the German term Gemeinschaftsgefühl. This term refers to an individual’s attitudes in dealing with the social world (Corey, 2009). Adler correlated social interest with feeling empathic towards others: “To see with the eyes of another,
to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 135). Adlerians see this concept of relationships as a deep appreciation of others.

Adler (1979) claims, “Feeling-at-home- is an important part of social interest” (as cited in Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 9). Each individual tries to get accepted by the community. “Adler provided the world a clear understanding of how a socially healthy way of life could be established and maintained. He believed that the healthiest and only sensible goal in life was social cooperation” (Carlson, Watts & Maniaci, 2005, pp. 18-19). The basic importance of social interest is that personal problems occur when social interest fails to develop.

According to Corey (2009), Adler believed that social interest must be taught, learned, and used. “Social interest is the central indicator of mental health” (p. 102). When adolescent girls are community oriented they think less of themselves and more of others. “Adlerian psychology sees people as social beings who cooperate with others to realize their goals and function fully” (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000, p. 60).

**Belonging.** Griffith and Powers (2007) suggest, “for Adler the strongest motivation force for the human being is the desire to belong to the social world” (p. 9). The need to belong to a group is a desire in all humans, and teenage girls are not an exception. The desire to feel belonging with others is a fundamental motive in people. According to Turkle (2011), when teenagers communicate via social media, they feel they are part of a larger thing. The world becomes a thing that they feel they are part of (p. 168).

Interestingly, social media can be an excellent place for teenagers to have social interactions. In fact, usage of social media may help shy and introverted teenagers to connect with family and friends. Oestreicher and McLane (2012), suggest “this enhanced connection really can make real-life relationships better” (p. 6). Adolescent girls are looking for something
bigger than themselves. They are trying to fill their lives with something. They may never be satisfied.

There are reasons to argue that technology use promotes a sense of belonging. Davis (2012) indicates that, “A new study from the University of Washington shows that digital media helps teens reach developmental milestones, such as fostering a sense of belonging and sharing personal problems” (para. 2). In contrast, Diaz, Evans, and Gallager (2011) argue that texting and social media affect in a negative way our children’s development. They call it “the anti-social network.”

Moreover, as Diaz et al., claim, “in social media interactions, there is more potential for contact with people parents don’t know” (p. 3). Consequently, there is a risk adolescents take when they interact with random people. Unfortunately, young subscribers of social media get constant requests to become friends with strangers. Before smartphones, teenagers connected via the telephone and face-to-face interaction. Now they communicate more often than not via social media.

“The term social interest denotes the innate aptitude through which the individual becomes responsive to reality” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). A positive social adjustment is a primary form of behavior. When teenage girls develop a capacity for social interest, they feel significant. Social media isn’t just about connecting with friends. It can also be an avenue to create fundraising campaigns or to create awareness about social topics they may be passionate about (Oestreicher & McLane, 2012). Social interest is a process where teenage girls can reach their potential.

Furthermore, as Oestreicher and McLane noted, young adults are growing up in a time when all their moments are documented. Adolescent girls spend a lot of time sharing, tagging,
tweeting, or commenting about their friends and their own lives. This behavior allows them to discuss a shared experience and promote a sense of belonging. In order to survive teenage girls need to acquire social media wisdom and stay connected with their friends.

As identified by Oestreicher and McLane, “while Facebook and Twitter may be platforms for their connections, texting on their own phones is their primary access to their friends” (p. 20). Many studies have emerged in the last few years about the importance of human social interactions to our well-being. For instance, as Rock (2012) asserts, social media can be so rewarding that it overwhelms our ability to focus on other things. In short, time can go by fast when adolescents are distracted with social media.

Moreover, teenage girls are concerned about fitting in, belonging, and feeling significant. As Davis (2012) illustrates, social networking increases the bonds of friendships among teens. As a result, teenagers feel that the ability to connect anytime and anywhere with friends is necessary to stay connected and never feel left out of group activities or isolated.

In summary, the research in this section confirms the fact that there is a strong connection between social media use by teenage girls and feelings of belonging and social interest. Through social media, young girls may document all their moments. This behavior allows them to discuss a shared experience and promote a sense of belonging. Teenage girls use social media to prevent social isolation and feel significant and important. It is apparent that teenage girls use smartphones as the primary access to their friends. It seems that there is no group more connected to the Internet than teenage girls.

**Compulsive Smartphone Use**

Smartphone use among teens has increased substantially and mobile access to the Internet is pervasive (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Young women in United
States spend a lot of time on cell phones texting and using social media. Lin (2008) found that “digital natives—young people born into a world of laptops and cell phones, text and twitting—spend an average of 8 ½ hours each day exposed to digital technology” (para.4). The smartphone has become such an important part of their lives that turning it off is unthinkable (Lenhart, 2009).

According to Diaz et al. (2011) “The total amount of media use by youth ages 8 to 18 averages 6-plus hours a day—more than any other activity” (p. 2). Furthermore, Diaz et al. (2011) recognized that because texting, instant messaging, and social networking sites like Facebook are still comparatively new, research is not really available yet on their long-term effects. It can be argued that overuse of social media by adolescents can have a negative impact on attention skills, and a negative effect on basic cognitive processes.

Older generations (parents and grandparents) believe that teenagers have lost the ability to engage in conversation. Teenage girls prefer to text or Facebook to communicate with family and friends. As Turkle (2012) asserts “Teenagers avoid making telephone calls, fearful that they “reveal too much.” They would rather text than talk” (p. 11). As Small illustrates, “All that tech time diminishes people skills, including important emotional aptitudes like empathy. Furthermore, Small’s study found that “a young person’s brain, which is still developing, is particularly sensitive…it is also the kind of brain that is most exposed to the new technology” (as cited in Lin, 2008, para. 3).

In order to answer the question, “How much are teenagers using social media?” The third part of this paper provides an overview of current relevant research on how compulsive use of smartphones affects academics, sexual activity, and relationship with friends. Conversely, smartphones have the capability to connect to the Internet. Therefore, individuals have access to social media through their smartphones (Mobile Phone, n.d.).
In a study conducted by Lenhart (2012) it was discovered that the majority of teens exchange texts daily. Teens are fervent communicators. Teenagers communicate daily and frequently with friends and family. Given this notion, consider the rise of texting among youth. To illustrate, in 2008 Nielsen reported that 13 to 17 year-olds with a mobile device averaged 1,742 text messages per month. A few months later, it rose to 2,272 texts per month and by mid-2009 teens passed the 2,500 marker. A couple years later, in October 2010, “the amount of texts rose to 3,339 per month” (Bauerleing, 2011, p. x).

Diaz et al. (2011) found that “eighty percent of adolescents possess at least one form of media access. Fifty-four percent of teens send text messages, and one third of teens send more than 100 text messages per day” (p. 2). The Pew Internet survey shows that the most enthusiastic texters are older teenage girls with a median of 100 texts a day in 2011 compared with 50 texts for boys the same age. Overall, 75% of all teenagers text. Consequently, texting volume is up while frequency of voice calling is down. “Teen’s phone conversations with friends are slipping in frequency” (Lenhart, 2012, p. 2).

Turkle (2012) claims that among all the students at Roosevelt High School, “it is all texting and messaging” (p. 187). According to Turkle’s findings many people hate the telephone. Adolescents believe that there is no need to call anymore. The students at the high school claim, “A phone conversation is a lot of pressure. You are trying to think of something to say real fast so the conversation does not die out. A text is better than a call” (p. 190).

According to the Pew Internet project’s 2011 teen survey, over three quarters (77%) of teens have a cell phone, and nearly one quarter (23%) of teens 12 to 17 indicate that their phone is a smart phone. Ninety-one percent of teens that own smartphones use social networking sites (Lenhart, 2012, p. 5).
In contrast, the study conducted a year later by Madden et al. (2013), among the new findings from the nationally representative phone survey of 802 teen ages 12-17 and their parents’ show that 78% of teens now have a cell phone, and almost half (47%) of those own smartphones. That translates into 37% of all teens that have smartphones, up from 23% in 2011. These findings are significant because they show how rapidly teens are purchasing or getting smartphones from parents. On a side note, smartphones are not cheap.

Furthermore, almost one in four teens (23%) ages 12-17 among respondents in the same Pew research study in 2012 report that they have a tablet computer and nine in ten (93%) teens have a computer or have access to one at home. Seven in ten (71%) teens with home computers say the laptop or desktop they use most often is one they share with other family members (Madden et al., 2013).

Nearly 35% of older girls ages 14-17 involved in the general Pew research about youth and technology (2012) say they are cell-mostly Internet users. In addition, these older girls say, they go online using their cell phone compared to 24% of boys ages 14-17. This is notable since boys and girls are shown to equally be smartphone owners (Madden et al., 2013). Rock (2012) found that social media is something that deeply excites the brain in a highly condensed form that keeps people coming back.

Crouch (2013) provided some insight into the dangers of texting and, more specifically, texting and driving. Crouch reports about a 35 minute documentary dedicated to texting and driving. “It expresses a skepticism about the value of technological connectedness” (Crouch, para. 2). The documentary brings light to the attention to a national campaign “It can wait”, launched by telephone companies in US. The purpose of the campaign is to keep young adults from texting and driving.
Moreover, as Crouch indicated, the campaign used national advertising, celebrity testimonials, demonstrations in schools, and social media tools like a no-texting Facebook pledge and a designated hashtag on Twitter. “On social-networking websites, hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), it is used within a message to identify keyword or topic of interest and facilitate a search for it. For example, the hashtag #sandiegofire was used to help coordinate an emergency response to the fire” (Hashtag, n.d).

Furthermore, “In order to be a good member of society we are supposed to give more to society than what we take” This is the statement made by Reggie Shaw, a teen who killed two men one early morning on his way to work (Herzog, 2013). The documentary where Reggie tells his story “gets to the point where texting and driving is as unacceptable as drinking and driving” (Crouch, 2013, para. 4). Sadly, Herzog noted that over 100,000 accidents a year involve drivers who are texting and, unfortunately, the numbers are climbing. As Crouch reported, using your phone to text, tweet, Facebook, or Goggle while driving causes accidents. It is called “distracted driving.”

Thankfully, texting while driving is not only dangerous but in most states it is also illegal. The responsibility lies on all of us. Grandparents, parents, and young adults can potentially be distracted while driving. Parents should include the conversation about not texting while driving and of course model the behavior to turn off the phone while driving.

Academics

Prensky (2005) illustrates how students have changed radically. Today’s youth (digital natives) are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. He argues, “they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other tools of the digital age” (p. 4).
It is safe to say that the Internet and smart phones are an integral part of students’ lives. According to Small and Vorgan (2010), many of these digital natives rarely enter a library, let alone look up something in a traditional encyclopedia. They use Google or other search engines instead.

Diaz et al. (2011) found that because social media use involves multitasking, they create a loss of concentration in teenagers. More time spent on social media means less time on other activities including academics. For instance, when teenage girls are preparing for a test, and at the same time they are sending and receiving texts and Facebook messages (from their friends and family members), it could be very distracting. This behavior may cause them to fail, unless of course they are helping each other with schoolwork. Defending this notion, Nielsen (2005) found that teens use the Internet for school assignments.

Madden et al. (2013) suggests that 95% of teens ages 12-17 are online, a percentage consistent since 2006. However, the nature of teens’ Internet use has changed from using computers at home plugged into the landline to mobile wireless access to the Internet. This change of behavior may be a blessing or a curse. It may give teenage girls the freedom to study and communicate from wherever they want, anytime they want. On the other hand, this freedom may be more distracting and may not help them get the focus needed to do their schoolwork.

The U.S. Census Bureau population 2013 estimate is 316,128,839 and a rough estimate of the world’s population is 7,129,405,300. Kluger (2013) claims that there are more than 1.1 billion people using Facebook, writing and uploading unlimited messages and photos, and more than half a billion use Twitter (140 characters at a time).

The set-up of these two types of social media (Facebook and Twitter) among others provides a perfect way to keep score. People can broadcast their vacation, their new house, and
new clothes, uploading messages images and videos. Overall, subscribers may share every event in their lives. As Way (2013) indicates, this leads to an unintended negative outcome, the life comparison syndrome. In this view, Way suggests that people on social media tend to get a bit depressed about their own lives because they see friend’s lives being fun and exciting. This is in part because people have a tendency to upload pictures of events that look like fun.

As a result, this overwhelming display in social media by many people of a fantastic life may affect teenage girls in a negative way creating what Way (2013) calls “Facebook depression”. Furthermore, Kluger (2013) found in a Time magazine poll, 60% of respondents said they do not feel better about themselves after spending time in social media and 76% believe other people make themselves look happier, more attractive, and more successful. Feelings of depression may affect all aspects of young teenage girls’ lives including academics.

As Oestreicher and McLane (2012) presented social media is a drug and our youth is obsessed with checking Facebook status and following tweets. Moreover, this behavior may affect academics. It becomes evident that this compulsive behavior interferes with the focus and concentration that studying requires. Moreover, sleep deprivation becomes inevitable. Oestreicher and McLane found that “sleep deprivation is a major problem for teenagers. They chat online into the night” (p. 57).

Further, we may ask how may parents and teachers find and establish appropriate limits during adolescence? According to King (2012), “in a world of ready Internet access, it has become essentially impossible to supervise the communication that occurs between adolescents” (p. 2).

Teenage girls need to learn how to use social media with wisdom and understanding. They need to use social media to their advantage. Way (2013) argues that teenagers need to
understand that everything they post online is public. There is no such a thing as Internet privacy; there is only perceived privacy. Google and YouTube open the doors to unlimited learning. On the other hand, if teenage girls post or display intended or unintended vulgar, sketchy, illegal, indecent, or overall inappropriate content in social media it may negatively affect future acceptance at universities and future employment or relationships.

A survey conducted in 2006 by researchers at the University of Dayton found “40 percent say they would consider the Facebook profile of a potential employee as part of their hiring decision, and several reported rescinding offers after checking out Facebook” (as cited in Rosen, 2007, p. 186).

Facebook, texting, and IM are integral parts of teenage girls’ daily lives. Teenagers are cyber-savvy (Small & Vorgan, 2010). For instance, a 14-year-old-girl can chat with 10 of her friends at one time with a couple strokes on her smartphone and find out the news about who broke up with whom in seconds- no need for ten phone calls or, heaven forbid, actually waiting to talk to the person face-to-face the next day at school.

When our youth use social media for the purpose of learning and researching for school, the positive effects may be unlimited. Social media may save us time and effort in finding the information we need. Teenagers may use social media to find friends from school and their teachers. They may not have all their phone numbers but they may all have Facebook accounts.

Nielsen (2005) conducted a study to determine how website designs can better cater to teenagers for learning purposes and entertainment. Nielsen used 88 participants ages 13-17. Most teens were from the U.S. and some were from Australia in order to assess the international applicability of the findings. Factors that make websites easy or difficult for teens to use were the same in both countries. Fifty-five percent of the participants were able to use any site. Nielsen’s
study found “Teen’s poor performance is caused by three factors: insufficient reading skills, less sophisticated research strategies, and a dramatically lower patience level” (p. 48). These findings display the negative side to this generation’s learning. No matter what, a person must know how to read. Teens ‘right now’ attitude has removed a lot of patience found in past generations.

In addition, Carr (2008) found that Google’s chief executive Eric Schmidt claims that the company is striving to systematize everything it does. “The company has declared that its mission is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” (p.72). For our youth, it would be hard to imagine a world without Google. They may ask themselves where and how their parents (when attending high school) obtained information to do their homework.

Moreover, Bauerlein (2011) suggests that digital tools have proven so efficient, compelling, and helpful that it now requires a leap of imagination to recall what life was like before their advent (p. xi). YouTube may amuse or assist students in school. These sites are not only popular but they are helpful. Based on observation, Google is widely accepted and used by adolescents and teachers to achieve academic success. Similarly, a study conducted in New Zealand demonstrated that “some computer games can improve cognitive ability and multitasking skills” (as cited in Small & Vorgan, 2008, p. 96).

As the modern brain continues to evolve, some attention skills improve, mental responses quicken, times sharpen, and the performance of brain tasks becomes more efficient (Small & Vorgan, 2008). Prensky (2005) found “their attention spans are not short for games, for example, or for anything else that actually interests them” (p.18). Adolescents sometimes choose not to pay attention. If it is not entertaining, colorful, or interactive, they may find it boring.
Sexual Activity

Today’s generation of adolescents use social media to aid in the important social and emotional developmental task of incorporating sexuality into a sense of self and relationships (Hua, 2012). Moreover, teens use the Internet to learn about health issues that they are too embarrassed to talk about (Nielsen, 2005). This immediate access to information may be beneficial if young girls are using the Internet for support about health issues. On the other hand, impulsive behaviors such as sending a sexually explicit picture to a boyfriend or spreading rumors can now have much more rapid and far-reaching effects than previously (King, 2012).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, young women need to be reminded that messages and images sent through the Internet or via text are not private. Compromising, inappropriate videos, messages, and pictures can emerge in the future, ruining reputations. Furthermore, parents and teachers want to help young girls understand that keeping their private life private is a better practice than becoming an open book on social media. King (2012) claims that pictures or comments posted on the Internet now exist essentially in perpetuity.

In the Pew Internet American Life project survey, participants admit that only 4% of all cellphone owners ages 12-17 have sent sexually suggestive images of themselves by phone; 15% say they have received “sexts” containing nude or nearly nude images of someone they know personally (Lenhart, 2009). Provided the participants were truthful these results are accurate for the year 2009. It is possible, that when teens fill out surveys about sexting, they might lie about their answers because they might feel embarrassment or shame. Further, the purpose of this behavior may be: that they want to feel like they belong, they may be discouraged or they simply want attention. Hua (2012) gave credence to “teens can garner instant attention by taking provocative pictures and sending them as text message by phone” (p.5).
These findings, from a report called “Teens and Sexting”, was issued after a survey of 800 teens ages 12 to 17 and the teens’ parent or guardian. Lenhart found that these exchanges of inappropriate messages and images were exchanged between two romantic partners, and other kids that hope to one day become romantic. “Teens explain how usually suggestive images have become a form of relationship currency” (para. 5).

In contrast, in 2009 a different study was done by The National Campaign to prevent teen and unplanned pregnancy. In an effort to better understand the intersection between sex and cyberspace, The National Campaign surveyed teens and young adults about sexting. The findings reveal that 20% of teens are sending or posting sexually suggestive messages, and 48% percent reported receiving such messages (Celizic, 2009). These results show a big difference from the above findings from Lenhart (2009). What we do not know for sure is if the youth being survey are being truthful. Regarding this issue of texting behavior, the teens in The National Campaign survey indicated that they do it because it is fun.

To illustrate, Celizic (2009) reported that Jessica Logan, an 18-year-old, sent a naked picture of herself from her neck down via “text” to her boyfriend. Soon after, they broke up. The young ex-boyfriend proceeded to disseminate the photo of Jessica to a large number of students. Jessica’s nude cellphone picture was meant for her boyfriend’s eyes only. He had no business sending that photo to adolescents who attended seven different high schools in Cincinnati, OH. Consequently, Celizic attested that the 18-year-old girl was bombarded with taunts: slut, porn queen, whore, stupid. One of her friends reported that she would frequently hear “there goes the girl who sent that picture, she is just a whore, she just wants attention.” Then, after the picture was disseminated electronically, Jessica began skipping classes. The report explains that
her mother offered to have her be home-schooled but she declined. Jessica wanted to graduate
with her class.

Sadly, Jessica committed suicide a month after graduating from high school. According
to Celizic’s report, Jessica’s mother explained that her daughter was being tortured. She attended
a funeral of a friend who had killed herself. Something was triggered in Jessica’s mind. She went
home and hung herself in her bedroom. Jessica’s mother was oblivious to the depth of the
problem. Jessica told her mother that there was a problem, there were pictures involved, and a
group of younger girls who had received them were harassing her, calling her vicious names.

Unfortunately, we do not know what went on Jessica’s mind the day she ended her life.
Further, the price she paid for making the mistake to text a naked picture of herself was too high.
Moreover, Celizic reported that officials at the high school were aware of the harassment but did
not take sufficient action to stop it. Indeed, after you press the send button in a smart phone it is
in cyberspace forever. Jessica’s mom joined forces with Internet security expert Aftab Perry in
her fight against the electronic exploitation of kids (Celizic, 2009).

As a result of cases like Jessica’s, there are charges being filed across the U.S. regarding
child pornography. According to Internet security expert Aftab Perry, there are laws in place
against child pornography that include sending naked images to a minor (Celizic, 2009).

Notably, some teens may think this is a good way to show interest in a potential partner
and start or maintain a romantic relationship. They do not realize that once they press the “send”
button the recipients may pass along the inappropriate messages and images as entertainment
value, as a joke, or for fun. Moreover, adolescents may trust a romantic partner, but what
happens when they break up? Do they still trust each other? Who guarantees that they will not
pass around their sexts?
As noted previously, “The Adlerian approach is one that shows great respect for all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, behavior and so on” (Carlson, Watts & Maniaci, 2005, p.18). Adler highlighted the importance of understanding people within their social context. If there were texting and sexting when Adler was alive, he would have been concerned with this behavior. Sexting does not show respect for self or others.

Lenhart (2009) illustrated, “The desire for risk-taking and sexual exploration during the teenage years, combined with a constant connection via mobile devices, creates a perfect storm for sexting” (p. 88). Furthermore, “it is clear that the combination of impulsivity, limited judgment, sexual development/curiosity, and immediate access can lead to dangerous consequences” (Hua, 2012, p. 5).

**Relationships with Friends**

Madden et al. (2013) found that the access point to an adolescent’s friends is their smartphones. Teens believe they can talk to whomever they want, find out whatever they want, and be whoever they want without any interference from parents or other adults. Adler believed that people are social beings. “For Adler the strongest motivation force for the human being is the desire to belong to the social world” (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 9). According to Davis (2012), “Teens’ technology use promotes a sense of belonging” (para. 1).

Connectivity may bring complications. Online life may provide plenty of freedom. However, it can be hard to escape from new group demands. “It is common for young people to expect that their friends will stay available” (Turkle, 2011, p.174). Feelings may get hurt when young girls text or message about something personal, or about feelings, and they do not get an immediate response. We live in a different world than the one digital immigrants grew up in. We
are living through a real shift, one that changed the way we educate, entertain, communicate and make friends. We live in a continuous “now” (Rushkoff, 2011).

As noted previously in this paper, Adler believed in personal freedom along with social responsibility (Carlson, Watts & Maniacci, 2005). We all want a sense of freedom. However, teenagers have learned to expect it. Tapscott (2009) found “teens expect freedom because growing up digital gives young adults the opportunity to explore the world, find out things, talk to strangers and verify information from the official source” (p. 131). For example, the same author tells us that his daughter’s use of the Internet and social media is a sweet taste of freedom. His 14-year-old daughter can check her horoscope, download music, research for her homework, play games, check the movie schedule, and talk to friends at the dinner table (p.131).

It may be very challenging for parents to supervise social media communication. As Adler believed, it may be better to educate, to teach social responsibility to children so that they can experience freedom as a consequence of being responsible. It is better to teach responsibility than to block access to social media. Turkle (2011) found that when parents give young adults a phone it is to mainly for staying in touch with the parent. The young recipient of this great gift is expected to answer the phone if it is mom or dad. “This arrangement makes it possible for the child to engage in activities – see friends, attend movies, go shopping, spend time at the beach - that would not be permitted without the phone” (p.173).

Facebook makes every effort to get account holders to use their real names, and each individual is theoretically limited to a single account. Twitter allows people to create as many accounts as they’d like using self-assigned usernames (Oestreicher & McLane, 2012, p. 18). Social media allows teenage girls to change their identity. Now teens can take and edit pictures to make themselves and others look completely different from reality. According to King (2012),
“the other significant change that the spread of digital media as a predominant form of communication has created is the shift in the teen’s ability to construct a fictitious social self” (p. 1197).

Aydin (2012) found the following:

Individuals over the age of 13 can upgrade personal profiles, add friends, exchange messages and chat online with friends. Moreover, Facebook also presents opportunities for members to organize themselves into groups in relation to personal and professional affiliations, which might include educational affiliations (such as schools), workplaces, interests, hobbies, and political and religious beliefs. (p. 1094)

“Many teens now do the bulk of their socializing via digital media. Even when they are in close proximity teens prefer to communicate in writing” (King, 2012, p. 1197). Shy young girls that have a hard time making and maintaining relationships face-to-face prefer to communicate in writing. Oestreicher and McLane (2012) claim “because most of social media is a written endeavor, extroverts tend to be more introverted online and introverts tend to be more extroverted online” (p. 58).

Rosen (2007) found, “Social networking sites are often convenient surrogates for offline friendships and community” (p. 188). Adler believed that social cooperation in the community is essential for healthy living (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2005). It is about how we change as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face. Turkle (2011) claims, “as we instant-message, e-mail, text, and Twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude” (p.11). Teenage girls may have many close friends in social media. However, they may still experience solitude after spending hours communicating on line.
Schoenaker, inspired by Adler, teaches “encouragement training.” According to Schoenaker (2011), friendships and acquaintanceships develop where people form communities. However, a collaborative and helpful attitude is essential. Social media may allow young girls to create friendships and communities online.

Rosen (2007) suggests, “online relationships are more reliable” (p. 188). Online relationships may avoid vulnerability and uncertainty that true friendships entail. Real intimacy requires risk - risk of disapproval or heartache. Furthermore, social networking may make relationships more reliable, but how do we know if those relationships are better or more satisfying? Turkle (2012) believes “sometimes people experience no sense of having communicated after hours of connection” (p. 12).

Turkle (2011) tells the story of a young girl who gave her opinion about her phone. The 13-year-old told her “I hate my phone and I never listen to voice mail.” Texting may offer just the right amount of access, just the right amount of control. For this young girl, texting may place people not too close, not too far, but at just the right distance. The 13-year-old girl, as many other teens, is convinced that she does not need her phone anymore for phone calls. “Teens prefer texting, twitter, and looking at someone’s Facebook wall. They learn what they need to know” (p. 15).

Social media may be a great medium to stay connected with friends and avoid feeling isolated. However, there are problems that may emerge from communicating in social media. These harmful consequences of social media participation include feeling pressured to respond to all messages, inappropriate behaviors, spreading gossip, possible abuse, cyberbullying, and potential invasions of privacy and friendship (Aydin, 2012).
To illustrate feeling pressured to respond to all messages, for example, Turkle (2011) interviewed a 16-year-old boy who, at the beginning of the conversation, politely turned off his phone. At the end of the interview he turned it back on and noticed that he had over a hundred texts from friends (boys and girls) waiting to be answered. He mentioned, embarrassed, he needed to find a quiet place to respond to them all. He also added, “I can’t imagine doing this when I get older. How long do I have to continue doing this?” (p. 170).

Teens may feel pressure to respond to all their messages for fear that their friends will stop talking to them and to avoid isolation. “You touch a screen and reach someone presumed ready to respond, someone who also has a phone in hand” (Turkle, 2011, p. 175). When young girls do not manage to answer all the messages they may feel guilty and rude. They may feel guilty because they do not have time to answer the incredible amount of messages they get. A young teenage girl said in an interview, referring to responding to texts and messages in different social media, “Just doing the minimum is pure exhaustion” (Turkle, 2011, p. 184).

Before this present digital era, dating never involved Facebooking, texting, tweeting, posting, sexting or IM-ing. According to Alvarez (2012), these electronic forms of communication or cybertools are becoming the primary medium of communication between teen dating partners. Moreover, “more than a third of teens say their boyfriend or girlfriend checks up on them as many as 30 times per day” (p. 1208).

Another harmful consequence of social media can be “spreading gossip”. Schoenaker (2011) tells a story about gossip:

Someone came to Socrates and said, “Listen up, I have something to tell you about your friend.” “Just a minute,” said Socrates, breaking in. “Before telling me, have you put this story through the three filters? “What three filters?” said the person. Socrates said, “The
first filter is the truth. Have you made sure what you are about to say is the truth?” “No, I heard it from another,” replied the other. “Now then, the second filter is charity. Do you wish to report this story from a charitable motive in your heart?” The person had to be silent. “The third and final filter is utility. Do you think this story will be useful in any way to me or my friend?” The other was left speechless and went away.

Young “mean girls” who enjoy putting each other down may benefit from the advice Socrates gave to that person. “Malicious gossip destroys relationships” (Schoenaker, 2011, p. 7).

Schoenaker (2011) defined malicious gossip as talk about the failings and weaknesses of others in their absence. “Spreading gossip, for example, no longer requires any direct contact between two individuals” (King, 2012, p. 1198). Once somebody posts something or texts it to another, it can be spread nearly instantly through a vast electronic network without anybody knowing precisely where or to whom it went. Furthermore, the gossip persists long beyond the original poster’s impulse to spread the word.

This paper established that adolescents use social media for gaining new knowledge, for doing homework, for entertainment and for social interaction with friends and family. However, according to Cetin et al. (2012), some groups of adolescents use information and communication technologies to threaten, humiliate, and share one’s personal information and photographs without consent. Willard (2007) defined cyberbullying as using information and communication technologies to send hurtful messages to others and act socially aggressive.

In online bullying, there is generally no audience that might rein in a bully by saying, “Hey, lay off” (Diaz et al., 2011). Other people are not aware of the bullying while it is happening until it is posted online for all to see. “It is estimated that 4% -15% of students are involved in cyberbullying compared with 25%-30% of youth who are involved in traditional

According to Turkle (2011) teens online rarely, if ever, apologize to one another. When they are caught having wronged someone, they confess. However, they never say they are sorry. Individuals who operate on the useful side of life cooperate with the community. Those on the useless side of life operate in ways that are obstructive to the interest and well-being of the community for the sake of what they mistakenly believe to be personal advantage (Griffith & Powers, 2007). These groups of adolescents doing the bullying and behaving badly towards others inevitably drag their life style to the useless side.

Adler (2011) found the following:

Lack of social interest is equivalent to being oriented towards the useless side of life. The individuals who lack social interest are those who make up the groups of problem children, criminals, insane people, and drunkards. Parents and teachers need to find means to influence them to go back to the useful side of life and to make them interested in others. (p. 40)

Cyberbullying may differ from traditional bullying. Cetin et al. (2012) explain how direct bullying involves a great deal of overt aggression such as pushing, hitting, teasing, and threatening. On the other hand, indirect bullying such as excluding someone from a group or gossiping online can be very hurtful. “Social isolation greatly increases the risk for illness and death. Feelings of fear, weakness, desperation, and isolation impede the process of healing and maintaining physical health” (Schoenaker, 2011, p.101). Cyberbullying may be anonymous. Alvarez (2012) addresses the potential for anonymity and the lack of empathy on behalf of the bully. These are, in fact, considered to be among the most injurious aspects of cyberbullying.

Anonymity allows cyberbullies to more easily make victims feel helpless, overcome
social inhibitions, and express freely and aggressively. Therefore, cyberbullying is more
dangerous than traditional bullying (Patching & Hinduja, 2006). The more anonymously we
engage with others, the less we experience the human repercussions of what we say or do
(Rushkoff, 2011).

Rushkoff, (2011) stated the following:

The less we take responsibility for what we say and do online, the more likely we are to
behave in ways that reflect our worst natures or even the worst natures of others.

Because digital technology is biased towards depersonalization, we must make an effort
not to operate anonymously, unless absolutely necessary. We must be ourselves. (p. 89)

Cyberbullying causes psychological problems among adolescents. Cetin et al. (2012) found
“major psychological problems of cyber victims were loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and
inferiority feelings” (p. 647). Griffith and Powers (2007) define inferiority feelings as those
universal feelings of incompetence, smallness, weakness, ignorance, and dependency included in
our first experiences of ourselves. Alvarez (2012) found that 38 states in the U.S. have laws
suicide is a sort of revenge-an accusation against society. It is the youth’s way of affirming
himself, via private intelligence, instead of via common sense” (p. 228).

Furthermore, Adler (2012) argues that the feeling of inferiority and the problem of social
training are intimately connected. There is a direct connection between social training and
common sense. In working with such persons, our task is to make social facts appeal to them.

“Inferiority feelings are the consequence of a series of discouraging experiences that lead to the
mistaken conclusion that I am not good enough” (Schoenaker, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, inferiority
feelings coming from the need to belong and feel significant, they involve disappointment and
suffering of the deepest kind (Schoenaker, 2011).

Alvarez (2012) illustrates:

Cyberbullying among adolescents has been a major focus of attention in mainstream media and has been documented to have negative effects, as evidenced by several highly publicized suicides of teens who have been bullied online. (p. 1205)

As stated above, cyberbullying involves harassment online. In short, it is bullying through technology. For example, there was a recent case in Florida that illustrate the damage that can cause this pervasive destructive behavior. According to Stanglin and Welch (2013), Rebecca Sedgwick was a 12-year-old girl who was picked on for months by as many as 15 girls through online messages and texts. This is a sad and tragic case. This problem of bullying is real. Further, the messages were cruel and uncalled for (e.g., “nobody likes you”, “drink bleach and die”, “you are ugly”). As Stangling and Welch describe, Rebecca started by cutting; she was hospitalized; she changed schools; and the bullying did not stop until she jumped to her death from a tower at a cement factory. She texted “I can’t take it anymore, I am going to jump” a few minutes before she died to a friend. The consequences of this case were tragic, resulting in one young girl’s life lost and two others arrested.

Eventually, the arrest of two girls ages 12 and 14 came after one of the two posted a message on her wall on Facebook saying, “Yes IK [I know], I bullied Rebecca and she killed herself IDGAF [I don’t give a (expletive)]” (Stangling & Welsh, 2013). Interestingly, the parents of the aggressors did not want to cooperate, and they never stopped their daughters from abusing social media. That being the case, the parents of these girls and especially all the aggressors exhibit no social interest. As noted previously in this paper, social interest starts in the family. The lack of compassion for the victim and the lack of remorse is clearly a perverse behavior that
belongs in Adlerian terms to the useless side of life.

Some parents, as the parents in this case, are obviously oblivious of their children’s destructive behavior. According to Stanglin and Welch’s report one of the aggressor parent’s posted on Facebook, “My daughter is a good girl, and I am 100% sure that what ever they are saying about my daughter is not true”. In contrast, Rebecca’s mom launched an anti-bullying campaign Rebecca Sedgwick against bullying, on Facebook. This is probably the only good thing that came out of this case, the anti-bullying campaign that may help teens and parents become aware of the problem of this bullying behavior and the horrific possible consequences.

Rebecca was, in Adler’s terms, deeply discouraged and she clearly felt as if she did not belong, this was a senseless way to end a beautiful young life and it could have been prevented. It is recommended that parents seek professional mental health for their children and adolescents when suspecting they are bullying or being bullied.

The Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) is an international, non-profit organization that works to make the online world safer for children and their families. FOSI convenes leaders in industry, government, and the non-profit sectors to collaborate and create new solutions and policies in the field of online safety. Lenhart (2012) found that “through research, resources, events, and special projects, FOSI promotes a culture of responsibility online” (p. 4).

Similarly, there is another issue with social media. There is a potential for invasion of privacy and abuse of friendship when bombarded with texts, messages, and phone calls. Young girls may feel like they are being intruded upon. Fortunately, there are technological fixes for this. “Caller ID, for example, you can block calls from old boyfriends, or screen calls to see who wants contact, or defer contact by dumping a call into voice mail” (Gitlin, 2002, p. 213). They may use blocking tools to block stalkers or intruders in other social media mediums such as
Facebook.

Reasonable adults may think that it is common sense to check with others before listing yourself as connected to another person. For example, in Facebook you can describe yourself as being single, married, engaged, or in a relationship. For young teenage girls, that could be an awkward conversation. At a young age, it may be hard to define relationships and give them a title. “So there are misunderstandings and recriminations. Facebook at fourteen can be a tearful place” (Turkle, 2011, p.181). It is an important task not to do harm, but rather to focus our attention on the welfare and happiness of others and ourselves. The goal is self-respect and respect of others (Schoenaker, 2011).

An example, to illustrate a case on “invasion of privacy” also ended up in suicide. In the year 2010 a gifted 18-year-old student jumped to his death because his privacy was seriously violated and he could not handle the humiliation. As Pilkington (2010) reported, Tyler Clementi, a gay student, committed suicide because his roommate spied on him violating his privacy. Ravi, the roommate along with a young girl friend, used a web-cam to secretly watch Tyler romantically embrace with a young man. Then, Ravi gossiped about him on twitter and wrote, “I saw him making out with a dude. Yay”. Ravi streamed a video of him having sex with a man. Unfortunately, the video was broadcast to 150 followers.

The consequences of this event were devastating for all of those involved including their families and the school. Two days later Tyler committed suicide by jumping from the George Washington Bridge. Further, Pilkington reported that Tyler’s last words posted on Facebook about 10 minutes before he died, were short and sad, “Jumping off GW sorry”. Subsequently, Ravi and his helper were charged with invasion of privacy. All three young adults involved were 18-years-old at the time.
This case is particularly sad because the young victim did not reach out anyone for help; there was no opportunity for anyone to have stopped him from jumping. He was deeply discouraged and saw no way out of his situation. The only good thing that happened from this case is that the state representatives of New Jersey introduced the “Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act”. According to Parker (2012), the president of the victim’s school reported that the two students that committed the violation of privacy “gravely violated the standards of decency and humanity”. Ironically, the president of his school pointed to the coincidence that the school has launched that same week a two-year program to encourage “civility” within the social life of the school.

In summary, the third section of this paper provides an overview of current research on how compulsive use of smartphones affects academics, sexual activity, and relationship with friends among teens. Moreover, research confirms that smartphone use among teens has increased. The terms “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” are born. This section highlights how students today think and process information fundamentally different from their predecessors, as a result of being surrounded by new technology. Undoubtedly, the smartphone has become an important part of teenage girls’ lives.

It has been shown that texting, Facebooking, Tweeting, and IM-ing may be the most popular way to communicate among adolescent girls. Social media connections brought to teens the freedom to communicate with whomever they want wherever they want, and provides easy access to information for learning and research with unlimited positive effects.

The findings in this section also confirmed that this freedom to communicate and the access to information combined with impulsivity, limited judgment, and sexual curiosity may lead to dangerous consequences including problems with the law, mental illness and suicide.
Adler believed in personal freedom along with social responsibility. As mention before in this paper, social interest begins in the family. After we are born, education falls on the parents.

As Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) noted, Adler called good intellectual functioning “common sense,” meaning parents need to make sure that their children grow feeling as if they belong to the family and the community. Parents need to teach cooperation to their children in the family and everywhere else. Displaying a high moral conduct and good values is the parent’s job. Parents and educators are responsible to raise kind, productive citizens, starting by modeling the behavior. Further, it is sad to find adolescents that become criminals without any scruples or signs of empathy or remorse. According to Ansbacher & Ansbacher “Good adjustment is the striving on the “commonly useful side,” while poor adjustment is the striving on the “commonly useless side” (p.154).

Finally, we concluded that many teens now do the bulk of their socializing via digital media. However, connectivity may bring complications. Young girls may feel pressure to respond to all messages. They may become victims of gossip, possible abuse, cyberbullying, and potential invasion of privacy and abuse of digital ‘friendship’. When any individual takes responsibility for self, acts cooperatively with others, and attempts to meet the needs of a given situation, Adler says the person acts with social interest.

**Implications**

As previously discussed through this document, the following section presents clear positive and negative implications of social media use and how this behavior harms or enhances teenage girls’ quality of life.
Positive

This paper demonstrates that using social media has benefits associated with communication, exchange of ideas, music, videos, pictures, access to health information, community connections, and education. Social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) encourage users to reach out and build online relationships, consequently finding more social support. In addition, social interest is present when social media sites allow easy access to raise money for charity and volunteering for local events. Young women use social media to include others from more diverse background as opposed to only including people from their own geographical location. As Schurgin and Clark (2011) noted, such communication is an important step for all adolescents and affords the opportunity for respect, tolerance and increased, discourse about personal and global issues.

It is important to mention that shy and introverted teenage girls benefit from social opportunities provided by these sites. Social media can enhance their ability to connect with others and form positive relationships with peers (Diaz et al., 2011). Moreover, adolescents use social communities like Facebook to tell their friends about experiences with companies and products, shows, music, books, or anything else. As Tapscott (2009) illustrates, “This is the relationship generation” (p. 146).

Furthermore, young adults use Google or other social media to find information about their health without feeling embarrassed. It is possible that young people access online information about their health concerns easily and anonymously. Moreover, as Schurgin and Clarke (2011) explained, excellent health resources are increasingly available to youth on a variety of topics of interest to this population, such as sexually transmitted infections, stress
reduction, and signs of depression. Parents should be involved to be sure that adolescents are using reliable online resources.

According to Schurgin and Clarke, middle and high school students are using social media to connect with one another on homework and group projects. For example, “some schools use teaching tools on line to which has the benefit of reinforcing skills in English, written expression, and creativity” (p. 801). Furthermore, mobile communication gives young women a sense of freedom. They can stay connected with friends and family and do homework from wherever and whenever they want. As Davis (2012) argued, digital media helps teens reach developmental milestones such as fostering a sense of belonging and sharing personal problems.

Moreover, technology allows adolescents to be creative and find new and better ways of doing things. More than ever teens are young entrepreneurs. For example, Stix (2014) reported about 14-year-old student who said the federal government could cut printing costs with one decision. Suvir Mirchandani analyzed ink used for a school project, then expanded his research and came to the conclusion that changing the font of all government computers default settings to “Garamond”, which uses less ink, could be significant. According to Suvir’s findings, the federal government could potentially save $136 million per year. An additional $234 million could be saved annually if state governments also jumped on board (Stix, 2014). Suvir used social media and technology for the majority of his research. He also uses it to communicate his findings to the government.

As identified by Diaz et al. (2011), there is a positive effect and an unintended negative effect to social media use. Adolescents are growing up in a sea of electronic media. Further, it is important for parents to consider how this impacts their social life, development, academics, and
adjustment. In addition, parents can serve as a buffer from some of the potential negative consequences.

Negative

In recognition of texting and sexting behaviors, there is nothing wrong with texting messages to stay in contact with friends and family, unless the adolescent texts compulsively and texting interferes with functioning. In contrast, sexting is a destructive behavior even if it is done once in a while. Defending this notion Walker, Sanci, and Temple-Smith (2011) argue that the spread of these sexual images and the associated shame has led to social psychological consequences.

As Gasser and Palfrey (2008) emphasized, adolescents face two main kinds of safety risks from social media. First, the psychological harm that can come from exposure to harmful images or from having damaging experiences online. These are cyberbullying and cyber-stalking. The second is the physical harm that can be inflicted to a victim found online.

In addition, there is a risk to be exposed to predators. There is also risk of invasion of privacy and abuse of friendship. Abuse of friendship can occur when young people get bombarded with texts and messages. Consequently, there is a risk to feeling pressured to respond to all messages. As Tapscott (2009) found, “Some wish they could disconnect by turning off their cell phones but they are reluctant to do this because they fear missing out on important message and detached from their social environment” (p.153).

Moreover, according to Schurgin and Clarke (2011), cyberbullying is quite common. Cyberbullying can occur to any younger person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.
Unfortunately, some adolescent girls can be mean. Some enjoy putting people down, spreading gossip, and humiliating others online. This behavior can lead to dangerous consequences. Information can spread extremely quickly. Furthermore, unhealthy behaviors directed towards others inevitably lead to their life style turning to the useless side. Therefore, these girls’ negative-destructive behaviors show a lack of social interest on their part. Inevitably, teenagers today have more opportunities to make bad decisions than they did in years past. Subsequently, parents and educators can only teach them to be responsible with the “many” decisions they make.

As Oestreicher and McLane (2012) assert, the good news is that Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube all have mechanisms for flagging potential bullying behavior. However, there is a possibility that these flagging mechanisms only stop some teens from bullying. As Diaz et al. (2011) noted, parents may need to learn more about social media, from their children or by taking a class. Further, Diaz et al. suggest to parents to allow their children to participate in social media. In this respect, it is recommended that parents to join their children’s social networks and “friend” or “follow” them.

Conversely, the intensity of the online world is thought to be a factor that may trigger depression in some adolescents. Adolescents can feel that at times it is hard to experience a moment of peace. Furthermore, what was created to connect people can leave adolescent girls feeling isolated, hurt, and alone. It is normal adolescents, just like Jessica, Rebecca, and Tyler who fall victims to the perils of the Internet and the easy exchange of information on smartphones. It is extremely sad that the consequences can be deathly.

Finally, the information available online is infinite. It is easy even for adults to become overwhelmed and fatigued by the need to always search for true reliable sources. Imagine how
hard and confusing it must be for adolescents to navigate in a sea of information. As Gasser and Palfrey (2008) explain, “Parents and teachers are on the front lines. They have the biggest responsibility and the most important role to play. But too often, parents and teachers aren’t even involved in the decisions that young people are making” (p 10).

**Conclusion**

Teenage girls tend to be connected on social media at all times of the day and night. The way that many young people are using social media is changing the way they communicate, learn, educate, socialize, date, and the way they entertain themselves. This paper demonstrates that the importance of young girls using their smartphones to connect to Facebook, Twitter, Google, and YouTube among other forms of social media doesn’t fade, it increases with time.

Moreover, every day teens conduct their lives online. Their smart phone combined with the Internet makes their life more convenient. Smartphone use allows adolescents to expand the number of “friends” they have on line and stay connected even if they do not see them face-to-face.

This paper presents evidence that there is a strong connection between social media and a feeling of belonging and social interest. More specifically, there is evidence that teenage girls are most concerned about fitting in, belonging, and feeling significant. Further, adolescents have a strong peer group need. In addition, with the mobile accessibility to social media, more adolescent young women communicate and stay connected with friends in ways that were not available in previous generations. As Small and Vorgan (2008) noted, the adolescent of today have never known a world without easy access to the Internet.

There is one thing we know for sure, as Gasser and Palfrey (2008) explain: this generation of adolescents is different. They study, work, write, and interact with each other in
ways that are very different from the ways that older generations did when growing up. Furthermore, “major aspects of their lives—social interactions, friendships, and civic activities are mediated by digital technologies. And they’ve never known any other way of life” (p.2).

In regards to dating, Jenkins (2011) argues, “long distance communication between lovers and friends is not new. Digital immigrants conducted face-to-face, letters through regular mail or late-night telephone conversations” (p. 161). In contrast, digital natives use social media in part for their courtship.

In regards to sexting, the study conducted by Lenhart (2009) found that only 4% of participants admitted to have sent a text with a sexually charged images or videos. In addition, only 15% admit to receiving “sexts.” In other words, not as many adolescents as one might think admit that they are involved in sexting behavior. Regardless of these findings, there is a possibility that the participants in this survey lied to avoid shame or embarrassment.

Moreover, it is recommended that parents and educators consider that teaching responsibility to our youth will bring a better outcome than blocking access to their smartphones, setting parental controls, or grounding them. Adolescents find ways to do things unsupervised if they want to. As King (2012) noted, it is essentially impossible to supervise teen’s online behavior. A rule of thumb could be: do not post anything online that you do not want your parents, grandparents, or future employers to see. Furthermore, smart-loving parents that model healthy behavior lower the risk for harm to their children. As Doyle (2008) illustrates, bad parenting, including parental control and intrusion, that is authoritarian and neglectful has been associated with higher risk for addiction.

In addition, parents and teachers should get information and education about the social media most used by their adolescents. As Schurigin and Clarke (2011) illustrate, parents and
teachers of our youth do not have to become digital-experts. Older adults only need to help their brain adapt and succeed in this ever-changing digital environment to better understand our teenage girls. Almost all digital immigrants will eventually become more digital savvy.

Furthermore, it is recommended that parents and educators make sure adolescents have the tools and the skills to navigate the social media environment. Evidence indicates that adolescents and their families can benefit from regular family meetings covering subjects such as time spent online, profiles, postings, over-sharing, smartphone etiquette, predators, pedophiles, bullying awareness, reporting cyberbullying, and healthy behaviors. Parents need to take the lead and be role models. The rules should apply to everyone at home.

Based on this literature review, it becomes clear that online safety is an issue and it is recommended that parents, educators, and adolescents take online safety seriously to avoid harm. Encouragement to teens to alternate screen time with playtime and activities outside is highly recommended.

As King (2012) noted:

Most parents want to support their children’s social strivings, while eliminating or minimizing inappropriate or dangerous behaviors. Since it is impossible to limit particular uses of digital media while maintaining that access overall, this puts many parents on the horns of a dilemma. (p.1197)

The more responsible adolescents are, the more freedom they enjoy. Schurgin and Clarke (2011) assert that parents need support in the effort to engage and educate youth to be responsible, sensible, and respectful digital citizens.

With that said, the question remaining is: Do social media enhance the life of teenagers? It depends who you ask. As Twenge (2012) argues, the Internet is better, faster, and more social.
There is nothing stopping it. Moreover, Diaz et al. (2011) suggest shy adolescents can actually enhance their ability to connect with others and form more relationships with peers. On the other hand, many researchers argue that social media is a significant distraction that affects adolescents negatively in relationships and academics. Social media can have both, a positive or negative affect on adolescents, depending on how social media is used. If social media is used appropriately, it can enhance adolescent lives. When it is abused, it may harm adolescents.

We can remain encouraged and positive about the future. This current generation of adolescents is incredibly creative and optimistic. They are more accepting of differences. As Twenge (2012) asserts, they believe in equality regardless of ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Our world is constantly changing. We all need to adapt to new ways of learning, teaching, playing, socializing, dating etc. We all (digital natives and digital immigrants) must remain open minded so that we can close the gap between us. Further, in order to survive, all of us, including adolescent girls, need to acquire social media wisdom.

In addition to this literature review, the following resources can assist families in discussing the more challenging issues that adolescents face online: (www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm). The AAP Internet safety site (http://safetynet.aap.org), and the AAP public education site, Healthy children .org (www.healthychildren.org/English/search/pages/results.aspx?Type=Keyword&keyword=internet+safety). Additional tips to help parents talk to their adolescents about sex and technology, type: http://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/sex_and_tech_summary.pdf
Further study could explore whether the education system in the US is catching up with technology, providing an innovative source of support for young adults. Social media has exploded and it is relatively a new phenomenon. Therefore, social media is in need of further research and clarification. Much research remain to be done on the effects of compulsive smartphone use by teenage girls and how it affects school performance, academics, sleeping patterns, sexual activity, safety, and relationships with family and friends.
References


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