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### Social media & College Aged Student's Mental Health

Being a college student during this time of uncertainty and Covid-19, a pandemic, and transferring to basically full time school online when I am used to being in person, building an education and relationships, has been pretty hard on me. I have found myself using my phone more because I don't feel the want to focus my time elsewhere. Where does all the energy? I would say most of my energy, when I am not writing thesis or writing for myself, goes to being on my phone and using TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, etc. anything that occupies my time, really. Though I am not proud of it I have found myself defending social media and it's effects it has on me and my mental health. As someone with pretty harsh mental health problems and having dealt with mental illness most of my high school and continue/d to throughout my college years I found myself saying that social media "helps me". Lately I have found that out of my friends I am not the only one who thinks this way, which is why I want to talk about social media and the effects it has on college aged student's mental health. Within this essay I will talk about how social media has an impact on higher education aged students, how real life closeness of social media and the relation to mental health, more specifically depressive symptoms, which will lead me to talk about college aged students and how they look for moral support through social media. Lastly I want to address college aged students and social media during the time of COVID-19 since the use of Social Media and college aged students have raised immensely over

the period of Covid. I think this is all important to talk about because of the fact that social media, for many students, is there “getaway” to either avoid school and or avoid situations they’d rather not deal with. This, though may seem fun, is not healthy and I am going to share with you reasons why this is not good.

Within society today and with everything going on many people have anxiety, depression, and or any other mental health instability. Even without what is going on throughout this year of 2020 many college aged students have a lot on their plates throughout their years away at college. They have the pressure on them to figure out a major, figure out a job, multiple classes with, sometimes, insane amounts of homework and tasks do do outside of their school life. What’s interesting though is that according to Darren Iwamoto, author of the article *The Impact of Social Media in Higher Education*, states that “social media is also viewed as a form of support for the majority of college and university aged students, but it can also have an advert effect on their mental health”, which is interesting to think about having social media be viewed as an “option” per say of support for them when most are using social media as a distraction.

Thinking about what is posted on social media can be interesting since there is much discussion of what is positive and what is negative. For various reasons, the content is different for people when it comes to what they see on their social media platforms, but for the most part, let’s say we are on twitter and we look at the “trending” section, topics such as “news”, “trending”, etc. don’t always have positive comments or stories that are being told. According to Iwamoto, the average student who spends up to 2 hours on social media every day will encounter more negative news, stories, and information, which will eventually affect their overall stress level and mental health status. Furthermore, when talking about stressors and the effects on

anxiety and depression social media platforms were found not to have a direct correlation or relationship with deep and meaningful social connectedness, as stated by Iwamoto.

In this article they talk about a recent study done including 181 undergraduate students at a university located in the Pacific over the course of the fall semester in order to study their usage of social media and the effects it had on them and their mental health. According to the article, based on when this study was taken place the levels of anxiety, depression, and stress levels were thought to come back in the normal range. Though, this was not the case. Anxiety levels were elevated by a lot more than researchers expected and all mental health, depression and stress levels specifically, had a positive correlation between the amount of hours spent on social media and the rise in numbers. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, ones that specifically speak to one's ego were found to have the most positive correlation in the rise of anxiety, depression and stress levels because they deal with one's ego and a lot of people's concerns these days are keeping up with society.

When looking at the closeness of relationships over social media verses face-to-face relationship building there has been some questions on which is better and if either affect the depressive symptoms of a person. When thinking about this study and college aged students this is for sure something to be aware of since most of our communication with each other is through our phones these days. According to the Journal of American College Health, college students in the US, in recent years are the most at risk group for depression. After looking at the previous study it helps back up this article by helping prove that the amount of time spent on social media can affect your mental health, here specifically depression, in a negative way. Another fact, based

on the Journal of American College Health, if untreated depression among college students can bring a high risk factor in suicidal thoughts, drug abuse, poor academic performance, and more.

The study that they did involved, in total, 1124 students who were between freshman to senior and both male and female. The study involved an independent variable, Real-Life Closeness of social media contacts, a dependent variable, the students depressive symptoms, and the socio-demographic factors as the covariates. From this study they found that having no face-to-face contact with social media contacts had a significantly big increase associated with depressive symptoms, those who had distant face-to-face relationships with social media contacts had little effect on the person's depressive symptoms and lastly, those who had close face-to-face contact with their social media contacts had little depressive symptoms and were at a decreased odd of developing major symptoms, according to the Journal of American College Health survey held in August of 2016.

When it comes to females and social media there tends to be a lot of comparison between them, from being a female and having a past of heavily comparing myself to others over social media I can attest to this being a big problem. I think when it comes to social media and finding support it can often be miscommunicated as "finding support" because finding support is different than comparing yourself. Though I've seen this for mainly women I also have heard this going on with guys too and how they feel they should look or act when it comes to their social media platforms.

Another form of support, especially for college students, can be looked at as how they adjust in new situations. When it comes to college there are a lot of changes going on in a person's life from making new friends, adjusting to living away from home, being in a new

environment, etc. This tends to have people focus more on either staying connected with their friends from home or trying to make new friends in order to start building a life away from home. Dr. Michelle Droun, author of *College Students in Distress: Can social Media Be a Source of Support?*, being away from home and social media related to adjustments, but it also can increase states of depression, anxiety, stress levels and more psychological distress because this is the only way college students know how to cope or at very least one of the biggest ways we know how to cope. According to Dr. Droun 60.8% of college students felt “overwhelming anxiety” and 38.2% of students felt so depressed that it was difficult to function. Along with those stats a majority of college students, about 60.6% felt that they were lonely and didn’t have many people to connect with once getting to college so in order to help their mental health, loneliness, etc. they would revert to social media for support and comfort in not being the only one that feels this way. Though, turning to social media can be looked at as support for a certain amount of time or a sort of getaway from reality those who use social media may be subject to online victimization and more or less encounter this time of treatment sometime throughout their time on social media.

There was a survey conducted via survey monkey asking students whether social media was a support tool or a stress inducer and the majority of the participants said they felt as though support and help through social media was hard most times and about 54.6% of participants said that it contributed to their stress occasionally and 9.8% said it contributes to their stress more frequently and they find little to no support from social media. Overall though, a majority of people that took the survey, 64.8% of people, would rather talk to someone in person who shares their problems or is able to help them.

I found this to be an interesting topic to cover, not only because I have struggled with this myself, but I have found it especially hard for me to deal with my mental health, more than before, now that we are in the middle of a pandemic. COVID-19 has taken everyone for a ride and not a good one might I say. Having found myself in spring semester of my junior year, spending the rest of my days and all throughout summer at home in a place I am not all too comfortable in, I felt the need to connect with those back at school. The only way to do that was through texting, social media, and or FaceTime. The way I found most draining on me and my mental health was social media because I found myself veering into subjects and areas of social media that just made me feel bad for myself. I stopped eating, I was very depressed and I wasn't too sure what I was doing with my life. Though, I wouldn't say I have hit rock bottom during COVID-19, there have for sure been moments where I have felt I almost did. The reason I bring this up is because I think it's important to talk about especially when I have been growing up in the age of social media and now more than ever is it the most prevalent.

During this time of COVID-19 there is already a lot of anxiety and stress because of the fact that no one knows what to do with it and the amounts of twists and turns that it throws at us from day to day. Now, imagine being a college student who is trying to complete your degree with immense assignments on your plate, a full schedule, the anxiety and mental health you're already dealing with because of that and personal life, and mix in the COVID-19 pandemic in there too. According to China Medical University, the symptoms of high prevalence mental health and psychological symptoms were very much increased within college students, especially when everything turned into online and many moved back home or had to figure out living situations when campus's closed down. The university did a study that resulted in the fact that

COVID-19 information that was floating around on social media increased their anxiety, psychological health, and panic up to 17.2%. Another thing they found was that risk communication, which is the interactive process of exchanging information among individuals, institutions and groups, had been up as well because many had been talking online in order to figure out next steps and how to continue education.

In conclusion, the amount of time spent on social media interacting with negative content, comparing oneself to others, and seeing other negative articles, information, etc. has been found to increase depressive and anxious behavior. Also, the amount of time spent on social media can affect one's psychological health by how students use it. The students who have said it helps with support and seeking help have also proven in a survey that it doesn't always help with how they are feeling and most have said unless it's really face-to-face contact the feelings of depression and anxiety are increased. During the COVID-19 pandemic it has been found that the amount of students with psychological health issues have increased because of information sent between individuals, institutions and other information found online.

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