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LIFE-ON-LINE

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Master of

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## **COMMITTEE APPROVAL**

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of Nikyra Capson find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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## **LIFE-ON-LINE**

Thesis Abstract—Idaho State University (2020)

Social media has become an integrative component of everyday life. My work looks at the shift from the physical to the digital and the effects it is having on mental health. In the installation, I incorporated comments which are sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and graphic in nature to depict online interactions. My objective is to show what children are exposed to on the internet, some times without parental knowledge, and to promote ethical online practices and encourage accountability.

Key Words: Social Media, Children, Internet

## **LIFE-ON-LINE**

Social media has become an integrative component of everyday life. My work examines the impact social media has on the younger generations, who have grown up in a world where aspects of various social media platforms have always existed. This thesis and body of work examines the effects social media is having on adolescents' mental health and the negative environments children are exposed to while online without parental knowledge.

I investigate and respond to this dynamic by 'calling-out' those who leave racist, sexist, homophobic, and harmful comments on other people's social media posts. The comments that I have collected from social media platforms (such as Instagram) range from death threats to insulting people based on their appearance. I have collected these comments and 'quote' the individual by writing down their post and username. I include usernames in my work in an attempt to hold those accountable for what they write. Each username is unique and can be tied back to the individual who created it.

To show the connection between the internet and adolescents, I created an installation that uses children's and baby's clothing and combine them with the negative Instagram comments I have gathered. The 'quotes' were stenciled onto the clothing and hung on clotheslines that were strung across the gallery. The clotheslines represented the transition from childhood pre-internet and the 'quotes' show childhood post-internet. The clotheslines were a part of my own childhood memories as my cousins and I would run around the poles and hang on the rope when we were younger. As we entered our teenage years less time was spent outside and we became more interested in electronics, such as gaming systems, computers, and phones.

This trend has continued with children becoming more tech-savvy than some adults.

Parents regularly give their young children phones and tablets to play with to keep them entertained. Children learn a lot of behavior through observation of those around them. They see their parents consistent phone use, so they are developing a natural inclination towards electronics and want to play with them over playing outside.<sup>1</sup>



Image 1: *Life-On-Line (Detail 1)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson

Along with the clotheslines, I included wooden boxes that reference the dimensions of smartphones, tablets and computer screens. Inside the boxes were layers of comments cut into paper and transparency with LED lights shining through them. The flickering LEDs illuminate the layers of comments and cast shadows onto the clothing. The boxes' wires were woven around the collage of screens to show the overwhelming quality of the internet and the need to be “plugged-in”. The light boxes incorporate the shift in mentality of children becoming more prone

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Lincoln R., Gary T. Green, and H. K. Cordell. 2011. “Children’s Time Outdoors: Results and Implications of the National Kids Survey.” *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration* 29 (2): 1–20. Accessed April 17, 2019. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=66248864&site=eds-live &scope=site>.

to want to play with electronic devices versus physical toys.<sup>2</sup>

My objective for this installation is to give these comments a physical presence. In addition, I have created a visual for adults that cannot be as easily ignored if left in a digital space. I want to make what is being posted online public knowledge and give parents an insight to what their children can potentially be exposed to, such as cyberbullying and inappropriate sexual content. A survey of 404 middle school students found that “22% of boys (compared to 6% of girls) reported having searched the topic of sex on the Internet and roughly, 40% of both boys and girls reported having encountered sexually inappropriate material on the Internet. Approximately 28% of the participants reported being harassed or bullied on social media sites.”<sup>3</sup> In another survey of 1588 middle school students who were ages 10 to 15, it found that “15% reported an unwanted sexual solicitation online” and 32% had been harassed.<sup>4</sup>

My work is also designed to serve as a warning to the younger generations. The ability to go by a pseudonym has given users a sense of freedom that influences them to write things they may not say in person. This false sense of security makes the user believe they will not be subject to cultural and social consequences, when in reality these posts can be traced back to the person who wrote them. Children need to be taught about online moral and ethical practices and understand that they can be held accountable for what they post online and it can have real-life consequences.

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<sup>2</sup> Larson, “Children’s Time Outdoors,” 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Florence, Chuang Wang, Teresa Petty, Weichao Wang, and Patti Wilkins. “Middle School Students’ Social Media Use.” *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 21, no. 1 (2018): 213-24. Accessed March 28, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26273881>.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, “Middle School Students,” 214.



Behind the usernames and the profile pictures on Instagram are real human beings who are receiving notifications of every like, share and comment their posts receives. There is a sense of satisfaction when receiving positive praise from peers but it is the negative reactions that linger. It is these comments that have the most significant impact on an adolescent's mental health.



Image 2: *Life-On-Line (Detail 2)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson



Image 3: *Life-On-Line (Detail 3)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson



Image 4: *Life-On-Line (Detail 4)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson



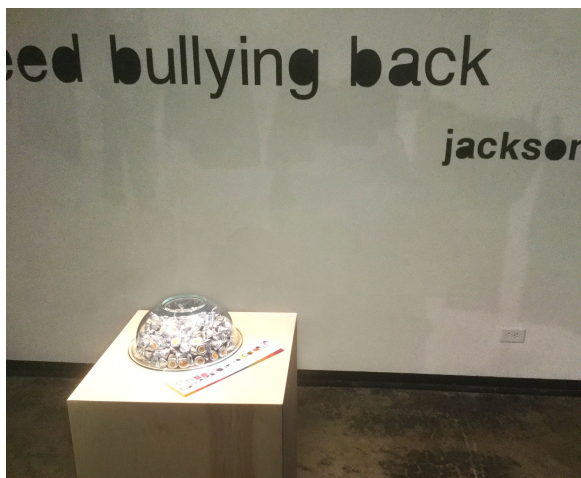


Image 5: *Life-On-Line (Detail 5)*, 2020,  
Nikyra Capson

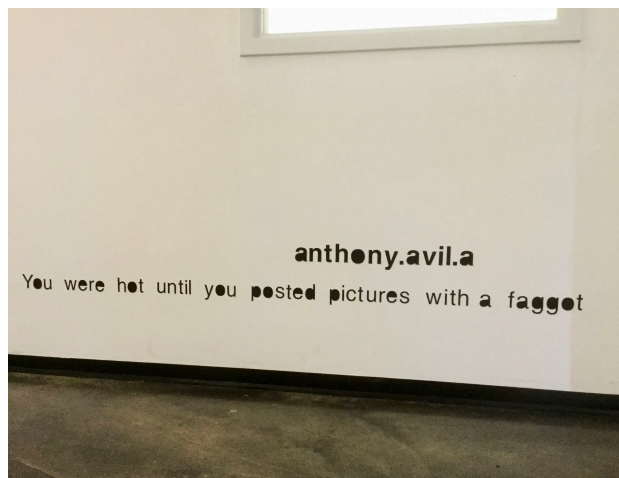


Image 6: *Life-On-Line (Detail 6)*, 2020,  
Nikyra Capson

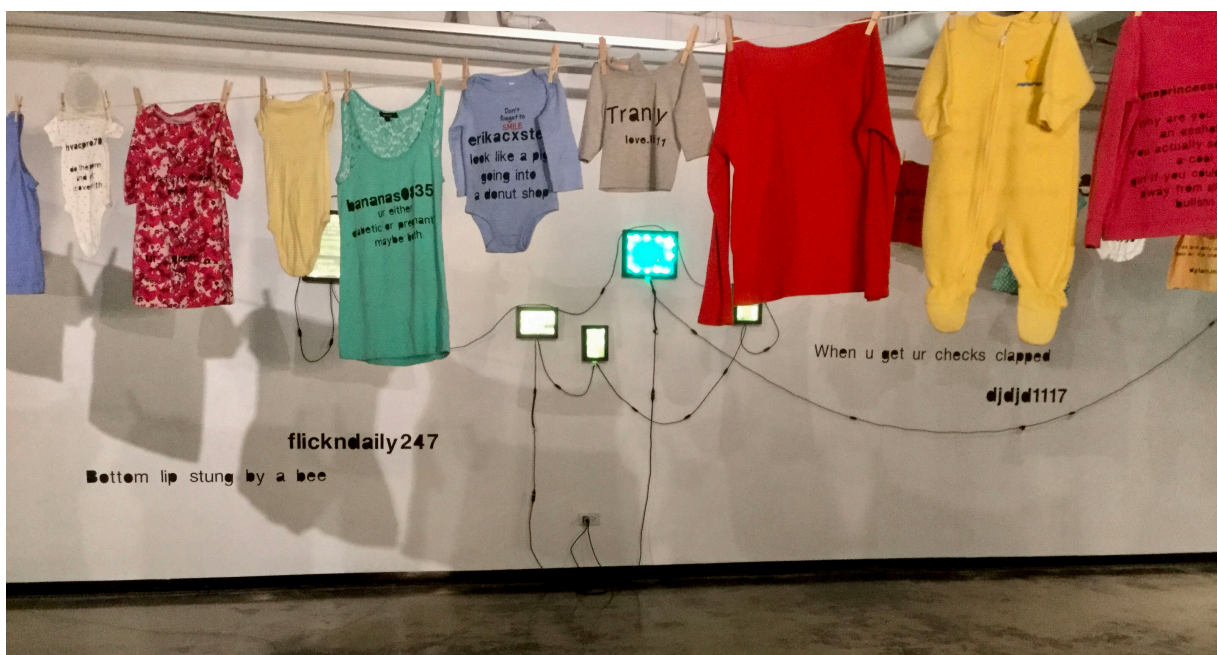


Image 7: *Life-On-Line (Detail 7)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson



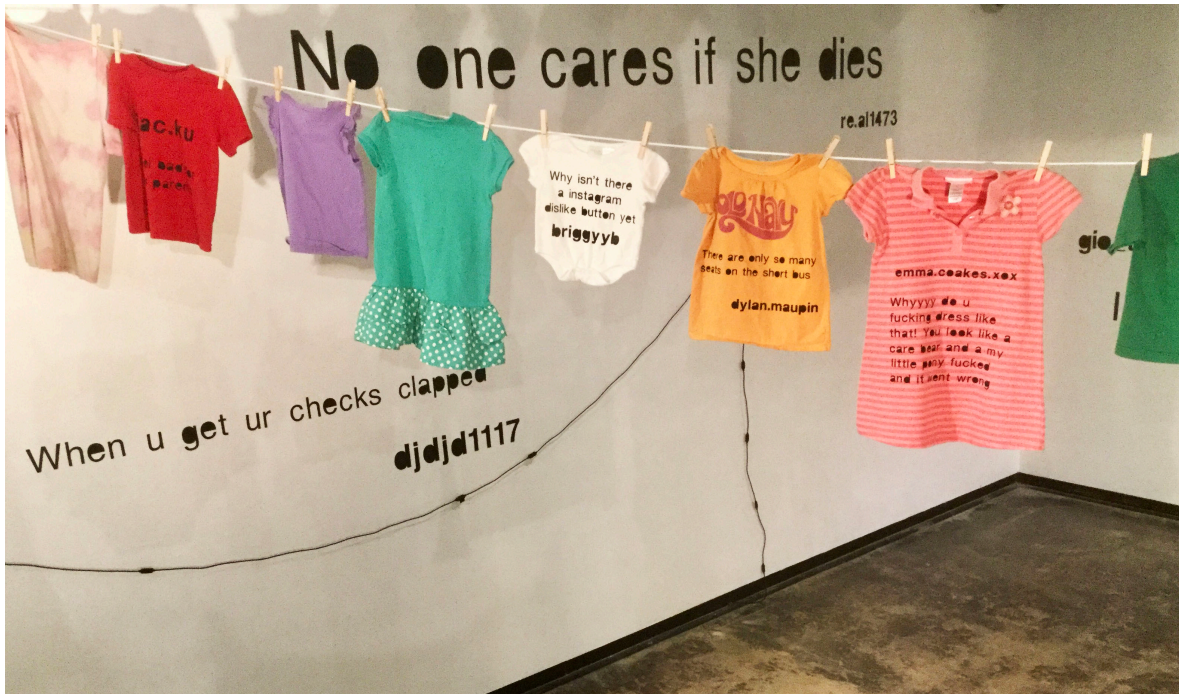


Image 8: *Life-On-Line (Detail 8)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson



Image 9: *Life-On-Line (Detail 9)*, 2020, Nikyra Capson

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Egon Schiele was an artist that examined the fragility of the human condition. In his self-portraits, he was able to express the delicate nature of a human being in his choice to use muted colors and represent the figure in an expressive manner. Schiele partnered this with raw sexuality. The idea of showing oneself in a vulnerable state is similar to what can be found online and people post pictures of their bodies seeking positive recognition in hopes of gaining a social media ‘following.’



Image 10: *Self-portrait*, 1912, Egon Schiele  
Retrieved from: [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Image 11: *Campbell's Soup I*, 1968, Andy Warhol  
Retrieved from: [theartstory.org](https://theartstory.org)

Andy Warhol worked with subject matter that critiqued consumerism and the gallery system. His work challenged the ideas behind what qualified as a piece of art as he combined pop culture icons and mass produced items with fine art techniques. Warhol also presented himself to the public as an edgy playboy versus the dedicated painter that he was in his private life. Even though Warhol was born before the creation of social media, he developed a persona that helped create a brand, which in the end made him a pop culture icon as well. Popular



Youtubers and Instagrammers are doing similar things in the way they curate what they show to their audiences and how they design their own personas to appeal to a specific demographic.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres drew on themes of hope and loss in his artwork. In his candy spill installations, he used audience participation for it to be fully realized. The replenishing and diminishing of the candy represented his partner's weight as he battled with AIDs. I rely on others to post comments online, as this is where I find my content. I take on more of a curator's role when I search through social media posts for the ones I will include in my work. My dependent relationship with internet users is what makes it possible for my installation to exist.



Image 12: *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991, Felix Gonzalez-Torres  
Retrieved from: [wikiart.org](http://wikiart.org)



Image 13: *Protect Me From What I Want- from Truisms series*, 1982, Jenny Holzer  
Retrieved from: [artaspoliticalvoice.weebly.com](http://artaspoliticalvoice.weebly.com)

Jenny Holzer is known for incorporating text into her artwork. She writes headlines and slogans which she prints on t-shirts, billboards, and projects onto buildings. By presenting her work in different ways, she is able to play with the context. Each environment has an effect on how the audience interprets the meaning behind the slogans. In my own art, I am changing the environment to give the comments a greater sense of permanence. By taking them from a digital space, I am giving them a physical presence that is harder to overlook.

Another aspect that Holzer utilizes in her work is using subject matter that is private in nature and makes it public. Holzer's slogans are personal ideas that she then presents to the public through her projections and billboards. Specifically, when an individual posts a comment online, they may not consider the broader audience, who is going to be able to view it. Also, when I take the comments off the internet, I am giving them a public presence that they may not have if they were left online to be lost in the millions of other comments that are posted daily.

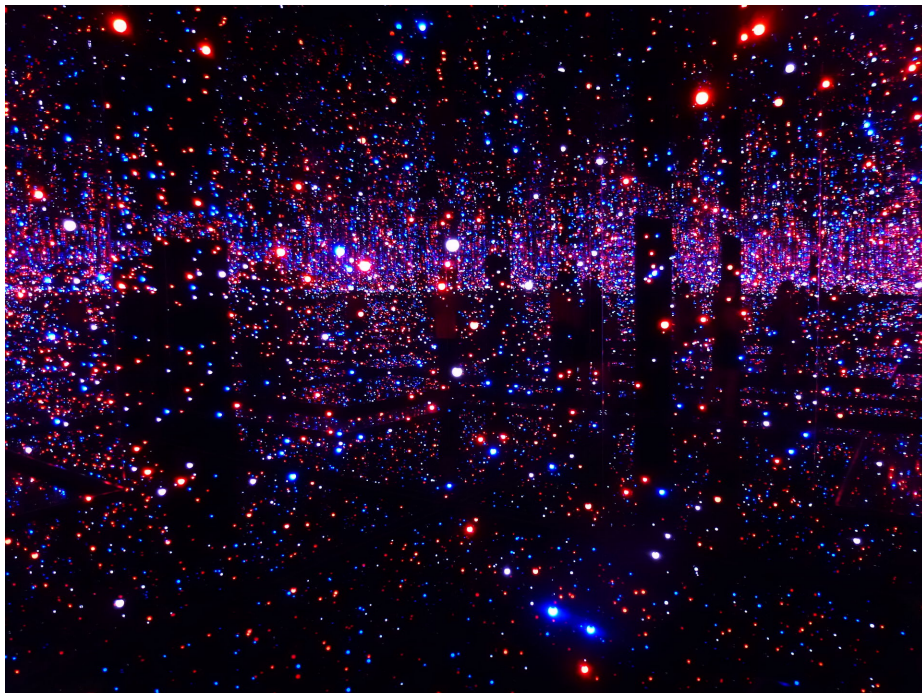


Image 14: *Infinity Room*, 2015, Yayoi Kusama  
Retrieved from: [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

The last artistic influence for my work is Yayoi Kusama. She is an installation artist who creates different experiences that invites the viewer to take part in the work. Her installations have an all-encompassing feel to them as participants are invited into spaces that she has designed. Some of her works have an overwhelming quality to it as she obsessively paints polka dots on every surface. The dots and bright colors she uses add a playful element to the

installation. For many, social media is an overwhelming experience as users are being exposed to large amounts of information in a short period of time. There is a correlation between “compulsive behavior and social media” as various studies found “youth of this generation habitually check their messages on social media sites and get restless when an easy access is not available or provided to them...”<sup>5</sup> This relationship can lead to “Phantom Vibration Syndrome” which is the feeling that a person thinks their phone is vibrating when in actuality nothing is happening. This in turn can result in anxiety, depression, and having low self-esteem as people use social media to connect with others but to also overcome feelings of loneliness.<sup>6</sup>

### **EMERGING ARTISTS COMMENTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Tom Galle describes himself as “the epitome of the contemporary web artist.”<sup>7</sup> He utilizes the “hyper-digital nowness” that is prevalent within modern society,<sup>8</sup> which can be seen in the growing number of online galleries and acclaimed museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum, and Musée du Louvre, having Instagram pages. Galle’s works look at the effect that the internet has on people. He does this by placing temporary tattoos of social media imagery onto the human body, and posting ads promoting that he is a “generous liker” and “writes thoughtful comments.” Galle’s art is a cross between academic art and meme

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<sup>5</sup> Ramzan, Muhammad, Javeria Arshad, Hina Adeeb, and Muhammad Asif. “Excessive Use of Instagram Causing Anxiety and Depression among Young Adults.” *Pakistan Library & Information Science Journal* 50, no. 3 (July 2019): 45–48. Accessed February 22, 2020. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=llf&AN=138208789&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>6</sup> Ramzan, “Excessive Use of Instagram,” 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> Galle, Tom. “BIO” Tom Galle. March 7, 2019. <http://tomgalle.online/About>.

<sup>8</sup> Galle, “BIO.”

culture.<sup>9</sup> His use of humor has helped him gain success in the media and online.

John Yuyi combines social media and fashion in her work.<sup>10</sup> She uses temporary tattoos and places them all over her model's body. She also addresses selfie culture and the obsession with brand name products. Her work draws on the need to feel validated online through the number of likes and comments that a post generates.



Image 15: *Seen*, 2016, Tom Galle and John Yuyi  
Retrieved from: [tomgalle.online](http://tomgalle.online)



Image 16: *Gucci Meme*, 2018, John Yuyi  
Retrieved from: [johnyuyi.com](http://johnyuyi.com)

An Xiao Mina updates the performance piece by Marina Abramović called *The Artist is Present*, where Abramović sat at a table in the Museum of Modern Art and invited guests to sit across from her. She does not talk to the participant so the two would simply gaze across the table at each other as they interacted in non-verbal connection. Some guests would start to cry during the experience as the performance piece examined the artist and audience relationship. In Xiao Mina's rendition called *The Artist is Kinda Present*, she communicated non-verbally with

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<sup>9</sup> Galle, "BIO."

<sup>10</sup> Yuyi, John. "Gucci Meme." *John Yuyi*. March 7, 2019. <https://johnyuyi.com>.



gallery goers via Twitter. She sat with the guests and talked back and forth through social media. The performance showed how today's youth struggle to have one-on-one social interactions without being distracted by social media and their smartphones.<sup>11</sup>



Image 17: *The Artist Is Present*, 2010,  
Marina Abramović  
Retrieved from: [news.artnet.com](http://news.artnet.com)



Image 18: *The Artist Is Kinda Present*, 2010,  
An Xiao Mina  
Retrieved from: [artnews.com](http://artnews.com)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA IMPLICATION ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH**

The effects of a relatively new way of communicating are starting to be noticed as more research is being done on how social media is affecting social and mental health, particularly in children. Individuals are posting moments from their lives and personal thoughts online to be viewed and judged by millions. Many teenagers and young adults are driven by the idea of becoming 'internet famous,' and posting various photos and videos in hopes of gathering positive reactions from their peers. The number of 'followers' a person obtains is being used as a status symbol. Because of the desire to create a large following, people are developing a dependency on these platforms to grow their audiences.

The University of California, Los Angeles did a study that looked at brain circuits around

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<sup>11</sup> Pollack, Barbara. "The Social Revolution." ARTNews. June 11, 2011. Accessed April 7, 2019. <http://www.artnews.com/2011/06/01/the-social-revolution/>.

the ‘reward’ center of the brain. They found the same circuits were activated in the brain when giving an adolescent a cookie or money as when a teenager posts something online and it received a large number of likes.<sup>12</sup> Pew Research Center found that 81% of adolescents have used social media and half reported being addicted to their phones.<sup>13</sup>

Evolution has given us incentives via a “dopamine tickle” to pursue certain life-sustaining activities, such as eating and sex, because dopamine made us feel good. But we have discovered that digital stimulation feels pretty good, too, and similarly lights up our dopamine-reward pathways. So then where does modern digital technology, which plays off these intersecting human needs for connection, reward and novelty, leave us? Short answer: addicted or, at the very least, potentially vulnerable to screen addiction. Many adults and kids have developed compulsive texting and social media habits precisely because such predilections quench our thirst for novelty while tickling our dopamine-reward pathways. And like addicts, they can go into withdrawal without it.<sup>14</sup>

The human mind is naturally programmed to seek out activity that causes a dopamine release and social media has become a way to achieve it. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (PRC), smartphone use was as followed: “73% of adolescents have smartphones, 76% of those adolescents being 15–17 years old and 68% being 13–14 years old.” PRC also found: “92% of adolescents report daily use of social media, with 24% saying they are online almost constantly.”<sup>15</sup> One survey of teenagers in the United Kingdom reported that 90%

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<sup>12</sup> “Social Media “Likes” As Yummy as Chocolate.” *The Science Teacher* 83, no. 6 (2016): 20-22. Accessed March 28, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44160007>.

<sup>13</sup> Memon, Aksha M., Shiva G. Sharma, Satyajit S. Mohite, and Shailesh Jain. “The Role of Online Social Networking on Deliberate Self-Harm and Suicidality in Adolescents: A Systematized Review of Literature.” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 60, no. 4: 384–92. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatrypass:[\_]414\_17.

<sup>14</sup> Kardaras, Nickolas. 2016. “Generation Z: Online and at Risk?” *Scientific American Mind* 27 (5): 64-69. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.1038/scientificamericanmind0916-64.

<sup>15</sup> Elmquist, Dana L., and Courtney L. McLaughlin. “Social Media Use among Adolescents Coping with Mental Health.” *Contemporary School Psychology* 22, no. 4 (December 15, 2018): 503–11. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.1007/s40688-017-0167-5.



of adolescents used social media both day and night and 37% of the participants said they were losing sleep which brought up concerns of sleep deprivation due to social media addiction.<sup>16</sup>

With social media becoming a prominent feature in modern life, psychologists, such as those from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Pakistan, are examining the positive and negative aspects that it has to offer. “Positive effects includes exposure to knowledge, free information, improved communication whereas cyberbullying, online harassment, low self-esteem, stress, depression, fatigue, social anxiety etc. are considered as negative aspects.”<sup>17</sup> Social media platforms and different chat rooms have been shown to give adolescents a safe place where they could connect with others who share similar interests.<sup>18</sup> A research study dealing with mental health in young adults examined the practice of “vaguebooking,” which referred to users writing social media posts “that contain little actual and clear information” in the hope of prompting others to ask for clarification.<sup>19</sup> Vaguebook could be seen as a “cry for help” as the individual may be hoping to receive words of concern from their peers and could be a sign that they were suffering with mental health issues.<sup>20</sup> Researchers have also found that pages on platforms, such as Pinterest and Tumblr, were being used as a place to advocate for mental health issues such as depression, self-harm, and suicide. These pages allowed teens to be

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<sup>16</sup> O'Reilly, Michelle, Nisha Dogra, Natasha Whiteman, Jason Hughes, Seyda Eruyar, and Paul Reilly. “Is Social Media Bad for Mental Health and Wellbeing? Exploring the Perspectives of Adolescents.” *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 23, no. 4: 601–13. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.1177/1359104518775154.

<sup>17</sup> Ramzan, 45-46.

<sup>18</sup> Elmquist, “Social Media Use Among Adolescents,” 504.

<sup>19</sup> Berryman, Chloe, Christopher J Ferguson, and Charles Negy. “Social Media Use and Mental Health among Young Adults.” *The Psychiatric Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (June 2018): 307–14. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.1007/s11126-017-9535-6.

<sup>20</sup> Berryman, “Social Media Use,” 308.

able to seek advice and help from peers closer to their age. The individuals running the pages may have even faced similar mental health struggles.<sup>21</sup>

Social media has created a community where potentially at-risk youth can get the help and support that they need from peers. They can connect to others on a deeper level, compared to talking to an adult figure. However, among the hashtag search results on these platforms, adolescents would be able to view graphic pictures of issues such as self-harm which could cause a relapse. In the U.K. survey, it found that the participants recognized exposure to risky behaviors might cause at-risk youth to copy the behaviors to cope with their own problems.<sup>22</sup> The effects social media could have on those who struggle from mental health was seen with the release of the Netflix series *13 Reason Why*. It followed the last days of a young girl who ultimately committed suicide due to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

Jay Asher, author of *13 Reasons Why*, explained that he wrote this story because “suicide is uncomfortable, but it happens, and so we have to talk about it, and it is dangerous not to talk about it because there is always room for hope.” However, the writers, directors, and producers did not shy away from showing the method in which she committed suicide. Brian Yorkey, executive producer of the Netflix series, stated that they did this because “we wanted it to be painful to watch because we wanted to be very clear that there is nothing in any way worthwhile about suicide.” Dr. Helen Hsu, licensed clinical psychologist, reiterated Brian’s position that “as hard as it was to see the final decision that Hannah made when she died of suicide I think it was important to show that it’s not a pretty death, it’s not an easy one, and then the pain that never ends for her parent immediately thereafter, who are left with this horrible burden.”<sup>23</sup>

Even though the creators of the series had good intentions, the National Association of School Psychologists cautioned youth who were struggling with mental illness to not watch the

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<sup>21</sup> Elmquist, 506.

<sup>22</sup> O’Reilly “Is Social Media Bad,” 12.

<sup>23</sup> Elmquist, 506-7.

series.<sup>24</sup> Research has shown that when an individual who has suicidal thoughts is exposed to another person's suicide, it increased the risk of that individual attempting suicide.<sup>25</sup> A study looked at internet search trends on Google around the release of *13 Reasons Why* and also the suicide of football player, Aaron Hernandez, and it reported: "the search queries related to suicide rose by 19%; specifically, 'how to commit suicide' increased by 26%, 'commit suicide' increased 18%, and 'how to kill yourself' increased 9%. However, search queries for 'suicide hotline number' also grew by 21%, 'suicide hotline' increased by 12%, 'teen suicide' increased by 34%, and 'suicide prevention' increased 23%."<sup>26</sup> While the series was able to bring awareness to suicide, it posed a risk to adolescents who were not able to mentally handle the imagery being presented to them.

Another hidden risk to minors is how search results are generated. Algorithms are used in Twitter and Instagram to decide what to show on the "likelihood users will be interested in the content, the relationship with the person posting, and the timeliness of the post."<sup>27</sup> Because of this, users could access websites that promote mental illness and even be pressured to continue those behaviors by 'online trolls.' Examples of this were pages that were pro-anorexia or images that showed graphic cutting which could trigger a relapse when viewed by at-risk youth.<sup>28</sup>

Teenagers today recognize social media enabled negative behaviors, such as cyberbullying and 'trolling,' as well as how it can affect someone's mental health. However,

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<sup>24</sup> Elmquist, 507.

<sup>25</sup> Elmquist, 507.

<sup>26</sup> Elmquist, 507.

<sup>27</sup> Elmquist, 506.

<sup>28</sup> Elmquist, 506.

when asked about the negative aspects of social media, many of them report their experiences in the third person.<sup>29</sup> They viewed these things as something that could cause anxiety or depression but didn't see it as something that would affect them.

### LEGAL REGULATION FLAWS

The internet is still relatively new and lawmakers are trying to figure out how to regulate the internet in order to protect children. Utah, Illinois, and Georgia proposed bills that would prohibit sex offenders from accessing social media platforms where they could associate with minors.<sup>30</sup> Some states require sex offenders to register their emails with the state and handover passwords to the accounts. The proposed laws were seen as too broad in language and challenged as a violation of privacy under the 4th amendment. The laws would have been hard to enforce since sex offenders could provide one email and then use another. Not to mention, the offender could easily create a new username and password after handing over the information to government officials.<sup>31</sup>

New Jersey created the *Social Networking Safety Act*, which “intended to deter cyber-bullying and the misuse of social networking websites.”<sup>32</sup> The first section would ban using social media to post “sexually offensive communication” to minors in New Jersey.<sup>33</sup> The second phase would make it illegal for a person to send a “harassing communication” through a social

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<sup>29</sup> O'Reilly, 10-12.

<sup>30</sup> Chang, Charlotte. “Internet Safety Survey: Who Will Protect the Children?” *Berkeley Technology Law Journal* 25, no. 1 (2010): 501-27. Accessed March 28, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24118648>.

<sup>31</sup> Chang, “Internet Safety Survey,” 509-10.

<sup>32</sup> Chang, 510.

<sup>33</sup> Chang, 510.

media platform that was to or about a person within the state.<sup>34</sup> New Jersey also required that platforms would have to remove any such posts from their website or be held accountable but made an exception for social media sites that offered a ‘report’ option.<sup>35</sup> The act brought up concerns involving the first amendment and freedom of speech.

Laws designed to protect children from cyberbullying and keep child predators off social media are hard to enforce due to ambiguous usernames and individuals having multiple accounts. State laws may in some cases be found to be unconstitutional. Under the first amendment, people’s right to freedom of speech is protected, and the fourth amendment protects our right to privacy. Legislation can attempt to shield adolescents online but enforcing said laws and prosecuting offenders will be difficult.

### **THE NEW REALITY**

One potential way to help minors navigate the internet is to encourage parents to be more involved with what their children are looking at and who they are engaging with online. One study looked at the mental health of students and how it was connected with parents controlling how much time their children spent online. While the study was looking at signs of depression and anxiety, they also took into account ‘appearance comparison’ that could correlate with body issues.<sup>36</sup> Students who made ‘appearance comparison’ may judge themselves based on images they found on social media. Another term was “Facebook Depression” which resulted from a

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<sup>34</sup> Chang, 510.

<sup>35</sup> Chang, 512.

<sup>36</sup> Fardouly, Jasmine, Natasha R Magson, Carly J Johnco, Ella L Oar, and Ronald M Rapee. “Parental Control of the Time Preadolescents Spend on Social Media: Links with Preadolescents’ Social Media Appearance Comparisons and Mental Health.” *Journal Of Youth And Adolescence* 47, no. 7 (July 2018): 1456–68. Accessed March 28, 2019. doi:10.1007/s10964-018-0870-1.

person feeling inferior or negative about themselves after looking through Facebook posts and comparing their lives to their peers.<sup>37</sup> The study examined students whose parents limited their social media time. These students reported making less ‘appearance comparison’ and improvement in their mental health.<sup>38</sup> The researchers concluded that based on the results, parents should be encouraged to limit the amount of time their preadolescents children are browsing social media feeds.<sup>39</sup>

Teenagers understand the anonymity that social media offers and it allows them to say things behind the “mask of the internet”<sup>40</sup> that they normally would not say to someone face-to-face. Whether it is allowing school districts to teach students proper online behavior or encouraging parents to be more active about what their children are doing on the internet, adolescents should be exposed to moral and ethical internet practices.<sup>41</sup> By doing so, they can avoid past behaviors coming back to affect their adult lives. “Adults frequently blame technology for undesirable outcomes instead of acknowledging other cultural, personal or social factors and it seems that this is also the case for adolescents. They tended to directly attribute fault to social media for causing such negative effects in their population. This may represent an oversimplification, as it is neither the internet nor social media to blame, but how we as users use these mediums.”<sup>42</sup>

While all internet users need to understand the consequences of posting inappropriate

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<sup>37</sup> Elmquist, 507.

<sup>38</sup> Fardouly, “Parental Control,” 1456-7.

<sup>39</sup> Fardouly, 1456-7.

<sup>40</sup> O’Reilly, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Chang, 1.

<sup>42</sup> O’Reilly, 21.

material online, I do not see a way to regulate commentary without infringing on privacy and freedom of speech rights. My work serves more as a physical example of what can be found online. It establishes a visual for adolescents and parents. In the modern world, the internet and social media is not something that can be avoided. It is a part of society, and for many individuals, it is seen as a major form of communication used to build relationships with their peers. Social media can be a positive addition to society when used appropriately and viewed as an extension of one's physical self. By becoming more self-aware of the internet's positive and negative attributes, people will be better equipped to navigate social media without succumbing to the dangers the internet can pose to users' social standings and mental health.

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