

Chapter 8

Clinical Topics in Social Media: The Role of Self-Disclosing on Social Media for Friendship and Identity in Specialized Populations

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ABSTRACT

The overall objective of the proposed chapter is to increase the reader's understanding of the role that social media plays in self-disclosing information about ourselves in the development of friendships and identity, as well as explore these themes in a clinical context. As such, readers will gain knowledge regarding the relations between self-disclosing on social media sites and the ensuing friendship and identity development that occurs, the extension of the research findings to clinical populations, and the questions that still remain unanswered. This information may be useful for the advancement of research, policy development, mental health programs, parenting, and education.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a rapidly growing enterprise that has become pervasive in society today. In fact, internationally, billions of people log onto social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, and YouTube every single day (Gramlich, 2018). In order to understand the outcomes associated with this modern, innovative, and evolving form of communicating with friends, researchers have examined the role that social media plays in social development. More specifically, this research has led investigators to suggest that when users log on to social media sites they are effectively using the media site as a vehicle to disclose information about the self (Verdyun et al., 2017), gain information about others (Feinstein

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et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2014), and ultimately develop closer friendships (Desjarlais & Joseph, 2017) as a result. In addition, investigators have found that disclosing on social media sites also plays a role in our identity formation (Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005). As such, the first purpose of the current chapter is to present and discuss the literature pertaining to self-disclosing online and its relationship to friendship and identity development in general. The second objective of the current chapter is to uncover how these processes work in populations where self-disclosing, social engagements, and identity development are hindered as part of a clinical diagnoses such as autism, psychosis, schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety; or due to social marginalization as present in the LGBT+ community.

Therefore, the overall objective of this chapter is to increase understanding of the role that social media plays in self-disclosing information in the development of friendships and identity, as well as explore these themes in a clinical context. This information may be useful for the advancement of research, policy development, mental health programs, parenting, and education.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a term that can be extended to any form of technology that aids in our communication with others. This includes text messaging, instant (or direct) messaging, online gaming, social networking sites, video sharing sites, and e-mail. All of these have one major theme in common: They are intended to be social environments that allow for quick and easy connections to be made among existing and new friends (Smith & Anderson, 2018). While there are a number of different types of social media, social networking sites, video sharing sites, gaming and direct messaging will be the focus of the current chapter.

Social media has become ubiquitous with daily life. Internationally, billions of people log onto social media sites every single day (Stats, 2018). In fact, the Pew Research Centre estimates that roughly 70% of the American public uses some form of social media, with the majority of logins occurring daily (Factsheet, 2018). According to Smith and Anderson (2018), the most popular social media sites include the video sharing site YouTube (73% of American adults), and social networking sites such as Facebook (68% of American adults), Instagram (35% of American adults), or SnapChat (27% of American Adults). On average, social media users are comprised of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years, with female users being slightly more common than male users (Factsheet, 2018; Greenwood et al., 2016). It should also be noted that there is a growing number of adolescent social media users, roughly 85% of American adolescents (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Adolescents generally follow the same social media use patterns as young adults, where the video sharing site YouTube (85% of American adolescents) was among the most popular, followed by the social networking sites Instagram (72%), SnapChat (69%), and Facebook (51%).

Generally speaking, social media websites are set up so that the user is able to create a personal profile where they are able to share an amalgamation of text, picture, and video content about themselves (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). This often includes some combination of personal information, photographs, videos, memes, and/or ideas that the user identifies with. In addition, users are typically given the ability to 'follow' or 'friend' other users, becoming, in a sense, enrolled to see the information these users have posted about themselves online (Ellison et al., 2007). These websites then allow for instantaneous connections to be made, and provide a plethora of information about other users--all at the click of a mouse. Users typically turn to social media sites to aid in the maintenance of their relationships

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