

The Adverse Effects of Social Media On Our Society

In today's world of social media, we have begun disturbing patterns of behavior that have many adverse effects on our society. Social media has taken the world by storm. Many of us use it to keep in touch with our friends and families, networking, meeting new people, dating. Many more of us use it for business purposes such as getting our news, business networking, job hunting, advertising our businesses, etc. However, there are darker things associated with social media that we just cannot ignore.

According to various studies, approximately half of Americans use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. There are, of course two sides to the argument as to whether or not these sites are harmful to our society. There are many positive uses to social media such as the ability of people to easily stay in touch with loved ones, local law enforcement uses social media to catch and prosecute criminals, employers use it to find employees, as well as people finding work, and many others. However, many bad things come from the use, and over-use of social media as well. Social media has many negative effects on our children, and their development, affects teens' concepts of friendship and intimacy, tends to negatively affect student's grades, has huge effects on our real-life relationships and marriages, and can greatly affect our jobs and careers. It is these adverse effects of social media that lead me to the opinion that the negative effects it has on our society can absolutely outweigh the positives things that it brings to us. Social media has become a disruption to our lives, and we must be careful not to fall victim to its negative influence.

Social media has many negative effects on our children, and their development. One of the most common activities among children today is the use of social media sites in the form of social networking, gaming sites, and even YouTube and blogging sites. While the use of social media by our youth has been shown to improve communication, social connection, and even technical skills, there are many ways that children are being affected negatively online.

Cyber-bullying has become a huge issue that can affect everyone, but is especially true with our children. To paraphrase Merriam-Webster, cyber-bullying is defined as a mean spirited electronic posting about a person, and is often done anonymously. The first case of cyber-bullying is recognized as occurring in the year 2000. This has been identified as the most common online risk for all teens, and is a peer-to-peer risk. Cyber-bullying has been known to “cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2013)

Sexting is another major concern regarding our youth, and the use of social media. Sexting can be defined as “sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or images via cell phone, computer, or other digital devices. Some studies show that as many as 20% of teens have shared nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves. These pictures and videos tend to not stay with the person they are intended for, as many teens will forward them to their friends, or release them publicly via the internet. Sexting, not only, is considered an illegal activity subject to criminal charges, but is also responsible for school suspension, and many people end up seeking counseling for emotional distress stemming from the inappropriate material being shared beyond the intended recipient.

A new term has been coined recently to describe the depression that arises from much of this activity, and that is “Facebook Depression”. (Pappas, 2011) Pediatricians and parents truly need to pay more attention to the children they are responsible for, and take a more pro-active role in identifying and helping to fix these issues. O’Keeffe states that while she doesn’t want to label social media as altogether bad, that people need to “slow down” and take note of what their children are doing. “ She goes on to state, “As with offline depression, preadolescents and adolescents who suffer from Facebook depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for “help” that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, or aggressive or self-destructive behaviors.”

The world of social media has also been attributed to the degradation of “real life” relationships, intimacy, and marriages. Social media has changed how teens interact with people, and how they place value on the relationships that they are a part of. In Dakin’s article, she quotes Dr. Patricia Greenfield, a UCLA developmental psychologist, as saying, "We found in our study that people, college students, are not getting a sense of social support from being on the phone. They're getting social support through bigger networks and having a sense that their audience is large." The intimacy seems to be gone from their relationships, and replaced with a broader acceptance acknowledged by “likes” and comments on their social media posts. The overall effect of this behavior is a lack of face to face bonding, and the ability to construct deeper, more meaningful relationships with their peers.

The adverse effect of social media isn’t limited to our youth, as it also goes on to have negative outcomes for adults, and their marriages. While it remains unclear as to whether an unhappy marriage leads to increased use of social media, or whether the increased use leads to an unhappy marriage, there are definite connections between the two. “Excessive use of social

networking and similar sites could indeed not just play a role in compensating for an unhappy relationship but may actually contribute to that unhappiness”. (Nowinski, 2014) Dr. Nowinski also points out that the divorce rate for excessive users of social media tends to be higher, as does the overall feelings of loneliness among the users. He does not necessarily recommend “going off the grid” as a solution to these issues, but that perhaps “maybe the least that individuals can do is to periodically pause to take stock”.

The world of social media has become a huge part of the business world as well. Employers are using social media in various ways, and people’s jobs and careers can be greatly affected by it. This is not to say that the effects of social media are all bad, but people must be aware that there is far more to be worried about than we may think.

Many employers use social media sites to check up on potential, as well as current employees, and see what they are doing in their personal lives. There are ways of using this to our advantage such as utilizing blogging sites to both get our names out into the business community in our selected fields, as well as showing the extent of our knowledge in said field. This will also allow us to expand our network and build a wealth of professional contacts. This can all help further us in our careers.

That is not to say there is not another side to the use of social media in our professional careers. Many of the things employers are finding through social media can be quite damaging to your career. We must remember that in the world of social media, there is no real privacy. Our status updates, tweets, photos, and even comments on the pages of others are all visible, and trackable. If we are not aware, and careful about what we post, where we post it, and how it may be seen by others, we could open ourselves up for a whole world of negativity in the work place.

According to an article compiled from the New York Times, Joe Bontke, outreach manager for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) office in Houston, said 75 percent of recruiters are required to do online research of candidates and 70 percent have rejected candidates because of what they found.

A recent example, and a celebrity case, is that of Gilbert Gottfried. Gilbert, a long time comedian who provided the iconic voice of the Aflac duck in their commercials, was fired by Aflac after posting some "insensitive" jokes regarding the 2011 tsunami in Japan. There are MANY other cases as well, including that of Olivia Sprauer, an English teacher at Martin County High School in Florida. Olivia did modeling work on the side using the name Victoria Valentine James. When one of her modeling photos that has been posted to Facebook was brought to the attention of the principle of the school, which he considered too "racy" which he, as the representative of the school, deemed inappropriate, she was asked to resign from her teaching position.

According to Larry Chiagouris, a professor of marketing at Pace University's Lubin School of Business in New York, "Job candidates, and particularly college students, need to understand we are entering uncharted territory when it comes to their privacy. Prospective employers have many tools that can reveal something about job candidates that they might not want the world to know." (Bradley, 2013) In many cases, photos or posts about attending parties, doing drugs, being hungover at work, an individual's religious or political affiliations, etc. have been known to be used against those individuals and to result in the loss of their jobs. Chiagouris advises, "The best advice I can offer is to be cautious about anything you make available on the Internet and learn to use the tactics that already exist to avoid leaving a trail you would rather not have discovered. You should keep your privacy as a top priority at all times or you might lose

out on a wonderful job opportunity for what might be something totally irrelevant to the job requirements.”

In conclusion, I would like to say that while there are many advantages to the world of social networking, and the ability it gives us to better our lives in many different ways, there is also a very different side to it, and we need to take caution not to fall into its many traps. Our children can so easily get caught up in a world they do not fully understand which can be quite harmful. This is true for young children, all the way into, and throughout their teenage years. The effects on their social lives, education, and health can be so overpowering that it is irreversible.

This pattern can also be seen in many adults, whether the use, and over-use of social media harms their relationships and marriages, or their professional lives, the hard that is done can be dire. Many people have lost everything due, at least in part, to the ever expanding world of social media.

As you can clearly see, the adverse effects of social media on our society can definitively outweigh the benefits. In today’s world of social media, we have begun disturbing patterns of behavior that have many adverse effects on our society. However, if we are careful to recognize these patterns that may arise, and are consciously aware of what exactly we are doing, and what we are sharing with the world, we can certainly avoid most, if not all negative outcomes.

Nowinski, J. (2014). Can Excessive Social Networking Harm Marriages. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-almost-effect/201405/can-excessive-social-networking-harm-marriages>

Dr. Nowinski writes about his observations of his patients who attribute social media sites like Facebook to many marital issues they are having. Although unsure whether unhappy marriages lead to a higher use of social networking sites, or the increased usage of such sites leads to the unhappiness in these marriages, he recognizes quite the strong connection between the two. He also goes on to give advice as to how couples may look at their situation and be able to help resolve it.

Kaiser, S. (2012). Social media can both help and hurt real-life relationships. Retrieved from <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/health/wellness/story/2012-02-13/Social-media-can-both-help-and-hurt-real-life-relationships/53084556/>

Psychotherapist Stacy Kaiser writes about social media and social networking sites and relationships. More than examining the actual effects these can have on relationships, she digs into certain things that couples should be aware of, things that should raise red flags, and certain actions that should be taken to avoid there being such problems.

Green, A. (2011). How Social Media Can Help or Harm Your Career. Retrieved from <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2011/05/02/how-social-media-can-help-or-harm-your-career>

It has been brought to our attention through news stories over the past several years how employers use social networking sites to check up on their employees and prospective

employees. There have been many cases of people's Facebook pages and such have been their "undoing" in the corporate world. Alison Green gives advice on how to use social media to enhance and further your career, and things to be aware of to avoid doing damage to yourself and your livelihood.

Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society. (). Retrieved from <http://socialnetworking.procon.org/>

Social Networking ProCon.org is a nonpartisan, nonprofit website that presents research, studies, and pro and con statements on questions related to social networking and its impact on society. This site offers insight to the positives and negatives of social networking sites on various levels. They look into the effect on people's jobs, children's schoolwork, how criminals and the justice system both use it for their own purposes, and many other aspects. This is a great study to get an idea of both sides of this argument.

American Academy of Pediatrics. (). The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/127/4/800.full>

Dr. O'Keeffe and Dr. Clarke-Pearson look into the effects of social media on the development of children. This is observed in both mental/psychological ways, as well as the development of their social skills. They give good advice and examples of both sides of the argument, acknowledging both the advantages, and the risks of our youth using social media.

Dakin, P. (2014). Social media affecting teens' concepts of friendship, intimacy. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/social-media-affecting-teens-concepts-of-friendship-intimacy-1.2543158>

In this study, the effect of social media on teenagers and their relationships is observed. This is a quite interesting look into these effects, and is, in my opinion rather disturbing. According to Patricia Greenfield, a UCLA developmental psychologist and the director of the Children's Digital Media Center @ Los Angeles, teenagers are not engaging in intimate relationships, but rather getting their support and affirmation from "likes" and comments and such on social media sites. This is a disturbing trend, as it means that teens are not gaining the interpersonal skills that are necessary for life-long friendships and other relationships.

Bradley, T. (2013). What You Say On Social Networks Could Cost You Your Dream Job. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/2013/11/21/what-you-say-on-social-networks-could-cost-you-your-dream-job/>

What Mr. Bradley offers in this article is insight into a book written by Larry Chiagouris entitled The Secret to Getting a Job after College: Marketing Tactics to Turn Degrees into Dollars. This provides a bit of insight into how to avoid social networking blunders that can cost you your job. I found it interesting, and to be good advice.