Teens, Social Media, and Suicide: Virtual No More

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Objectives

• Typical adolescent use of social media

• Developmental neuroscience and social media effects on teens?

• Social media (SM) and suicide risk
  – Cyber-victimization
  – Digital footprints of suicidal risk
  – Contagion
  – Sources of support and help

• Implications for further study and policy
A snapshot of adolescent SM use

- Frequency
- Type of platforms
- Sociodemographic correlates
Upward trend in social media use in past decade corresponds to increase in teen suicide
Internet Use Frequency by Adolescents

Frequency of Internet Use by Teens
% of teens ages 13 to 17 who use the internet with the following frequencies

Daily 92%
Almost constantly 24%
Several times a day 56%
About once a day 12%
Several times a week 5%
1x a week 12%
Less often 2%
Less often 2%

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Adolescents’ use of SM

### Teens’ Phone, Computer & Console Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>% of all teens who have access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A desktop / laptop computer</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gaming console</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A smartphone</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A tablet computer</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A basic cell phone</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Pew Research Center’s Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014 and Feb. 10-Mar. 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).*

### Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat Top Social Media Platforms for Teens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>% of all teens 13 to 17 who use Facebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different social media site</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SM Use by Household Income

Split in Social Media Used Most Often by Household Income

Among teens ages 13 to 17, the % of teens who use most often, by household income

- **Facebook**: 51%
- **Instagram**: 19%
- **Snapchat**: 7%
- **Twitter**: 3%

- **Less than $30,000**: 46
- **$30,000 - $49,999**: 46
- **$50,000 - $74,999**: 46
- **$75,000 - $99,999**: 46
- **$100,000+**: 46


Pew Research Center
Sociodemographic correlates of SM use (Pew Report, 2015)

• Girls more active on social media, boys on gaming

• African American youth more likely to have a smartphone (85%) vs. 71% for White and Hispanic youth

• Lower SES more likely to use Facebook; middle and upper SES, make greater use of Instagram (but Facebook still dominates)

• Lower SES youth have more consistent network of friends on all social media platforms
Social and affective neuroscience and effects of Social Media

- Reward and reputation
- Response to “popular” and to “risky” pictures
- Peer rejection
- Influencing others
Neural responses to improved reputation (Meshi et al 2013)

• 31 healthy young adults
• Rated on “Facebook intensity score”
  – Time on Facebook
  – Need/desire to go on Facebook
  – Number of friends
• Monetary reward and “enhanced reputation” social reward tasks
• Activation in nucleus accumbens =reward response
• Greater activation to “enhanced reputation,” greater Facebook intensity score.
**A**

![Brain Images](image)

**B**

![Brain Images](image)

**C**

$r = 0.400^* [0.147/0.615]$

$p = 0.026$

**D**

$r = 0.107 [-0.264/0.480]$

$p = 0.565$

**E**

$r = -0.250 [-0.518/0.047]$

$p = 0.174$

**F**

$r = -0.143 [-0.492/0.224]$

$p = 0.444$
Neural responses to social media (Sherman et al. 2016)

- 34 adolescents
- Looked at 148 pictures
- Classified by number of likes, and whether risky or not.
- More likely to endorse pictures with more likes
- Show greater reward activation for risky images and for popular images
- Show less activation of cognitive inhibitory network when viewing risky pictures
Neural response to peer acceptance and rejection (Masten et al. 2013)

- Cyberball task (while in fMRI scanner)
  - R1: inclusion (throwing ball back and forth)
  - R2: inclusion followed by exclusion
  - R3: witness inclusion/exclusion of a peer

A. [Image]

B. Round 1: Firsthand Inclusion
   Participant included throughout a Cyberball game lasting approximately 2 minutes

Round 2: Firsthand Inclusion, followed by Exclusion
   Participant initially included (for 1 minute), and then excluded (for 1 minute) during a game of Cyberball

Round 3: Witnessed Inclusion, followed by Exclusion
   Participant witnesses a new player’s inclusion (for 1 minute) and then exclusion (for 1 minute) during a game of Cyberball

Participant exits scanner
After rejection, witnessing peer inclusion causes emotional pain similar to personal rejection.

Watching peer be excluded resulted in activation of regions known to be associated with emotion regulation (DMPFC, MPFC, precuneus)—dampening response or could be empathizing.

Therefore, exposure to rejection can make it hard for that person to be supportive of others’ acceptance, and, when other peers are rejected, might either distance from peer rejection or more empathic to their plight.
High vs. lower influence information brokers on Facebook (O’Donnell et al., 2017)

- 65 adolescents
- Gave researchers access to Facebook and used software to determine who were “high information brokers” using network analysis
- Task was to make a recommendation of gaming application
- Participants were given peer feedback relevant to their recommendations
O’Donnell et al. (2017): High vs. low information brokers
Greater activation in areas associated with “mentalizing” in those who are high information brokers (O’Donnell et al., 2017)
High vs. lower information brokers

- High information brokers showed a greater tendency to activate “mentalizing” network (DMPFC, MPFC, posterior cingulate, etc.) when given peer feedback divergent to their own initial opinion.

- Influential information brokers show greater activation of brain regions associated with considering the viewpoints of others when given peer opinions that differ from their own.
Tentative conclusions from these studies

- Social media can be rewarding and shape reward responses
- Risky and popular stimuli elicit responses that could lead to risky behavior
- Peer rejection could make peers less sensitive to other peers’ exclusion and more upset about other peers’ acceptance
- Those who are more influential on Facebook could be due to a greater tendency to consider the responses of others
Impact of Internet and Social Media Use on Suicide Risk

- Time and timing
- Direction of association
- Mechanisms
  - Sleep
  - Social comparison
  - Cyber-victimization
Longitudinal effects of internet use (Hokby et al., 2016)

- 2286 European youth who participated in prevention trial
- Assessed depression at baseline and 4 months later
- Gaming, gambling, targeted searches related to mental health
- Mediated by impact on sleep
Time on SNSs and mental health (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2015a)

- Survey of 753 Ontario students (in 2013) (cross-sectional)
- 25.2% using SNSs more than 2 hrs/day
- 54.3% < 2 hrs/day
- 20.5% minimal or none
- Amount of use (especially 2+ hrs/day related to distress, poor self-related well-being, and suicidal ideation)
Internet effects on suicide

• Longitudinal studies suggest that internet use results in a decrease in mood rather than vice versa (van Eijnden et al., 2014; Landoll et al., 2015)
  – Social comparison
  – Cyberbullying (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017; Hamm et al., 2015; Bottino et al., 2015)
  – Decreased sleep
Technology-based social comparison, popularity, and depression (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015)
Image-based SNS, Loneliness and Happiness (Pittman & Reich, 2016)

Fig. 2. Trait scores at three levels of image-based social media use (text-based social media users excluded, N = 132).
Social Comparison Orientation, IG use, and Loneliness (Yang et al., 2016)
Authenticity on Facebook (Grieve et al., 2017)

• Hexaco (60 item personality inventory) – self report and abstracted from Facebook posts

• Greater distance between self report and Facebook image, greater depression, lower social connection, greater anxiety.
SNS/Internet use, sleep, and depression

- Arousal from material viewed on SM
- Screen emission (suppression of darkness-related melatonin release)
- Computer/screen time in hour prior to bedtime related to sleep disruption and lower total sleep time (Orzech et al., 2016)
- Later Sleep-onset time
- Sleep disruption**
- Decreased sleep time, increased cellphone/email use associated with increased odds in being involved with bullying (OR’s 1.2-1.5) (Tochigi et al., 2012)
Internet/SNS use and depression (Lemola, 2015)

- 362 teens
- Relationship of SNS use, sleep, and depression
- Sleep disturbance most important mediator
- Staying online and having phone available at bed time most predictive
Cyber-victimization

- Frequency
- Profile of victims and victimizers
- Relationship to adverse outcomes
- Moderating factors
Review of cyberbullying (Baltino et al., 2015)

- Review 43 articles
- Prevalence: 20-40% experience at least once, 9% frequent victimization
- Methods: pictorial, verbal, exclusion
- Worst effects if: bullier is an adult, use pictures, has contact with victim off-line as well.
- 68.5% report adverse effects. Bulliers 1.5 increased odds of suicidal ideation, victims, 1.9.
- Van Geel et al. 2014: OR= 2.2 for ideation, 2.6 for attempts
Relationship between “unnatural” child deaths and prevalence of CV (Hong et al., 2016)
Cyber-victims and cyber-bullies: Two sides of the same coin?

- **Cyber-victims**
  - Somatic complaints
  - Not feeling safe/protected at school
  - High amount of SNS use
  - 3-4 fold increased risk of depression

- **Cyber-bullies (often victims, too)**
  - Headaches
  - Don’t feel safe at school
  - ADHD and alcohol/drug use
Cyberbullying and traditional victimization (Hemphill et al., 2015)

- 673 adolescents.
- Predictors of cyber-victimization were: previously having been bullied, low family attachment, high family conflict, low emotion regulation
- Family support and emotion regulation can play a role in helping the child to have resilience to being bullied
Parental monitoring and cybervictimization (Khurana et al, 2015)
CH, Support, and Symptoms (Fridh et al., 2015—N=8544)
Frison et al., 2016: Negative Facebook experiences and Depression/Life satisfaction with low perceived peer support
Frison et al. (2016): Negative Facebook experiences and depression/life satisfaction with high perceived peer support.
Cyberbullying

• Family monitoring and peer support moderate the effects of cyberbullying (Hemphill et al., 2014; Khurana et al., 2015; Livingston & Smith, 2014; Hebert et al., 2016; Frison et al., 2016)

• Cyberbullying mediates relationship between SM use and suicidal ideation (Sampasa-Kanyiga et al., 2014; Hong et al., 2016; van Geel et al., 2014)

• Cyberbullying associated with decreased sleep (Souranger et al, 2010; Wood & Scott, 2016; McIver et al., 2015).
Conclusions

- For youth who are being cybervictimized, consider de-activating accounts or blocking abusive interactions.

- But kids will often generate a private account, therefore:
  - discussion about responsible and safe use of SM
  - deal with bullying in vivo at school
  - safety plan
  - parental monitoring of use
  - timing and sleep
Digital Footprint of Suicidal People on SM

- Posts and contagion
- Posts and national statistics
- Posts and individual digital “fingerprints”
Social Media and Suicide Contagion

- Because individuals can be affected by social media across a widely distributed geographic network, suicide clusters may occur in time, but not necessarily in space.

- Several studies show that an increase in suicides after a celebrity suicide is mediated by social media posts about the suicide (Ju et al., 2014; Arora et al.; Myung et al., 2015; Ueda et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2013)

- Great connectivity of suicidal “Tweeters”
Relationship between SM posts and suicide (Won et al., 2013)

• 153,107,350 posts on 5,093,832 sites in ROK

• Dysphoria or suicide

• Prediction of suicide rate in next 3 days = 0.88 for training set, 0.79 for replication
Song et al., 2014: Google Searches and Suicide

- Examined Google searches related to suicide, stress, alcohol and correlation with national suicide rate in the ROK
Suicidal Twitter Users Connectivity (Columbo et al., 2016)
Content on social media (Twitter, Tumblr) related to suicidal, depressive themes is correlated with clinical symptoms (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Passos et al., 2016; Sueki et al., 2015; O’Dea et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2016).

Content also is more self-referential, with themes of loneliness, self-loathing, rejection, poor body image.

Therefore, it is possible to identify individuals who are suicidal on the basis of their social media content (Guan et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2015, 2017; Cavazos et al., 2017).
Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2017: Tumblr sites for depression

- Reviewed 17 depression-related Tumblr sites (3360 posts, about 82% of comments were related to depression)
- Often reblogged (1.7 million posts)
- 15% self-loathing
- 15% loneliness or feeling a burden to others
- 15% self-harm
- 15% suicidal ideation or behavior
Sueki et al., 2015: Japan survey of Twitter users

- 220,848 participants
- 61.3% female, avg age=24.9 years
- Tweeting wanting to die or wanting to commit suicide associated with 2-fold increased risk for ideation, plan, attempt, and NSSI
The Secret Society of Self-harm (Moreno et al., 2016)

- Blithe#
- Self-harm
- Self-injury
- Ehtlib

#MySecretFamily
Repost if you battle with any of these and put the name in your profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anorexia</td>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Rex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranoia</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>Pat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety/ADHD</td>
<td>Addie</td>
<td>Andy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCD</td>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderline</td>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar</td>
<td>Bri</td>
<td>Bob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Skip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Izzy</td>
<td>Isiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDNOS</td>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfharm</td>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Deb</td>
<td>Dan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal</td>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Dallas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linguistic analysis of Weibo postings (Cheng et al., 2015)

- 974 participants
- Suicide probability (increased use of pronouns, fewer verbs, increased word count)
- Depression, increased use of 2\textsuperscript{nd} person plural (they)
- Suicide communication (decreased communication about work, decreased use of 3\textsuperscript{rd} person plural)
- Overall classification wasn’t so good but proof of concept
Data mining of Korean adolescents’ SM (Song et al., 2016)

- 2.35 billion postings from 1/1/11-12/31/12 on 163 websites
- 99,693 postings related to suicide
- Strongest path was academic pressure → depression → suicidality, but body image, bullying, concern about illness also played roles
- Recommended monitoring of SM for an intervention
Absolutistic words and suicide risk (al-Mosiawi & Johnstone, 2018)

- 1 absolutely
- 2 all
- 3 always
- 4 complete
- 5 completely
- 6 constant
- 7 constantly
- 8 definitely
- 9 entire
- 10 ever
- 11 every
- 12 everyone
- 13 everything
- 14 full
- 15 must
- 16 never
- 17 nothing
- 18 totally
- 19 whole
Language analysis on disease-specific fora (Al-Mosaiwi & Johnstone, 2018)
Positive effects of Social Media

- Discussion boards (Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2016; Ybarra et al. 2015)
- Suicide watch fora (Kavulara et al., 2016; Til & Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2016)
- Crisis/text (e.g., Berroguiguet et al., 2014; Predmore et al., 2017)
- On-line treatments of depression, suicidality, insomnia (Park & Conway, 2017; Harris et al., 2014; Coulson et al., 2016)
- Social support on line (Ybarra et al., 2015)

- Most were young adults (19-21)
- 69% female
- 19% acknowledged a history of depression

**Positives**
- Support
- Advice about how to stop self-harming
- Advice on obtaining treatment

**Negatives**
- Normalizing
- Vivid images of self-harm
- Concealment, encouragement, provocation
The Facebook Initiative

- Use of AI to identify words related to suicidal risk
- To present to those at risk options for help
- To make those options accessible via Facebook
- Analogous initiative prevention of on-line harassment—bubble=that comment might be considered harmful.
Offline Versus Online Suicide-Related Help Seeking: Changing Domains, Changing Paradigms (Young (A) vs. Middle-aged (B) Adults)
ML and NLP and Suicide

- ML and NLP can identify aggregations of risk factors that can predict suicide
- Can identify patterns of phrases associate with suicide risk
- Pair with pop—up warnings, links to support, provide safety plan or app to help diminish the risk of suicide
Conclusions

• There is a link between SM use and suicidal risk
  – Amount time
  – Impact on sleep
  – Cyber-bullying
  – Moderated by family and peer support
  – Type of language in posting
  – Contagion

• There is also evidence of supportive and protective functions from SM
  – Social support
  – Finding and getting help
  – Automated case finding and intervention
Technology and Adolescent Mental Health

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Family-based Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Depressed Preadolescents

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Thank you for your attention!

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