

Mental Health and Media Technology

Cain, J. (2018). It's time to confront student mental health issues associated with smartphones and social media. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 82(7), 738–741.

Summary: Cain highlights the importance of recognizing the abundance of research that points towards the influence that social media has on overall mental health: “If we are serious about providing a “holistic” approach to student development and wellness, we must consider the emerging issues regarding mobile digital technologies as a legitimate factor with regard to mental health” (p. 738). A call for further research is made, specifically addressing the communicative and relational aspect of social media as a potential “third variable” in a causal relationship between mental health decline and social media use. The author claims we must first examine what social media-based relationships look like, and what affect social media relationships might have on mental health. One newly-researched construct is known as “Fear of Missing Out” (FoMO).

Clark, J. L., Algoe, S. B., & Green, M. C. (2018). Social network sites and well-being: The role of social connection. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(1), 32-37. doi: 10.1177/0963721417730833

Summary: Clark, Algoe, and Green examine the findings of several studies in this meta-analysis. Internet use has long been deemed as detrimental for mental health (specifically, depression, isolation, and loneliness), stemming from experimental research done as early as the 1990s (p. 32). However, the authors point out that it is important to make the distinction between “internet” use and “social media” use, since social media, by its very nature, may have the capacity to create meaningful relationships from within the platform. The authors agree that there exists certain pros and cons of related to the use of social media. The identified cons, based on “a sizable body of research” (p. 33), include isolation and social comparison. The identified potential pros include using social media as a platform to experience an intimate relationship, which is critical to well-being, self-disclosure, and interpersonal-connection-behaviors. These interpersonal behaviors include “felt connection, perceived social support, and social capital” (p. 34). The authors conclude that the issue is best dealt with by “differentiating between connection-promoting and non-connection-promoting use” (p. 35). In short, further, specific constructs are required to measure the true, causal effect that social media has on individual well-being. One such construct is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).

Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science, 6*(1), 3-17. doi: 10.1177/2167702617723376

Summary: Data was gathered from two nationally representative surveys of 8th-12th graders in the US ($n = 506,820$). The authors were motivated to conduct this study by the alarming rate of increased caseloads at University centers (nearly 30% across the country) and reports of increases in counseling use by high-school students. This led them to believe that “more young people than in previous years are suffering from mental health issues, putting them at risk for suicide and other negative consequences” (p. 3). A significant increase in depressive symptoms and suicide-related outcomes was observed, “driven almost exclusively by females...between 2009/2010 and 2015, 58% more females scored high in depressive symptoms, and 14% more reported at least one suicide-related outcome” (p. 8). Increases were also seen in males, but not as extreme as among females. “Overall, the results show a clear pattern linking screen activities with higher levels of depression symptoms/suicide-related outcomes, and nonscreen activities with lower levels...adolescents using electronic devices 3 or more hours a day were 34% more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome than those using devices 2 or fewer hours a day, and adolescents using social media sites every day were 13% more likely to report high levels of depressive symptoms than those using social media less often” (p. 9). Based on the data, risks become elevated as the adolescent increases his or her electronic device use; “adolescents using devices 5 or more hours a day (vs. 1 hr.) were 66% more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome” (p. 9).

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

Blachnio, A., & Przepiorka, A. (2018). Facebook intrusion, fear of missing out, narcissism, and life satisfaction: A cross-sectional study. *Psychiatry Research, 259*, 514-519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2017.11.012>

Summary: “The fear of missing out (FoMO) is a concept comprising a desire to keep up with what other people are doing and a belief that other people experience more interesting events when one is absent” (p. 514). Blachnio and Przepiorka conducted a cross-sectional study on 360 Polish individuals and found that “The results showed that narcissism, fear of missing out, and satisfaction with life are directly linked with Facebook intrusion” (p. 517). In this study, FoMO was measured using the *Fear of Missing Out Scale* (FoMOs), which is a validated scale. Facebook intrusion is a construct categorized by a pathological dependence on the attention and interaction with others via Facebook and was measured using the *Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire*. Facebook intrusion has been seen as synonymous with Facebook addiction, and “People who are strongly involved in Facebook feel distressed when they cannot use it, and they have already unsuccessfully attempted to reduce Facebook use” (p. 514). The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* was also used to determine the quality of life of the participants. In sum, this study revealed that FoMO, narcissism, and a negative satisfaction with life are all positive predictors of Facebook intrusion.

Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(4), 1841-1848

Summary: The researchers in this study discovered, through the development of a 10-item assessment tool designed to measure FoMO, that “the young, and young males in particular, tended towards higher levels of FoMO” (p. 1846). The compulsive need to check social media excessively and dwell on the activity of others seen in FoMO were more likely to be distracted, have a short attention span, and be checking social media during inappropriate and dangerous times, such as while driving or during college lectures.

Oberst, U., Wegmann, E., Stodt, B., Brand, M., & Chamarro, A. (2017). Negative consequences from heavy social networking in adolescents: The mediating role of fear of missing out. *Journal of Adolescence, 55*, 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.008>

Summary: The authors conducted a study of 1468 Latin-American adolescents between the ages of 16-18. The participants were administered the *Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale* (HADS), the *Social Networking Intensity scale* (SNI), the *FOMO scale* (FOMOs), and a questionnaire on negative consequences of using SNS (social networking sites) via mobile device (CERM). The authors not only found that adolescents tend to be particularly vulnerable to develop significant FoMO the more they used their mobile phones, but also that individuals who experienced psychopathological symptoms (depression, anxiety) were more likely to be at-risk for developing “maladaptive mobile phone use” behaviors, which has been shown to lead to addiction and overall poor well-being (p. 58). Girls were shown to be more motivated to overuse social media when depression was prevalent. Boys were shown to be more motivated to overuse when anxiety was prevalent. The authors discuss the important implications of the research, such as educating parents and students that the intensity of the social network platform use is not necessarily the problem; it is often simply the trigger for the emergence of pre-existing psychopathological and FoMO-related behaviors.

Implications

Scales used by the authors may be of benefit to clinicians in recognizing potential overuse of social media or FoMO contributing to the mental health condition of the client. They can be accessed here: <http://www.andrewprzybylski.me/Scales/>

An informal assessment tool that may be beneficial to a clinician can be found here: <https://psychcentral.com/quizzes/fomo-quiz/>

It is important to inquire about the amount of social media and internet use to screen for FoMO in clients, as research shows that it is a powerful indicator (and possibly a precipitant) for mental health conditions and irresponsible behaviors connected with heavy social media use.