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## Does Facebook Influence Well-Being and Self-Esteem Among Early Adolescents?

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# Does Facebook Influence Well-Being and Self-Esteem Among Early Adolescents?

Submitted by Sarah G. Schwartz  
May, 2012

## MSW Clinical Research Paper

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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## **Abstract**

In America today, adolescents are the most “wired in” group of individuals and the most well positioned to utilize new technologies. As technology expands and the use of the computer as a medium of communication increases, adolescents begin to use the internet to maintain more of their friendships through social media such as Facebook. The ability to stay socially connected is something that adolescents rely on and largely determines their self-esteem development as adolescents. This study examined how the use of Facebook plays a role in development of self-esteem and well-being in 13, 14, and 15 year old adolescents. Using a quantitative research design, participants of this study utilized skills of self-evaluation to answer an online survey comprised of 26 questions. Thirty ( $n=30$ ) respondents were recruited through the use of an online bulletin article, Facebook event page and after school community youth program. Data was analyzed and descriptive and inferential statistics we used. Findings demonstrated that respondent groups value their ability to stay socially connected, and associate positive feelings with functions of Facebook such as photo tagging, friend requests, status updates and private messages. Respondents indicated that their Facebook friend networks were dominated by individuals they know in their life offline. They also indicated that they associate positive feelings with both their offline friend groups and Facebook friend networks. Implications for clinical social work practice and future research were discussed based on the findings of the study.

*Keywords:* social networking, adolescent well-being, social connectedness,  
Facebook

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Looking back at my journey, it is hard to know where to begin...

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## **Does Facebook Influence Well-Being and Self-Esteem Among Early Adolescents?**

### **Introduction**

When the World Wide Web was first introduced just shortly before the turn of the millennium, today's most prominent internet users were not yet conceived. In America today, teenagers are the most "wired" group of the population and are positioned better than any other age group to take advantage of the latest technologies as they emerge (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). A national survey produced in 2000 by the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that 73% of youth were users of the internet and 50% of surveyed youth lived in homes with broadband internet access. In their latest study produced in 2007, the number of adolescents online increased to 93%, and 75% of all youth online live in households with broadband internet (PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2007). As the number of teenagers using the internet has increased and their ability to access the internet becomes easier, faster and more direct, America's adolescents are going online in greater numbers and using the internet more intensely than ever before (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2007). Not only are teenagers gaining faster access to the internet at home, it has become common for 80% of adolescents between ages fourteen and seventeen to have the latest cell-phone technology with internet access, not only making their access quicker, but almost instantaneous (Lenhart, 2011).

The expansion of technology and increased uses of computer mediated communication means adolescents possess the ability to maintain more of their friendships and peer group interactions through the use of the internet verses face-to-face communication. While there are those that wonder how the internet is impacting the



communication skills of adolescents and question whether it is hindering their ability to form close interpersonal relationships, there are others that uphold the idea that the internet is a healthy way to maintain relationships. In addition, many adolescents are using the internet and social networking sites as a way to enhance relationships they have already established in offline life (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Pierce, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). While parents and professionals working with adolescents might be skeptical as to the benefits of adolescent internet use, research by Subramanyam and Greenfield (2008) reports that 48% of teens believed that the internet has improved their relationships with friends and perhaps most notably, the more frequently they used the internet, the more likely they were to voice this belief. This belief shows that adolescents are placing significant importance on their ability to use and access the internet in the most interactive and progressive way possible. Now, instead of going home after school and dialing a friend's number on a landline, adolescents are using cell phones to exchange text messages and logging onto the internet both on a computer and their cell phones to connect with friends using the internet.

When the internet was first introduced and became popular among the general population, it was mostly used by individuals acting as consumers of content, with few having a role in the creation of that content with little ability to use the web interactively; this form of internet function is now known as *Web 1.0* (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). While the distinction between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is hard to define, the term *Web 2.0* encompasses the many innovative changes that have been introduced on the internet over the past several years (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). For most of the population, the term Web 2.0 is unexplored vernacular that raises many questions, yet

most people may indeed use Web 2.0 daily, in some fashion without realizing it. *Web 2.0*, also known as “social web” or “interactive web,” is a term used to reference web applications that are built on user-generated content focusing on interaction, participation, integration and connections (PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2011; Schembri, 2008). Applications encompassed in Web 2.0 can include podcasts, wikis, blogs, digital radio, twitter, and social networking websites such as MySpace, Google+, LinkedIn and Facebook. It is important to distinguish that Web 2.0 is a platform for which many of the new innovative technologies and social networking sites are built upon (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). The interactive interface of Web 2.0 is what allows for the content, photo and video sharing, comment posting, friend networking, profile creation as well as other popular functions of interactive websites, especially those classified as social networks.

Social networking websites are those that allow internet users to create a profile and connect their profile to others generating a personal network (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). In 2007, MySpace, while not the first social networking site, was the fastest growing social network site and drew more traffic than any other website on the internet, according to the PEW Internet and American Life Project. However, not a short while before, Mark Zuckerberg and a team of Harvard students were hard at work creating one of today’s fastest growing social networks many have come to know as Facebook. In 2005, Facebook was the ninth most visited site on the web and host to many college students with a valid college or university email address. Facebook was developed with the idea that it would be a social network exclusive to college and university students. Then in 2006, Facebook went public allowing any person age thirteen or older, with a

valid email address, to create an online profile on Facebook (Stern & Taylor, 2007). After going public, some users were disappointed that the exclusivity of a social network for only college students had ceased to exist however, many non-college age internet users jumped at the chance to become a part of the fastest growing international social network that is now home to over 6 million users worldwide (Well Aware, 2011). This change, while not explicitly linked to the growing internet use among the adolescent population, appealed to adolescents in their search for autonomy and social connectedness. Because adolescents seek to fit into their peer group in as many ways possible, there is no mystery as to why it did not take long for so many youth to jump onto the Facebook bandwagon, marking their generation as the fastest growing users of the interactive web and social networking websites.

As adolescents become the most defined group of internet users and engage in computer mediated communication, like social networking at an increasing rate, there are questions as to whether this is taking a toll on their well-being. As social networking becomes a highly accessible way to maintain friendships and a venue for picture sharing, profile pages, information sharing and instant feedback, the question remains whether this fast paced style of information sharing is impacting essential developmental processes of America's adolescents and the way in which they begin to understand themselves, their peers and their world. The reality is adolescents are the most connected generation whose affinity for internet use will only continue to grow. Knowing this, it is important to understand whether their use of interactive web and social networking is impacting their ability to form strong relationships. According to developmental theorists like Erik Erikson, the formation of strong peer relationships is a key developmental task

of adolescence and a contributing factor in their overall well-being. If adolescents can form a more concrete sense of self amidst positive acceptance of their peer group, they are more likely to have a positive self-concept and better overall well-being (Erikson, 1993; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009). The notion of using the internet to generate peer connectedness among adolescents paints a complicated picture because many adolescents are venturing into uncharted territory and encountering challenges many parents, teachers, church leaders and professionals are unfamiliar with. Their functioning in daily life has become dependent on whether they can connect with their friends interactively online, creating a new language of communication that makes the most sense to the adolescent population. This leaves many parents at a loss for ways in which they can stay connected with their teen, while others are concerned that the use of the internet and social networking among this group is going to create a set of challenges that many are unprepared to meet.

The use of the web to maintain friendships among adolescents means that parents and caregivers are taking on a new role of safety in their home. They are no longer strictly responsible for monitoring phone calls, overseeing homework completion and keeping track of which child is at what play date. Parents are now having to learn about things like internet filters, how to use social networking and interactive web just to keep up with their teenager, being intentional about where they are positioning the computer in the home and setting restrictions on cell phones to maintain boundaries around text messaging and internet use on their child's cellular phone. The Internet and American

Life Project has invested time and resources to explore how these factors are coming into play in the home and a study published by two of their researchers, Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that 53% of parents in their research reported having filters installed in their home computers, 45% reported that they have computer monitoring software installed on their computer, 65% of parents “checkup” on their child after they have used the computer and over three quarters of homes with computers linked to the internet have their computer in a public place. Although all of these precautionary measures are being taken by parents to ensure the safety of their children, 59% of parents surveyed in Lenhart and Madden (2007) indicated that the internet is a positive addition to their child’s life. Even though there is a particular concern for parents regarding their adolescents and their internet use, there are other individuals who are impacted by the growing affinity among adolescents for interactive web knowledge and their draw to social networks.

Adolescents spend much of their time at school, at home or at the homes of friends. While this is the case, there are other individuals who work with adolescents that can benefit from the knowledge of interactive web and social networking, especially as adolescents continue to become the most prominent users of those mediums (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). First and foremost, knowledge of Web 2.0 is important to the field of social work because its emergence defines the generation gap (Schembri, 2008). Schembri (2008) argues that social workers risk becoming irrelevant if they do not engage in the use of interactive web. The use of interactive web by social workers not only means new technologies to facilitate social connectedness, advocacy, social action or mutual aid, but also frames a new set of challenges for the population’s social workers

already work (Schembri, 2008). For example, individuals who may have addictions to shopping or gambling are able to access these avenues more readily through the use of the internet (Schembri, 2008). Likewise, adolescents are not only at risk for safety issues and being exploited online, they are also at risk for jeopardizing important developmental markers if they do not learn to manage their use of social networks and interactive web in a safe and healthy way. Social workers located within the schools as well as community agencies directly serving youth are well-positioned groups to facilitate knowledge of safe and secure interactive web and social network use. There are many youth that may be unaware of the risks associated with being a member of a social network or using an interactive web page. When social workers engage in new learning around Web 2.0, they expand the ways in which they can empathize with and understand their clients making them more accessible and relevant within their field. In work with adolescents, social workers who understand the functions and draw of interactive web and social networks are more able to have an appreciation for the role of these networks and understand how an adolescent's world can exist heavily in cyberspace.

Knowing that social network use is continually growing within the adolescent population, this study seeks to understand how the use of social networking sites can play a role in the self-esteem and overall well-being of early adolescence. Due to the fact that much of the research in this area has been done with late adolescents, specifically adolescents over the age of seventeen, there is a need to understand how youth in the early stage of adolescent development perceive their use of social networks and understand the impact it may have on their sense of self and the world they live in centered on fitting in and making peer connections.

## Literature Review

To fully understand the manner in which social networking can impact adolescents, it is important to examine several aspects including: how adolescents are engaging in social network use, the developmental tasks of adolescence, ways in which adolescents are using the internet to explore identity, as well as factors that impact self-esteem, self-concept and well-being. To investigate the interplay of these factors several studies published by leaders in these fields were paired with the foundational knowledge of adolescence presented in the work of Erik Erikson and Sigmund Freud. Together their findings offer a foundation in which adolescents and their draw to social networks, like Facebook, can be explored and understood.

### Social Networking

As adolescents begin to use the internet as a way to reinforce their offline relationships and transform into the most prominent users of the internet, it is no mystery why they would be avid users of social networking sites, like Facebook. Lenhart and Madden (2007) define *social networks* as “spaces on the internet where users can create a profile and connect that profile to others to create a personal network.” As they evaluate their demographics Lenhart and Madden (2007) note that age is an important factor in understanding social networks. Their study in 2007 noted that 41% of teens between the ages of twelve and thirteen are users of social networking sites where as teens of high school age between fourteen and seventeen responded as 61% being users of social networking. Four years later in 2009, those numbers showed significant growth indicating that 55% of teens between twelve and thirteen and 82% of teens between fourteen and seventeen were now users of social networking sites (Lenhart, 2011).

Social networking websites offer various ways for users to communicate with other members, both within and outside their personal friend networks (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Within social networking sites, particularly Facebook, there are several functions that allow users to facilitate communication including sending private messages to a single individual or group of users, posting comments on the wall of another user, sending “pokes” or kudos, sharing links, posting photos or giving personal status updates that can include a geographic location and names of others who might be in the physical company of the user (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Lenhart and Madden (2007) presented the viewpoint of several adolescents who participated in a focus group in which they indicated that they associated positive feelings with friends posting on their profile wall, noting that 84% of adolescents surveyed for their study reported that they have engaged in comment posting on their social networking site. Lenhart and Madden (2007) also indicate that one of the major reasons adolescents are using social networking sites is because these sites give them the opportunity to plunge themselves into a group of their peers getting instant feedback and affirmation through the built in functions of the website. “Teens get to feel like they are a part of a group of like-minded friends, and can visualize their network of relationships, displaying their popularity for others” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

Though the research has discussed several of the possible benefits that are linked to the use of the internet and social networking sites for adolescents, there is still a question of why so many teens feel a draw to use them. Yes, it is true many adolescents use social networks because their friends use them and after all, peer approval and belonging to a friend group is essential to an adolescent’s well-being however, what is it



about online social networks that keep them engaged and going back for more? Koh and Kim (2003) discuss how cyberspace can serve as a way for individuals to generate a virtual sense of community drawing them in. They discuss community as being relational or social interactions that bring people together and further, cyberspace can act as a forum for those relationships creating a virtual sense of community among users (Koh & Kim, 2003). After completing their research of 172 participants, Koh and Kim (2003) concluded that a virtual sense of community has three dimensions: membership, influence and immersion, and that each play a role in generating a sense of belonging in cyberspace. The research indicated that membership is strongly influenced by an individual's leadership within an online community, the enjoyability of the interaction and whether the interaction generated an opportunity for offline contact (Koh & Kim, 2003). While Koh and Kim (2003) indicated that cyberspace can generate feelings of belonging and community, Reich (2010) expanded on that idea to investigate an adolescents' sense of community on social networking sites.

After completing surveys and focus groups with high school and college age adolescents, Reich (2010) examined five areas that were present in previous research as well as their own findings; these areas were: membership, influence, integration of needs, shared connection and immersion.

### **Membership**

To define membership, Reich (2010) simply leaves membership as a person's feeling of belonging and connection to a group. In terms of social networking, there were not any specific factors that defined general membership other than being registered as a user of that site. While there were many participants that reported having a larger number

of people in their online friend network, most did not know or interact with those “friends” outside of the social networking site. In addition however, respondents also reported that they used social networking to communicate with friends or family that may attend other schools, live outside their area or whose contact information was lost (Reich, 2010). While general membership is one aspect of membership that defines belonging and community within a social networking site, there are some aspects, such as emotional safety, that contribute to a psychological sense of community.

One aspect of social networking membership that influences users and their experience is feelings of emotional safety within groups online. Reich (2010) uncovered that of the respondents, 25% of high school age participants reported social networking had contributed to problems of some kind within their offline friend group. The most common problems that emerged in the responses were rumor spreading, disloyalty, misunderstandings in which friends felt excluded or romantic partners misinterpreted comments made by their counterpart and escalating problem situations by sharing private information in a public forum or removing friends from their network list (Reich, 2010). Though there were many respondents in Reich’s (2010) study who reported encountering problems on social networking sites, 19% of participants noted that social networking sites also helped resolve problems. The three most common themes that emerged as contributing to problem resolution on social networking sites were that social networking sites provided a safe space to talk out problems, they offered evidence of what was actually said due to the fact that comments are published on profile pages and they also offered a medium for maintaining friendships and keeping in touch (Reich, 2010).

Another aspect that Reich (2010) contributed to membership was personal investment. Among the high school age students that participated, 83% reported that they used a social networking site everyday indicating that users feel a strong draw to use the site, supporting the immersion factor cited by Koh and Kim (2003). In addition, Reich (2010) noted that while time investment was high, emotional investment was low due to the fact that 63% of high school age respondents indicated that they used social networking sites as a way to fill time when they were bored, implying high membership but low investment.

### **Influence**

Koh and Kim (2003) conceptualized influence as “the ways in which members influence and are influenced by others” with a core factor being the demonstrations of power that occur between members. When Reich (2010) investigated the level of influence that occurred between members, it became apparent that individual users held the bulk of the power through their abilities to add, block or delete friends, edit and remove comments from their personal profile and untag photographs they are in. On Facebook specifically, blocking or deleting friends can limit interaction by removing abilities to visit profiles, leave comments, get status updates or reinitiate friendship in the future (Reich, 2010). Across the studies Reich (2010) reviewed, it appeared that individual users held a lot of influence over others’ access to their profile and information however, there was little evidence that suggested others had notable influence on other individual users.

### **Integration of Needs**

When exploring how adolescents use social networking to meet their needs, Reich (2010) found that these sites address the need and facilitate connection with others. Social networking sites allow users to stay connected and in tune with what is happening in the lives of their friends and others with whom they may have offline relationships (Reich, 2010). The most frequent activities that adolescents engaged in on social networking sites were social in nature such as responding to messages and invitations, writing comments on other users profile pages and simply browsing pages of other users in their friend network (Reich, 2010). In addition to staying connected socially, Reich (2010) also found that social networking sites provide a way for users to share resources, find common interests and promote issues, causes or local events. For users in general, social networking provides a forum to stay connected, share interests and talents, keep updated on current happenings in their area, generating feelings of group investment, building relationships and facilitating and enhancing the growth of offline friendships (Reich, 2010).

In summary, social networks offer a way for adolescents to get connected and stay connected with individuals within and outside their offline friend network and peer group. The functions that allow adolescents to facilitate communication generate a sense of membership and influence, while providing an avenue for adolescents to meet their need of connection with others (Koh & Kim, 2003; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Reich, 2010). Online social networks create a space of safety while also giving users a sense of power and connectedness. Ultimately, social networks offer a place for adolescents to

make social connections and generate a sense of belonging without demanding a high level of personal investment (Koh & Kim, 2003; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Reich, 2010).

### **Tasks of Adolescence**

Though Koh and Kim (2003), Lenhart and Madden (2007) and Reich (2010) gave light to the reasons why adolescents are drawn to social networks and what it has to offer, it is important to understand the internal processes that are going on during the developmental period of adolescence that cause this group to seek out the presented functions and appeal of social network membership.

Within the community of individuals that work with adolescents, both now and in the past, there is debate regarding the age at which childhood ends and adolescence begins. Near the end of middle childhood, children who have met the developmental tasks have mastered the ability of logical thought, can view situations from varying perspectives and have adopted several strategies for self-regulation (Davies, 1999). The onset of puberty is generally considered to be the marker of beginning adolescence, and while the age of on-set varies among boys and girls, puberty traditionally begins between and the ages of eleven and twelve (Davies, 1999).

The hormonal changes that come with the onset of puberty, paired with the internal stress of rapid physical growth as well as sexual maturation and curiosity, can make adolescence an especially challenging and volatile time for many youth. During this confusing time, adolescents set out on a search for “sameness”; they want to feel as if they belong and are not alone. Social networks are an avenue for this quest allowing adolescents to feel the same as their peers yet they can also maintain a sense of individuality. In addition to the physical changes that set in during adolescence, the brain

is also triggering many psychological shifts identified as separation and individuation (Levy-Warren, 1996). Levy-Warren (1996) discusses adolescence and its functions as recurring processes that first occur in early childhood, but manifest in adolescence with different functions.

Separation in childhood for example, is when a child first discovers that they are unique and separate people from caregivers and other siblings. In adolescence however, separation is a time in which adolescents distinguish themselves and build on the functions of childhood. During separation, adolescents begin to understand that they are no longer the same people they were during childhood: they begin to look different, sound different and interact with their world in a different way. During adolescence, youth learn to be more responsible for themselves and no longer rely on caregivers for tasks like personal hygiene, eating, sleeping, or reminders to do schoolwork. While the tasks of separation occur progressively and throughout the course of adolescence, youth are becoming more autonomous, developing identity, finding intimacy and exploring sexuality (Levy-Warren, 1996; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

While many adolescents begin the tasks of separation, they are also experiencing tasks of individuation which involves movement from the childhood focus of the self to awareness of the self in relationship to others (Levy-Warren, 1996). Adolescents begin to develop abstract thought in which they are able to think about how others perceive them and compare that with how they perceive themselves (Erikson, 1993). During individuation, adolescents also begin to account for their specific traits such as strengths and weaknesses, fantasies, observations, mental representations of their bodies and its

parts, their personalities and their competencies all aiding in their eventual development of self-image (Erikson, 1993; Levy-Warren, 1996).

In addition to developing self-image in the individuation process, adolescents also begin to possess the ability to regulate *object constancy*, meaning they are able to keep a constant and accurate image of a caregiver in their mind. While adolescents begin to explore object constancy in earlier childhood, the ability to regulate that caregiver image and allow it to influence personal choice and moral reasoning is refined in adolescence (Erikson, 1993; Levy-Warren, 1996). The image adolescents keep of their caregiver begins to provide the same security and comfort that the presence of the caregiver provided in childhood however, caregiver presence is no longer required for comfort in adolescence, allowing the adolescent to become more autonomous and responsible for themselves (Levy-Warren, 1996). As adolescents separate and individuate themselves, the idealization of their relationships turns from their care-givers and parents, to coaches and peers allowing them to develop identity and become more aware and invested in their social contexts (Erikson, 1993; Levy-Warren, 1996).

As adolescents begin to perceive their self-image, they are considering where they want to fit socially on a quest for “sameness”. In adolescence, youth reach a mind of what Erikson (1993) calls *moratorium*. In this psychosocial stage of moratorium, adolescents are on the fragile brink between childhood and adulthood in which they merge the moralities learned in childhood with the perceived ethics to be learned in adulthood (Erikson, 1993). The mind of an adolescent is an ideological mind that is eager to be confirmed by peers as well as be a part of social ritual. In their search for confirmation and identity development, adolescents are exploring multiple facets before committing to

a defined identity and specific roles; for today's adolescents, much of this identity development and social exploration is being performed through the use of the internet (Erikson, 1993; Calvert, 2002).

### **Identity Development and the Internet**

If the major task of adolescence according to Erikson (1993) is to resolve the crisis of identity, and the number of adolescents using the internet is increasing, would it make sense to infer that adolescents are using the internet as a form of identity resolution? Online identity experiments are defined by Valkenburg (2008) as adolescents' tendency to pretend to be someone else when being online. According to a study published by Gross (2004), over half of the 175 respondents reported that they had, "at least a couple of times" pretended on the internet, with 82 of those responses being related to adolescents claiming they were older in age. While a large number of respondents in Gross's study admitted to pretending online, there were several reasons that were given for the presentation of false information.

A majority of the respondents who reported to pretending often did so in the presence of another person, most commonly friends, supporting the individuation process of adolescence. Many stated they pretended to be someone else as a joke, some hid their identity to protect themselves and their privacy while others pretended online to avoid age restrictions of a particular website (Gross, 2004). Gross (2004) goes on to speculate that the respondent's pretending to be someone older is developmentally specific and related to the exploration of future identity. While only eleven percent of respondents in the study who admitted to pretending online did so in order to seem more appealing to



another person, it suggests there are some adolescents who are using the internet to explore the idea of identity resolution in their search for an authentic self.

While Gross (2004) provided some insight as to how adolescents use the internet for identity exploration, Valkenburg (2008) and Turkle (1995) aid in an explanation of why the internet can stimulate online identity experiments for adolescents. First, while technology continues to evolve, the internet reduces auditory and visual cues allowing and encouraging adolescents to emphasize, conceal or change specific features of their self. In their search for self, adolescents are exercising their abstract thoughts, considering how their peers will perceive them (Levy-Warren, 1996). Therefore, the reduction of auditory cues that comes with internet use paired with the quest for peer acceptance creates a lens for which a teens draw to change aspects of themselves online can be understood. In addition, internet communication often occurs in online social communities that are separate from those in real life, therefore the social repercussions in offline life are reduced, thus encouraging identity experimentation. Valkenburg (2008) goes on to state that identity experimentation and the number of identities adolescents take on, increases because teens start to take on and interact in more relational context. Traditionally, these relational contexts occurred within the family, with peers or at school however, the internet and social networking expanded these contexts allowing adolescents to become a part of a wide variety of relationships with varying audiences offering an opportunity for further self-discovery and identity development (Valkenburg, 2008).

As access to the internet has increased adolescent's social connectedness and given opportunity to be a part of an increasing variety of relationships, they are also

continually overexposed to varying relationships ideas, perhaps increasing their doubts about their identity and hindering their ability to form a more stable sense of self (Gergen, 1991, p. 145-160; Valkenburg, 2008). Calvert (2002), while presenting similar ideas about adolescents and their use of the internet for identity development, also offers some areas for concern and addresses why adolescent internet use is something to be attentive to. Operating under the definition of developmental psychology that *identity* is a manner in which individuals are defined focusing on personality characteristics and an internal sense of self, Calvert (2002) offers this:

Living within a body impacts the construction of identity. People have a biological sex, age, race and other physical features that affect how people perceive themselves and how others perceive and treat them... But what if individuals were no longer constrained by their physical body or their real-life name to present themselves? Who would they be?

This notation is the very core of why the internet and social networking are appealing venues for adolescents. The internet does not contain the way in which they present themselves. Online, adolescents can alter their physical appearance, alter their biological characteristics such as age and take on identities outside themselves in order to fulfill how they want others to perceive them. Further, the internet allows these changes to occur in an anonymous fashion without requiring the individual to leave a physical space that is comforting and familiar (Calvert, 2002, pp. 58).

Knowing that the internet can act as an avenue to alter physical aspects of one's identity, there are concerns to be aware of. The internet can seem like a harmless realm for identity formation to take place however, there are issues such as deception, identity confusion and the construction of a negative identity through the acting out of antisocial activities to consider. Pretending to be someone else when online can provide the

opportunity for children and adolescents not only to be exploited, but there is also a concern that identity confusion can occur in which distinguishing their online world from their real-life can become challenging (Calvert, 2002, pp. 66-67). If adolescents create an online identity in which they are important to others in their cyber-world but in their offline life are less popular amidst their social group, potential risk is presented in that they may begin to have trouble differentiating their worlds causing them to be unable to develop a stable self-concept influencing identity confusion (Calvert, 2002, pp. 66-67).

Gackenbach and Stackelberg (2007) offer that psychologists believe that each person's identity is a composition that reflects different aspects of self, depending on psychological and biological development and history paired with the way one currently experiences their world. While the ability to integrate the many aspects of self into one fluid identity is traditionally seen as a developmental marker of adulthood, adolescence is a time where the various aspects of self are being explored and possible selves are contemplated (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). Sometimes adolescents explore identities that are radically different as a way to exercise independence and explore autonomy, as well as push limits to understand more fully their boundaries of risk and safety (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). As the use of the internet and online identity exploration becomes a social norm among adolescents, research in the field of psychology indicates that the formation of online and offline identities are similar however, it is not uncommon for individuals to find themselves engaging in situations online that are uncharacteristic on their offline self; Suler (2004) calls this phenomenon disinhibition (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). *Disinhibition* is defined as the inability to control impulsive behaviors, thoughts or feelings that manifests online as people

communicate in ways that they would not ordinarily do offline (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). Disinhibited communication experiences can involve individuals engaging in higher levels of self-disclosure that are uncharacteristic of offline life and can generate both positive and appropriate or negative and inappropriate experiences (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). Suler (2004) argues that disinhibition is not a shift away from the true self, but is rather a representation of the self that is usually kept hidden in offline life (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007).

Suler (2004) explains that disinhibition can work in two forms that are seemingly opposite from each other, naming them benign disinhibition and toxic disinhibition. *Benign disinhibition* can be acts of sharing personal things about the self, revealing secrets, emotions, fears or wishes, it can be random acts of generosity, kindness or going out of one's way to make an intimate connection with another individual (Suler, 2004). In the opposite, *toxic disinhibition* can be involvement or witnessing of rude language, harsh criticisms, anger hatred or threats, it can be in visitation of sites that feature pornographic material, crime, violence or other territories that would not be explored in real life (Suler, 2004). Benign disinhibition can be understood as a way to better understand and develop the self, to resolve interpersonal problems or to explore new emotional or experiential dimensions of identity. If an individual is experiencing toxic disinhibition, it can simply be a representation of compulsion or acting out without any personal growth (Suler, 2004).

No matter the form of disinhibition the distinction between the two types can be complex and uncertain (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007). For example, an individual might form a close intimate relationship through email in which they disclose personal

information quickly, later experiencing regret and feelings of exposure, shame and vulnerability shifting from seemingly benign disinhibition to toxic disinhibition. This is where the use of the Web 2.0 platform generates potentially problematic situations for many users, most specifically adolescents. Disinhibition online can give adolescents the opportunity to develop relationships with predators online, develop a sense of false self due to a blur between offline self and online self, expose adolescents to threats and criticism from peers or simply allow adolescents to engage in healthy identity exploration (Gackenbach & Stackelberg, 2007, Gergen, 1991, Suler, 2004). Whether disinhibition is benign, toxic, or a mix of both, Suler (2004) outlines six factors that contribute to the disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination and minimization of status and authority.

### **Dissociative Anonymity**

While usernames and email addresses give identification to individuals while online, they often do not reveal much about the user and who they are in their offline life. Online, people can hide some, or even all, of their identity and become someone completely outside themselves when online (Suler, 2004). The anonymous nature of the internet gives people the opportunity to separate their actions while online, sometimes with few consequences in their offline life making the internet feel safer, less vulnerable and more anonymous for identity exploration and acting out. The online self becomes what Suler (2004) calls a compartmentalized self, allowing a person to avert responsibility for behaviors online sometimes convincing themselves that those behaviors “aren’t them at all”.

**Invisibility**

Many online environments are “text driven” online communities and even those that are not, such as social networks, where users can access posted photos of each other, individuals are still physically invisible when they are online contributing to disinhibition (Suler, 2004). When online, individuals do not have to worry about what they look like or how they sound in that moment, when sending a message. In addition, they do not have to worry about how others look or sound in response. In face to face communication, people may avert eye contact when disclosing personal or emotional information but, online this process is built in, making it feel safer (Suler, 2004).

**Asynchronicity**

When individuals engage in face to face conversation, there is a continuous feedback loop that occurs, fostering moment to moment responses and shaping the ongoing flow of information exchange, expression and self-disclosures; this process is called synchronicity (Suler, 2004). Online, conversations are not occurring in real time. There is a delay between responses allowing an individual’s train of thought to progress more quickly and deeply thus, it feels safer to put comments out into cyberspace and leave them there; Suler (2004) names this process asynchronicity.

**Solipsistic Introjection**

When face to face cues become absent in text communication, boundaries that someone has with themselves can be altered (Suler, 2004). While individuals often know what another person’s voice may sound like, they often experience online messages in their own internal voice. Individuals may also consciously or unconsciously assign a visual image to how they think the message sender looks and behaves (Suler, 2004). As

the internal character becomes a more elaborate and “real” person, individuals may carry out online conversations in their offline life fantasizing about flirting, arguing with their boss or confronting a friend about their feelings. These disinhibited conversations can sometimes unleash powerful psychological issues turning the internet into the “stage” for which users become the players (Suler, 2004).

### **Dissociative Imagination**

For many internet users, the separation of online fantasy from real life fact is something that happens quite easily and naturally; they are able to relinquish what happens in make-believe play as having nothing to do with reality (Suler, 2004). In dissociative imagination, for online users with a predisposed difficulty distinguishing personal fantasy from social reality, the distinction between online and offline life becomes blurred intruding on reality testing (Suler, 2004).

### **Minimization of Status and Authority**

In offline life, individuals who hold authority often express their status and power in the way they dress, body language and environment. Similarly in face to face communication, people who view themselves as holding less power often are reluctant to stand before an authority figure and express what they really think (Suler, 2004). Online, all users potentially start off on a level playing field no matter their race, gender, socioeconomic status or age. Because of this, authority status in cyberspace may shift giving those who excel in written communication, self-expression, persistence, idea quality and technological knowledge an advantage (Suler, 2004).

Considering the six factors presented by Suler (2004) and knowledge that social connectedness and being a part of a peer group is crucial to adolescents when forming an

identity, it is important to be aware of how these aspects can influence a negative self-concept and impact adolescent well-being. While Calvert (2002) presents several areas for concern, Gross (2004), (Calvert, 2002, pp. 66-67) and Valkenburg (2008) suggest that the internet can be a useful place for adolescents to develop identity. Due to the varying perceptions of the internet and its influence on adolescent identity formation, it is important to look at how self-esteem and well-being are impacted in adolescence and whether there are factors that dictate positive versus negative experiences online.

### **Adolescent Well-Being**

Within the research of those that have studied adolescents and their online lives, there are several factors that are cited as being influential to the well-being of an adolescent, such as: loneliness, depression, stress, self-concept, personal and social identity, intimacy, autonomy, social connectedness and possibly others. While all of these factors are tossed around as possible contributors to the volatile well-being of an adolescent, one factor that is widely noted as playing a vital role in adolescent well-being is their social connectedness and closeness to friends. (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009)

In late childhood and early adolescence, intimacy in close personal relationships begins to emerge as an expectation with close meaningful interactions with peers taking importance (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002). Gross, Juvonen and Gable (2002) site that research has demonstrated close peer relationships can positively impact adolescent self-esteem and well-being just as negative peer relationships can foster feelings of depression



and negative-self views. This same notion applies to the use of the internet in that its use can influence well-being and self-esteem in adolescents, depending whether it is being used to enhance and expand meaningful daily contact with peers. In their study, Gross, Juvonen and Gable (2002) found that online communication appeared to be similar to the social interaction youth had in person in that online communication occurred largely in private settings, with friends who were a part of the adolescents daily offline life with communication being mostly devoted to traditional intimate topics for youth such as friends and gossip. It is important to note that the use of online communication in these topic areas was motivated by the desire for companionship on the part of the adolescent. The results of the study presented by Gross, Juvonen and Gable (2002) indicate that who adolescents communicated with online was a predictor of peer-related psychological well-being. For example, adolescents who felt connected and comfortable with school-based peers were likely to seek out additional opportunities online to interact with those peers whereas, adolescents who reported feeling lonely or socially anxious at school were more likely to communicate with strangers online.

This factor was also found to be true by Valkenburg and Peter (2007) stating that adolescents traditionally use the internet to enhance interpersonal communication within their existing group of friends. To reach this conclusion, Valkenburg and Peter (2007) considered two hypotheses' known as the reduction hypothesis and the stimulation hypothesis. The reduction hypothesis operates under the basic assumption that the internet motivates adolescents to form online relationships with strangers reducing their closeness to friends. In contrast, the stimulation hypothesis assumes that the reduced cues on the internet encourage adolescents to disclose their inner feelings more easily than in

offline interactions fostering trust and reciprocation stimulating closeness in existing peer relationships. The results gathered from their research indicate that 88% of respondents used the internet primarily to maintain existing relationships which is consistent with other research performed by Gross (2004) in which 82% of online instant message partners were friends from school. Further, Valkenburg and Peter (2007) reported that participants who communicated online felt closer to their existing friend group and 30% of their respondents viewed the internet as a more effective mode of communication when engaging in self-disclosure. It should be noted that while Valkenburg and Peter (2007) present findings that support the stimulation hypothesis, there are earlier researchers such as Kraut et. al. (1998) whose results support the reduction hypothesis. This differentiation can be attributed to the growing number of adolescents that use the internet, the increased uses of the internet, the introduction of Web 2.0, and many other previously discussed factors validating the dramatic shift in internet use that has taken place in such a short time frame.

As internet use by adolescent's increases and the perceived benefits of internet use among that population becomes more prevalent, it is important to understand how social networking drives those benefits and the aspects that enhance social connectedness for adolescents. Being that early and middle adolescence has an increased focus on the self, youth in this stage of development are likely engaging in a behavior known as the imaginary audience, in which they contemplate the extent to which others are noticing and evaluating them (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). On social networking sites, much of the interpersonal communication that occurs can be viewed in a public forum to all members of an individual's friend network therefore there is reason to question

whether that exposure impacts well-being. Many self-esteem theorists believe that self-esteem and well-being for adolescents is directly linked, therefore their social connectedness and social self-esteem play a vital role in their overall well-being (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Valkenburg and Peter (2009) define social connectedness as an adolescent's relationship with others in their environment.

Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006 go on to define social self-esteem as

...adolescents' evaluation of their self-worth or satisfaction with three dimensions of their selves: physical appearance, romantic attractiveness and the ability to form and maintain close friendships. "Well-being refers to a judgment of one's satisfaction with life as a whole" (p. 585).

While research in the field of adolescent well-being and internet use has produced mixed results, Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006), state that social self-esteem and well-being are more likely to be affected if adolescents are using the internet as a form of communication verses information seeking. This belief comes out of the notion that feedback on the self and peer involvement are more likely to occur when adolescents engage in online communication as well as the understanding that developmentally, adolescents are increasingly consumed with the opinions of their peer group seeking their approval and acceptance (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). In an individual sense, daily internet use in adolescence is not an indicator of low well-being rather, internet use becomes negatively influential on well-being when the user cannot stop using the internet, internet use begins to interfere with day to day operations or social contacts or the user is constantly preoccupied with their online life generating a link between internet use, loneliness and low well-being (van der Aa, et. al., 2009). While it is important to note that individual internet use holds influence on well-being, much of the research indicates that well-being and self-esteem are more closely linked to how adolescents

experience other peers while online (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenberg & Peter, 2009; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006).

Feedback continues to surface as a predictor of positive self-esteem and well-being, specifically in the tone of the feedback received by adolescents on their individual social networking profiles (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) found that 78% of respondents received positive feedback on their profiles making social networking an effective mode of enhancing self-esteem with the opposite being true of 7% of respondents. Further, 35% of the respondents participating the research by Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) indicated that they had established one or more friendships through a social networking site leading to the conclusion that the quality of friendships and romantic relationships may be a stronger predictor of positive social self-esteem and well-being over quantity; however, Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) state that further research is needed in the area of the quality of social relationships on social networks. In comparison, the study conducted by Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) found that 48% of respondents believed the internet had improved their relationships with friends. Overall, what has the research shown in the area of well-being and self-esteem for adolescents and their internet use? The tone of the feedback, and the use of the internet to maintain existing offline friendships were strong indicators that internet use can foster positive self-esteem and overall well-being for online adolescents (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002; Gross, 2004; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenberg & Peter, 2009; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006).

### **Developing a Research Question**

Considering the research that has been done on the tasks of adolescence, their use of the internet for identity exploration, the effect internet use has on their well-being and adolescent involvement with social networking sites, as discussed in the literature review, this study seeks to understand how all of these aspects interplay. As adolescents mature, it becomes developmentally appropriate for them to begin to separate from their caregivers and seek support from peers. Their peer group becomes the audience through which they develop their identity, with peer approval taking on vital importance. The internet and social networking sites continue to grow in use by adolescents, making them a central spot for developing strong social ties and peer relationships. With these factors in mind, this research study asks whether the use of Facebook impacts the well-being and self-esteem among early adolescents.

## **Conceptual Framework**

In looking at the research that has been done in related fields, it is important to understand what research states about the factors that play into adolescents and their draw to social networks. The topics of social networking, the developmental tasks of adolescence, how the internet facilitates identity exploration and solidification, as well as what qualities influence well-being and self-esteem are all important foundations for the research sought out by this study. Because research within social networks and their influence on adolescents is fairly recent and emerging, it is important to understand how classic and widely recognized theory can be related. Psychoanalytic theory proposed by thinkers like Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson have long been recognized and upheld in fields like psychology and clinical social work. Those that work within this framework are familiar with the theories they proposed and allow it to greatly influence their practice. While psychoanalytic theory has been around for many years, its ideas continue to be upheld in current practice and research. The foundations of psychoanalytic theory and developmental stages give light to how current research is grounded in classic theory and thus have direct relevance and influence on the development of this research paper.

### **Psychoanalytic Theory and Psychosocial Stages**

In the field of Developmental Psychology, there are several individuals that paved the way for its emergence and shaped the way in which development is approached; Freud and Erikson are perhaps the most well-known examples.

**Freud.** Berzoff (2011) speaks of Freud as being the first psychological theorist who viewed humans as being driven by instinctual forces they are unaware of. Freud hypothesized, that psychological problems occur when a person's drives are opposed by

other forces in the mind. In his development of theory, Freud was the first to propose a stage driven approach to development which he called psychosexual development (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Freud divided childhood psychosexual development into five stages: infancy, toddlerhood, the phallic stage, latency and adolescence (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900).

***Infancy.*** The first stage of infancy, or the oral stage, spans from birth to one and a half years of age. In this stage babies experience their drives of pleasure and aggression through the use of their mouths and are stimulated and satisfied through suckling. In this stage babies rely on caregivers to regulate their tensions, soothe, feed and comfort them (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Psychosexual issues at this stage are the meeting of basic needs and the satisfaction of oral drives. If this developmental task occurs, a capacity for trust, self-reliance and self-esteem can emerge later in life (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900).

***Toddlerhood.*** Spanning the years from one and a half to three years of age, children enter into what Freud calls toddlerhood or, the anal stage. In this stage, toddlers learn to walk and climb gaining a small level of autonomy for exploration (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Children are self-centered and have little capacity for reason, focusing on the control of both their bowel and bladder capacities and then control important people in their lives. Toddlers seek approval from care givers around these functions and form relationships in pairs (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900). When this developmental stage is complete, children now not only possess the tasks of infancy, they now hold the capacity to form meaningful relationships with their caregivers and use that relationship to explore their external world (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900)

***Phallic stage.*** During the phallic stage of development, encompassing age three to age five, children are beginning to explore the world of fantasy, imagination and romance (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900). Children will begin to discover their own genitals, fantasize about the parent of the opposite gender and play out situations of marriage and love with their peers. Later in this stage, children will begin to learn morals, ethics and values from the parents of the same gender establishing their own gender-role identity (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900). During the phallic stage, children are using their capacity for trust, caregiver relationships and reality of their world and integrating those factors with imagination (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900). Eventually, these factors will also play into their development of self (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900).

***Latency.*** The stage of latency, age six to eleven years, a child moves away from sexual and aggressive energies, moves away from the parent and begins to focus on peers. School-age children move into the world, mastering physical skills and cognitive learning and through peers, develop a more concrete dimension of societal gender roles (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Aggressive energy moves out of the nuclear family and again begins to be explored thorough competition with peers (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Children in the latency stage tend to be modest about their bodies with its main function being used in competition; such as playing sports (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900).

***Adolescence.*** In Freudian stages, adolescence is a time in which a child's body begins to go through major biological changes with an increase in aggressive and sexual impulses (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Boys and girls begin to become more aware of their bodies noticing the changes congruent with puberty with the physical changes influencing cognition, fantasy and emotions (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). Adolescence is



also a time of consolidation of consciousness, goals and future oriented thinking in which they begin to develop morals and ideals through experimentation and experiences (Berzoff, 2011; Freud; 1900). During this stage, adolescents begin to integrate their mastered tasks of former stages. They are now using their capacity for trust to form peer relationships, they rely on the image of their caregiver and learned morals and ethics to inform future oriented choices (Berzoff, 2011; Freud, 1900).

***Freud and the internet.*** As individuals move through the psychosexual stages presented by Freud (1900), they are combining new skills with ones they have already mastered. For example, in infancy, a baby explores their world and gains a capacity for trust and self-reliance and as they move into toddlerhood, that sense of trust and self-reliance allows the child to explore and form relationships with caregivers. As children master skills associated with each developmental period, they enter adolescence with a general sense of themselves in comparison to their caregivers and therefore the shift onto a focus of peers begins to define an adolescent's sense of self. An adolescent's ability to explore their adolescent sense of self is contingent on their ability to master the skills of psychosexual stages. The interactive nature of Web 2.0 and social networking allows adolescents to generate proximity and feel connected to peers in a non-threatening way. Therefore, the use of the internet to explore these developmental skills in the adolescent stage becomes a key tool to generate their mastery.

**Erikson.** Accepting the Freudian foundation of psychoanalytic theory to developmental processes, Erik Erikson set out to expand Freudian philosophy by developing eight psychosocial stages that span over a person's lifetime (Miller, 1989). In the development of these stages, Erikson maintained the belief that the main theme of life

was the development of a positive identity which involves the understanding and acceptance the self and one's society (Miller, 1989). Erikson believed that nature determined the sequence of stages and set limits within that which nurture would allow. He also believed that development was a lifelong process and that some conflicts of childhood or adolescence may not get resolved until adulthood with the development of a more complex mind. The stages developed by Erikson begin at birth and span into late adulthood, with the stage of adolescence placed as number five. Though Erikson does not specify an age for the onset of adolescence, which is unlike his other stages marked by age, he does note that stage four, "Identity versus Inferiority", ends at the beginning of puberty thus plunging a person into the stage of adolescence which Erikson calls "Identity and Repudiation versus Identity Diffusion" (Miller, 1989).

Trust, autonomy, initiative and industry are aspects that Erikson noted as contributing to the development of a child's identity, noting that in adolescence, they come to a climax in conjunction with to bodily changes associated with puberty. As children move into the stage of adolescence, they begin to reassemble their identity to meet the new needs, skills and goals of adolescence, as well as navigate the many roles that come with the social pressure to make occupational and educational choices (Erikson, 1993; Miller, 1989). As they begin to form a more concrete identity and navigate the many roles of adolescence, youth begin to seek out their true selves within their peer group, clubs, religion and other groups "trying on" different roles using the guidelines of what is acceptable by society, identifying and developing an authentic identity that gives coherence to one's personality (Miller, 1989). In the world of Web 2.0 and social networking, the exploration of these roles becomes more accessible and

readily validates as adolescents search for a sense of self as well as their quest for social connectedness and peer approval (Erikson, 1993; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Levy-Warren, 1996; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009)

### **Research Lens**

Using the lens provided by Erikson on the developmental stage of adolescence paired with the research provided by Reich (2010) on online communities and the sense of membership and belonging they provide for adolescents, forms a scope for this study. Many individuals, including Erikson, have noted that adolescents' search for belonging and sense of self in their peer group and look to them to navigate their developing identity. As the use of social networks among teens increases and as research continues to demonstrate that teens are using social networks to maintain existing friendships from their offline life, there is a need to understand whether cyberspace can influence the well-being of an adolescent based on their perceptions of their peer group and the degree to which they are accepted and valued.

### **Personal Lens**

As an emerging clinical social worker who seeks to work with children and adolescents, I valued the idea of researching a topic that was relevant and fairly new to the lives of youth in today's world. As a "millennial", I grew up on the brink between land lines and cell phones, postal mail and email, written notes and text messages with MySpace as the up and coming social network. Now, I look at the lives of my siblings, cousins and their friends and realize that text messaging and Facebook have become the

center of their world. They are no longer worried about their peers passing bad notes about them at school or prank calling them at home, they are worried about rumors on the internet, photos or videos of them going “viral” on You-Tube and have entire conversations in text instead of calling friends on the phone. Their world and my world are beginning to exist in separate spaces.

When reflecting, I began to wonder how their lives are changing and how their sense of self is being impacted by their virtual lives. Whether we like it or not, the internet is becoming a place of vital importance for today’s youth and if we seek to make connections with them and understand their world, being aware of the benefits and challenges adolescents encounter online puts me in a better position to make a positive impact on the lives of youth, their parents and other clients I will encounter in my future.

## **Methodology**

This study seeks to understand whether the use of Facebook among 13, 14 and 15 year old adolescents can have a role in their well-being and self-esteem. The methodology section of this paper will discuss the design of this study including justification for the selection of early adolescent participants and Facebook and the findings that the research expects to discover. Issues related to sampling, feasibility, recruitment, the protection of human subjects as well as strengths and limitations of the research will also be discussed.

### **Design**

The research design used quantitative questioning and descriptive statistics to evaluate the outcomes of the research question and hypothesis. Adolescent participants utilized self-evaluation skills to give voice to experiences they encounter in their use of Facebook.

**Using Facebook.** Though there are many forms of social networks that exist on the internet, Facebook is the fastest growing social network and commonly used language among the general population, especially adolescents (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). As people become more familiar with the uses and functions of Facebook, it is important to evaluate how the most prominent users of the internet today, adolescents, are using social networks. Facebook was chosen for this study for two reasons. First, because it is an emerging area for research and second because it provided a context for which the research of this study could be focused and contained.

**Selecting early adolescent participants.** Within the research that had been previously conducted on adolescents and the impacts of social networking sites, there

was little that has examined how social networks, like Facebook, play a role in the lives and well-being of early adolescents or adolescents under the age of seventeen. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2009) demonstrated that between the ages of twelve and fourteen, there is a large increase in the number of adolescents that are using social networking. Generally, between ages twelve and fourteen, adolescents are also making the volatile and pivotal transition from middle school to high school.

**Hypothesis.** Based on the research that was cited in the literature review the researcher of this study hypothesized: participants who report having a positive association with their friend network on Facebook will respond as having more positive qualities of overall well-being and self-esteem (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009). To evaluate this hypothesis, this study used a quantitative measurement tool comprised of scaled response questions to assess the relationship between questions related to self-esteem and well-being with questions related to Facebook and a participant's online and offline friend networks.

### **Measurement**

This quantitative research study used a self-constructed survey (Appendix A) to assess the experiences related to well-being and self-esteem that adolescents are encountering in their use of Facebook. The survey was constructed using the common themes that emerged in the research on adolescent well-being and self-esteem. Creating a measurement tool that was applicable and useful within the population of 13, 14 and 15

year old adolescents was essential to this study. It was not only important to ensure the measurement tool would gather relevant information to social networking and self-esteem, it was also important that the language was congruent with the voices of that age group.

**Quantitative verses qualitative.** To facilitate this study, the main factor to consider was which method would be most accessible to the target population. With this in mind, it was determined that a quantitative design would be most effective with one benefit being the low invasive qualities it would have on the survey participants. The survey was facilitated online and therefore could be completed in an environment that felt safe and secure to the participants. There was no identifying information asked and no in person interaction took place, keeping anonymity intact without jeopardizing the outcomes of the research. Participants were also given the option to skip survey questions and leave the survey at any point during their participation. All of these aspects not only maintained a level of safety for the participants, a qualitative measuring tool also gives respondents the verbal language to represent their experiences. For example, if a researcher wanted to understand how adolescents feel about their online friend network, a quantitative study asks questions such as “I feel valued by the people in my online friend network” and then provides a scale in which a participant might evaluate their response.

**Measurement tool.** Within the research of well-being and self-esteem, there are several quantitative measurement tools referenced. One scale that was cited by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) and investigated for this study is the self-esteem scale utilized by Rosenberg (1965). Rosenberg (1965) sought to “specify the bearing of certain social factors on self-esteem and to indicate the influence of self-esteem on socially significant

attitudes and behavior” (p. 15). To measure this, Rosenberg (1965) used a ten item Guttman which asked questions on a four point scale in areas such as feelings of worth, self-satisfaction, success, pride, happiness, how often one compares themselves to another as well as other areas that might measure self-concept.

Due to the fact that the scales used in Rosenberg (1965) did not have a general fit to this research study, it was determined that a self-made measuring tool would need to be created in order to gather the data needed to answer the research question (Appendix A). This measurement tool was created through the referencing of the scales used in Rosenberg (1965) as well as finding common themes in the research on self-esteem and well-being. First, Rosenberg (1965) states that self-image is an aspect of a person that can be difficult to define however, in general it is considered to be the favorable or unfavorable orientation one has toward their self. This idea paired with the common themes of loneliness, inclusion by a peer group, feelings of sadness, and the close relationship between well-being and self-esteem aided in the creation of the measurement scale for this study (Gross et. al, 2002; Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992; Valkenberg, Peter & Schouten, 2006; van der Aa et. al., 2009)

The survey was constructed to meet the needs of this study used 26 questions including: two demographic questions about age and gender, five “yes” or “no” questions, seventeen scaled questions, one thirteen item question specific to functions of Facebook and one free response wrap up question. The survey was intended to be short in length as a way to keep the respondents engaged and authentic in their responses. In addition, it was constructed using language consistent with the reading level of a 13, 14 or 15 year old adolescent placing warm questions such as age, gender, and Facebook



membership first as a way to get respondents acquainted with the survey tool, using the online forum, as well as answering instinctively. Following the warm-up questions, participants moved into questions related to their membership on Facebook and feelings they may have about its use and functions. The final question of the survey was a free response question intended to capture any remaining feelings or thoughts that were not covered by the constructed measurement tool. These questions were used in data analysis to run descriptive and inferential statistics as a way to evaluate the research question posed by this study: does Facebook influence the well-being and self-esteem among early adolescents?

**Implementing an online survey.** The survey was completed by participants through the use of the Qualtrics online survey database. The link to the survey was posted on an event page through Facebook where users could access general information about the research study. In addition, the online Bulletin article shared both the link to the Facebook event page and the direct link to the survey on Qualtrics. The link to the Qualtrics database hosted the survey tool (Appendix A) as well as the parent consent form (Appendix B), adolescent assent form (Appendix C) and resource pages for both parents and adolescent participants (Appendix E and F).

### **Sampling**

Recruiting participants for this research study asked for several considerations first being, how to maximize recruitment and response rates to achieve the intended participant goal between 30 and 50; in research, this often refers to the “n” value. This study also has a set of designated criteria for participation, or inclusion criteria, in which participants were required to be the ages of 13, 14 or 15 and be users of Facebook. The

researcher also looked at how parental consent could be achieved since participants were under the age of 18 as well as what venues would produce access to both required audiences.

**Feasibility.** When developing a methodology, the researcher first considered accessing participants through the school system. Because adolescents spend much of their time at school, recruitment would be higher if they could be accessed in this way. This method however posed several challenges, most of which were issues related to parental access for consent as well as the cost of printing and distributing a large number of surveys. There was also a time issue to address if participants were recruited through their school due to having to administer the survey at some point during the participants' school day. If the research study was conducted using this method, the researcher would need to ensure that the time required was short and done during a non-academic hour such as lunch or homeroom.

With all of this in mind, it was determined that posting an online survey would be most effective in terms of cost, access and time. In addition, posting the link on Facebook would target the intended participant group and while there was no guarantee for parental consent, the low risk nature of the study allowed for some flexibility for unknown factors.

**Recruitment.** In consideration of the challenges presented in the feasibility of the intended mode of respondent access, participants were recruited through the use of an online article and Facebook. Because the focus of this study is on social networking, the researcher wanted to appeal to that audience and therefore created a public event page using Facebook as a way to give access to a diverse community of users. The event page gave users information about the survey, what they will be asked to do and where to

access the online survey (Appendix D). It was anticipated that using this method of recruitment would generate a high response rate.

In addition, information about this study was posted in an online Bulletin of the University which is emailed daily to all faculty, staff, alumni and students. Though there were some individuals notified of the study whose response did not apply, their access allowed knowledge of the survey to be passed on to anyone who met the parameters of the research study. This mode of recruitment is free to any university student and requires merely a request to the editor to publish information. This article ran one time with no follow-up article due to time restrictions (Appendix D).

A few weeks after the survey was activated, it became clear that participation was lower than anticipated. To supplement the low participate rate, the researcher contacted a local community center to inquire whether surveys could be handed out at their monthly youth night. After consulting, it was determined that the event would not access the intended audience but it was suggested that the surveys be given out to youth in the after school program. In addition, a second community program was contacted and they also agreed to give out the survey to youth in their after school programs. Paper copies of the survey as well as the consent form, assent form and resource guides were given to each agency along with pencils and candy; pencils and candy were intended to provide small incentive for participation. After two weeks, surveys were collected and manually inputted to the online database to keep all data together for analysis.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

There were a number of measures that needed to be taken to ensure the safety of the research participants. Because this study seeks to recruit adolescents under the age of

eighteen a group considered to be a vulnerable population, it is important to take measure to keep them from harm. Protection of the participant population included measures such as the establishing of the research committee, application to the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB), consent and assent forms as well as additional resources guides for both participants and their care givers.

**Establishing a research committee.** As a student researcher, the first step in the protection of the participants was the establishment of a research committee. On this committee, there were three other professionals, two from the academic institution overseeing the research and one from a community organization that that serves an adolescent population though drop-in centers, education, employment and housing services as well as overall wellness interventions. Each individual on the committee was contacted though email requesting their presence on the committee as well as what the expectations of their service would be. These included providing their expertise and advice throughout the course of the research study as well as attending two committee meetings and the public presentation forum after the research was completed. After consent to serve on the committee was given, each member was asked to sign the committee member form authorizing their agreement to participate on committee. After the research proposal was completed, the committee was gathered and asked to look over the content for general suggestions, as well as whether any concerns arose regarding potential risks to participants. Once the proposal was discussed and advised revisions were made, the committee authorized the proposal to take the next step in implementation which was the application and submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of St. Thomas.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB).** After the committee gathered and approved the proposal the researcher began the process of submitting all necessary forms for Full Board Review. For the IRB, there are three levels of review that a research study may undergo depending on the level of risk associated with the research as well as whether the population to be studied could be considered vulnerable. Vulnerable populations could include elders, the mentally or physically disabled, mothers, children under the age of 18 and several others. Because this study wanted to survey adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15, it was required to go through a Full Board Review process.

When the Board assembled, they looked over the submitted application and assessed the proposal for purpose, relevancy and potential risks to participants. To capture a full glimpse of the research study being proposed, forms submitted to the IRB included: a lay summary, participant information including the intended target population and recruitment, confidentiality of data including how the data will be stored, retained and who will see it other than the researcher, the informed consent process for the participants as well as risks and benefits to the research. In formulating the information to be included in the application forms, it was important to be aware that research in the field of social networking is still emerging. Further, this study sought to utilize functions of Facebook to recruit survey participants and therefore, this study was considered with no previous precedent in place for comparison or evaluation.

After the initial submission for approval, the Board requested several changes and posed several questions related to the legality of using Facebook to recruit adolescent participants. After deliberation and noting the measures being taken to ensure safety, they determined the study to be relatively low risk and granted approval to begin research.

Through this process however, the overarching concern for recruitment through Facebook and the internet was to guarantee parental consent.

**Establishing parental consent.** The first measure that was taken to directly protect the adolescent participants in this survey was done through the means of parental consent. Parents or caregivers of the participant were asked to read over the consent form (Appendix B) which discussed the qualifications of the researcher, the purpose of the research study, how the results were going to be used, how the data was going to be kept confidential and contact information for the student researcher and research chair in the event there were significant questions or concerns. After consent was given, the person giving consent was then directed to read over the resource page in case they were in search of more support regarding adolescent internet safety and social networking use.

**Establishing participant assent.** After being granted permission to participate, participants were asked to give their own assent (Appendix C) to ensure they are aware that while their parent or caregiver agreed to their participation, they were in no way obligated to participate. Further, participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any point during survey completion as well skip questions they did not wish to answer. The assent form also informed them of the purpose of the research, general information about what they were going to be asked. When the participant agreed to assent for participation they agreed that they had read the assent letter, understood that they could leave the survey at any time without penalty, that they would answer the questions honestly and to the best of their ability and that a parent or caregiver they trust had given permission for their participation.

**Data storage and analysis.** The records of this study were kept confidential and neither the participants nor their caregivers were asked to provide identifying information such as a name, email address or phone number. The records created for the sake of data analysis included a master list of survey responses that were kept on a password protected computer and could only be viewed by the researcher and a data analysis assistant who signed a confidentiality agreement. After the period of one year, all survey data will be removed from computer storage and any other records will be destroyed.

**Addressing risk.** While the intent of the research committee and Institutional Review Board was to reduce potential risk to participants, the final measure to protect the adolescent respondents from risk was the creation of two additional resources guides; one for parents (Appendix E) and one for the adolescent participants (Appendix F). These resource guides were created in case parents or participants were in need of further support. They also encouraged discussion between parents or caregivers and their child regarding the use of the internet and social networking, and how to stay safe online. They also encouraged adolescents to address questions or concerns about something or someone that felt unsafe online with an adult they trust.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

In any research study, there are strengths and limitations to consider and discuss as a way to create awareness of what the study can and cannot achieve. For this research in particular, there are inherent strengths and limitations that come with the recruitment method and the survey population as well as implication for professionals, such as clinical social workers.

**Strengths.**

*Seeking adolescent voices.* This study found it important to seek a direct adolescent sample to gain a better understanding of how they view their experiences with social networks and self-esteem. Staying consistent with social work values, the researcher wanted to empower adolescents to speak with their own voice giving them an opportunity represent themselves. Adolescence is a time in which identity is beginning to be formed and gaining autonomy has great importance. For these reasons, it was important to hear from adolescents about their experiences rather than relying on parents, caregivers, school social workers or other adolescent professionals to speak about adolescent experiences in adult voices.

*Creating a Facebook page.* There is a both a strength and limitation in the creation of a public Facebook page where the survey link will be located. While it does limit the audience the survey will access, a Facebook page will target most directly the ideal participant group. Adolescents have been noted to be the most prominent users of social networking and therefore, their participation and tendency to “share” in their friend network will solicit the participation of their peers (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

One drawback of this method however, is that adolescents may be deterred from doing the survey due to the fact that they have to gain caregiver permission. This presents a challenge for a few reasons: they may not want to take the time to discuss their participation with their parents, they may not want their parents to know they are on Facebook or they may not be exposed to notifications for the study thus removing their ability to participate.



**Limitations.**

*Exclusion of non-Facebook users.* Being a member and user of Facebook is necessary for the participation in the study and therefore, inherently excludes adolescents that are not users of Facebook, but may experience well-being or self-esteem distress due to influence of their peer group. Though it would be important to know how the experiences of users and nonusers may be the same as well as different, this information is outside the scope of this research study and the knowledge it seeks to gain.

*Measurement tool.* Continuing the Expansion of potential limitations of this research, it is also important to note that the measuring tool for this study is self-made and intended to capture the basic elements of well-being and self-esteem discussed in the research. Therefore, this study relies on the expertise of those already researched in the field as well as the experiences of the researcher. It should also be noted that research on social-networking is fairly new and effectively accessing the intended participant audience can be a challenge. There had been little research done in the field of social networking involving the age range of this study which presents two factors: first a strength in that, there is a need for the voices of young adolescents to represent their experiences with social networking and second, being a limitation due to the challenge in gaining caregiver permission for adolescent participation present.

**Implications for clinical social workers.** Strengths and limitations aside, there are several implications this research has on the field of clinical social work. Furthering the understanding of adolescent practitioners regarding their knowledge and understanding of an adolescents desire to use social networks as well as the importance that is placed on peer group acceptance in these venues will enhance their abilities to

practice effectively with this population. The profession of social work is a field that takes pride in empirically supported treatment methods and providing the most effective interventions and evidence based practices in work with clients. Being able to more fully understand the connections youth are making online can inform the treatment and care that is given to adolescent clients. Understanding that connectedness to their peer group online can be equally important as other aspects of adolescent lifestyle, allows social work practitioners to not only to make better connections with their adolescent clients, but also allows them to empower their clients to make healthy and positive choices in every facet that might influence their development of positive well-being and a concrete identity.

## **Findings**

As a way to develop and observe the findings of this research, the following section will discuss the responses provided by participants to the survey tool ( $n=30$ ). The presentation of the findings based on the data will be broken in subsections to represent the major ideas of the study: demographics, social networking, tasks of adolescence, identity development on the internet and overall well-being. In each section, questions related to the topic area will be presented and evaluated for outcomes to better understand how the variables are related to the research question and hypothesis of this study. Table 1 represents which questions from the survey tool (Appendix A) were operationalized in each area.

Table 1

*Operationalized Survey Questions*

Major themes	Related questions
Demographics:	<p>What is your age? How do you identify your gender?</p>
Social networking:	<p>Membership</p> <p>How many friends do you have on Facebook? How many do you know offline and only from Facebook?</p> <p>Social connectedness</p> <p>Using Facebook helps me connect with my friends Facebook helps me feel closer to my friends Using Facebook influences how I feel about myself (free response)</p>
Tasks of Adolescence:	<p>Separation and individuation:</p> <p>Having my own profile gives me a sense of freedom.</p> <p>“Sameness”</p> <p>I feel that my Facebook friends like to do the same things I do</p> <p>Peer group approval</p> <p>I feel the number of friends I have on Facebook influences how much my friends offline like me I feel using Facebook show my friends that people like me</p>
Identity development on the internet:	<p>Do you have a photo of yourself on your profile? Are there other photos of you posted on your profile page? I have changed information about myself so my Facebook friends would like me more I feel good/bad when others post photos I am in I feel good/bad when others post photos I am not in</p>
Overall well-being:	<p>Offline friendships:</p> <p>I feel I have many close friends in my life offline I believe I am important to my friends offline Most of the time I feel___about the friendships I have offline</p> <p>Facebook friendships:</p> <p>I feel I am important to my Facebook friends Most of the time I feel___about my Facebook friendships I feel good/bad about photo tagging, friend requests, status updates, wall posting and private messages</p>

To evaluate the research question of whether Facebook influences the well-being and self-esteem in 13, 14 and 15 year old adolescents, this study created an original survey instrument for participants to assess their online and offline friend networks. Prior to beginning the recruitment process this study hypothesized that the participants who reported having positive associations with their friend network on Facebook would respond as having more positive qualities of overall well-being and self-esteem. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study stated that there was no relationship between positive associations with Facebook friend networks and overall qualities of well-being and self-esteem. While there were several qualities that contributed to overall well-being and self-esteem, this study focused on social connectedness and closeness to friends as the vital qualities to assess the outcomes of this research (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009).

### **Recruitment**

The initial launch of this study began February 29, 2012 and completed April 9, 2012 giving potential participants 40 days to take part in the online survey. Due to low recruitment, 24 of the 30 survey responses were obtained through direct access to two voluntary community agencies. These agencies distributed the survey in paper format to youth in their after school program who volunteered to participate. The remaining four responses were obtained using the online Facebook event page and email bulletin through the University of St. Thomas (Appendix D). Participants were required to be of age 13, 14 or 15 and be a member of Facebook.

## **Data Analysis**

After recruitment was concluded and the data was entered, Predictive Analytics SoftWare (PASW) was used to complete a series of descriptive and inferential statistics to assess for findings related to the research question and hypothesis. Due to the fact that the survey instrument was built using Likert Scale questions, the variables in this study are ordinal variables. Specific modes of data analyzing are designated for ordinal variables and therefore, descriptive statistics will be presented in the form of frequency distributions and inferential statistics will be assessed using a chi-square analysis. Frequency distributions display how often answers to specific variables occurred in both count and percent while chi-squares demonstrate a relationship between two variables by presenting associations between variables through cross tabulation as well as presenting a p-value. The p-value demonstrates whether the variables are statistically significant to one another and a determination is made regarding the relationship based on whether the value is greater than or less than .05. Before beginning any tests for relationships, the first step was to understand the demographics of the data.

**Demographics.** To understand the lens in which the data presented, it was important to understand how the participants varied in age as well as gender. To assess for these qualities within the data, the frequency distribution demonstrated that while participants could be of age 13, 14 or 15, 19 of respondents comprising 63.3% were 13 years of age. In addition, 70% percent of the survey participants were female. Table 2 displays the numeric and percentage distribution of age and gender in this study.

Table 2  
*Age and Gender Distribution*

		<i>n=30 (%)</i>
<b>Age</b>		
	13	19 (63.3%)
	14	7 (23.3%)
	15	4 (13.3%)
<b>Gender</b>		
	Female	21(70%)
	Male	9 (30%)

**Social networking.** An adolescent's draw to a social network like Facebook is grounded in several qualities. To understand elements like membership and social connectedness, the survey tool presented questions for which adolescents self-assessed their perceptions of themselves and their friend network.

**Membership.** To evaluate the aspect of membership on social networks in this study, participants were asked to make an estimate of about how many friends they have on Facebook and break their network into friends they know offline and friends they know only through Facebook (Appendix A, Question 7). The results of the question "about how many friends do you have on Facebook" indicate that of 30 responses, the average number of friends reported by this participant group was 481.73. It should be noted however, that the number of friends reported by the response group ranged from 43 to 3,000 generating a standard deviation of 600.203. While the range of the estimated size of friend networks in this study is quite large, of the 30 respondents in this group, 14 participants indicated that they "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that the number of

friends they have on Facebook was important to them. In addition, six more reported that they “neither agree or disagree” with that statement indicating that 71.4% of the respondents in this study showed no preference to having a large Facebook friend network.

After estimating the size of their friend network, respondents were asked “out of those friends, a) how many do you know from your life offline such as from school, church, your neighborhood or activities separate from school and b) how many do you know only from Facebook?” Responses to this question indicated that 28 out of 30 participants comprising 93.3% of the response group knew “all” or “almost all” of their friend network on Facebook in their life offline. In addition, while most of the respondents reported that they knew “all” or “almost all” of their friend network in their life offline, only 17 respondents indicated that they know “none” or “almost none” of their friend network only through Facebook. Table 3 shows a numerical distribution of the responses to these questions.



Table 3

*Online verses Offline Friend Network Encounters*

	<u>In person friendships</u> <i>n=30 (%)</i>	<u>Facebook friendships</u> <i>n=30 (%)</i>
All	13 (43.3%)	6 (20.0%)
Almost all	15 (50.0%)	4 (13.3%)
Very few	2 (6.7%)	3 (10.0%)
Almost none	0 (0.0%)	9 (30.0%)
None	0 (0.0%)	8 (26.7%)

*Note.* In person friendships= the amount of friends in their Facebook respondents know from their life offline such as from school church, their neighborhood or other activities. Facebook friendships= the number of friends in their network that respondents know only through their Facebook use.

***Social connectedness.*** To determine the overall influence of Facebook on aspects of social connectedness, the survey asked respondents whether using Facebook made them feel as if they could get in touch with their friends any time they wanted (Appendix A, Question 12). With a total response rate of 28 out of 30, 22 participants comprising 78.6% of the response group indicated that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” to this statement.

Another way social connectedness was evaluated in this study was through the responses to the question “Facebook helps me feel closer to my friends.” Of the participants in this study, 17 out of the 30 responses, or 60.7%, indicated that participants “strongly agree” or “agree” with this statement. 35.7% of respondents indicated that they “neither agree or disagree” with this statement and further only one respondent reported that they “disagree” with the statement that Facebook helps them feels closer to their friends.

In addition, one respondent offered a qualitative response about the use of Facebook and its influence on how they feel about themselves (Appendix A, Question 26):

*A lot of people that don't have cell phones or other ways to talk to their friends use Facebook. It used to help me get to know my new friends and see and keep up with the things they're doing over the weekend and summer. Even though I don't agree with some of the things that people say, it helps me keep in touch and stay updated.*

**Tasks of adolescence.** To evaluate how participants in this study are engaging in the developmental tasks of adolescence such as separation and individuation, quest for sameness and peer group approval, several questions were operationalized.

***Separation and individuation.*** First, to determine whether Facebook use gives respondents a sense of individuality and separation from their families and caregivers, respondents were asked whether having their own Facebook profile gave them a sense of freedom (Appendix A, Question 13). Out of the respondent group, 28 out of 30 responses were recorded; four indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement, 11 indicated that they “agree”, eight expressed that they “neither agree or disagree” and five stated that they “disagree” with the statement that having a Facebook profile gives them a sense of freedom. The various responses to this question may be due to several factors and do not allow for any generalizations about the data set however, it is worth noting that 15 respondents comprising 53.6% of the participant group in this study did indicate that having a Facebook profile gives them a sense of freedom.

***Quest for “sameness”.*** Another task that adolescents seek during this developmental stage is a feeling of “sameness” with their peer group. In this study, survey participants were asked to evaluate the statement “I feel that my Facebook friends

like to do the same things as I do” as a way to assess feelings of “sameness” within this adolescent respondent group. Of those that answered the question totaling 28 out of 30 responses, four respondents indicated that they “strongly agree”, ten stated that they “agree”, nine respondents stated that they “neither agree or disagree”, and five indicated that they “disagree” with the statement that their Facebook friends like to do the same things as they do. In looking at the data, it appears that half of the respondent group indicated that their Facebook friend network shared their interests while the other half were neutral or disagreed with the statement.

*Peer group approval.* As youth mature into the stage of adolescence and they begin to individuate and seek out “sameness”, their mental state shifts placing a large focus of attention on acceptance within their peer group (Calvert, 2002; Erikson, 1993). To understand more about how Facebook influences feelings of being liked by their peer group, participants were asked to evaluate two statements. First, respondents evaluated whether the number of friends they have on Facebook influences how much their friends offline like them. Out of the 28 responses to this question, six participants indicated that they either “strongly agreed” or “agreed,” eight respondents stated that they “neither agree or disagree” and 14 respondents either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement that the number of friends they have on Facebook influences how much their friends offline like them (Appendix A, Question, 9).

In addition, survey participants were asked whether they believed using Facebook showed others that people liked them. In response to this statement, 28 participants provided their answer indicating that two respondents “strongly agreed,” five respondents “agreed,” ten respondents stated that they “neither agree or disagree,” eight indicated that

they “disagreed” and three stated that they “strongly disagreed.” Data for this survey question indicates that a majority of respondents comprising 75% revealed that they either had no preference or “disagreed” that using Facebook shows their peer group that other people like them.

**Identity Development and the Internet.** Though this study did not directly seek identity development through the use of Facebook, pretending online is one major way that adolescents engage in this process (Gross 2004; Calvert 2002). Being that many adolescents have an online profile it was important for this study to understand how basic functions of Facebook such as profile photos, photo tagging and profile information are being utilized by the respondent group.

To gain a better understanding of whether the respondent group engaged in pretending online and how that might play a role in their self-esteem and well-being, the survey asked respondents whether they have changed information about themselves so that their Facebook friends would like them more. Of the 28 participants who answered this question, 24 respondents comprising 85.7% responded “no” to this question. This response rate indicates that a majority of adolescents in this study have not engaged in altering information about themselves to feel more appealing to other Facebook users. While it should be noted that 4 participants responded with an answer of “yes” to this question, no further questions were asked and therefore it is unknown which aspects of self they have altered and to what extent.

In addition to information sharing in a profile, photos are another way adolescents disclose information about themselves online and Facebook is a major forum for photo sharing. Participants of this study were asked whether they had a photo of themselves

posted on their profile page and 29 out of 30 respondents answered “yes” to having a photo of themselves posted on their main profile page. In addition, respondents were also asked whether they had additional photos of themselves online that they have been “tagged” in. Out of the 29 responses to this question, 26 participants indicated that they have other tagged photos of themselves linked to their profiled page. Table 4 breaks down the frequencies for information and photo sharing in this study.

Table 4

*Distribution of Information Sharing and Photo Posting on Facebook Profiles*

	Yes <i>n=28-30 (%)</i>	No <i>n=28-30 (%)</i>
Changed information	4 (14.3%)	24 (85.7%)
Photo on profile page	29 (96.7%)	1 (3.3%)
Other photos	26 (89.7%)	3 (10.3%)

*Note.* Not all respondents provided an answer to each question (*n=28-30*). Changed Information = I have changed information about myself so that my friends on Facebook would like me more. Photo on profile page = Do you have a photo of yourself posted on your Facebook profile page? Other photos = Are there other photos of you posted on your profile page that others have tagged you in?

While many respondents in this study indicated that they have photos posted on their main profile page, this study also asked respondents about whether specific functions of Facebook make them feel good or bad (Appendix A, Question 25). The use of the word “good” in the study was a way to represent positive feelings in language consistent with the survey population. Likewise the use of the word “bad” was used to represent negative feelings. Survey participants were asked whether they associated “good” or “bad” with photo tagging on Facebook. Out of the 27 responses to this question, 23 respondents indicated that they feel good when other users post photos they are in. Additionally, 21 out of 27 participants indicated that they also feel good when

others post photos they are not in. In general, a majority of respondents indicated that they associated positive feelings with photo sharing (see Table 6).

**Adolescent well-being.** The first section of the findings related to social networks revealed that 93.3% of respondents in this study know all or almost all of their friends in their Facebook network from their life offline (Table 2). This is important to note because using Facebook to maintain offline friendships is vital to the development of positive well-being in online adolescents. Therefore this section will look at various aspects of the respondent group's offline and Facebook friendships.

**Offline friendships.** Participants of this study were asked whether they believed they have many close friends in their offline life. Out of the 29 respondents who answered this statement, 27 comprising 93.1% of the participant group indicated that they felt they had many close friends in their offline life. In addition, participants were asked whether they felt those relationships were important. Results indicated that 27 out of the 29 respondents indicated that they believed their offline friendships were important. Based on the data that many of the participants in this study indicated that they have friendships in their offline life that are important to them, it was important to assess whether the respondent group associated positive feelings with those friendships.

To test for a relationship between offline friend networks and positive feelings the questions "I believe I am important to the friends I have offline" and "most of the time I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about the friendships I have offline" were evaluated using a chi-square analysis (Appendix A, Question 20 & 23). These questions are relevant to demonstrating a relationship between offline friendships and self-esteem and well-being because one of the questions asked respondents to evaluate their feelings using the terms: happy,

accepted, satisfied, lonely and sad. For the purposes of this study, the terms happy, accepted and satisfied were intended to be associated with more positive feelings about the friendships while the terms lonely and sad were associated with more negative feelings.

The cross-tabulation of the variables regarding feelings about offline friendships and whether respondents felt important in those friendships revealed that 16 respondents indicated that most of the time they were happy about the friendships they had off line. Of those 16, eight stated that they strongly believe they are important to their friends, six agreed with the statement and two indicated that they neither agreed or disagreed. Of the four respondents who indicated that they felt accepted in their friendships offline, three stated that they agreed they were important to their friends and one person disagreed. In addition, 6 respondents indicated that most of the time they feel satisfied with their friendships with three agreeing that they are important and three having no preference either way. Out of the 28 participants who responded to this question, 26 demonstrated that they hold positive feelings about their friendships offline. The remaining two respondents indicated that they feel lonely in their friendships but agreed that they were important in those friendships. Table 5 displays the numerical values of these relationships.

Though the table reveals that there is a relationship between these two variables, the inferential test also shows that these variables have a p-value of .027. With a p-value less than .05, the relationship between these two survey questions is confirmed to be statistically significant therefore, it can be concluded that close personal friendships in

the lives of early adolescents are influential in the development of positive self-esteem and well-being.

Table 5

*Relationship Between Offline Friendships and Feelings*

Offline Friendships	Feelings					Total
	Happy	Accepted	Satisfied	Lonely	Sad	
Strongly agree	8	0	0	0	0	8
Agree	6	3	3	2	0	14
Neither agree or disagree	2	0	3	0	0	5
Disagree	0	1	0	0	0	1
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	16	4	6	2	0	<i>n</i> =28

Note. Feeling s= Most of the time I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about the friendships I have offline. Offline friendships = I believe I am important to the friends I have offline

**Online Facebook friendships.** Though the data of this study supports previous research in that it confirmed the relationship between offline friendships and overall well-being in adolescents, the intention and focus of this study was to examine the influence of Facebook on the same factors. To understand more fully how adolescents in this study felt about Facebook and specific functions built into the network, participants responded to a number of statements with the evaluation of “good” or “bad” based on how they feel when they happen (see Table 6).



Table 6

*Distribution of Facebook Functions and Associated Feelings of Good or Bad*

	Good	Bad
	<i>n</i> =26-28 (%)	<i>n</i> =26-28 (%)
When others post photos I am in	23 (85.2%)	4 (14.8%)
When others post photos I am not in	21 (77.8%)	6 (22.2%)
When others “like” my status update	27 (100%)	0 (0%)
When others comment on my status update	26 (96.3%)	1 (3.7%)
When others “tag” me in their status update	26 (96.3%)	1 (3.7%)
When others write on my “wall”	27 (100%)	0 (0%)
When someone sends me a private message	21 (80.8%)	5 (19.2%)
When I am invited to an event on Facebook	25 (92.6%)	2 (7.4%)
When someone I do not know sends me a “friend request” on Facebook	9 (32.1%)	19 (63.3%)
When someone I do know sends me a “friend request” on Facebook	26 (92.9%)	2 (7.1%)
When someone posts a comment on my Wall	27 (96.4%)	1 (3.6%)
When I post on the wall of one of my Facebook friends	26 (96.3%)	1 (3.7%)
When someone “likes” or comments on a Wall post I make	27 (96.4%)	1 (3.6%)

*Note:* *n*=26-28. Respondents were able to skip over some questions and were not required to give an answer for all. Some respondents also indicated that they had “good” and “bad” feelings for multiple questions but were forced to choose between the response options.

In addition to evaluating the specific functions of Facebook and the feelings participants associated with them, inferential statistics were used to test for a relationship between feelings related to friendships on Facebook and whether participants believed they were important to their online friend network. Similar to the inferential test that analyzed the relationship between offline friend networks, participants used the words “happy,” “accepted,” “satisfied,” “lonely” and “sad” to evaluate their feelings about their Facebook friend network. Again, the options happy, accepted and satisfied were intended to represent positive feelings with lonely and sad intended to represent negative feelings.

Displayed in table 7 are the results of the chi-square analysis. The test demonstrates that 12 respondents indicated that most of the time, they feel happy about their friendships on Facebook. Of those 12 respondents, five “strongly agree” that they were important in those friendships, 4 “agree” and 3 responded as “neither agree or disagree.” Of the 4 respondents who stated that they felt accepted in their Facebook friendships, two indicated that they “neither agree or disagree” that they were important in those friendships and an additional two stated that they “disagree” with the statement. Finally, 12 respondents stated that most of the time they felt satisfied in their Facebook friendships with a majority showing that they were neutral or disagreed that they were important in those friendships.

In addition to the numerical results of the chi-square test, the data was shown to have a p-value of .031. With this statistically significant p-value, the results indicate that these two variables have a significant relationship to each other. Considering the significant p-value paired with data that all respondents indicated that they associate positive feelings with their Facebook friend networks, it can be concluded that Facebook

plays a role in the development of positive well-being and self-esteem in the adolescents of this study.

Table 7

*Relationship Between Facebook Friendships and Feelings*

Facebook Friendships	Feelings					Total
	Happy	Accepted	Satisfied	Lonely	Sad	
Strongly agree	5	0	0	0	0	5
Agree	4	0	1	0	0	5
Neither agree or disagree	3	2	6	0	0	11
Disagree	0	2	4	0	0	6
Strongly disagree	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	12	4	12	0	0	<i>n</i> =28

*Note.* Feelings = Most of the time I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about the friendships I have on Facebook. Facebook friendships = I believe I am important to my Facebook friends.

Though the statistical analysis of the data indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between Facebook and feelings of value in online friendships, it is important that note that while many adolescents may in general have positive experiences on Facebook, there are times when encounters with individuals in a friend network can overshadow those feelings. One respondent offers this insight about their experiences on Facebook:

*I wouldn't say that I have had any problems with something that I have posted on Facebook; my friends are usually kind and supportive about what I post. However, I cannot say that that is true for others. I am friends with another 15-year-old girl on Facebook with whom I used to attend school with. She, along with a friend of hers, posted some rather inappropriate photos on her profile and was incessantly harassed as a result of it. Needless to say, the pictures were taken down within a day of the time they were posted. From what I have heard, the girl who posted the photos took this whole debacle pretty badly and missed a day of school due to bullying from her peers. I cannot imagine that her self-esteem was boosted... In any event, I suppose what I am trying to say is that if Facebook has any real impact on the way that you feel about yourself, you are either taking it to personally or what you are posting is inappropriate. There are exceptions to this (out right cyberbullying, for one), but for the most part this theory holds true.*

In addition, another respondent stated “*Facebook makes me feel insecure.*”

In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate that the adolescent participant group is not only engaged in their online friend network but that they attest to the key areas of Facebook and overall well-being in the areas addressed: social networking, tasks of adolescence, identity and the internet and self-esteem development. To gain a better understanding of how these findings are applicable and significant, it is important to assess how they fit in with previous research as well as explore areas in which more research is needed.

## **Discussion**

To recapture the intentions of this study, the central focus of social connectedness and closeness to friends as the cornerstone of well-being and self-esteem in adolescents was encompassed in the research question: does Facebook influence well-being and self-esteem among early adolescents? This study hypothesized that the participants who reported having positive associations with their friend network on Facebook would respond as having more positive qualities of overall well-being and self-esteem. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study stated that there is not a relationship between positive associations with Facebook friend networks and overall qualities of well-being and self-esteem. Based on the data provided and the assessment of the descriptive statistics, this study concludes that the null hypothesis is rejected.

In the following discussion, the data analysis will be integrated with previous research to assess how the findings of this study justify the rejection of the null hypothesis and support the inference that Facebook has a positive impact on the self-esteem and overall well-being in adolescents. In addition to discussing the four main ideas encompassed by this study, adolescent well-being, tasks of adolescence, identity development on the internet and overall well-being, the research findings will be used to assess the studies strengths and limitations as well as how it can be applied to the field of clinical social work and future research.

### **Social Networking**

For many adolescents, the draw to social networks rests solely in the opportunity for adolescents to become immersed in a group of peers and likeminded individuals fostering feelings of connection and belonging (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). For some,

simply being a member of a social network provides a means of belonging and connection. Research indicates that social connectedness and closeness to friends is a large determinant of overall well-being in adolescents (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009).

**Membership.** Membership is one of the qualities that attract individuals to social networks. While membership as it ties to social networks cannot be readily defined in research, one aspect of membership that was brought forward was the number of friends each member has in their online network. This study asked respondents to estimate the number of friends they have on Facebook and participants provided a wide range of responses. One had as many as 3,000 while another as few as 43. Even though neither previous research nor this study speaks to whether the size of a friend network influences overall well-being in an adolescent, it is notable that 71.4% of the respondent group was not concerned with the size of their friend network. In addition, 63.3% of respondents reported they get “bad” feelings when someone they do not know sends them a friend request.

In addition, research indicates that while many members report having a large friend network, they do not interact with most of those “friends” outside of the social networking site (Reich, 2010). While this is a finding presented in previous research of social network membership, 93.3% of respondents in this study indicated that they know almost all of their friend network from their life offline. Several respondents who answered that they know all or almost all of their Facebook friend network in their offline

life also indicated that they know most of their online friend network solely through Facebook. This mixed finding allows for several interpretations, one being that some respondents who indicated they know “all” or “almost all” of their friend network in their offline life as well as only through Facebook may indeed know each person in their friend network from school, but only have contact with them through Facebook due to belonging to different social groups in the offline setting.

Together these findings suggest that most adolescents who use Facebook are not using it to contact those they do not know, but rather reinforces the idea that adolescents are using social networking to stay connected with their offline friend group. Because one of the main roles of social networks according to Reich (2010) is to facilitate connection with others, it was important to understand further how respondents perceive this function in their own Facebook experiences.

**Social connectedness.** Through the responses to the survey it became clear that a majority of respondents believe that Facebook allowed them to get in touch with their friends anytime they want to. In addition respondents also disclosed that they believe Facebook helps them feel closer to their friends. The majority response rate of this study paired with previous research that social connectedness is a vital component to adolescent well-being, allows for the conclusion that Facebook in terms of social connectedness and membership contributes to the overall well-being of the adolescent group in this study (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009).

## **Tasks of Adolescence**

During the developmental stage of adolescence, youth begin to learn to be self-reliant, separating and individuating themselves on a quest for “sameness” with their peer group (Levy-Warren, 1996; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The mind of an adolescent becomes an ideological one that is eager to be confirmed by peers on their search for identity (Calvert, 2002; Erikson, 1999).

**Separation and individuation.** To assess whether participants in this study felt using Facebook gave them a sense of separation, respondents evaluated their response to whether using Facebook gave them a sense of freedom. It became clear in analysis that respondents in this study held mixed associations with Facebook and freedom. Though there were not an overwhelming number of respondents that attested to this being true in their own experience, there is a chance that adolescents do not feel freedom online because of restrictions parents put on their use. This could also be due to who is in their friend network, how they use Facebook and its functions as well as their frequency of use. While there are potentially several reasons for why respondents in this study did not provide overwhelming evidence that Facebook fosters feelings of freedom, it was important to note that at least half of the respondents associated feelings of freedom with their Facebook use.

**Quest for “sameness”.** Another task that adolescents seek during this developmental stage is a feeling of “sameness” with their peer group. This feeling of “sameness” can come in many forms such as personal style, haircut, activities, interests or peer group affiliations. In this study, survey participants were asked to evaluate the



statement “I feel that my Facebook friends like to do the same things as I do” as a way to assess feelings of “sameness” within this adolescent respondent group.

Based on the data collected in this study and in comparing it to previous research on “sameness” during the stage of adolescence, no conclusions can be made about whether the respondent group in this study seeks feelings of “sameness” within their offline peer group or Facebook friend network. This is due to the fact that the respondent group was divided almost evenly in their responses to the statement about whether their friend network shares their interests.

**Peer group approval.** As adolescents seek out the approval of their peer group, it becomes important for them to be as similar and immersed in that group as they can. To understand how this played out for the respondent group of the study, they participants were asked whether they believe the number of friends they have on Facebook influences whether they are liked offline and whether they believed using Facebook showed others that people like them. Both of these questions were valid in the evaluation of the developmental task of peer approval because they allowed this study to further understand whether the respondent group believed that Facebook played a role in peer group acceptance. Based on the results of the data from these two questions, it can be concluded that this respondent group did not perceive the number of friends a user has on Facebook or the general use of Facebook to influence whether they are liked or accepted by others in their peer group. While previous research indicates that adolescents seek peer group approval and engage in social rituals as a way to be integrated with that group, the findings of this study do not indicate that Facebook use facilitates peer group integration or approval.

## **Identity Development and the Internet**

As adolescents begin to seek out the approval of their peers, they also begin a journey of discovering their own identity. One major way that adolescents are engaging in identity development online is through the use of experimentation and pretending (Calvert, 2002; Gross, 2004; Valkenberg, 2008). While this study did not seek to understand how Facebook is influential in identity development and pretending online, previous research indicates that resolving the crisis of identity is a major task of adolescence and in turn can play a vital role in an adolescent's self-esteem and thus their overall well-being (Erikson, 1993; Calvert, 2002; Gross 2004; Valkenberg, 2008).

After analyzing the data it became clear that the adolescent respondent group in this study have not engaged in changing information about themselves to appear more appealing to their Facebook network. This finding was inconsistent with previous research which found that half of their respondent group had pretended online (Gross, 2004). While most of the respondent group in this study indicated that they had not pretended online, there were 4 respondents who indicated they had engaged in this behavior. Even through this was the case, no further information was gathered about what information they had changed, reasons for why they changed information or the extent to which the information was false. In addition to information sharing on profile pages, photo posting and sharing is another way adolescents disclose information about themselves on Facebook. A substantial number of respondents indicated that they not only have a photo of themselves on their main profile page, but that they also have other photos of themselves linked to their Facebook profile.

When adolescents were asked to evaluate 13 functions of Facebook based on whether they feel good or bad when they occur, most of the respondents indicated that they associate good feelings with photo sharing online. This finding paired with the others and previous research indicates that disclosure in the form of photo sharing is something that the respondent group engages in, values and associates positive feelings with.

### **Adolescent Well-Being**

As stated previously, there are several factors cited as being influential to the overall well-being in adolescents including: loneliness, depression, stress, self-concept, personal and social identity, intimacy, autonomy and social connectedness (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, P.M. & Peter, 2007; van der Aa, Overbeek, Engels, Scholte, Meerkerk & Van den Eijnden, 2009). While there is little distinction between what fosters positive well-being and how that is the same or distinct from self-esteem, researchers believe that well-being and self-esteem for adolescents are directly linked and therefore factors of well-being can also be considered as factors of self-esteem (Valkenberg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Previous research also indicates that internet use to maintain existing friendships can foster positive overall well-being for online adolescents (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002; Gross, 2004; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenberg & Peter, 2009; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006).

**Offline friendships.** The findings of this study related to social networks revealed that 93.3% of respondents in this study know all or almost all of their friends in their

Facebook network from their life offline. This is important to note because using Facebook to maintain offline friend friendships is vital to the development of positive well-being in online adolescents and therefore looking at other factors of the offline lives of the participants was important to investigate.

After revealing that most of the respondents in this study believed that they had many important friendships in their offline life and that most of the time they associated positive emotions with these friendships, an inferential statistic was used to test for a relationship. The value of this test indicated that the relationship between these variables was significant and that close personal friendships in the offline lives of adolescents was influential to their development of positive self-esteem and well-being. This finding was consistent with previous research that adolescents who have strong ties to their peer group offline will seek out opportunities to connect with that same peer group online which contributes to positive peer-group psychological well-being (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002). The finding that offline friendships is related to the well-being of adolescents in this study also reinforces the findings of Valkenberg and Peter (2007) that adolescents are using the internet to enhance interpersonal connections with offline friend networks that are of value to them. After establishing that offline relationships were important to the adolescent respondent group, the next step was to understand whether these same factors held true in their friendships online.

**Facebook Friendships.** In most social networks, specific functions are built in to foster connection and community building within a network. On Facebook, these specific functions are grounded in photo sharing, wall posting, messaging, status updates and friend requests. While adolescents are using these functions to serve their own purposes,

each function has the potential to foster specific feelings and reactions. Each respondent was asked to evaluate 13 specific functions of Facebook and assess whether they felt good or bad when they happened. After analyzing the data, the first thing noted about the responses is that a majority of participants answered “good” to most of the questions except the statement about how they feel when someone they do not know sends them a friend request.

The findings regarding the response “good” associated with the functions of Facebook indicates that in general, most of the participants have positive feelings related to their membership. Specifically, they associate the response of “good” with photo sharing, wall postings, status updates, and comments from those in their friend network. While it appears that the respondents did not associate these same feelings with users they did not know, in general the functions of Facebook that keep users included and connected with their friend network generate positive feelings and associations. This finding continues to support the notion that social connectedness, including the use of online forums such as Facebook, can generate positive feelings of well-being reflected in an adolescents ability to form and maintain close friendships (Valkenberg, Peter & Schouten, 2006).

In addition to assessing the statements about their online and offline friend network, some respondents provided a written response to how using Facebook influences the way they feel about themselves. These comments from participants paired with the findings of the research demonstrate that users can have both positive and negative encounters on Facebook. While the comments provide insight into how Facebook use can generate negative feelings, the findings of this study seem to show that

adolescents in general are having positive experiences with their online friend network and its ability to keep them socially connected to their peer group.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

After looking at the data and assessing it for relevant findings, a question arises of what the study teaches. Because research on social networks is still quite new and emerging, it was important to look at common factors and assess how they are all integrated. Based on the reoccurring themes of previous research, this study used the four main ideas of social networking, tasks of adolescence, identity development on the internet and well-being to assess the hypothesis and research question. In looking at the information provided by the respondents, it appears that they are using social networks to connect with friends from their life offline through friend requesting, information sharing and photo posting. Respondents also indicated that they know most of their Facebook friends from their schools, neighborhoods, churches or other activities and that even though most of their friend network on Facebook do not share similar interests, participants still believed that their online and offline friend networks were important.

Even though it appeared that respondents were associating positive feelings with their Facebook use, it was important to test this relationship using the data. After running a second inferential statistic to assess the relationship between the variables of believing they were important to their Facebook friends and respondent feelings associated with their Facebook friend network, the test value confirmed that these variables shared a relationship. Because the variables shared a relationship and respondents demonstrated that there was a link between Facebook and overall positive feelings, the null hypothesis of this study that stated there was no relationship is rejected. In summary, the respondent

group of this study indicated that their use of Facebook fosters social connectedness generating positive feelings and therefore, Facebook plays a positive role in the development of positive well-being in adolescents.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Inherent in every study are a set of strengths and limitations that inform the development of the research as well as its outcomes. For this study, there were strengths in the research design and its fit to the survey population. However, there were limitations in the information the survey allowed for as well as generating responses to provide sufficient data.

**Strengths.** While qualitative data and interviewing participants allows for specific information to be sought and makes room for elaboration, this method is not always effective with the 13, 14 and 15 year old population of this study. Because most of the previous research on social networks samples late adolescents and young adults, this study wanted to understand how the young group of adolescents who are the most prominent users of social networks understand their experiences.

Often, adolescents in this age group have trouble naming their experiences, giving their experience voice in a way that can be used in research and often have a difficulty making links between their external experiences and internal feelings. With this in mind, a survey tool was a way to access this population and gather information needed to answer the research question while still allowing adolescents to give an authentic voice to their experiences. The quantitative model used in this study was the most ideal way to allow the participants group to evaluate their experiences. In addition, numerical data speaks for itself and allows for the statistical process. While qualitative data is based in

the interpretations of the researcher, quantitative data is calculated and conclusions are made based on the value of the relationships.

### **Limitations.**

While a quantitative research design allowed for this study to effectively access the survey population in the most efficient way possible, there were recruitment challenges and therefore it is arguable whether enough data was gathered to generalize the findings. Facebook hosts over 6 million users worldwide and this study accessed only 30 of those voices. While not all of those 6 million users fall into the age range for this study, a more direct recruitment approach such as emailing the link, phone surveys and adolescent access through the schools paired with the recruitment methods of this study would have generated a more notable and substantial sample size.

In addition to the recruitment challenges, the survey in itself brought about some limitations that were not foreseen. While the survey allowed the study to access the voices of the respondent group, there were questions that could not be answered. During the data analysis process there were clarifying questions that arose as a result of the findings that were produced. Because of the nature of the research design, it was not within the parameters to go back to the respondent group and gather more information. This is where future research in the field can help fill in the gaps and generate more conclusions about the role of Facebook in the well-being and self-esteem of adolescents.

### **Implications for Future Research**

When this study began, it became apparent the research on social networks was emerging with almost no research being available about the role and use of Facebook. It also became apparent that early adolescents, because of access challenges, were a rare



group to gather data about. These are the first two implications for future research: more investigation about Facebook and its role in the lives of 13, 14 and 15 year old adolescents.

In addition, further information about the role of Facebook and self-esteem could be illuminated by asking more in-depth questions about the specific functions of Facebook. The measurement tool of this study asked questions that covered several areas and functions to gain general knowledge about the role of Facebook in adolescent self-esteem and well-being. Often, adolescents cannot give voice to how much time they are spending online or why they are attracted to be friends with those that are in their network however, they can talk about their experiences. For these reason, a survey was more applicable to this study than other methods of data collection however, exploring functions of Facebook one at a time would cast more light on how adolescents perceive and understand their online experiences. For example, most adolescents indicated that they felt good when they and others shared photos on Facebook. Building on this finding to understand what about photo sharing makes them feel good would give light to how this function specifically plays into adolescent self-esteem and well-being. Additional knowledge about well-being and self-esteem would also be informed by gathering information about the other specific functions of Facebook explored in this study such as information sharing on profile pages, comment posting, status updates and friend requests. Lastly, while a survey allows adolescents to give voice to their experiences without having to find the words, a mixed-method design that integrates a focus group would supplement the information gathered and create a more complete picture of the

role of Facebook in the lives of adolescents and how it impacts their overall well-being and self-esteem.

It should also be noted that the survey population of this study created a picture that Facebook in the role of adolescent well-being is a positive one. While it is possible that this finding can be generalized to adolescents over all, there were some respondents of the study the indicated negative feelings can be associated with using Facebook. In addition, not all adolescents experience normative development and as a result their experiences on Facebook may be distinctly different from the respondent group of this study. Youth who have experienced trauma, pathological parental attachment, non-normative social emotional development or other developmental derailments have the potential to experience Facebook in a dominantly negative way. For these youth, Facebook can become a forum for cyberbullying, rumors and gossip generating negative feelings fostering low well-being. With these factors in mind, it would become important for future research to explore how the role of Facebook varies in this population verses the sample in this study. In addition, youth with non-normative development are not always aware that their experiences are maladaptive or different from their peers. Therefore to gain an accurate picture of this population, gathering data using their voices paired with the perspectives of clinicians and professionals serving them would ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness.

In the area of research regarding social networks like Facebook and the role they play in adolescent well-being, there remains a large amount of unknown information. This study sampled an early adolescent population and speculates that that in general they have experienced normative developmental processes. In addition to investigating how

experiences with Facebook might be different in adolescents who have experienced non-normative development, it is possible that older adolescents, specifically between the ages of 16 and 20, may have different experiences and thus produce findings that vary from those of this study. Overall, future research should seek to access adolescents of varying ages, gender, cultural identity, socio-economic status and developmental experiences to understand whether Facebook plays a dominantly positive or negative role in the well-being and self-esteem of youth today.

### **Implications for Social Work**

As the world becomes more connected through the use of Web 2.0, the role of social workers begins to change. The skills we have always practiced still apply and our values to empower our clients, advocate on their behalf and highlight their strengths remains a cornerstone of social work; it is not the values that change, it is how we talk about them and engage with them that alters. Social justice and advocacy work becomes more global with the use of Web 2.0. Interactive media like that of Facebook provides a greater amount of access and allows for more ears to hear the voices of social workers and those we represent.

Social networks and other web 2.0 media also impact that work that social workers do with their clients. More and more of their lives begin to exist online and often times, there is not a distinction between what happens offline and what happens online. Those aspects become interwoven and impact the lives of clients and the boundaries we keep with them. For example, social workers in the schools are not only concerned with the mental health and academic success of students while they are attending school, but aspects from home and occurrences on Facebook are now being carried over into the

school setting impacting their overall success. Facebook alters the way clients, no matter their age, experience life and their world.

Facebook is not a phenomenon specific to the adolescent population. In fact, there are many adults who are highly engaged in the world of Facebook and social media. While the content of their conversations on interactive web may be different in content from that of youth, many adults have come to rely on social media to stay engaged with their friend groups. Ultimately, people no matter their age have a drive to be included and will do what is needed to ensure this takes place. The emergence of interactive web has changed the way this process unfolds for all people. Youth are not the only ones who are learning to send text messages or creating online friend networks. Inclusion and approval are things that people naturally seek out and therefore it is important to be aware that social media and Facebook are impacting the lives of populations outside of adolescents and if social workers are not prepared to be in tune with and understand how influential those online connections can be, our ability to be empathetic, compassionate, social justice seeking, best practiced driven client advocates becomes diminished.

## Conclusion

All in all, as the use of social networks like Facebook continues to gain popularity and dominate the lives of adolescents as well as many other populations, it is important to pay attention to how the internet, interactive web and social networks impact the way we develop self-esteem and well-being. Businesses, trends, social causes, organizations, newspapers, magazines, television networks and shows, music icons and people alike are using social media to gain popularity, momentum and exposure. Now more than ever, the instantaneous access of the internet and social networks dominates the topic of conversation and influences the way people experience the world. The findings of this study indicated that youth associate positive feelings with their ability to connect with friends, but there is question about whether this finding can be generalized and leaves room for the field of research to expand the study of social networks and their influence on self-esteem and well-being development.

While social workers continue to strive to be best practiced and client centered practitioners, they are not the only group of individuals who are being called to attend to the influence of social media. Individuals, communities and society alike have a responsibility to themselves and others to be aware of the influence Facebook and social media play in their own lives as well as the lives of those surrounding them. Whether the experiences people have on social networks is positive or negative, fosters security or insecurity there is room to be aware of how Facebook impacts the relationships we build and cannot replace or repair the developmental processes of life. Human interaction continues to play a vital role in our development as people and while in person relationships will always shape the human experience, Facebook and other modes of

social media modernize how those relationships are defined and change the way we share information about ourselves with the world.

As we move into a future where social media will likely become commonplace and our reliance on computers and smart phones to feed us information grows, it is important to take notice of the things in life that are not “wired” and the value they hold within us. Children, adolescents, young adults, parents and elders are continually learning a new language in order to stay connected and in tune with one another. While Facebook is yet another place these connections occur, it is important to remember that not all of its aspects are negative and that many of us have fully integrated its existence into our everyday human experiences.

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## Appendix A Survey Questions

For the following questions, place a check mark (✓) or “X” on the circle that matches your answer. Please read all questions carefully and choose the answer that best fits how you think and feel.

1. What is your age?

- 13
- 14
- 15
- None of the above

2. Do you use Facebook?

- Yes
- No

3. How do you identify your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do your parents know you use Facebook?

- Yes
- No

5. Do you have a photo of yourself posted on your Facebook profile page?

- Yes
- No

6. Are there other photos of you posted on your profile page that others have tagged you in?

- Yes
- No

7. About how many friends do you have on Facebook? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Out of those friends:

A. How many do you know from your life offline such as from school, church, your neighborhood or activities separate from school?

- All
- Almost All
- Very Few
- Almost None
- None

B. How many do you know only from Facebook?

- All
- Almost All
- Very Few
- Almost None
- None

9. I feel the number of friends I have on Facebook influences how much my friend's offline like me

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. I feel that my Facebook friends like to do the same things as I do

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. The number of friends I have on Facebook is important to me

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. Using Facebook helps me feel like I can get in touch with my friends any time I want to

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. Having my own profile and friend network on Facebook makes me feel like I have freedom

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. I feel using Facebook shows my friends that people like me

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. I feel like I am important to my Facebook friends

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. I feel that my Facebook friends think I am good-looking
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither Agree or Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
17. I have changed information about myself so that my friends on Facebook would like me more
- Yes
  - No
18. Most of the time I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about friendships I have on Facebook.
- Happy
  - Accepted
  - Satisfied
  - Lonely
  - Sad
19. I feel I have many close friends in my life offline (from school, church, my neighborhood or other activities separate from school)
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither Agree or Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
20. I believe I am important to the friends I have offline (from school, church, my neighborhood or other activities separate from school)
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither Agree or Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
21. I think I am a good friend
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither Agree or Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
22. I feel my offline friendships are important
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither Agree or Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree

23. Most of the time I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about the friendships I have offline.

- Happy
- Accepted
- Satisfied
- Lonely
- Sad

24. Facebook helps me feel closer to my friends

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

25. Please answer if you feel “good” or “bad” when the following things happen on Facebook:

When others post photos I am in	Good	Bad
When others post photos I am not in	Good	Bad
When others “like” my status update	Good	Bad
When others comment on my status update	Good	Bad
When others “tag” me in their status update	Good	Bad
When others write on my “wall”	Good	Bad
When someone sends me a private message	Good	Bad
When I am invited to an event on Facebook	Good	Bad
When someone I DO NOT know sends me a “friend request” on Facebook	Good	Bad
When someone I DO know sends me a “friend request” on Facebook	Good	Bad
When someone posts a comment on my Wall	Good	Bad
When I post on the wall of one of my Facebook friends	Good	Bad
When someone “likes” or comments on a Wall post I make	Good	Bad

26. After completing this survey, is there anything you would like to add about how you think using Facebook influences the way you feel about yourself?

## Appendix B Consent to Participate

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student researcher conducting a study that investigates how the use of Facebook influences the well-being and self-esteem of adolescents ages 13, 14, and 15. I am inviting any adolescents living under your guardianship to participate. Please read the following information carefully before giving your consent.

This research study is being facilitated as a research project required for the completion of a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work through St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. All research questions and procedures have been approved by social work professionals serving on the research project committee as well as the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how adolescents ages 13, 14, and 15 are using Facebook, and determine whether their use is influencing their overall well-being and self-esteem. As internet use among the adolescent population continues to grow, it is important for parents and other individuals working with adolescents to know how their lives are being impacted by social networking as well as the risks and rewards that are associated with their membership.

If you agree to let your adolescent participate in their study, I will ask you to do the following things: After you have logged into the web address provided that links you to the Qualtrics website where the online survey is located, you are asked to give your child consent to participate. Following your consent, you will be asked to direct the survey to your adolescent(s) who will be participating in the survey at which point they will answer several survey questions, including information about their age, Facebook membership and experience with their online and offline friend networks. If for any reason, there are questions they do not wish to answer they are able to skip those; they also have the ability to leave the survey at any time should they choose.

While the research is intended to be low in risk to your child, it is important that you are talking with your adolescent about internet safety and their use of Facebook. There are many ways in which you can ensure your child is being safe when online, if you wish to do so. A resource guide for parents will be provided following your consent as well as a resource guide for adolescents following the completion of the online survey. If you feel you or your child is in need of additional support in this matter, it is important to utilize the resources provided. You should also be aware, there are no direct benefits to you or your adolescent for their participation. The research will serve to inform those who work with adolescents and further their understanding of how to best meet the needs of this population.

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Neither you nor your child will be asked to give any identifying information such as a name, email address or phone number. Any published report will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or your child in any way. The records created may include a master list of survey responses that will be kept on a password protected computer and only be viewed by the researcher and an individual who will assist in analyzing statistical information. After the period of one year, all survey data will be removed from computer storage and any other records will be destroyed. All acquired research data will be analyzed and put into a written research report to be presented in May of 2012 to a public audience. A copy of the written research report will also be kept in the archives located at both Universities which may be accessed as a reference by future students completing their own projects.

If you have questions or concerns about the participation of your child in this survey, you may contact the researcher at [researcher email]. You may also contact the person overseeing my research at [research chair contact information].

If you wish to have a copy of this consent form for your records, please print it now. By consenting to allow your adolescent to begin the survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to allow adolescents under your guardianship to participate in this research, with the knowledge that they are free to withdraw their participation at any time without penalty.

***Thank you for your time, participation and support of this research study!***

Sincerely,

[Researcher Name]  
MSW Candidate 2012  
St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas

- 
- Yes, I give my adolescent permission to participate in this research study
- No, I do not wish to allow my adolescent permission to participate in this research study



Appendix C  
Assent to Participate

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student conducting a research study that explores how the use of Facebook influences the well-being and self-esteem of adolescent's ages of 13, 14, and 15, and you are being invited to join in!

This research study is being done as a final project that is required to complete a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work through St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. All of the questions you will answer have been read by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas to make sure that you are kept safe during your participation.

The purpose of this study is to see how adolescent's ages of 13, 14, and 15 are using Facebook, and understand whether using Facebook can influence your well-being and self-esteem. If you agree to take the survey, you will be asked to complete a 26 question survey that will ask you about your age, Facebook membership and experience with your online and offline friend networks. You should know that nobody will not see any of the answers you provide, so you are encouraged to answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability. If there are questions you do not wish to answer during the survey, you make skip those; you may also leave the survey at any time, if you wish to do so.

Even though many people have looked over the survey to make sure you are safe, it is important that you discuss internet safety and using Facebook with an adult you trust. You will get a resource page when you are done answering the survey questions that will give some places to look for information about online safety, social networking and safe internet use. If you are ever online and someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, it is important that you tell someone.

The answers to the questions you provide will be kept secret and you will **NOT** be asked to give any information about yourself including your name, email address or phone number; you will be asked to give your age. The answers you provide will only be seen by the people working on the research study and will be used to complete a research report that will be turned in at the end of this school year. After the report is finished, all of the survey answers you gave will be erased.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the survey, you may contact the researcher at [researcher\_email]. You may also contact the person overseeing my research at [research chair contact information].

If you wish to keep a copy of this assent form, please print it now. By saying “yes” to begin the survey, you admit that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

***Thank you for your time, participation and support of this research study!***

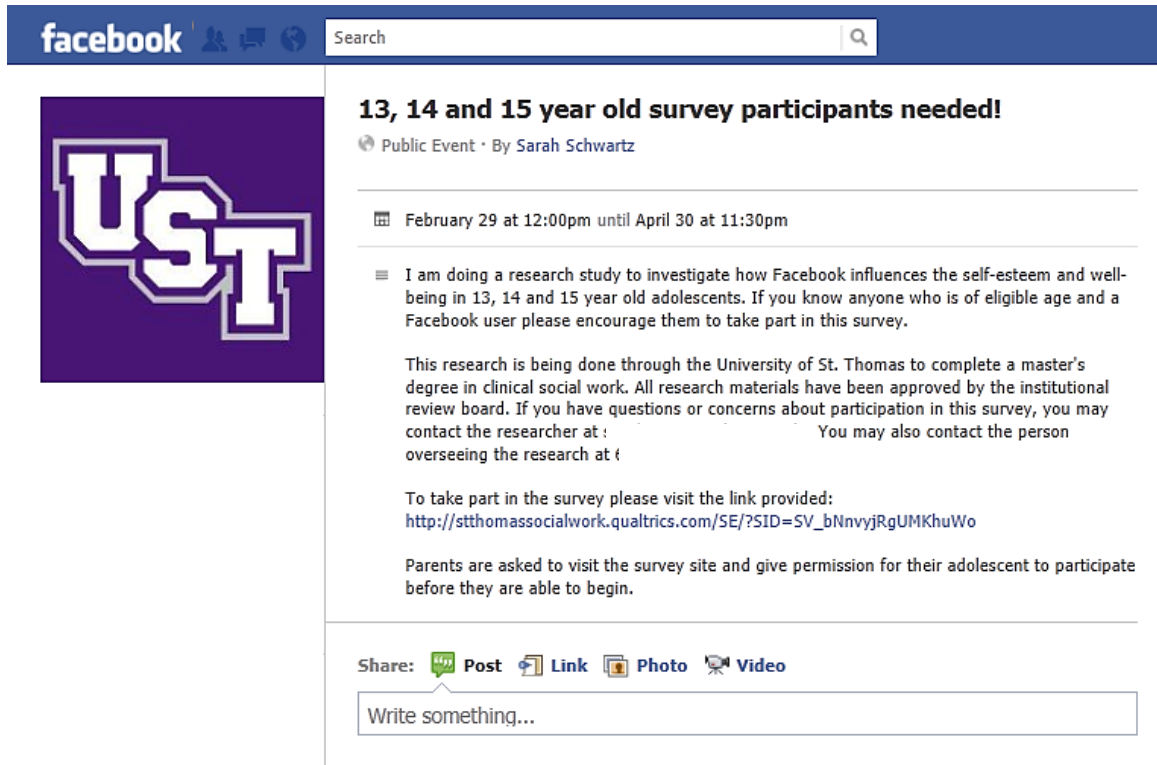
Sincerely,  
[Researcher Name]  
MSW Candidate 2012  
St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas

---

- Yes, I agree to take the survey
- No thanks, I don't want to participate

## Appendix D Recruitment Methods

### Facebook Event Page



The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook event page. The top navigation bar is blue with the Facebook logo on the left and a search bar on the right. Below the navigation bar, on the left, is a purple square containing the white 'UST' logo. To the right of the logo, the event title is '13, 14 and 15 year old survey participants needed!' in bold black text. Below the title, it says 'Public Event · By Sarah Schwartz'. A date and time range is listed: 'February 29 at 12:00pm until April 30 at 11:30pm'. The main text of the event describes a research study on Facebook's influence on self-esteem and well-being in adolescents. It includes a list of bullet points, a paragraph about the research's approval by the University of St. Thomas, and a URL for the survey. At the bottom, there are sharing options for Post, Link, Photo, and Video, and a text input field with the placeholder 'Write something...'.

**facebook** Search

**13, 14 and 15 year old survey participants needed!**

Public Event · By Sarah Schwartz





February 29 at 12:00pm until April 30 at 11:30pm

- I am doing a research study to investigate how Facebook influences the self-esteem and well-being in 13, 14 and 15 year old adolescents. If you know anyone who is of eligible age and a Facebook user please encourage them to take part in this survey.

This research is being done through the University of St. Thomas to complete a master's degree in clinical social work. All research materials have been approved by the institutional review board. If you have questions or concerns about participation in this survey, you may contact the researcher at : You may also contact the person overseeing the research at t

To take part in the survey please visit the link provided:  
[http://stthomassocialwork.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bNnvjRgUMKhuWo](http://stthomassocialwork.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bNnvjRgUMKhuWo)

Parents are asked to visit the survey site and give permission for their adolescent to participate before they are able to begin.

Share:  Post  Link  Photo  Video

Write something...

Email Bulletin Article through the University of St. Thomas


UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS
NEWS, EVENTS & DIRECTORIES
A-Z I

Home
University News
See/Hear/Do
For Students
Faculty & Staff
Our Community

## Bulletin today

Bulletin

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### Social Work graduate student seeks adolescent Facebook users for research study's online survey

**By: University of St. Thomas News Service**  
*Published on: Tuesday, March 27th, 2012 at 12:01 am*





ShareThis

Sarah Schwartz, a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University, is seeking 13- to 15-year-old adolescents to participate in an online survey for a clinical research study.

The survey looks at how Facebook plays a role in the well-being and self-esteem of the 13- to 15-year-old age group.

Access the [survey here](#), or via the [Facebook event page](#). Eligible participants must fall into the 13- to 15-year-old age range and be Facebook users. All research materials have been approved by St. Thomas' Institutional Review Board.

For more information about the survey, email [Schwartz](#). She encourages readers to forward this Bulletin Today story to those who would be eligible to participate in the survey.

*This article was posted at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, March 27, 2012 and is filed under University News.*

## Appendix E

### How to Keep Their Child Safe Online- Resources for Parents

There are several aspects that parents or caregivers should be aware of in the case that they have an adolescent who is connected to the internet. The following resources provide information regarding tips on how to keep your adolescent safe online, how to engage them in conversation about social networking and internet use, ways that risks can be lowered as well as how internet use can be a positive experience for many youth.

*American Academy of Pediatrics*

**[www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm](http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm)**

This website gives ideas to parents ways in which they can stay connected and in tune with the social media their children are a part of as well how to ensure they are being safe and free from risk online. They also discuss the rising challenge of “sexting” as ways in which parents can generate a discussion around it, bringing awareness to their children about appropriate texting and picture sharing through cell-phones.

*Federal Trade Commission*

The Federal Trade Commission gives tips for parents on how to give their child skills for using social networking safely as well as what to do if there are problems that arise. They give a link to a website they sponsor regarding internet safety- [www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov) which provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help parents be on guard against Internet fraud, securing their computer, and protecting personal information.

They also provide the following additional resources including some that are mentioned below:

**ConnectSafely**

**[www.connectsafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org)**

**Staysafe**

**[www.staysafe.org](http://www.staysafe.org)**

**Wired Safety**

**[www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)**

*RadicalParenting.com*

RadicalParenting.com provides several book resources for parents are various topic areas including issues related to the internet, safety and social networking, how to approach teenage issues such as missing curfews, behavior changes as well as talking with your teens about difficult subjects. Some of the books included on their “Top 50 Best Parenting” books are:

- **Generation Text: Raising Well-Adjusted Kids in the Age of Instant Everything**  
by Dr. Michael Osit
- **Video Games and Your Kids: How Parents Stay in Control**  
by Hilarie Cash, PhD, and Kim McDaniel, MA
- **Christian Parenting in an Age of IM & MySpace**  
by Peggy Kendall

## Appendix F

How to Be Safe Online and Who to Talk to When Something Feels Unsafe  
Resources for Teens

*Cyberbully411*  
Cyberbully411.org

Cyberbully411.org is an organization that provides resources to teens and their parents about issues of bullying online. For teens it provides tips on how to talk to your parents about cyberbullying as well as a space to seek help and tell your stories.

*Federal Trade Commission*  
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.shtm>

The Federal Trade Commission gives tips to teenagers about how to make good choices about social networking. They provide tips and things to think about when joining as well as additional resources they have found useful regarding internet safety.

*NetSmartz*  
[www.nsteens.org](http://www.nsteens.org)  
[www.netsmartzkids.org](http://www.netsmartzkids.org)

NetSmartz.org is a program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has sponsored websites specifically for kids and teens on how to make safe choices online through a series of animated videos that feature internet-related adventures.

*Teen Angels and Wired Safety*  
<http://teenangels.org>  
[www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)

WiredSafety.org is an internet safety help group that provides education and assistance about internet issues such as bullying, privacy, security, crime and responsible use of technology. TeenAngels.org is a division of WiredSafety.org that trains teens ages 13-18 on how to make the internet safer.

***It is important for you to tell an adult you trust if something or someone feels unsafe when you are online. If you or anyone you know is feeling sad or depressed or said they want to hurt themselves, it important for you to talk to an adult you trust; it could be someone at home, at school such as a teacher or counselor, in your place of worship, or at your community center.***