SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECT

ON SELF-ESTEEM AND MENTAL HEALTH

Isabeau Justice White Kaigler

HMN 679HB
Humanities Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

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Stephen Slawek, Ph.D.
Head, Division of Musicology/Ethnomusicology
The University of Texas at Austin
Supervising Professor

Smyth Johansson
Department of Germanic Studies
The University of Texas at Austin
Second Reader

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Abstract

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Isabeau Justice Kaigler, BA Humanities Honors

The University of Texas at Austin, 2020

Supervisor : Stephen Slawek

Modern technology enables today's society to have social media tools and applications readily accessible on their smartphones and the internet. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and tumblr can impact the health of peer relationships and the critical development of the sense of self. People use these online social environments to share information and seek social support in times of need. This desire to connect and relate to one another can lead to social comparison and affect mental well-being. Additionally, people often use social media as an avenue for self expression and creative endeavors. Using music and lyrics to convey a specific message dates back to ancient times and it is still a common way to tell stories to a broad and diverse audience. Modern day musicians have adapted their craft to appeal to audiences on these new social platforms and the art of storytelling in music has evolved to incorporate today's technology and social media applications. The songs written and recorded for this

project tell three unique stories relating to issues surrounding social media and its

effect on self-esteem and mental health.

CHAPTER ONE:

Song Analysis and Social Media Discussion

Introduction

Music has always been a common way to tell stories. Songs passed down from generation to generation continue to teach the history of ancestors. Using music as a form of storytelling also allows artists to gain broader audiences. While written lyrics can be read as if they were poetry, songs allow the artist to perform their story and the stories of others. By forming stories into song, the writer can highlight the most important moments in their lyrics even if the lyrics do not explain the story thoroughly.

The songs recorded as part of this project are written from different points of view. Each song tells a story relating to issues involving the use of social media and its effect on mental health.

Eating Disorders and Social Media

The first song titled "Honest" tells a story of a girl who struggles with eating and how she is encouraged to form unhealthy behaviors by social media (https://youtu.be/64H_9WNIzbM). The media can increase a person's likelihood of developing an eating disorder because of the increased need to compare oneself to another. Celebrities who photoshop themselves to appear more favorable on social

media can encourage young developing girls to create unachievable weight/physical appearance goals. Constantly viewing unhealthy beauty standards can lead to the development of anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge-eating disorders and body dysmorphia. These psychological illnesses are commonly discussed by celebrities who feel like the media facilitated the development of those illnesses.

There are even specific areas of the internet that are devoted to and encourage bad health habits. For example, websites like tumblr allow for content posters to run "pro-anorexia blogs". Despite the attempt to regulate such content, tumblr users are still able to share toxic imagery and information regarding anorexia. "Pro-anorexia" tumblr's "advocates as a lifestyle choice what the medical establishment and popular opinion considers to be an eating disorder" (McLaughlin et. al, 2015). Though tumblr shut down "pro-anorexia" blogs on their website, the content is still shared and easily accessible. Those who suffer from eating disorders often suffer distorted thoughts and feel a lack of self worth. A common "distortion" that may occur within the thoughts of a bulimic is a feeling of weakness or inability to control oneself (Eddy, 2010). The lyric below "you're not hungry, you're just weak" is an example of a distorted thought that may be experienced by an individual with an eating disorder.

"You can blame it on the magazines that tell you how to be
Your actions are driven by your own mentality
You'll look at your plate and see that its empty
But you wouldn't be okay if you didn't count
every calorie

every gram

Of all the plans you may never live to see to the end

If you spoke about what's on your mind

They would blow you off and say you're fine

If you talked about how you won't eat

you're not hungry, you're just weak

She never thought she would see the day that she would talk about it

She couldn't tell the truth if she was being honest"

Identity Formation and Manipulation

The second song titled "Identity" is written from an outside point of view of those who spend their entire life attempting to be someone else (https://youtu.be/Pu_qCowHvT4). With the prevalence of social media, people can view "intimate" details of others lives at the single click of the button. Facebook broadcasts everyone's birthday, hometown and education. Instagram allows people to visually display parts of their lives through photos and videos encouraging everyone to showcase their hobbies, families, pets and accomplishments. Snapchat is a way for users to share what they are up to at any given moment. Additionally, since Snapchat "stories" are only 24 hours, users can be lulled into a false sense of security that the things posted won't cling onto their identity.

"Your plastic hands open the manmade door

with your metal keys to your factory jeep

Your Nike sneakers will get you to the theatre

where your mandated classes are better spent on instagram

Your sorority sisters are reality
It would be a shame if they pushed you to originality
You're walking a path ran a thousand times
Watching like a hawk but still following blind

Your plastic legs walk you down the street
To your busy life and brainwashed dreams
Your tired eyes will get you through the time
You spend faking your life online

Your goals will get you through life
Trying to be everyone's favorite that nobody likes
Your plastic friends will leave you again
You're always wrong and the internet is right
Why would you be a part of their clique
They control what you do and watch how you live
"Did you hear what she did last year?"
They didn't like it so now they steer clear

Your plastic legs walk you down the street
To your busy life and washed up dreams
Your tired eyes will get you through the time
You spend faking your life online
You spend watching your life go by

You didn't know you were going insane
Trying to fit your picture in someone else's frame
You'll still live day to day
Just being a name without a face"

Cyberbullying

The third song titled "Sabotage" describes an outside perspective of guilt about the life of a girl who is bullied (https://youtu.be/31Bsazguldk). Children have suffered from instances of bullying for decades but the internet gave rise to a new form of harassment. Cyberbullying occurs when an act of bullying takes place using technology or over the internet. Definitions of bullying use three criteria: "intent to harm, imbalance of power and repetition" (Rao et. al, 2018). This can go even further on the internet because of the potential anonymity that is achievable on the web. This bullying can be through messages on social media, emails, or negative posts created about another. With source anonymity (the inability to tell who is behind the content) it has become increasingly common for those on the internet to hide their identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2010). Bullying anonymously allows the bully to avoid all the negative consequences of their actions.

An argument can be made that cyberbullying is worse than bullying that takes place offline because of its permanence. The mean interactions that take place over the internet may be stored in archives, screenshots or individual user accounts. The internet unfortunately creates an environment for victims to constantly relive their bullying experience.

"Little is nothing and nothing is little
Everything is brittle, it broke
The cavalry is loaded, without a motive

That's all they wrote

Her shoes tied together

she trips down the stairs

You wonder why you weren't there

It's not your fault, It was sabotage

Her hands in her pocket

She couldn't catch her fall

You wonder why they did nothing at all

It's not your fault, It was sabotage

She walks down the hall, Everyone whispers

They all stop and stare

She will stop and wonder if everything would be better

if she wasn't there

All the attention all of her flaws

She just wont stop the unwanted calls

If she does

She thinks she's all alone

Her shoes tied together she trips down the stairs

She will wonder why you weren't there

It's not your fault , It was sabotage

Her hands in her pocket

She couldn't catch her fall

You wonder why they did nothing at all

It's not your fault

It was sabotage"

Chapter 2

Mindfulness and Self Esteem

It is important to consider how the use of the internet and media may benefit the user. While there is plenty of toxic information out there, there is also a lot of educational materials and other resources on the internet that can vastly improve people's lives. For example, the psychological concept of "mindfulness" has had an impact on many individuals and communities because of its ease of use and accessibility. There is a vast amount of free information on the internet and social media on how to become mindful.

Mindfulness is defined as "involving self-regulation of attention to immediate experience and an open, accepting orientation to that experience" (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness is considered a form of intentional attention without bias. This technique has gained interest in the past few decades even though it has been used throughout history. Mindfulness techniques can vary from simply being present in the moment to guided meditations and habit forming actions to improve daily life. Mindfulness based interventions (MBIs) " aim at restoring or enhancing emotional well-being" (Cousin & Crane 2016).

A study published this year uses mindfulness to counteract the traits of psychological distress, negative emotion, hostility and antisocial tendency caused by social media use (Weinstein et. al, 2009). The mental state of the participants was evaluated and assigned a value based on their satisfaction for basic needs. Their

mindfulness levels were also assigned values based on their levels of attention and awareness. Figure 1 depicts their result that higher levels of mindfulness reduce the negative effects of social media on mental health.
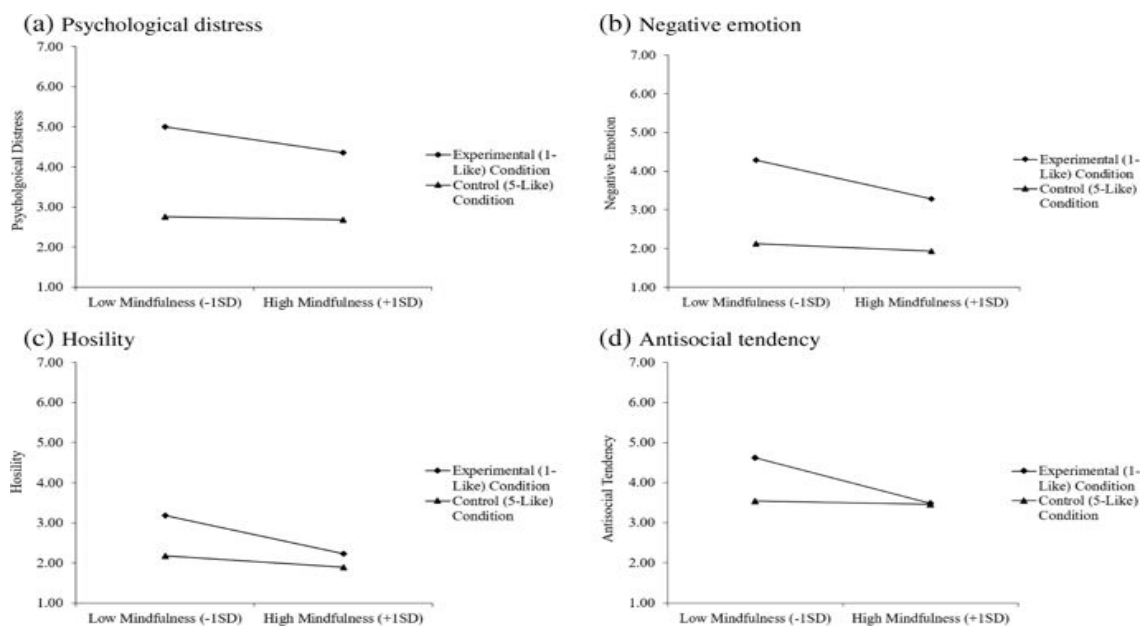

Figure 1 - Mindfulness Traits and Psychological Distress

There are two major hypotheses that have been debated regarding social media's impact on self identity (Valkenburg and Peter, 2010). The first "self-concept unity" hypothesis states that the sheer amount of personality options and artifacts on the internet allow for someone to pick and choose their perfect identity. Learning about other identities and cultures with such ease allows the individual to fully develop an identity that they feel suits them. The second "fragmentation" hypothesis believes that social media is a performance. Those who have an online presence must alter their identity depending on the website they are on or who they are talking to. By having to perform in so many roles, one's identity can become "fragmented".

The fact that these separate identities are so easy to create, and have little to no social repercussion can start to break down the already fragile identity of adolescents.

Both of these hypotheses have evidence to support them (Valkenburg and Peter, 2010). The difference between the likelihood of either theory is up to the individual. People have different dispositions and motivations that directly impact which identity development path they may follow. These dispositions and motivations can be altered by mindfulness. Those that have high mindfulness are more likely to have a more positive and solid identity while those with low mindfulness tend to have a negative self image and a more flexible identity.

Those who interact with others through online communities can feel insecure about their social relationships. People can often become consumed by the number of likes or comments their content has and can directly relate this to their own self-worth. A lack of attention on the internet can lead to "psychological and behavioral maladjustment" (Poon & Jaing, 2020). Poon and Jiang found in their research that those with higher levels of mindfulness were able to cope more efficiently with the negative effect caused by feeling left out on social media.

With the negative impacts of social media being so prominent, it is important to also share information about coping mechanisms like mindfulness.

Chapter 3

Media Influence on Mental Health During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Since this project was written during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic that began in early 2020, it is important to include an analysis of mental health from a completely isolated perspective. With global stay-at-home orders and gradual re-openings, people all over the world are learning a new way of life that includes social distancing. Of course, there are those who refuse to accept and follow new guidelines and regulations. However, studies show that those that are following the guidelines have made a positive impact in their communities by helping to "flatten the curve" and decrease the number of new COVID-19 cases (Kenyon, 2020).

This success from social distancing does not come without negative consequences. Data from previous outbreaks shows a trend of an increase in stressors and mental turmoil. SARS (sudden acute respiratory syndrome), which caused a previous infectious disease outbreak in 2002, shows the predictive impact of the current COVID-19 outbreak. Studies conducted after the SARS outbreak indicated that the outbreak could be "regarded as a mental health catastrophe" (Wit Chik Mak et. al, 2009). In a post-analysis of SARS patients, incidence of mental illness in participants post-SARS outbreak rose to 58% (Wit Chik Mak et. al, 2009). Paying close attention to the risk factors associated with increased incidence of

psychological issues can help mitigate the societal fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to look at the role of social media during the pandemic and whether it exacerbates the psychological distress experienced by large populations in isolation. Currently many individuals are receiving their information regarding the pandemic through online news outlets and social media. Whether it be statistics, social impacts or political opinions, COVID-19 has been a dominant subject on the internet in recent months. While paying attention to current events is an essential way to remain informed and connected to society, it can also cause unintended distress. Studies have shown that viewing "distressing media footage" following negative events such as global health crises has a relationship with an increased rate of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Bernstein et. al, 2007).

It can be easy to get caught up in the negative effects caused by certain aspects of the internet but in times like now where people are forced into isolation, it is just as paramount to appreciate the small victories that take place in the online world. For example, due to COVID-19 many more educational and social resources have been made more readily available. Using ZOOM software, the education system has adapted in order to become accessible during the pandemic. This transition to online courses allows students to keep attending their classes with their peers through an interactive environment. Additionally, different streaming services have hosted virtual weddings, baby showers and birthday parties. These types of social support can relieve one's anxiety when in a precarious situation and those

who receive social support can "enjoy more favorable mental health" (Harandi et. al,

2017). Building communities virtually can create large amounts of social support

between people and decrease the chance of negative psychological symptoms.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The use of social media platforms has both positive and negative impacts on mental health and self-esteem. While online social environments can help people form stronger relationships and find support when needed, these applications can also create destructive environments that promote unrealistic expectations and standards. Social media applications are an ideal platform for self presentation and creative expression, but the instant feedback can affect an individual's sense of self. Some musicians have taken the art of storytelling to the next level with projects that address the issues surrounding online social environments. The songs written and recorded for this project relate to various mental health and self-esteem issues that arise from participating in online social environments.

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