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Socially Marginalized Youths' Experiences with Social Media and its Impact on their Relationships

Kira A. Regan
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. Jason Brown
The University of Western Ontario

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Abstract

Social media use is prevalent among adolescents and young adults. However, little is known about the role and function of social media in the lives of youth who have experienced social marginalization. These youth face different challenges than their mainstream peers when it comes to the development, maintenance and outcomes of their friendships and relationships. It is unknown whether findings on social media and relationships accurately represent the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization, given the different challenges they face in achieving belonging and intimacy. Semi-structured interviews with youth regarding their social media use and its impact on their relationships took place at local youth-serving community agencies in a central Canadian city. A content analysis of 11 interview transcripts was performed and 6 themes emerged. Themes included: Prevalence & Preferences; Typical Activities; Negative Influences; Awareness of Risks; Positive Insights and Suggestions; and Break-Ups. Conclusions provide an understanding about how youth experiencing marginalization are using social media, and how programming can be developed to suit their specific mental health needs and concerns.

Keywords

Youth, Marginalization, Social Media, Relationships, Social Networking, Emerging Adults

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

In the past ten years there has been an influx of research which has begun to explore the impact of social media and communicative technology in the lives of adolescents and young adults (Casiano, Kinley, Katz, Chartier & Sareen, 2012; Common Sense Media, 2012; Lenhart, 2015; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Additionally, there is a plethora of literature regarding the lifestyle risks, difficulties and experiences faced by youth who have experienced social marginalization (Brownell, Roos, MacWilliam, Leclair, Ekuma & Fransoo, 2010; Foster & Spencer, 2013; Kim, Orpinas, Kamphaus & Kelder, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2011; Tweddle, 2007; Tyler, Johnson & Brownridge, 2008; Ungar, 2004). However, there is presently limited literature that synthesizes these two domains of research (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014; Stevens, Gilliard-Matthews, Dunaev, Woods & Brawner, 2016), which is curious given the prevalence of social media use among youth overall (Common Sense Media, 2012; Lenhart, 2015; Lenhart, Smith & Anderson, 2015). Thus, there is a need for researchers and mental health professionals to better understand this phenomenon as there may be challenges and benefits associated with social media use that these youth face which are unique from the experiences of their mainstream peers (Tao, 2014; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While there is a growing body of research pertaining to the function of social media in the lives of adolescents and young adults, there remains a dearth of literature examining the similarities and differences of these findings specific to youth who have experienced social marginalization (Lim et al., 2013; Stevens, Gilliard-Matthews, Dunaev, Woods & Brawner,

2016; Zhang & Leung, 2014). The proposed research is important for counsellors and mental health workers given that these youth often face different barriers than their mainstream peers when it comes to the development, maintenance and outcomes of their relationships (Foster & Spencer, 2013; Tyler, Johnson & Brownridge, 2008; O’Keeffe, 2005; Taylor, Lydon, Bougie & Johannesen, 2004; Connolly, Furman & Konarski, 2000; Nadon, Koverola & Schludermann, 1998). There is therefore a need for exploration of the experiences of these youth considering the broader landscape of rapidly developing communicative technologies, and the novelty of the general discussion of social media’s impact on adolescent psychological wellbeing.

1.2 Context

Social media has been defined as “digital platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content and collaboration across people” (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015, p.1654). Within these platforms are included both web-based and mobile-based technologies that permit interactive distribution and consumption of digital content and communication (i.e. photos, videos, texts, messages, memes, e-mails and many others) (Beasley & Haney, 2015; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). There are also varying types of social media platforms, such as social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook or LinkedIn; video and photo sharing sites like YouTube, Instagram and Snap Chat; and micro-blogging sites like Twitter and Tumblr, in addition to many others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Meyers, 2012). In their review, Boyd & Ellison (2007) defined some of the functions of SNS as allowing “individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). Privacy settings which control who can access and view an

individual's profile content vary from site to site, and degree of self-disclosure is largely determined by an individual's own personal discretion (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

It has been reported that “the first recognizable social network site [SixDegrees.com] launched in 1997” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 214), which was the early predecessor to the once very popular SNS, Myspace, which launched in 2003 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Today, the most popular SNS based on the number of active accounts is Facebook, with 1.59 billion monthly active users as of April, 2016 (Statistica, 2016). Developed in 2004, Facebook was originally created with the intention “to support distinct college networks only” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 218), specifically college students at Harvard. However, Facebook like many other SNS has expanded its reach to corporate, professional and other various niche demographics.

Today, social media use among adolescents and young adults is an almost ubiquitous phenomenon, with survey research indicating that 92% of teens go online daily, with 56% of youth aged 13-17 reporting that they go online several times a day (Lenhart, 2015). While youth who experience various forms of systemic marginalization may have limited access to technology and other devices (e.g. smartphones), recent survey literature has indicated that 87% of all youth report access to a desktop or laptop computer and 68% of youth without cellphone-based Internet access still go online at least daily (Lenhart, 2015). These statistics may represent the use of publicly accessible computers with Internet access such as at a local library or school as alternative means to handheld devices (Breyette & Hill, 2015; Smith, 2013). As such, it may be that the experiences of marginalized young people who use social media merit closer attention, given that these youths are not necessarily excluded from participation in the technological mediums as earlier research might indicate.

1.3 How Social Media has been Implicated in Youth Mental Health

While the existence of new forms of communication technologies such as social networking sites (SNS) provides novel opportunities for developing and maintaining relationships, there is also a darker propensity of these technologies that may require some caution on behalf of users. One example is the case of Canadian teen, Amanda Todd, whose experiences of exploitation, harassment and cyber-bullying went viral after she posted a video recounting her story onto the video sharing website, YouTube, in 2012 (Villalva, 2012). In her video, Amanda holds up handwritten notes describing her horrific story after an online stranger lured her to take and send him photos of her breasts, which he uploaded to a Facebook page where her peers could access them and ridicule her. Amanda tragically died by suicide in October 2012 after enduring months of extreme anxiety and depression, bullying both off and online, and various unhealthy attempts to cope with her circumstances (Villalva, 2012). However, her story is disturbingly not unique, as another Canadian teen, Rehtaeh Parsons, experienced similar events connected to social media. In 2013 Rehtaeh also died by suicide following the online distribution of photos of a gang-rape she had survived in 2011 (Jauregui, 2013). After months of harassment and bullying, in addition to the Canadian justice system's failure to provide justice for what happened to her, Rehtaeh took her life at the age of 17 (Jauregui, 2013). Sadly, the experiences of both young women exemplify the speed and breadth of distribution of content in online platforms, and the devastating effects such distribution can have on emotional wellbeing and personal safety.

These cases of sexual exploitation and distribution of photographic content highlight an important factor when considering the scope of impact social media and communicative technologies impart; that being consent. While at a no point did Amanda or Rehtaeh ever

consent to the sharing of the photos, there is presently a phenomenon among teens and young adults of consensually and knowingly sharing suggestive, nude or nearly-nude photographs with others. This is one facet of an activity referred to as “sexting” (Lenhart, 2009; NCMEC, 2009; Ringrose, 2012). One quality that makes sexting a somewhat risky activity is that while the photo-taker may consensually share the photographic content with only one specific party, they cannot confirm whether the person with whom they shared the photos will then go on to share them with others (Lenhart, 2009; Judge, 2012; Ringrose, 2012).

The Pew Internet & American Life Project was one of the first studies to provide detailed information on teen cell phone and Internet use in North America (Lenhart, 2009), and some of the scenarios for sexting they found from their survey research included “1) exchange of images solely between two romantic partners; 2) exchanges between partners that are shared with others outside the relationship and 3) exchanges between people who are not yet in a relationship, but where at least one person hopes to be” (Lenhart, 2009, p. 3). Of the teens surveyed, they also found that 4% of cell-owning teens have sent sexts while 15% have received them (Lenhart, 2009). This may be indicative of responding biases in the survey responses representing a potential social desirability bias (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). They also found that “28% of teens who did not report sending sexts stated they had parents who restricted the number of texts they were allowed to send” (Lenhart, 2009, p. 3), which may be indicative of a mediating relationship between parental involvement in youths’ social media and digital communicative activities and their online risk-taking behaviors (Liau, Khoo & Ang, 2008; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Sexting itself may not be an entirely bad thing as it can serve as an alternative means for young people to express and develop their sexuality without the necessity of physical contact

(Brown, Keller & Stern, 2009; Katzman, 2010). However, despite this potential benefit to sexting there still exist many instances where the violations of the photo-sharer's consent and trust are well documented in the popular literature. For example, "revenge-porn" websites (Holpuch, 2014) –where sexually explicit photo and video content can be uploaded without the participants' consent—exist with the sole intention of causing public humiliation and reputational harm (Beasley & Haney, 2015; Holpuch, 2014). Moreover, the legal repercussions for sexual content sharing without the participants' consent have also been well documented; a recent example including two Canadian 15-year-olds facing child pornography charges for distributing images of a third party, another 15-year-old girl, without her consent (CBC News, Nova Scotia, 2016).

These examples highlight the importance of understanding the permanence, speed of distribution and reach of content posted onto social media and through digital communication technologies. Indeed, a degree of cognizance relative to the amount of self-disclosure one shares is paramount to using social media with mindfulness and caution. As Sheldon stated in their 2015 book, "unlike other forms of computer mediated communication, social network sites usually encourage users to disclose a great deal of information about themselves including private information such as hobbies, tastes in music, books, movies, relationship statuses and sexual preferences" (Gross & Acquisti, 2005 as cited in Sheldon, 2015, p. 4). As such, an important consideration for social media users, particularly teens and young adults, is to become aware of the privacy policies specific to the platforms they are using, and to avoid over-sharing personal information or content (Beasley & Haney, 2015).

1.4 Potential Contribution

In addition to generating preliminary data for researchers to better understand the role of social media and communication technologies in the lives of youth who have experienced social marginalization, this research will also help to inform practice concerning ethically informed methods of intervening and navigating social media use within professional relationships with youth and their families. Additionally, this research may also contribute to the development of appropriate psychoeducational programming for the youths and their caregivers, which would fit their specific needs and concerns.

A recent study explored the experiences of child welfare workers relative to their social media use and professional practice where a variety of challenges for service providers were raised (Breyette & Hill, 2015). The researchers addressed the earlier work of Mishna and colleagues (2012) who identified four main categories of practitioner concern, those being; Pandora's Box (i.e. difficulty in limiting the communication once it has commenced), the ethical grey zone (i.e. the greater propensity for ethical conflicts when engaging in online communication and other concerns with privacy and confidentiality), the slippery slope (i.e. a shift in the original intended communication to other unrelated content) and permeable boundaries (i.e. an introduction of more fluid boundaries which can be difficult to regulate) (Breyette & Hill, 2015). The results of their study indicated similar challenges faced by the child welfare workers, specifically related to "boundary concerns, issues with privacy and confidentiality, threatening or harassing communications, and ethical issues related to monitoring online activities of clients" (Breyette & Hill, 2015, p. 302). While "more than half of the respondents reported that e-mail use (66.2%) or text messaging (57.4%) has made their work with clients easier" (Breyette & Hill, 2015, p. 289), the appropriate strategies for

navigating sensitive online, client-generated content is still a contentious issue for practitioners. Indeed, there does not yet exist a specific universal policy for service providers to provide guidance about how to appropriately intervene after exposure to content related to the solicitation or consumption of illegal substances, videos of fights, harassing threats or suicidal status updates.

Other researchers have begun to address the role of social media and policy development as it relates to maintaining professional relationships with clients (Creaner, 2015; Crtalic, Gibbs, Sprong, & Dell, T. F., 2015; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Pridgen, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2014; Tao, 2014; Wells & Mitchell, 2008). For example, Crtalic and colleagues (2015) reviewed some of the ethical standards and considerations proposed by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification's (CRCC) incorporation of *Section J: Technology and Distance Counseling* into the CRCC Code of Ethics (Crtalic et al., 2015). They identified issues of boundaries, privacy and confidentiality like Breyette & Hill's (2015) work. However, they also identified some potential benefits of electronic correspondence as a tool in the therapeutic relationship. Specifically, they noted that for clients who have experienced social marginalization, the degree of anxiety experienced with self-disclosure may potentially be minimized which could result in increased feelings of emotional safety (Crtalic et al., 2015). Additionally, they addressed the impact of limitations to transportation and mobility, in that clients who live in rural areas may benefit from electronic correspondence considering their limitations in accessing services. Ultimately, the researchers surmised that practitioners should make their personal or agency policy on social media communication explicit at the outset of establishing ongoing informed consent, and that they "must take responsibility for his or her

current social media practices, keeping the best interests of the client first and foremost” (Crtalic et al., 2015, p. 49).

Other specific suggestions informing agency policy surrounding social media use have included: clear and consistent administration of policy for both professionals and clients early on in the professional relationship; supplying proactive and ongoing systematic training on boundaries, media literacy and appropriate content sharing; addressing the function of social media at differing points of the professional relationship and; developing appropriate policies and boundaries related to the termination of a professional relationship (Schwartz et al., 2014).

Research has also addressed some of the intergenerational disparities associated with the digital divide between parents and adolescents. As Judge (2012) stated, “teenagers typically navigate digital media and ancillary devices more expertly than their parents, which can create intergenerational tensions in a family around authority, expertise, and limit setting” (Judge, 2012, p. 93). Moreover, when providing psychoeducation for socially marginalized and at-risk youth, research has indicated that professionals working with such youth can function as a bridge for providing effective online management strategies, which may not always be as readily accessible via other forms of prevention programming (Wells & Mitchell, 2008). A specific example related to discussing appropriate responses to online sexual solicitation might include reporting the incident to a trusted adult, changing accounts or ending contact with the questionable person (Wells & Mitchell, 2008).

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

To understand the role social media plays in the relationships of youth who have experienced social marginalization, it is important to explore the significance of relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood more generally (Arnett, 2000; Connolly, Nguyen, Pepler, Craig & Jiang, 2013; Reich, Subrahmanyam & Espinoza, 2012). A review of sociopolitical contexts and barriers which affect these youth, as well as an introduction to the literature on social media relative to adolescents' wellbeing is also presented.

2.1 Youth Development

It has been well reported in the literature that adolescence is a time of significant change in biological, social, and relational areas of life (Connolly et al., 2013; Parkes, Henderson, Wight, & Nixon, 2011; Reich et al., 2012; Tao, 2014; Weger & Emmett, 2009). Adolescents undergo adjustments in their identities, sexualities, autonomy, roles, and relationships with friends and romantic partners (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003; Reich et al., 2014). Research has shown that peer networks significantly impact the emergence and quality of heterosexual romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman & Konarski, 2000). Furthermore, research on developmental romantic dating trajectories has supported that adolescents who begin dating sooner (early-starters) and have more atypical sequential dating patterns and reported "higher levels of externalizing symptoms across adolescence" (Connolly et al., 2013, p. 1021). Therefore, it is supported that "the development of intimate and romantic relationships, although important across a life span, is particularly relevant during adolescence and emerging adulthood" (Tao, 2014, p. 124).

Arnett (2000) was one of the first to use the term “emerging adulthood”, and proposed that it was its own developmental theory. He surmised that the late period of adolescence and early period of adulthood (18-25 years) constitutes as its own developmental period, with its own challenges and changes uniquely distinct from both adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging adulthood is characterized as the period of development where there is “relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). However, he also addressed that “not all young people in this age period are able to use these years for independent exploration. Like adolescence, emerging adulthood is a period of the life course that is culturally constructed, not universal and immutable” (Arnett, 2000, p. 470). In this sense, emerging adulthood is a developmental period that exists in cultures where the responsibilities and roles expected of adults can be affordably delayed or postponed (Arnett, 2000). However, it should be noted that not all young people have the environmental circumstances which would allow for this period of heightened focus-on-self and access to resources.

2.2 Youth who are Socially Marginalized

Numerous studies have found evidence of several risk factors and difficult environmental realities that youth who have experienced social marginalization face, which distinguish their lived experiences and relationships from mainstream peers. The term to “marginalize” is defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as “to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group” (Merriam-Webster,

2016). Using this definition in the context of research, the process of social marginalization can include discriminatory experiences such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia or body shaming. Moreover, the overarching structural and systemic inequalities such as living in poverty, experiencing stigma associated with mental illness, and having limited access to resources have been well documented as being inextricably connected in the lives of youth who have experienced varying intersections of social marginalization (Barker, Kerr, Nguyen, Wood & DeBeck, 2015; Gosine & Islam, 2014; Iwasaki et al., 2014; Martens et al., 2014; Williams & Sheehan, 2015).

In a study of educational outcomes for high-risk youth who lived in poverty, all had a mother who was a teen at first birth, were involved with child welfare services and failed to complete high school (Brownell et al., 2010). Education is therefore highlighted for these youth, given that those emancipated from the child welfare system have little community or financial resources to help them establish themselves (Brownell, 2010; Tweddle, 2007). Given such realities, it is suggested that youth who have experienced marginalization likely face more challenges transitioning into the associated roles and expectations of adulthood than their mainstream peers.

Youth who face sociopolitical barriers and social marginalization have additional threats to their well-being. Research documenting the prevalence and presence of risk factors such as childhood physical and sexual abuse, family poverty, problematic relationships with caregivers, parental alcohol abuse, intimate partner violence, drug and alcohol abuse as well as homelessness or experience as a runaway or street youth, illustrate the realities faced by youth who are marginalized (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). These risk factors have been connected to depression and anxiety, poor self-esteem, sexual exploitation, substance abuse,

domestic minor sex trafficking and suicide (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Hadland et al., 2012; Johnson & Taliaferro, 2012; Nadon et al., 1998; Tyler et al., 2008; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; Tyler & Johnson, 2004).

Adolescence is a time where peers become increasingly more important in helping youth cope with life circumstances (Reich, 2012; Connolly, 2013; Plaiser, 2013), and youth who have experienced social marginalization are not exempt from this. Indeed, trusting and stable relationships play a major role in the psychosocial well-being of “street kids” and other youth who have experienced social marginalization (Taylor, 2004). For example, in a qualitative study conducted in Quebec it was found that “street kids” have no coherent set of medium or long-term goals, do not trust or look up to authorities, and they lack stable friendships involving trust and admiration. However, “street kids” who have a trusted friend are more intrinsically motivated and tend to feel less irritable and less anxious.” (Taylor, 2004, p. 1). The significant impact of trust and belonging on their lives is further supported by research that has found peer rejection to have additional adverse effects on those who already experience marginalization (Kim, Orpinas, Kamphaus & Kelder, 2011).

Other research has demonstrated that because youth who have experienced social marginalization face difficulty with trust and belongingness among peers, they seek out affordable opportunities for such experiences and intimacy through drug and alcohol use (Foster & Spencer, 2013). In their (2013) research, Foster & Spencer interviewed youth at a drop-in center in Ottawa and found when they had established supportive bonds with their peers, they were clear about personal boundaries regarding appropriate and inappropriate drug and alcohol use (Foster & Spencer, 2013).

Regarding the impact of parental relationships with youth, Ungar (2004) reported that support of parents and caregivers served an important role in the mental health of at-risk youth, in addition to providing youth with a safe space to explore and express their identities. These findings were evident for youth who were more peer than family oriented. It is suggested that youth seek out supportive, trusting, intimate relations elsewhere when their needs are not met in their families (Ungar, 2004).

2.3 Social Media and Youth

When researching the literature on social media and youth, the search parameters were from the year 2000 to present, given that most research on social media has been produced in the last ten years. The databases for peer reviewed content included ProQuest through PsycINFO and Sage Journals. Search terms included a variety of combinations of “adolescen*”, “social media”, “marginalized youth”, “vulnerable youth”, “digital media”, “youth-at-risk” and “Canada”. Research on social media and digital technologies is part of a larger, multidisciplinary discourse and as such, the search results were manually limited to include those pertaining to social and psychological issues. Other research content and grey literature was found through Google Scholar, library books on social media and reference lists from located sources.

Prevalence, Preference and Purpose

Technology and communication media have rapidly advanced in the past ten years (Lenhart, 2015; Common Sense Media, 2012), and social media use is highly prevalent among adolescents and young adults. Recent American survey research with teens between the ages of 13-17 years old has determined that 92% of teens report going online daily while 56% go online several times a day (Lenhart, 2015). This is largely facilitated by the prevalence of smartphone

ownership among young people considering that 73% of teens surveyed own, or have access to, a smartphone (Lenhart, 2015). In fact, 91% of American teens surveyed reported that they go online from mobile devices at least occasionally, while 24% of teens said they're online "almost constantly" (Lenhart, 2015). Regarding what these youths are using social media for, other survey research has shown that 88% of teens use social media to keep in touch with friends they can't see regularly, 69% use it to get to know their classmates better and 57% use it to connect with new people who share a common interest (Common Sense Media, 2012). Of all social media sites, Facebook is the most popular among teens with 71% of survey respondents reporting using it, followed by Instagram (52%), Snapchat (41%), Twitter (33%), Google+ (33%), Vine (24%), Tumblr (14%) and other social media sites (11%) (Lenhart, 2015).

Impact of Social Media on Peer Relationships

In their review of the literature on social media and its impact on social connectedness among adolescents, Allen and colleagues (2014) suggest that "a paradox may exist: social media can enhance belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity development, while at the same time exposing young people to potential negative outcomes" (Allen, Ryan, Grey, McInerney & Waters, 2014, p. 28). Indeed, this sentiment is shared by others, as Barth states that "the data is often somewhat contradictory (e.g. one study says that Facebook makes adolescents lonelier while another says that it makes them feel more socially connected)" (p. 201). In Reich and colleagues' (2012) research with high-school students regarding their Internet and social media use, they found that teens reported using social networking sites (SNS) mostly to connect with people they already had relationships offline, indicating that SNS function as an extension of youths' social offline social environments. These findings echoed the earlier work of Gross (2004), who found that adolescents' online interactions were largely

undertaken in intimate settings (i.e. instant messaging or email) with friends who were already a part of their offline social network. Moreover, Valkenburg and Peter (2009) addressed the mixed results in the literature by pointing out the changes in technology over time, such that the existence of newer forms of communicative mediums pose different psychosocial benefits and risks in adolescent peer relationships as compared to technologies of the past.

In a study of how youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods use social media “about 70% of the sample reported currently using Facebook” and “youth, regardless of use, had an opinion about Facebook” (Stevens et al., 2016, p. 7). Themes that emerged from the interviews included perspectives that yielded a fair amount of ambivalence about social media in general. The youth described how Facebook functioned as a platform where “drama” was perpetuated through content related to popularization (posting sexualized photos for “likes” and peer validation) and violence (posting videos of fights between youth in the neighborhood). “Drama” was defined by Boyd (2007) as “performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active engaged audience, often on social media” (p. 137), and is an expectation of social media interactions by youth.

The youth also discussed “exposure” pages (Stevens et al., 2016, p.10) which are created with the intention of “exposing” an individual (i.e. “putting someone on blast”), usually for public ridicule and vindication which often results in sexual harassment and other forms of bullying. The authors also addressed the potential for negative social media use being that the drama online could “escalate into physical violence” (Stevens et al., 2016, p. 13). They went on to state that “in this community, online aggressions moved beyond emotional damage to physical altercations—including fistfights and gun violence” (Stevens et al., 2016, p. 13). This is a consideration not elsewhere addressed in the literature on social media use among youth.

Social Media and Romantic Relationships

About 8% of teens who have dating experience report that they met a romantic partner online with 57% of all teens reporting that they have begun friendships online (Lenhart, Smith & Anderson, 2015). Research on the role of Facebook on romantic relationship development revealed that Facebook is one of the major resources for uncertainty reduction in the beginning of a relationship and that becoming “Facebook Official (FBO)” (Fox, Warber & Makstaller, 2013, p. 771) is indicative of higher commitment in a relationship, as it functions as a form of public declaration of status.

While social media can reportedly help teens feel close to their friends and romantic partners (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), it can also play a detrimental role in relationships as well. One study found that a quarter of adolescents had reported being a victim of cyber dating violence (Zweig, Dank, Yahner & Lachman, 2013). In Baker & Carreño’s (2015) focus-group research with high school aged teens that had experienced problematic relationships in the previous year, “adolescents used technology to initiate and dissolve dating relationships, often with text messages or posts to social networking sites. Technology use also caused jealousy, and it was used to monitor and isolate partners from others” (p. 308).

Related to these findings, a recent study conducted by Rueda and colleague (2015) used focus groups, survey data and videotaped observations of Mexican American youth to better understand the role of technology in their romantic relationships and its impact on relationship conflict. From the qualitative content analyses, the following themes emerged: technology contributed to romantic jealousy; mistrust propagated partner monitoring, surveillance and controlling behaviors; and technology alerted others to unhealthy romantic relationships. Their results showed that “feelings of romantic jealousy resulted in text message harassment and the

expectation of immediate technology-facilitated contact” and “females were more flirtatious as well as emotionally affected by jealousy resulting from social media sites, and males set rules regarding other-sex texting” (Rueda, Lindsay & Williams, 2015, p. 419). Moreover, “online spaces offered an opportunity for outside parties to observe unhealthy relationships and to offer support” (Rued et al., 2015, p. 419), which were facilitated by peer observation of the emotionally charged status updates posted by partners who used Facebook as “an outlet for emotional upset” (Rueda et al., 2015, p. 433). These findings demonstrate that social networking sites and digital communicative technologies can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of partners in romantic relationships as well as impact the health of the relationship itself.

In respect to the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization, Lenhart and her colleagues reported in their (2015) report on *Teens, Technology and Romantic Relationships*, that “teens from lower-income households communicate more frequently with their romantic partners using social media, as well as instant messaging. They’re also more likely (43% versus 28%) to say they’ve encountered a partner doing something online that was upsetting them, fueling jealousy or uncertainty in the relationship” (p. 35). Moreover, social media use among teens from lower-income homes is reportedly used in a context of peer approval of relationships, with “47% of teens from households earning less than \$50K/year have used social media to publicly express affection for a significant other (versus 33% from higher-earning households) (Lenhart et al., 2015, p. 45) and “73% (versus 59%) [Of lower-income teens] support their friends’ relationships via social media as well” (Lenhart et al., 2015, p. 73). Thus, social media use among lower-income youth may very well have more severe

consequences on their wellbeing, given the degree of impact it appears to have on the public support-seeking behavior related to their intimate relationships.

Psychological Implications of Social Media

A study by Vogel and colleagues in 2014 examined the impact of exposure to others' profiles in social media on youth's self-esteem, and whether resultant changes were attributed to social comparison processes. Results supported the hypotheses and indicated that adolescents who used Facebook more often had poorer self-esteem, which was mediated by exposure to upward social comparisons (i.e. comparing themselves to others who they perceived to be better than them in some way). When they followed up with an experimental study, self-esteem was similarly impacted, indicating that social comparison online has a significant influence on offline psychological wellbeing (Vogel et al., 2014). These results are consistent with Valkenburg and colleagues' (2006) research which found that frequency of social media use influenced adolescents' wellbeing and social self-esteem.

Other research has shown similar results, with higher frequencies of social media use having negative implications for adolescents' wellbeing. In their study with youth 12-16 years of age, Nesi and Prinstein (2015) found that "technology based social comparison and feedback seeking were associated with depressive symptoms" (p. 1427). The effect was particularly strong for females who self-reported being less popular than others (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

It should be noted however, that other studies have failed to find a significant relationship between social networking site use and mental health, such as clinical depression (Jelenchick, Eickhoff & Moreno, 2013). Indeed, research on the "Facebook depression" phenomenon (Selfhout et al., 2009) has yielded conflicting opinions from researchers, More

research is needed to better understand the mechanisms of potential impact for negative mental health experiences among adolescents.

Social Media and Risk Taking Behaviors

There is a great deal of literature examining the effect of social media on youths' sexual activities, risk for sexual solicitation, and alcohol use (Reid & Weigle, 2014). One example is research on the association between adolescents posting sexualized photos on their profiles and their sexual attitudes and behaviours. Van Oosten and colleagues (2015) found that adolescents' exposure to peers' self-sexualized online self-presentations had predictive power in their detecting changes in their sexual behaviours over time. Additionally, adolescents who had experience with sexual behaviours were also more likely to have viewed others' sexualized online profiles (van Oosten et al., 2015).

Sexualized profile photos are also associated with peer status and self-image. Young women who self-sexualized their profile photos were rated as less attractive and competent by their female peers (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2014). Those youths also had higher rates of self-objectification (Slater & Tiggemann, 2015). Taken together these findings suggest that exposure to, and perception of, peer online presentation has significant impact on self-presentation and self-concept.

Those at highest risk for experiencing sexual solicitation online are heavy users of social media, chat room participants, and those open to revealing conversations with people they did not know (Mitchel et al., 2001). Males' attempts to have an online sexual relationship were more direct and explicit than for females, whose expressions were more subtle and implicit (Subrahmanyam, Smahel & Greenfield, 2006). While younger females were more likely to connect with strangers in monitored chat rooms, older males were more likely to frequent

unmonitored chat rooms. However, no demographic was more or less concerned about meeting people they did not know online (Lenhart, 2007).

There has been research concerning the online and in person interaction with others who are underage users of alcohol. It was found that youth who had higher alcohol use were more likely to have online friendships with other youth who used alcohol and were more likely to increase their alcohol use if their friends did (Huang et al., 2015). In contrast, another study reported that youth who were high-frequency Internet users were generally less likely than low-frequency Internet users to report significant alcohol use or binge drinking (Caisano et al., 2012).

Positive Aspects of Social Media

There are also findings about the positive associations between social media use and relationships among youth. For example, communicating with an unknown, opposite-sex peer online following social exclusion increased self-esteem and decreased negative affect in adolescent girls (Gross, 2009). In another study 18% of the youth surveyed sought help from the Internet for emotional problems, of which the Internet was a resource to supplement other sources of help rather than substituting for them (Gould et al., 2002). There is an indirect link between the frequency with which youth use social networking sites and their social self-esteem and wellbeing (Valkenburg et al., 2006), supporting the notion that technology has the potential to connect youth and in doing so promote a sense of belonging (Derrick et al., 2009; Casiano et al., 2012).

Social media may also serve as a resource for supportive, trusting relationships for youth who have difficulty engaging in such relationships—and achieving these needs—elsewhere (Wolak et al., 2003). For example, “teens with difficulties may use online relationships as

temporary bridges that bring them into comfortable and supportive face-to-face relationships” (Wolak et al., 2003, p. 106). Moreover, “adolescents maybe especially drawn to online relationships because of their intense interest in forming relationships, and because the expansiveness of cyberspace frees them from some of the constraints of adolescence by giving them easy access to a world beyond that of their families, schools and communities” (Wolak et al., 2003, p. 106). Youth, both mainstream and those who have experienced marginalization, use social media to maintain offline friendships and relationships. However, youth who have experienced marginalization may also be using it to facilitate intimacy, identity validation, and affirmation in their relationships, which may not be so easily accomplished offline.

To explore the potential positive influence of social media on the lives of marginalized young people, a recent study examining Internet and social media use among homeless youth yielded important information. Rice & Barman-Adhikari’s (2014) research with homeless youth in Los Angeles is among the first to contribute to the literature about where, when, why and how homeless youth use the Internet and social media. It was found that the youth accessed the Internet via a public library (47%), youth service agency (40%) or the place they were staying at night (11%). Nearly two-thirds of the youth were using the Internet for email and over half were using the Internet for social networking, accessing sites such as Facebook and MySpace (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014). Email was used to communicate with family, caseworkers as well as possible employers while social media was used to interact with peers. Similarly to mainstream youth, homeless youth used the Internet for both social and practical purposes to send and receive information “to obtain information, fulfill recreation and entertainment needs, and to socialize” (Rice & Adhikari, 2014, p. 242).

There remains little research concerning social media and its role in the lives of youth who experience social marginalization (Rice & Adhikari, 2014; Stevens et al., 2016). Moreover, much of the literature on social media and adolescents has been conducted with youth in the United States or Europe, whose experiences may not be accurately representative of the experiences of youth in an urban Canadian context. With these limitations in mind, the present study represents an attempt to generate new information concerning the experiences of these youth.

Chapter 3

3 Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization in regards to their social media use and impact on relationships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 youths between the ages of 16-24 years, who were recruited from and interviewed at local community agencies in a central Canadian city. Of the 12 interviews conducted, 11 were transcribed and analyzed. Using a content analysis procedure based on the interview transcripts, 224 codes were identified and merged to form 6 themes. The themes represented youths' experiences with—and opinions of—social media as it related to their relationships. In this chapter, a description of qualitative research design, process of data collection and analysis as well as how the researcher promoted trustworthiness are presented.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not hypothesize or manipulate variables to provide causal or relational conclusions (Creswell, Hanson & Plano Clark, 2007a). Rather, this study aimed to contribute depth to an understanding of experiences associated with social media use among youth who have experienced social marginalization and their relationships with romantic partners and peers.

While qualitative research differs from quantitative in its absence of numerical data and statistical analyses, it is equally as rigorous. Specifically, qualitative researchers interpret their data with awareness of the individual lenses they contribute to the data interpretation and reporting process of analysis (Creswell et al., 2007a). In doing so, they acknowledge and

account for the influence of their own personal values and biases, experiences and worldviews on the way that data are collected and results. As such, the researcher is considered to be the instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

In the present study, the researcher chose to use a social-constructivist lens on the data with the supposition that people construct meaningful concepts to make sense of their environments based upon their previous lived experiences (Jones-Smith, 2016). This view was chosen with an understanding that the youth interviewed may construct meaningful insight into the impact of social media on their relational lives by basing it out of, and relating it to, their previous understanding of—and lived experiences with—interpersonal relationships. For this study a qualitative design was appropriate given the researcher's previous experience working with youth in a clinical context, as well as the fit of this clinical experience with their prior knowledge of the general discourse in social media research. The chapter is written in third person as an effort by the researcher to maintain some distance from the data to reduce her influence on the views expressed by participants.

This study was informed by a phenomenological design to provide insight into the essence of the youths' experiences with social media on their relationships. In this case, a phenomenology of participants' specific statements and experiences aimed "to reduce the experiences of people with a shared phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell et al., 2007a, p. 252). More plainly, by using a phenomenological design, the researcher aimed to tease apart the shared experiences of these youth to better understand the overall essence of the phenomenon (i.e. social media's impact on socially marginalized youths' relationships) based on the themes that emerged from their interview transcripts. This design was chosen with consideration of the present dearth of literature providing information about

differences in the quality of *how* marginalized youth are using social media as compared to their mainstream peers. As such, a phenomenological design was deemed suitable to provide richness to our understanding of their experiences based on the accounts provided by the youths themselves.

3.2 Defining “Marginalized”

The term “marginalized” as it is used in the study refers a variety of sociopolitical circumstances that may have been experienced by the youth. These circumstances have been almost entirely unaccounted for in previous research on social media use among adolescents (Hourcade, Bullock-Rest & Schelhowe, 2010; Lim et al., 2013; Lucero, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2001; Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014; Rueda et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2016; Wolak et al., 2003). While the term “marginalized” may be contentious as a descriptive term, the researcher believed that the target youth for this study were already conscious of the sociopolitical barriers they face daily—including the discrimination they’ve experienced—and that using the term “marginalized” as an inclusion criterion was not believed to belittle participants into a reality that they were not already aware of. In essence, the sentiment underlying the decision to use the term “marginalized” was not founded in a deficit-model which would pathologize these youths’ voices or experiences. Rather, it was chosen to explicitly address the greater systemic and societal barriers that these youths have been forced to contend with while navigating the same developmental and technological terrain as their mainstream peers (i.e. youth who may not have the same degree of experience with the different possible intersections of social marginalization).

Moreover, it was decided by the researcher to describe the youth who participated in this study as “youth who have experienced social marginalization”—as opposed to

“marginalized youth”—with the rationale that the youths’ identities are comprised of far more than just their experiences with discrimination and marginalization. While those same experiences account for the crux of the focus in exploring differences in the features of these youths’ experiences as compared to their mainstream peers, the researcher does not believe that the youths who were interviewed should have their identities reduced to their experiences with social marginalization, as might be suggested by tritely identifying them as “marginalized youth”.

3.3 Participants

Participants consisted of 12 youths (7 self-identified female individuals; 4 self-identified male individuals; and 1 self-identified Two-Spirited individual) between the ages of 16-24 years. Of the participants, 5 self-identified their ethnicity as being Aboriginal; 2 self-identified as being First Nations; 3 self-identified as being Black; 1 self-identified as being Métis; and 1 self-identified as being Caucasian. Participant self-identification of having experienced marginalization was indicated by their recruitment from youth-serving agencies which provide services and programming to community members from high-poverty inner-city neighbourhoods. Participants also indicated their self-identification as having experienced social marginalization by their informed decision to participate in a study about the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization. While most participants stated that they had previous experience with romantic relationships, many participants also reported not presently being involved in a romantic relationship.

3.4 Recruitment

Given that the researcher is originally from the same city, she could reach out to familiar local agencies ahead of time to obtain their permission, and internal ethics approval, to participate in recruitment and data collection at each of the respective agencies. Western University ethics approval that incorporated feedback from the agencies was obtained. Recruitment posters (see Appendix A) were posted in two youth-serving agencies prior to the study taking place. The youth who access the programming at these agencies either contacted the researcher directly through the contact information provided on the posters, or approached the researcher directly with interest in participating on days where the researcher was present at the agencies. Agency staff and volunteers were not aware of which youths had participated or not, and it was communicated explicitly to the youth that their participation in the study would not impact their access to services at the agencies in any way. Participation was strictly voluntary, and participants could decline answering any questions or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

Participants were read and given a letter of information (see Appendix B) at the beginning of the interview. After discussing the letter of information and clarifying any questions participants' might have had, participants were then asked to sign a copy of informed consent. Participants were continually reminded that they did not have to answer any questions and could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. A list of additional local support resources was also attached to the letter of information for all participants in the case that they experienced any stress that they were interested in seeking additional support.

3.5 Data Collection

The sample was a purposive, convenience sample due to the researcher's conscious effort to avoid coercive recruitment tactics. While interviews could be scheduled to take place at any mutually agreeable and private location (i.e. a meeting room in the agency, public library, university etc.), all interviews took place in private rooms within the agencies. Participants were required to commit up to 60 minutes for the interview and were compensated with a \$5.00 Tim Horton's gift card for their time. Participants were not required to complete the interview to be compensated the \$5.00 Tim Horton's gift card, and were welcome to withdraw from the study at any time. Interviews began with the researcher reading over the letter of information with 5 minutes allotted to discussing its contents and clarifying any questions. The participant and the researcher then filled out the letter of informed consent prior to the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, and the researcher obtained participants' informed consent to do so beforehand. The semi-structured interviews took 20-40 minutes to complete, which was less time than the participants were originally asked to commit. The researcher also kept a detailed log of observations and notes from each interview for reflection at the data analysis stage.

The interviews were comprised of two sets of questions that the researcher asked participants. The first questions were to collect basic, non-identifiable demographic information and the second questions were to explore the opinions and experiences of these youth relative to social media and relationships. Given that the interviews were semi-structured, the questions were intended as open-ended prompts to generate discussion of different topics relative to the research question, and could be rephrased per each participant's individual level of understanding. Time for introductory questions and closing questions was afforded at the

beginning and end up the interview, as is characteristic of semi-structured interviews in phenomenological designs (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The Participant Demographic Questions (see Appendix C) was an 8-item survey that the researcher asked participants to clarify some basic non-identifiable demographic information including: age, self-identified gender, present living situation, present level of obtained education, present employment status, self-identified ethnicity, present relationship status and history of involvement in a relationship. It took approximately 5 minutes to administer.

The second survey (see Appendix D) was comprised of 14-items that the researcher developed to provide insight into the youths' overall experiences with social media (e.g. What kind of social media do you like to use? How do you access social media?); preferences of social media (e.g. What do you generally use social media for? Who do you tend to contact the most using different forms of social media?); and opinions about social media relative to their own and others' relationships (e.g. How do you feel about people using social media to meet new partners? What would you say is the biggest impact social media has on your relationships?). The questions were asked in a semi-structured fashion, and usually took approximately 25 minutes.

3.6 Data Analysis

While 12 interviews were conducted and audio-recorded, the researcher ultimately decided to exclude one participant's interview from the data analysis stage, resulting in only 11 interviews being used. This decision was made after listening to the participant's audio-recording. The participant was very thoughtful and generous in sharing their experiences with social marginalization and discrimination connected to their self-identified ethnicity. However, the participant's responses did not address the influence of their experiences with social media

in such a way that their contributions fit the intended research question of this study. As such, it was decided to exclude this participant's responses from the analysis rather than trying to over-interpret the participant's responses to make them fit this specific context.

For the remaining 11 completed interviews, the audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and subjected to content analysis (Creswell, 2007b). This process involved initially reading through each interview to develop an understanding their overall content and tone. Next, the researcher identified and organized important quotes from the interviews (which are referred to as "meaning units") (Creswell, 2007b), and assigned them to codes which captured the essential content of each specific meaning unit (see Appendix E). Finally, the researcher categorized each of the codes into groups which constituted the overarching themes that emerged across participant responses (see Appendix F).

3.7 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of a study is determined by its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Each of these will be addressed individually as far as the specific strategies that were used to strengthen this study's overall trustworthiness.

The qualitative concept of credibility may be viewed as parallel to the quantitative concept of internal validity, or how well the research reflects the content it purports to (Shenton, 2004). To strengthen the credibility of this study the researcher provided an exhaustive and thorough description of the meaning units, codes and themes in the results chapter (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, the credibility of the reported results was strengthened by the amount of time the researcher spent with each participant individually in the interviews (20-30 minutes), and her independent involvement in analyzing and interpreting the source data. The sufficiency

of the data was assessed via the saturation of content that emerged from responses that were collected across the 11 participants, at which point it was deemed that no novel information was being reported.

Transferability may be viewed as parallel to the quantitative concept of external validity, or how effectively the results of the study generalize to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Due to the nature of the small sample size, the results of this study cannot be generalizable to the experiences of other youth who have experienced social marginalization in the traditional sense. Essentially, the results of this study with these youths may not be representative of the experiences of all urban-Canadian youth who have experiences of social marginalization in respect of social media and relationships. Rather, it is with consideration of the unique characteristics of the youth who were interviewed at that time, in that context and setting, that the transferability of the results can be considered. To promote the transferability of the results, the researcher was mindful to include sufficient information about her interests in pursuing this research, and the role she contributes as the instrument through which the data was interpreted and reported (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, the involvement of the youths' collaborative understanding of the process and procedure for conducting the research also contributed to the transferability of the results.

The dependability of this research, may be viewed as parallel to the quantitative concept of reliability, refers to the likelihood that if the same study were repeated in the same context, with the same participants, using the same methods, results would be similar to the results obtained in the present study (Shenton, 2004). To promote the dependability of this research, the researcher has reported the methods in an explicit fashion such that it is possible that they could be repeated. Moreover, the researcher was diligent in using a consistent methodological

procedure across all participants, which included: beginning all the interviews with the same introductory questions; using the same sequence of obtaining informed consent; using consistent administration of the same questions in the same order; and using the same format to engage closing comments and thanking participants. Additionally, the researcher kept an audit trail by writing notes about each participant interview in a journal to aid in the reflection process at the data analysis stage.

Finally, the confirmability of the research—akin to the concept of objectivity in quantitative research—considers the comparison of the findings of the study to the original data itself (Shenton, 2004). In the present study its confirmability refers to how well the results represent the original data. To promote this, the thorough reporting of the themes, codes and meaning units contribute by reflecting the overall essence of the phenomena described in the interviews. Moreover, the researcher took care to thoughtfully consider her subjectivity as an interpreter of the results, by including a detailed personal reflections section in the results chapter of this research.

Chapter 4

4 Results

In this chapter, a thematic analysis of the findings from the semi-structured interviews is presented. Each theme is illustrated by direct quotes from participants. Included within this chapter are the personal reflections of the researcher, written in first person, which describe her experience of the overall research process including the interpretation of results.

4.1 Themes

Six themes emerged from the interview data, which represent the essence of the experiences of youth regarding social media and their relationships. These themes include commonalities in their: Prevalence and Preferences, Typical Activities, Negative Influences, Awareness of Risks, Positive Insights and Suggestions, and Break-Ups.

Prevalence and Preferences

In this theme, participants discussed which social media platforms they prefer to use the most, the frequency in which they access their profiles and accounts through these platforms as well as the methods in which they prefer to access these platforms. Moreover, participants commented on the duration of time that they had been using social media throughout their lives.

Regarding specific platforms, Facebook and Snapchat seemed to be preferred, with Instagram as a close second.

Um well Facebook is number one, uh Instagram is okay...Snapchat, I did have a Twitter but then no one used it anymore. So I would say Facebook is number one.
(Participant 7)

I use like Snapchat, Instagram, sometimes Facebook. I like that you can like, on Snapchat, I like that you can like talk to people and send them pictures of what you're doing. Like you can also have conversations, but it's mostly about taking pictures, like, yeah.

(Participant 6)

Umm Instagram, Snapchat, I used to use Facebook but not anymore.

(Participant 1)

Participants also commented on the frequency with which they were using their social media, which was staggeringly often, as indicated by their self-evaluations.

Every day, from when I wake up and then when I'm at school, during lunch, go home. Yeah, so it's constant.

(Participant 1)

Well, I mean not as much now, I probably use it about, maybe five hours a day because I go home. I don't have WiFi during school so, but when I have my phone it's literally constantly. Maybe, I think for at least eighty percent of the day.

(Participant 2)

I think I use it a lot, cuz like at school I'm always sitting with all of my friends and we all sit in a row, and there's always a teacher walking by asking us why don't we talk to each other, we're like all on our phones just like not even talking to each other ha. Like, I notice it from other people telling me, like yeah...I always see people like bumping into poles because they're always on their phones and stuff.

(Participant 6)

Some participants related the frequency with which they used social media to that of an addiction.

If I have any access to Wi-Fi and some kind of a device I could be on it day and night...Oh, it's an addiction. It absolutely is. Like emotionally, it can alter you emotionally if you don't have it if you're addicted to it. Oh yeah, for sure. Like it's something that I will strive to do in the day; like I will travel distances to find something to use it. Even if like, I'm sure lots of people have told you this, but yeah like even if I know that I don't have any inboxes or anything, just signing into it. It's like a relief, you know?

(Participant 12)

Participants reported using social media through a personal smartphone, as well as other devices including tablets, hand-held devices and computers.

Um with a phone haha. Or computer, or like any device actually.

(Participant 4)

Uh on my phone...I have both like if I'm somewhere without Wi-Fi I'll use my data, and when I've got Wi-Fi then I'll turn off my data.

(Participant 10)

Well I mean when I was a kid it was just computers but I've had mobile devices. I've had more things like iPods and stuff like that, but uh I've had phones and stuff like that, ya know. Laptops, I've used a tablet once or twice.

(Participant 12)

Finally, participants also commented that they had years of experience using and navigating different social media, and that it's been a part of their social lives since their early adolescent years.

Mmm grade six. My mom didn't want us to have Facebook but I first like, had one I just didn't tell her until like, I think I was in grade seven. And then yeah, and then I just been like, I've been on Facebook so much like I remember when I first

had it how it looked, haha it's changed so much!

(Participant 2)

Probably when I was like, eleven...that's when I got my first phone, when I was eleven...Yeah, I've been in it for a while but like growing up like a little kid and like, yeah. And now like little kids like eight year olds, like me niece she's only six years old and she has a tablet and she's always asking for it, always on it and I don't like that at all, and so whatever.

(Participant 10)

Typical Activities

Participants shared experiences of primarily (almost exclusively) keeping contact with people online who they had existing, offline relationships with. They used social media predominantly for making plans with people as well as for entertainment. The only times where they were not the primary uses of social media was for those who used it as a means to facilitate sexual relationships with potential partners.

Participants primarily contacted those with whom they already had existing relationships with. These people included friends, partners, family members, and acquaintances.

Umm friends. Uh yeah just friends mostly...I have some family but I don't really talk to them, they just like ask me once in a while "how are you doing?", stuff like that. Um yeah, most of well like, I just have a few friends, I don't have a lot of friends. Most of them are like, I've already met them...Um well I just mostly have like family and close friends, because well like I used to do—well, whatever everybody else used to do—was add everybody that they're like acquainted with and stuff like that so yeah...I dunno I guess you could say made Facebook more personal kinda, yeah.

(Participant 3)

Family and friends. Um just mostly my friends. Yeah cuz my sisters and brothers are not allowed to use devices in their home facility I guess, so yeah I just contact one of my friends and use it.

(Participant 4)

Uh my boyfriend and like my best friend...like, friends of friends. I don't, I don't feel comfortable having people that I don't know, and people that I know don't know on my Facebook.

(Participant 5)

The youth noted that social media functioned as an opportunity for them to feel connected to what other people were doing in their own lives, and to stay up-to-date on the social news of the day.

If it's like a Friday or a Saturday or Sunday I'm talking to someone and like making plans, but if it's during the week I'll just be like scrolling down my newsfeed on like Instagram or Facebook cuz I don't usually talk to people. The people that I talk to mostly are at my school, so then I just talk to them then.

(Participant 2)

I find that I could just sit there and scroll through the news feed, and sometimes I'll find in a weird way I'll actually like, like if I'm scrolling through and it messes up and goes back to the top I'll just keep scrolling right back down through. I do find that entertaining for some reason, it's like a fidget toy. It's just something to do.

(Participant 12)

Just to see what's going on with other people—the news feed—or if I need to get a hold of somebody I just message someone, or I check my messages if somebody's trying to get a hold of me. And basically just to see what's going on during the day, or whatever I missed in the past couple of days. Or if something happened I'll just check the news feed and that just basically shows me what's going on...If I

can't get a hold of somebody I'll check Facebook but then Snapchat, you can get messages through that too. Instagram not so much, but kind of too, yeah.

(Participant 7)

I'd probably be on Snapchat most of my day. Like, when you walked in here I was on Snapchat talking to someone I was like, "oh this would be great to do" hahah. Yeah communicating with people going on, like news, and I don't know just finding out what people are doing with their day and stuff I guess.

(Participant 11)

Participants commented that social media was often used as entertainment.

Mmm I don't know, just like watch videos and pictures and I dunno, just yeah...I use it just to message people, stay in contact with people. Um just to keep in contact with people, that's about it. And if like I get bored, and if I need entertainment I'll watch videos.

(Participant 10)

Participants commented that social media allowed them to be more sexually active.

Probably the people that like, the people who are like...people who I like I guess, like people who I want to like chill with, you know what I mean? Like, people that I like like. That's who I mostly talk to on Snapchat, but I still have lots of friends...[Without It] I don't think I'd be as sexually active as I am. Or I would be as, like I said, connected to people.

(Participant 11)

I think that it's amazing, and I love it, and I live for it. Yeah, for sure man. I'm always so happy for my boys or whoever if they're getting some. So yeah, social media's great man. Are you kidding me? Almost every day I'll be on Facebook and my buddy will be like "Bro! Check out this chick that I just slept with bro!" and he'll send me like two pictures of her and I'm like "Nice, nice!" It's awesome

for that, that's a positive.

(Participant 12)

With this, they had more access to non-committed hook-ups than might otherwise be possible to facilitate.

When I was younger the only thing that I cared about was girls. So it's an amazing tool to meet females—to meet anyone in general, but for me; girls. I don't care, I have my buddies on Facebook or whatever and stuff, but yeah...Not even necessarily new partners, just someone to hook up with, you know?

(Participant 12)

Negative Influences

There were also different kinds of content participants described, which they believed had potentially unhealthy implications. Topics included jealousy, drama, mate poaching, as well as trust, loyalty and partner behavior-monitoring. In addition, identity performance and attention-seeking as well as the influence of social media on body image were described.

In terms of jealousy, participants reflected that one partner “liking” the picture of an opposite-sex individual outside of their romantic relationship was one of the highest offences that one could commit in a relationship, and would result in suspicion.

I would say it becomes problematic when my girlfriend—or ex-girlfriend in this case—would notice me posting on other girls' walls or liking their photos. But I don't think it'd be that serious if I'm just like, if I just happened to like a picture, you know? It's just me saying “oh, that's a nice picture”. It's not me flirting in a type of way, it's just I don't know, not showing affection but kind of just telling them that they look nice. But then I guess the girl in a relationship would see that as like, not a threat, but like, inappropriate.

(Participant 7)

Say when the guy likes another girl's picture or the girl likes another guy's picture or one of them is talking to somebody that messaged them out of nowhere. For example like, the creeps that would like send a random stranger nudes, like their partner might find it and yeah...Like I said, it can cause problems when a guy likes another girl's picture, the girl can say "Does she look prettier than me?" or "Do you prefer her?" and she'd get jealous of that. She'd probably be thinking "How dare he like her picture!" or "Is he going to leave me for her because she's prettier than me?" Stuff like that.

(Participant 9)

Hahaha. I think it's completely ludicrous that at the press of a button—hitting the "like" button—on a female or male's page can enrage someone to the point where they will want to kill you, or want to get you jumped and beaten up. But it's real, it happens. Like, people do get extremely angry and jealous in relationships when it comes to Facebook. Oh yeah. "Why is that girl liking your picture? Oh my god! What, are you fucking them?!"

(Participant 12)

Related to the jealousy created through liking someone's picture, participants also commented on a "fear of missing out" when seeing friends post pictures together online where the individual was not included.

Jealousy is everywhere, especially with social media because like say you like someone's picture or whatever or you comment on there like if you're in a romantic relationship or whatever. Or even just as friends. Like if you're hanging out with friends, and then like you're best friends and she's hanging out with other friends and like you wanna be there, and that's your best friend and like I dunno, whatever.

(Participant 10)

Drama was another negative feature experienced or observed on social media, with participants reporting a disinterest or dislike for drama-inducing content and online behaviors.

Well like, my last ex, I actually met him online too and then I met him in person and stuff like that cuz we lived in the same city and then his um ex or whatever found out that we were dating or something like that, so she added me on Instagram, added me on Facebook, stuff like that. And then turns out that she had a baby so yeah it just became more of a big problem. Yeah haha lots of drama...Yeah she was like texting him, stuff like that and then she started talking to me, stuff like that.

(Participant 3)

I don't really share my relationship online...a long time ago that used to cause problems with me and my boyfriend so I kinda like grew out of that. Like when I, if I tell a joke like something funny happened between me and him and I post it, he'd be mad that I posted it cuz like, it embarrassed him but to me it was funny. Or when I was mad I would post a status about him and yeah, I don't do that no more... it started a lot of drama. Like they would stick up for me or they would stick up for him, and then other people would start fighting about some other stuff on my status and it was just not worth it.

(Participant 5)

Like I play football and my coach told me "don't ever talk to people on social media" because like, what's it called, if somebody says "yeah, he wants to fight you" or what's it called, this, this and this, you're obviously not gonna back down and all this and stuff like that. And I feel like that's how everything escalates because people always want drama and they want to see a fight, and I feel like if somebody wants to see a fight you just start thinking "yeah, we should just fight", and like it just changes your whole view of like what the problem is and like, what's it called, how it can be solved.

(Participant 6)

Not only [Posting About] their personal lives—other people’s personal lives which they have no business sharing. It’s called “putting someone on blast”. That happens all the time. I’m not too sure if it’s a big problem really anywhere because people now know that it’s bullshit. People just go on there for entertainment, cuz it’s drama, you know?

(Participant 12)

Participants also commented on the conflict that can arise from mate-poaching behaviors that can threaten a romantic relationship, as well as the ease of infidelity that can be achieved through social media.

Well um like on Facebook you, say if you’re in a relationship with like a guy and then you don’t know like, like say what if girls try adding him and you don’t know if they’re trying to talk to him because they don’t like you, so they’re tryna...or something like that. So I know a lot of that happens. I mean, that happened to me too.

(Participant 2)

I think, uh well if you’re in a relationship and then you choose to showcase it online it shows others that you’re together and that you want to make it public. So I think that would be a positive. But then I also notice that when other girls see that you’re in a relationship they tend to uh, start addressing you more and they wouldn’t have if you were single...I think it’s all about like they see that you’re doing okay and happy and then I don’t know if they’re like home-wreckers, but I think they want what they can’t have. So yeah, I think that would be the main cause.

(Participant 7)

I feel like social media like, there’s like you could always be talking to somebody else and like, it’s a lot of like cheating. Like back then, when you cheated, you had to go to the person and talk to them and stuff like that, but like now, what’s it called, you can just sit there with your girlfriend and still talk to another girl like

right next to her. Like, I have a lot of friends that like girls have done that to them or guys have done that to them, and I feel like it makes everything so much easier for people to get jealous and like not trust their partner. So I feel like that's something that's not good about social media.

(Participant 6)

Issues related to trust and loyalty were of particular focus to the youth.

Umm I'd say it's had a big impact on my relationships. I guess...I don't know, it's social media, it's like it's just there and you can't really like take it away, cuz then, I dunno if someone told me to take away my social media I'd kind of be mad, or I'd say no, cuz I'd be like "I can't, I'm sorry". I guess it all comes down to the trust and like, do you really trust the person to have social media but you can't really tell them not to have social media, but it's like, I mean sometimes it can ruin relationships because of like, other people. Or like, even your partner can not be loyal or something they can like be talking to another girl, or another guy or something.

(Participant 2)

I think it's problematic from the beginning because I guess, cuz it's like people can see what you're doing...you can't really lie about what you're doing. Or like, I don't know just like there's lots of issues that get created with social media and relationships like trust issues and like the fact that you can talk to somebody for like a long time and like, not even be able to actually be next to them. That's huge, like, that's fucked up.

(Participant 11)

Moreover, participants commented on the existence of forced password-sharing within a romantic relationship to prove loyalty.

Or like, you, I dunno, people might think you're unloyal or something because they don't know your password and then that might cause a fight or something.

But sometimes like the other partner doesn't want to do it or something, then I dunno; there's a lot of fights. when I'm in a relationship I don't really, I mean I would want their password to be honest hahaha, cuz I would feel more like, I dunno I feel like I would trust the person more because then I don't have to wonder. But I also think like, you should already trust, like why are you in the relationship if you don't trust someone? You never know cuz like Facebook I want, if I want to be with someone I want to make sure I trust them so I would want their password if I think about it now so yeah.

(Participant 2)

Yeah, you gotta like tell them your password and stuff like that...or else I guess you get your phone broken aha. Yeah, so I just gave it to him.

(Participant 4)

Pfft it's a problem in relationships in general because it'll cause trust issues. Like they'll start to be "I want your password, I don't trust you, blah blah blah" cuz I mean like, the majority of people in today's society have trust issues so, you know. Yeah, Facebook can definitely get you in trouble. Just, they think you're talking to another chick or whatever, you know. Maybe you are, maybe you aren't but whatever.

(Participant 12)

Partner monitoring was reported as a function of social networking in the interest of affirming trust and loyalty in a romantic relationship.

When you're in a relationship and your partner doesn't want you on like social media, especially Facebook because that can like break up your relationship and stuff...cuz like the partner's like jealous and immature and stuff. Right now I can't have like no boys on my Facebook or no nothing, I can only talk to certain friends and if I go like overboard then I don't know what would happen. Because he's jealous, he's like the jealous type of person and immature and I'm like trying to

get him out of that, but it's not like working aha.

(Participant 4)

In a romantic relationship um the biggest impact it had on me was like with social and the relationship and whatnot was like, them um like being sneaky I guess and being a pathological liar and all that stuff...Yeah, he was messaging other people and he would delete the message but he wouldn't delete the history and yeah so I knew something was up. Like I'm not like fuckin... it's not rocket science to fuckin figure out...so like, you know, whatever like I looked –cuz I just happened to look—and then sure enough I seen like everything and I was like “What the fuck?” So, whatever.

(Participant 10)

I dunno, that's just how people are. They won't feel comfortable unless they have access to their partner's Facebook. I don't personally follow into that, if somebody demands that I give them my Facebook information I tell them they can dip, they can go...like, no. Like, I have my privacy and my individuality and that's that.

(Participant 12)

Attention-seeking behaviors were also regarded as unsavory, and participants expressed a keen aptitude for interpreting such behaviors through another's online presentation.

When they just like pour their life out and like what they, what they're doing at this moment and who they're chillin' with and like umm like every little single thing they're doing, like “oh, going for a walk” or “oh, seeing this person” or “oh seen this dog”, like you know what I mean? Like a play-by-play, and so that's really annoying. And I know I have this person on my Facebook that does that all the time, and she likes her own statuses and like no one likes her statuses or anything and like, she likes her own. Probably cuz people are annoyed and she wants attention. I dunno.

(Participant 10)

Finally, the negative influence of social media on youths' body image and self-esteem was reported by participants.

Yeah, people get really influenced of social media, and it affects a lot of people cuz society on how the way you look, how the way you feel, and, you know. Everyone wants to be like everyone else. They don't want to be their own person because they're affected by social media, which is dumb aha.

(Participant 1)

I think the biggest thing that annoys me is the fact that the standards of beauty and masculinity and everything is so deadly. I feel so bad for all of us, really, because like we're being sucked into this fake world of like being fake and not ourselves, and not like how we are or how we look. We should be proud of who we are and how we look, you know what I mean? So I think that's like the biggest problem. And it's like really hurting a lot of our people, well not "our" people, I mean like everybody haha.

(Participant 11)

Awareness of Risks

Youth were aware of potential risks associated with being active on the Internet through social media. They were aware of risks associated with meeting strangers online, cyberbullying, stalking and harassment, as well as sexual exploitation and exposure to a peer's high-risk content. Moreover, participants demonstrated an overall awareness of issues related to privacy, self-sexualizing photos, sharing nude images as well as the change in value systems over time and gender-specific considerations. Finally, they described an understanding of the paradoxical nature of social media and of the necessity of using caution when navigating these mediums.

As related to their preference for interacting with people with whom they had an existing relationship with offline, participants described an awareness of risks associated with meeting strangers online.

A lot of my friends use that app [Hot or Not], and it's like it's crazy. They're like "yeah you should go on it, there's so much girls that are always like..." and I'm like nah, like you don't really want to meet somebody like through social media. Like you don't really know them that well...

(Participant 6)

They would message you, then there's a reason why they would message you. They'd want like, they'd send you nudes and they would try to like meet up with you and you don't know these people, and they're old—old men who would lie about their age. It was disgusting so I was like, "I'm not going to deal with" that cuz my mom would tell me horrifying stories, so I just deleted it.

(Participant 9)

Participants also addressed their awareness of gender-related risks and considerations.

Cuz as I said, I'm two-spirited so it's pretty hard to meet people so I have to go and like find strangers on like scary apps and shit hahaha. I've never had a bad experience where I like went to somebody and like anything happened cuz I like, I do to take measures to protect myself. Like I'd be going to a public place if I were to meet them and yeah I wouldn't be like, I wouldn't risk that. Yeah, but like I do get bugged on social media all the time, and like there are those old disgusting men or like those really pervert-y people and it's just like, yea so.

(Participant 11)

The phenomenon of “catfishing” [when a person provides false information about their identity online to draw another into a relationship] was described.

A couple months ago, like before school ended, there was this cop that came and talked about like predators and stuff like that. And like after the cop talked to us about that, all of them [the participant's friends] deleted that app cuz they all were like "yeah, I'm not doing this no more" and stuff like that. Like people legit like they didn't know people actually make fake accounts with all this stuff and they have all this information on them so then it just turns out that it's like an old man or whatever.

(Participant 6)

Yeah, I've been catfished like twice haha. I know, the gay community is so bad for that like, really bad for that actually...Like, sometimes they even have like their own like new identity and shit like I've seen people who are like not even the same person and I was like "what the fuck?" Yeah, and like I had connections with them for years and then all of the sudden I'm like "daaamn" so like, really, it's pretty scary.

(Participant 11)

Moreover, participants demonstrated an awareness of the potential for misinterpretation and miscommunication. As such, they talked about the need for more clarity if the online context was too ambiguous.

For couples I feel like having a one-on-one, face-to-face conversation I feel like, you feel more connected, more than just like staring into a screen talking to somebody cuz like, yeah. I feel like, what's it called, when you're talking to somebody and it has more meaning to it when they're not just reading a text, so like yeah...but I feel like because when you're talking to somebody you can tell when something's wrong or something, but when you're talking on social media you never know.

(Participant 6)

It could help but it also could be like bad because last night I was talking to somebody who was like really suicidal, and their sister passed away and yeah. I

don't know, it was really hard to talk to her through that way, and the fact that she doesn't like to be on the phone just like me, so yeah like it was pretty hard. Especially when you can't read context properly, that's like a huge issue when you're trying to help somebody. And then there's that thing like where if you're going to help somebody you have to be careful about what you say. So yeah, social media I guess is kind of bad for that too.

(Participant 11)

Awareness and experiences of cyberbullying was also addressed.

I've seen um like bullying online and then it comes to the school and then it turns into a big problem after that. And then the kid doesn't want to come to school because he or she's going to get punched out or something. And it makes the kid feel bad and want to go do something to themselves or something. Like cy—cyber I can't even say that word...I just stayed home...it just caused more problems so I just took the, like the messages that they're sending to me and stuff to the station and showed them, and that person got arrested...they got arrested for assault...but like when I seen them at school, they like gave me dirty looks and stuff and yeah. I was just kinda shitty.

(Participant 4)

Stalking and harassment were also potential downsides to an active social media presence.

Like I have an ex-girlfriend, I actually do still associate with her, but for years and years I didn't because she would stalk me over social media. She would make fake Facebook account after fake Facebook account; she would somehow dig into my life and find out everything I was doing at all times. She would always know who I was dating and it was really, really creepy. And me and my girlfriends would call the police on this girl and they would say there's nothing we can do; we can't prove it's her.

(Participant 12)

Participants also displayed an awareness of the unhealthy or sometimes illicit content that their peers would post on their own social media. In some cases there was video footage of street-fights or solicitation of drugs.

Yeah, that's like a daily thing... Well I don't know about the fights, but like selling drugs and that is a daily thing. Um I feel that they're young and they shouldn't sell drugs, and they should be like getting their education instead of being on the streets.

(Participant 4)

When they like, Friday night or something when they're constantly posting them being all drunk on Snapchat, that bugs me... or like they do stupid things like "oh I stole this from this" or "I stole a car". It's just annoying. Or if I get involved somehow, like, if I comment on a status saying like "this was on the news" like, then they'd get mad that I said it was on the news. Meanwhile, like it's on the news, everyone already seen it. And like, the person that did it like I know and then that bugs me cuz like, they don't know like everybody knows it was that person so like, yeah.

(Participant 5)

Uhh I see a lot of people trying to sell drugs, people rambling on about their dramatic nonsense—which is pretty usual for Facebook. I don't know, I have a pretty typical news feed.

(Participant 12)

With their understanding of the dangers of sexual exploitation by strangers and online predators, the youth were concerned about the potential for younger children to be harmed because of a lack of awareness.

Uh I remember one time I was here [at the agency] and these little kids, they were getting some pictures from this forty-year-old guy um what was it... Kik? [An app]

They were showing it to me and I don't know it was, it looked like a weird thumb, but I think it was the guy's genitals and these were kids who were eight years old. And that's the only thing I don't like about it...And little kids, they think it's fun so they just play around with it. When I was talking to them and they showed it to me, the guy he was like texting them "it's your turn", and I told them to block this guy! And they were like "wait, we just want to fool around with him; we want to see what he's going to do next". Kids I don't think really think about the consequences or anything, they just wanna push.

(Participant 9)

Just as the youth shared an awareness of some of these risks, they also described ways in which they could exercise personal agency in their online personas, especially related to privacy.

I think whatever's personal should stay to yourself. I don't believe anyone should know your business, and I don't really think people care about your business to be honest haha. Umm, that's something for you to know and only you to know, not other people.

(Participant 1)

Yeah, and I like to hide my things cuz I like to hide my things from my family. I dunno, I just, I go out and have a few drinks and I don't want my mom seeing that...like I know she won't get mad but like, I just feel like she'll just be sad, so I don't want her to be sad, cuz she's my mom. Yeah I tell my friends "don't tag me in anything, wait till I have a computer or something" cuz then I can change my settings but yeah.

(Participant 2)

Along with the topic of privacy, participants also discussed their opinions of, and cautions for, self-sexualizing photographs online.

Maybe [people should post] less revealing photos, because that's on there forever. Like, even though they delete it, I'm pretty sure it's still somewhere in the archives of whatever media you're using. But I think again the people that post that type of stuff are just looking for attention. They probably are but I think they just crave it or something, I can't really explain it. But yeah, I think the people that post those kinds of pictures are just... yeah, I dunno. Hah.

(Participant 7)

Just be careful about what you post and, I dunno just because there's people out there that can hack you and like steal your pictures and like whatever and stuff like that. Especially like all these young girls that like are posting pictures that are like really revealing and that it's like, it's disgusting—it's really disgusting. And they're just young too, and they don't understand how like, how many people are in this world and, you know?

(Participant 10)

They were also aware of the risks associated with sharing nude photos through social media.

If you send a photo of yourself over Facebook, other people are going to get it. Nudes? Yeah you bet your ass all your homies are getting those. If you're stupid enough to put naked pictures of yourself on the Internet, they're going to go around. So you'd better either have no shame to your game or be damn proud of your body if you're going to send people naked pictures of yourself. Everybody does it, are you kidding me? Everybody does it. Like, a girl will add me on Facebook, I'll talk to her for five minutes and boom, she'll send me a video of her masturbating. It's just like hooooooooo.

(Participant 12)

The youth also addressed their perceptions of an overall decline in values and integrity associated with overuse of social media.

People spend way too much time on their phones...they don't see the value of things anymore. Like how it is back in the day haha.

(Participant 1)

In sum, participants conveyed an awareness of the need for young people to use caution when interacting with social media given the paradoxical nature of it and potentially negative experiences within one's relationships.

I think that all people should be cautious cuz it's like not just about sexual predators but like, people who are out there for credit cards for old people and squander people out of money. Or like those Nigerian Princes kind of deals hahahah.

(Participant 11)

You know what, I know that this study is about social media but in life in general, there's a flip side to everything. And there's a good and bad to everything. Social media can be extremely beautiful and extremely helpful, but it can also be a poison and a curse of society—depending on how you use it. Well, we make choices in life, right? So do you make the choice to be appropriate online or do you make the choice to use the Internet to say, slander people? Or bully people? Or steal from people using credit card information? Like, it really depends on how you use it.

(Participant 12)

Positive Insights and Suggestions

The youth also shared positive ways that social media influenced their lives. They reported that through social media they could advocate for the protection of children online, meet new people, obtain peer support and learning opportunities, as well as get outdoors more.

The youth were very concerned about identifying ways to keep children safe and protected in the wake of these rapidly advancing technologies. As such, they had observations and suggestions.

I don't like when people post things that are inappropriate, or that shouldn't be there because there's young children that use the Internet, right? And you shouldn't be posting inappropriate things knowing that other children may see them.

(Participant 1)

There's nothing I would change about social media except um, the fact that there are little kids that go on it. Kids that can be influenced in ways, and there's nothing really blocked from children on social media unless the parent stops them and most parents, they don't even know their kids have these things.

(Participant 9)

I don't know I just would want to try to help keep them more safe, cuz of like the Amanda Todd things and a lot of girls and boys getting sexually exploited. Especially like underage kids. I think that's a huge problem that needs to be stopped. So tell those university peoples to stop that shit hahaha.

(Participant 11)

Other positive uses of social media included its function as an alternative to meet new people when meeting someone in person was not feasible.

I mean if you're socially awkward I think maybe the net would work really good for you aha but like, I dunno, some people like don't go to school nowadays so. Especially youth actually, so social media is probably like the only way people meet each other.

(Participant 2)

Um well you could meet a lot of people I guess. Um, I dunno I'm not sure how it could be good...Hah yeah um, I guess it's a good way to meet people but then again you have to like take precautions with that too.

(Participant 3)

I met my boyfriend through Facebook...we had the same friends and then, I dunno I met him, started talking. And like that girl that was just here before me, I met her on Facebook haha. (Participant 5)

Moreover, social media was a method of communicating, facilitating connection and belonging.

I mean I honestly prefer hanging out with my friends, with them face-to-face. I would always choose that over just through a computer. But it's given us the option of talking to each other when we're not together. I have friends who are not allowed to leave the house at all, so I can talk to them through social media.

(Participant 9)

I think it's bringing us close together as a globe, you know what I mean? Yeah, cuz like we're able to talk to somebody like in China where a hundred years ago we wouldn't have been able to do that...or even like 15km away you wouldn't have been able to get in touch as easy as nowadays, so I guess that's really good. And it's like opening our minds to new ideas and stuff I guess.

(Participant 11)

Youth also reported using social media in other healthy ways, such as a resource for support and learning.

Sometimes I'll just go on...I like doing Google searches just for anything, cuz then I learn more stuff and it's interesting. Like my cousin, she's all about YouTube, she watches YouTube all the time on like anything. She's like a walking dictionary and like Wikipedia or whatever. And so mine is Google, I love Google. I'll Google

anything.

(Participant 2)

I'm able to connect more with them [their friends], and talk with them and like be able to reach out to them when they need somebody to talk to...like there's always that balance in everything. There's always that good and bad but, I think that social media has helped us a lot.

(Participant 11)

Additionally, the youth reported that they were able to learn to make healthier choices for themselves by learning from the experiences of others online.

You see what other people go through and you're kind of "oh, I don't wanna go through that" so then you kind of like, learn. And then sometimes you see it keeps happening, so then you like, it kind of makes you learn more and it kind of sticks to you so that's what I kinda see. So I don't really like public school, that's why I like this school and there's not really—there's no drama here. So I don't really like public school, so that's why I just watch on my Facebook cuz the kids on my Facebook go through stuff.

(Participant 2)

A lot of people on my Facebook are like, crashing cars and on the news and all that, and that bugs me so like if I see it I delete that person cuz like I don't like that stuff. I used to be like that, but not anymore...and I don't want to get back into that cuz people always ask me if I wanna go drink but like I do stupid things when I drink, so I delete the people who drink aha.

(Participant 5)

Participants reflected some interesting insights regarding how things might be different if there weren't any social media. It was particularly noted that they would spend more time outdoors.

I think people would be less shy and then not so insecure about how they interact with other people [without social media]. Like, if I couldn't message someone or text someone then I think then, I dunno, visit or chill time would be longer and I think people would be outdoors more.

(Participant 7)

It would be totally different. We are so brainwashed right now I think, cuz we're always on our phone and don't even like, we don't even go out into nature you know what I mean? We don't even enjoy stuff anymore like we used to, like go out and play and ride a bike and play tag and something like that. I dunno, do something active and stuff like that, but we're always on our phone like even if like we go visit someone we're always asking for the Wi-Fi code just to be on your phone and like everything. And back when I was growing up, like when I was growing up we would always play outside all the time like, that's why I was so happy that I grew up in that generation.

(Participant 10)

In fact, participants suggested that people would benefit from spending less time on social media altogether, especially when it came to relationships.

I feel like you would connect better and relationships would be better in a way because like, you just, just you coming to somebody shows like you care about them and like, you know, you would do anything to see them and stuff like that. And I feel like that's something relationships lack if you're talking to people on social media.

(Participant 6)

So I feel like, you get along with people, it's more healthier and a lot healthier mentally when you're not on social media. Cuz you have more time to do things, you're not constantly being in your room, on your bed...sometimes I don't even leave my room for days except for the washroom and food. I would like take a

bunch of food to my bed and then not leave unless I had to go to the washroom.

(Participant 9)

Break-Ups

Participants described in some detail their perspectives and experiences with social media as it pertained to break-up etiquette. The youth agreed that breaking up through social media was an undesirable method. However, the topic of personal safety was a unique contribution to the discussion, as there were some instances where involvement in a violent or abusive relationship meant that having a remote method of communication such as social media could function to protect personal safety. Finally, participants advised that people use compassion and empathy, and avoid using social media maliciously or as a tool for vindication.

Participants were against the use of social media as a tool for people to break-up with their partners.

Um, then that's just an asshole move. Yeah, just like you can tell your partner in person instead of on social media, cuz that can like cause a big scene on there, and then you have a bunch of drama now.

(Participant 4)

I don't think that that's a good way, or even through text messaging, like that's not cool at all. But then again they could just be doing that to showcase and to let others know that the relationship's over and they want to make it public...cuz maybe there's somebody else that they want to see and not want to tell them directly. Or they might not want to break up with that person in person, and they just don't have the guts to do it in person.

(Participant 7)

I think that's like a really immature, cowardly way to break up with someone. Um and yeah they're just no good. For them to break up with someone and over the Internet instead of like going to them at least, or at least calling I dunno. At least

to go to them to break up with them is a really pathetic way to do it, you know.

(Participant 10)

I hate it, I think that's such a scummy thing to do. If you're going to break up with someone, break up with them to their face. Don't hit the "block" button. That's shitty...my homies used to do it all the time.

(Participant 12)

Oh that's harsh hahah. You're heartless if you do that! I think I know guys who do that, but none of my friends have gotten dumped through social media. Well my friends do the dumping sometimes through social media, which is terrible I guess...but if you met who they're dumping, you'd understand.

(Participant 9)

However, there were suggestions that in some circumstances breaking-up online may be more appropriate because it was safer.

But then sometimes it's better to break up online too, depending on how crazy they are. I've heard someone got stabbed because someone broke up with someone in person, so I was like "oh, you don't really know someone I guess...until you get them mad" haha.

(Participant 2)

Yeah, that was kind of another reason too...I never did but if I needed to, yeah.

(Participant 5)

Ultimately, the youth felt that social media should be used for positive or constructive reasons, and not to denigrate or hurt others.

It doesn't matter how much someone hurts you, it doesn't matter what you feel inside or how intense your emotions might be. Never ever use social media as a tool to get revenge on somebody. Don't take people's nudes and put them on your status feed for everyone to see, don't spread rumors, don't tell people's personal

dirty laundry—their secrets and stuff like that. Because you know what, from my experience I've learned that every human being is imperfect, and we all do things that are messed up and screwed up; and we all screw up. And just because you get upset at them doesn't mean that you have the right to make them pretty much some kind of a taboo some kind of marked person, you know what I mean? Like don't use social media to hurt people, to blast them and to make them embarrassed and stuff like that. Don't—that's terrible. Like when I see people put people on blast on Facebook I don't laugh with people on the picture that's being talked about, I laugh at the people who posted it and I'm just like "you're weak".
(Participant 12)

4.2 Summary

After the interviews were completed and transcribed the researcher performed a content analysis. Codes were applied and themes emerged to capture the youths' views of social media and relationships for both themselves and other youth who experienced different forms of social marginalization. From this analysis, six themes emerged which included Prevalence and Preferences, Typical Activities, Negative Influences, Awareness of Risks, Positive Insights and Suggestions, and Break-Ups. Prevalence and preferences included what kinds of social media youth were using, how often they were using them, and how they were accessing them. Typical activities included contacting people with whom they already had existing relationships, contacting potential sexual partners, and entertainment. Negative influences included the different areas that had psychological or behavioral implications, including topics of jealousy, trust, loyalty as well as partner-monitoring behaviors. Awareness of risks included the different areas in which youth demonstrated an understanding of themselves among various risks associated with being active online. Positive insights and suggestions included discussions of

the kinds of changes the youths felt should be addressed. Finally, break-ups included the experiences youth had in their opinions of appropriate break-up etiquette.

4.3 Personal Reflections

As was mentioned in the methodology, a defining feature of qualitative research involves the promotion of trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). For this reason, I will be commenting on my role in interpreting and filtering the interview data to contribute to the confirmability of this study (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, this section will include reflections of my interest in conducting this research, as well as my experience of the data collection process overall.

Personal Interest in this Research

I was born and raised in the city where interviews took place, and I am also an emerging adult who has had years of experience working with varying populations through local not-for-profit agencies in the heart of the city. This research was not only born out of a curiosity about the phenomenon of the experiences of youth and social media, but also of my direct involvement working with youth who interact with these mediums every day. I self-identify as a white, cis-gendered, able-bodied woman, and as such I acknowledge the many intersections of privilege that I have been afforded for characteristics that I did not earn. With this, I strive to remain cognizant of how my experiences of social privilege impact the lenses in which I filter information, and work with people who have different experiences than my own.

With this awareness of some of my filters in conjunction with my experiences working with youth who have experienced different forms social marginalization, I was inspired to begin looking more deeply at the social cultures that interact in respect of our offline and online identities. Having grown up in the generation of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001)—living

alongside the birth of social media and communicative technologies—I was afforded a first-hand understanding of the impact and prevalence of these mediums on a young person’s life. However, I recognized that the experiences of young people who use these mediums were not necessarily reflected through my own personal experiences with these technologies, nor within the experiences reflected in the extant literature on youth and social media (which are typically represented by university undergraduates). In fact, it is from my years of counselling young people relative to their reproductive health and interpersonal relationships that I became curious about whether these mediums could serve a very different function for their social wellbeing than might be reflected by my own. Thankfully, the timing of my curiosity and clinical experiences coincided with the surge of literature on social media and mental health in general, and it wasn’t long before I had the opportunity to pursue my graduate studies and research bridging these domains as well.

The Data Collection Process

Having already had some experience with one-to-one counselling with youth and young adults, I felt prepared and comfortable to conduct in-person interviews with these youth on the topic of social media and their relationships. It is also from my training and experiences as a counsellor that I had some previous knowledge about the implicit power-differential between a “researcher” and a “youth”. As such, I consciously dressed and presented myself in a way that was intentionally casual, approachable, and nonthreatening. It is my belief that my personal experience with social media, along with my knowledge and usage of typical vernacular and slang used by folks in that age range contributed to the rapport built between participants and myself. Moreover, I believe my age and visible tattoos also may have also contributed to

participants feeling like I would be someone that could understand their experiences and observations.

Overall I found that the interviews with participants went the way I had expected them to. I was pleased that I was able to recruit participants fairly easily, and I found that the overall tone of participants' contributions influenced how I sorted their responses into themes. Listening to the recordings, as well as having personally conducted the interviews, I could recall the areas of concern that participants had which lent itself well to the "Negative Influences" theme. Moreover, their suggestions and hopes for the future seemed to fit in the context of "Positive Insights and Suggestions". In general, it was by reflecting on *how* participants had spoken about different topics that guided me in categorizing the essence of their shared experiences into themes.

I found the entire recruitment and interview process to be incredibly enriching. I was honored to provide the youth with a space to explore the open-ended questions and content through their own experiences and reflections, and I feel so grateful to have been given the chance to sit with them as they shared their stories and lived experiences. I feel that by interpreting their accounts as objectively as possible I have been successful in communicating authentically what it is that they wanted the world to know about youth who use social media.

Chapter 5

5 Discussion

In this chapter results from the present study are compared and contrasted with the existing literature on social media and youths' relationships. There were similarities between the youths in the present study who had experienced social marginalization and the existing literature that reflected their mainstream peers' experiences with social media. However, there were also some salient differences as well. The implications of these findings and limitations of the study are discussed.

5.1 Summary of Themes

The Prevalence and Preferences that emerged from participant responses encompassed the more basic features of patterns of usage with social media. Specifically, it was apparent that the preferred social media platforms used by these youths were Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. While some youth may have preferred one over the others, all the youth contributed their opinions of, or past experiences with, all three of these platforms. The youth shared the characteristic of having an incredibly high frequency of usage of these platforms, with the minimum usage being only once a day. The high frequency in which these youths use social media was even compared to the traits of an addiction. Participants reported that they typically used a personal smartphone to access social media; however they were open to using other devices depending on what they had access to. Finally, participants reported that social media had been a part of their social lives for years, with many of them having their first exposures and experiences with these mediums in their early adolescence.

The Typical Activities that participants shared when using their social media most often related to either maintaining contact with people with whom they already shared existing relationships offline, or scrolling through their peers' content for entertainment purposes. Most often participants reported that they used their social media to make plans with others or to simply stay up-to-date with what was going on in other people's lives. However, some participants also discussed the function social media played in facilitating connections with potential sexual partners, which had a direct impact on participants' sexual experiences and behaviors. These appeared to be the only circumstances under which participants shared an interest in connecting with or meeting strangers online.

Participants also shared commonalities in their experiences with negative influences on their relationships and sense of psychological wellbeing. Specifically, participants reflected the prominence of jealousy that could be produced from picture "liking" behaviors, or from having a fear of missing out on experiences others were having. Participants reflected the impact the mate poaching and cheating behaviors had on the trust and loyalty experienced in a relationship, and how drama could be perpetuated by a partner's inappropriate behavior. Moreover, participants discussed the implications of a partner's jealousy and suspiciousness contributing to controlling partner-monitoring behaviors such as forced password sharing, and forced open-access of their partner's profile. Finally, participants also shared their reflections of other people's attention seeking behaviors, and of the overall impact of social media on body image and self-esteem.

The Awareness of Risks that participants shared was also a defining theme of their overall experience with social media. The youth displayed an insightful awareness of the risks associated with meeting strangers online, particularly as it related to the potential for being

“catfished”, and the overall necessity of using caution online. They also displayed an awareness of the risks associated with posting self-sexualized photos on social media and sending nude photos to a potential sexual partner online. Other awareness of the potential for stalking or harassment behaviours, cyberbullying, and child sexual exploitation were discussed.

Additionally, the youth presented unique awareness of gender differences in the experiences of risks online, insights into the potential for misinterpretation and miscommunication of messages through online mediums, and the need for maintaining one’s privacy. Ultimately, participants commented on the paradoxical nature of social media, and even suggested that its over usage was contributing to the disintegration of personal values.

However, the themes were not all focused on the negative potentials of social media. Participants described insights and suggestions regarding the beneficial impact of social media, as well as their own contributions for improvements. These reflections included awareness that social media functioned as a tool to meet new people, and provided an opportunity to bridge connections in a way that has never before been seen. They also acknowledged that social media functioned as a resource to learn from others, as well as to provide and receive support. However, participants also generated insights that they would like to see more policy and regulation in place to help protect children from exposure to inappropriate material or exploitation. Moreover, participants suggested that people may be psychologically healthier if they used social media less frequently, and suggested that such changes could have the potential to improve their interpersonal relationships and get them spending more time being active outdoors.

The final theme of participants’ experiences with Break-Ups pertained both to what participants’ first-hand experiences were, as well as what their overall opinions were. The

majority of participants agreed that breaking-up with a partner through social media was at best undesirable. However participants also reflected that they knew of peers, or had themselves, experienced such phenomenon. Participants also reflected that there were some circumstances under which it was more beneficial to break-up with a partner through a medium like social media, as it could function to protect one's personal safety. However, participants communicated an overall message that conveyed a necessity of using social media with empathy and compassion rather than for malicious or vindictive purposes.

5.2 Similarities to the Literature

In many ways the results from this study echoed the findings of other research on youth and social media. There were elements of each of the themes that had been previously reflected in the existing literature.

Regarding the prevalence and preferences of youth in this study, it appears that the experiences of these youth who have experienced different forms of social marginalization parallel the experiences of their mainstream peers in their preferences for Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram as top choices in social media platforms. In Lenhart's (2015) survey research of *Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview*, she also found that Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram were the top three reported platforms used by teens surveyed. Moreover, much like the experiences of the youth in this study, the youth surveyed in that research demonstrated very high rates of usage, with 92% reporting going online at least once daily, and 56% of respondents indicating that they use social media several times a day (Lenhart, 2015). Similarly to participants' responses in this research, Lenhart's (2015) research also demonstrated that 91% go online from mobile devices occasionally, while 24% reported being online "almost constantly". This experience of high usage of social media appears to be a shared characteristic

among youth who use social media and have access to the Internet, regardless of their experiences with social marginalization.

In respect of the typical activities reflected by youth in the existing literature, research demonstrated that youth tended to use their social media to keep in contact with people they already knew (Gross, 2004; Reich et al., 2012), and connect with people with whom they shared a common interest (Common Sense Media, 2012). This is similarly reflective of the youth's responses indicating that they tended to almost exclusively contact people with whom they already shared an existing relationship, and otherwise used their social media to scroll through their news-feed for entertainment purposes, as is also a shared characteristic demonstrated by Lenhart's (2015) surveyed youth.

Regarding the themes of Negative Influences and Awareness of Risks, participants in the present study raised points which have also similarly been reflected in the existing literature by other youth. Other research with socially marginalized youth and social media has touched on the topics of jealousy, trust, partner behaviour-monitoring, cyber dating violence, and outsider influence on relationships (Baker & Carreño, 2015; Rueda et al., 2015; Zweig et al., 2013). Moreover, similar themes of drama, the phenomenon of sharing self-sexualized photos, and putting people "on blast" via exposure pages has also been reflected in the literature before (Stevens et al., 2016). Another interesting similarity between the experiences of these youth and the existing literature is regarding their understanding of the paradoxical nature of social media, as it had the potential to provide social connectivity while at the same time exposing them to potential negative outcomes (Allen et al., 2014; Barth, 2015). Finally, it appeared that the youths' insights about the impact of social media on body image and self-esteem were also reflected in other youth's experiences, as has been demonstrated by DeVries' (2014) work.

Participants' positive experiences with social media have also been previously mentioned in the literature, as research has supported that social media may operate as an opportunity to provide supportive relationships and bridge connection (Wolak, 2003), and may supplement youths' resources for support (Gould et al., 2002). Furthermore, research with homeless youth indicated that 57% of youth surveyed use social media to connect with peers; obtain information for learning purposes; use it for entertainment purposes; and overall socializing activities (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014). Thus, the experiences of homeless youth in other research echoes the experiences of the socially marginalized youth interviewed in this study.

When it comes to participants' experiences with break-ups, the previous literature has also supported that youth surveyed regard breaking-up with a partner through social media to be highly undesirable. Of the youth surveyed in Lenhart's (2015) research, only 18% reported having broken up with someone through social media, while 20% reported having been broken-up with through social media. With this it can be surmised that youth in general prefer to avoid breaking-up with partners through social media and consistently report that in-person interactions are the most desirable for such purposes.

Taken together these findings indicate that the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization are not so different from the trends presented in the existing literature, particularly as it pertains to patterns of usage with these technologies. As such, it is important to understand the qualitative differences in their experiences with these technologies, given that they appear to be using them at the same rate—and with similar intended purposes—as their mainstream peers.

5.3 Differences from the Literature

One of the first differences between the youth interviewed in this study and the existing literature pertained to Prevalence and Preferences. While the youth interviewed displayed many similar characteristics to other youth who had participated in previous survey research, they did differ in their account of the severity of their usage. The topic of addiction was alluded to by these youth, who identified that the nature in which they use social media bears similarities to the characteristics of other types of addiction. Moreover, these youths reported that they had been using social media for years—often beginning in their early adolescence—and as such, may have had to contend with the negative implications of social media for a longer duration of time as compared to their mainstream peers. While this difference in length of exposure is not definitively measured in the existing literature, it remains a possible area for future research to explore.

Another difference between these youths' experiences from those of their mainstream peers pertains to the Typical Activities they participate in through social media. In general, these youths tend to participate in the same overall types of activities that young people use social media for. However, these youths also commented on the impact social media had in acting as a tool to facilitate connections with potential partners for casual-sex (i.e. hook-ups). To date, there does not appear to be any literature exploring this specific feature of social media in the lives of young people, so it draws interesting attention to the youths' insights about their experiences with social media on their sexual behaviors in this study.

The youth in this study also differed from the literature on their mainstream peers in their overall Awareness of Risks associated with being active online. While Lenhart's (2015) survey research with youth revealed that 77% of respondents were not particularly worried

about being contacted by strangers online, the youth in this study demonstrated a cautious awareness about the risks of meeting a stranger through social media, the potential for being lured with false information (i.e. catfishing), and other potential sexually exploitative scenarios. Moreover, the youth in this study differed in their insight regarding the differences in risks between genders, and the overall need for people to be more cautious and knowledgeable about their privacy online than had been previously explored. This may be due to a difference in time between the climates of social media when this past survey research was conducted versus the state of present day social media in youths' lives. However, it may also demonstrate a difference in the level of awareness these youths have of risks that face them, and the necessity to use caution when navigating online environments as compared to their mainstream peers, who perhaps may not have had as much exposure to such risks. Previous research has shown that "troubled" youth who use the Internet more frequently are at a greater risk of sexual exploitation by strangers online (Mitchel et al., 2001). As such, it may be that an awareness of this greater risk is reflected in the participants' insights about their own experiences with social media, and the experiences of their friends and peers.

Other differences in the Negative Influences of social media between these youths and the existing literature pertain to the youths' exposure to—and experiences with—controlling and/or abusive partner monitoring behaviours. Lenhart's (2015) survey research indicated that only a small percentage of teens surveyed had any experience with partner-monitoring behaviours, with only 13% of respondents reporting any experience with forced password sharing. The youth in this study differed from their mainstream peers in their higher rates of reporting such experiences, particularly related to the forced password sharing and jealousy related closely to issues of trust and suspicion. While only a small percentage of their

mainstream peers had to contend with such behaviors or issues within their romantic relationships, the youth in this study deal with these behaviors on a far more frequent basis. Even if they themselves hadn't directly experienced such behavior from a partner, all of the youth interviewed had known someone in their personal lives who has dealt with the Negative Influences of drama from picture "liking", and having to prove loyalty by sharing their password and account information with their partner.

Finally, the youth in this study differed from the findings from previous literature in some of their Positive Insights and Suggestions and their perspectives on Break-Ups. The youth in this study were highly cognizant of the risks for children who are active online, and demonstrated passion in their desire for there to be policy and regulatory changes made by different levels of authority to better to protect children. The previous literature to date has not accounted for the first-hand perspectives of youth in ways to improve their lives in the context of social media, so this finding was a novel and exciting contribution. Moreover, the youth discussed the opportunities they had to make healthier choices for themselves by observing the unhealthy behaviors of others online. Taken with their perspectives that youth should spend less time on social media, and more time getting active outdoors, it was inspiring to understand how these youths integrate a forward-thinking framework into their awareness of, and exposure to, the harmful features of social media. Furthermore, the youth in this study differed from the overall discourse of youth in social media in their consideration of the function social media can have in protecting one's physical safety when breaking-up with a potentially violent partner. This finding holds significance in its ability to better inform ways to support youth who are experiencing intimate partner violence, and can contribute to discussions about media literacy for this population.

5.4 Implications

The implications of the findings from this study shed light on the opportunities for mental health workers, service providers, caregivers, and researchers to support youth who have experienced social marginalization in the ways that they interact with social media.

Future Research

This study used a qualitative design that provided a content analysis of the emergent themes which encapsulate the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization. As a characteristic of its qualitative design, it has provided depth and richness to our understanding of these youths' experiences and perspectives of social media's impact on their relationships. However, it has not been able to provide any quantitative, relational, or causal insight about the nature of these experiences.

Future research could potentially explore and compare the experiences of youth who have experienced social marginalization with their mainstream peers directly. This process would provide insight into the specific differences between these populations, and could therefore tease apart the nature of those differences through quantitative or mixed-method analyses.

Moreover, future research could also examine differences between socially marginalized youth who use social media more frequently versus their peers who do not use it as frequently. Such analyses could provide a deeper understanding into the power and impact that social media plays on different factors of youths' lives not limited to their social and relational realities.

As well, future research could contribute to the development of administrative policy governing agency and service provider roles in supporting youth in the context of social media. Training programming and intervention programming might also be developed for agency staff,

caregivers and youths themselves. Such programming could benefit by being informed by the overall trends and patterns of youth behaviour relative to social media; psychoeducation regarding the risks of being active online as informed by these youths' experiences; and with consideration of the youths' suggestions and perspectives on what changes might be required to facilitate healthier living and relationships.

Caregivers and Service Providers

The findings of this research pose a number of implications for caregivers and service providers regarding youth and emerging adults. One of the first of these implications relates to having an awareness of the ubiquitous nature of social media as an ever-present factor impacting youths' relational lives. These youth are using social media with high frequency and with a high degree of personal attention. As such, it is important for caregivers and service providers not to devalue or minimize the significance and impact that these technologies impart on these youths' offline lives. Given the greater climate of technology as an entity that is not likely to be going away any time soon, caregivers and service providers might benefit from developing an open and curious framework for integrating healthy uses of this technology into their relationships with youth.

Moreover, caregivers and service providers might benefit from understanding the potential differences that may exist for youth relative to gender. With consideration of the limits of generalizability of this research, it has nonetheless come to surface that some youth may have different experiences in using social media as a medium to facilitate high-risk sexual behaviors as compared to their peers. One factor that remains to be explored is whether gender functions as a mediator in this finding. No female-identifying participants reported that they used social media as a platform to explore their sexualities by meeting strangers. As such, caregivers and

service providers may use this information to better inform the conversations they have with youth regarding making healthy decisions relative to their sexual lives.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that the experiences of youth who identify as being part of the LGBTQIP2SAA community may have different experiences with navigating the risks associated with social media as compared to their cis and hetero peers. With this, further research into their unique experiences and needs is required in order to better inform caregivers and service providers on the ideal ways to support these youth in navigating these online worlds.

Caregivers and service providers may also benefit from the finding that these youth are highly aware of the subtle nuances of communication within these mediums, and have thus have developed sensitivity in their detection and understanding of the associated risks of being active on the Internet. With this, these youth have demonstrated a passionate concern for protecting other vulnerable populations (who do not have the same skill level in using these technologies as they do), including children and the elderly. These youth communicated a need for more regulation and appropriate rules for social media, and as such they have more or less called upon caregivers and service providers to stand as supporters for providing justice and safety. By having an awareness of this, caregivers and service providers could use this information to inform open conversations with youth about what they identify their needs to be; collaborating and developing with the youth what appropriate rules would help to keep them safe while keeping adults informed; and facilitate a supportive exchange of knowledge and resources between adults and youth.

Within the developmental trajectory of developing personal autonomy and practicing personal agency associated with adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), the

landscape of social media has somewhat reversed the power-differential between caregivers and their children, pertaining to who holds “expert” status relative to technology. As opposed to fighting to re-establish power in favor of the adult, it may perhaps be more beneficial for caregivers and service providers to seek to find balance in their relationships with youth in the context of social media by collaboratively deciding appropriate rules and regulations together. This could serve as an opportunity for the youth to exercise their personal agency while at the same time strengthening the trust in the relationship, and trust in the adult as a supporter and ally.

Finally, service providers and youth-serving agencies might benefit from this research in developing administrative-level policy related to where and when staff, volunteers and/or agencies may need to intervene. Examples of such circumstances might include youth disclosure of inappropriate/sexually exploitative interactions with strangers, experiences of online harassment or cyber-bullying, nonconsensual distribution of nude photographs, exposure to or knowledge of others’ illegal activity, or disclosures of their own or others’ risk for self-harm or suicide.

Moreover, some agencies or professionals may already have their own social media presence, and as such are able to interact with or observe youths’ content directly through these mediums. As suggested by the works of Schwartz (2014) and Wells & Mitchell (2008), any policy governing agency or professional practice should be clearly made at the outset of a youth’s engagement in relationship with a professional and/or agency, and this informed consent of each individual’s roles and responsibilities should be ongoing and made with consideration of the youths’ best interests made first and foremost. As such, if a professional or agency develops policy that includes responsibility to intervene based on their observation of a

youth's risk through the social media platform itself, then the youth should be made aware if this stipulation prior to connecting with said agency/professional through their personal social media.

Limitations

Given that this research used a qualitative design, it is important to consider the limitations of this study from within the qualitative perspective rather than inappropriately imposing quantitative considerations. With this in mind, one of the most salient limitations of this study pertains to the phenomenological nature of the design itself. In its attempt to capture the essential thematic commonalities of socially marginalized youths' experiences with social media in a relational context, the research is limited by the fact that the researcher herself is not an in-group member of cohort who was interviewed and therefore can never truly filter an authentically unobstructed interpretation of the findings. While accounts of personal biases and worldviews were reported as an attempt to minimize the impact of this limitation, the ultimate basis of the researcher's out-group membership means that the findings will never be able to be entirely reflective of the essential nature of these youths' experiences. To remedy this limitation, future research might benefit to include a participatory-action element to the data collection and interpretation processes using the population of interest. This might help to more authentically reflect the common experiences of this population by filtering the findings about these youth *through* the youths themselves, using their own lens and experiences as the interpretative filter.

Moreover, not all youth who experience social marginalization may have their experiences reflected in the themes and discussions generated by the youth who were involved in this particular study. The small sample size of eleven participants generated from this

particular cohort of youth, at that particular cross-section of time may not be identically replicable in a different cohort of youth interviewed at a different point in time. It is important to be considerate of the context in which the data was collected. Therefore, interpretations about youth who have experienced social marginalization and their experiences with social media in a more general context should be made with frugality.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATIONSHIPS

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the impact of social media on marginalized young people who meet the following criteria: Are 16 to 24 years old, use social media and are affiliated with this agency.

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to: meet with me for an interview about your use of social media and how it affects your relationships with friends and romantic partners.

Your participation would involve 1 session, which will be up to 60 minutes long.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$5 gift card to Tim Horton's.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please call, text or email: Kira Regan Faculty of Education xxx-xxx-xxxx or Email: xxxx@uwo.ca

Appendix B- Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title: Marginalized Youths' Experiences with Social Media on Relationships

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jason Brown, Faculty of Education, Western University

Co-investigator: Kira Regan, Faculty of Education, Western University

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate:

You are being invited to participate in this study, which seeks to examine the experiences of marginalized youth regarding the impact of social media on relationships.

2. Purpose of the Letter:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

3. Purpose of this Study:

The aims of this study are to explore how social media use affects the friendships and romantic relationships of marginalized youth.

4. Inclusion Criteria:

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are: between 16-24 years of age, use social media and are affiliated with the agency where you saw the recruitment poster.

5. Exclusion Criteria

Youth under the age of 16 years and over the age of 24 years are not eligible to participate in this study.

6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your experiences with social media regarding your friendships and romantic relationships. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped. If you do not wish to be audiotaped, I will take notes. I will be using pseudonyms in the transcripts of the interview, as well as in the research paper generated from the data and analysis. The interview will take place at a mutually agreeable and private location (e.g. meeting room in a local agency, university or public library). There will be a total of 8-12 participants in this study.

7. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Nonetheless, it is possible that a participant may experience stress when recounting negative relationship experiences. If you experience distress, the interview will be halted and a referral to a counselor will be offered, unless it is in the opinion of the researcher that immediate intervention is called for. Other potential local support resources include: Klinik, Women's Health Clinic, Rainbow Resource Center, Kids Help Phone and Reason to Live. The contact information for these resources is provided on the last page of this document.

8. Possible Benefits

Information gathered from your participation in this study may provide a better understanding of how social media impacts marginalized youths' relationships; however, you may not benefit directly from participating in the study.

9. Compensation

You will be compensated with a \$5.00 gift card to Tim Horton's for your participation in this study. If you do not complete the entire study you will still be compensated with a \$5.00 Tim Horton's gift card upon your decision to withdraw. Refreshments will also be provided.

10. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You can choose to withdraw by verbally indicating to the researcher that you would like to end the interview, and do not have to provide any explanations. Your decision to participate or not in this study, or your decision to withdraw at any time, for any reason, will have no effect on your access to services at this agency.

11. Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. We will conduct the project with professionalism, respecting confidentiality as outlined under Manitoba's provincial PHIA rules and guidelines. Interviews will be saved on a personal computer and backed up on a hard drive. Both the computer and hard drive are password protected, and the files will be encrypted.

All data will be stored in accordance with Western's University policy (for a minimum of 5 years). Paper documents will be shredded after the 5 year period. Electronic files will be deleted after this time. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from

our database. While we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so.

I have a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse and other similar information to Child and Family Services, which may limit confidentiality.

12. Contacts for Further Information

If you require further information about this research you may contact Kira Regan via e-mail at xxxxxx@uwo.ca or the principal investigator in the Faculty of Education, Dr. Jason Brown at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, ext. xxxxx or via e-mail at xxxxxx@uwo.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca

13. Publication

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results; please contact Kira Regan (co-investigator) or Dr. Jason Brown (principal investigator) through the contact information above.

14. Consent

If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign the attached consent form and return it back directly to me before the interview.

Thank you for your participation

Sincerely,

Kira Regan (Co-Investigator)

This letter is yours to keep for future reference

Consent Form

Project Title: Marginalized Youths' Experiences of Social Media on Relationships

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jason Brown, Faculty of Education, Western University

Co-investigator: Kira Regan, Faculty of Education, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent that disclosures of harm to myself or others (or risk of harm to myself for others) will be reported to the appropriate authorities (please initial): _____

I agree to participate in the study: _____

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded (please initial): _____

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Additional Local Youth-Serving Agencies and Resources

“Understanding Marginalized Youths’ Experiences with Social Media on Relationships”

Klinic Free Drop-In Counselling	204-784-4067
<i>545 Broadway, Winnipeg, MB and/or 845 Regent Ave. West, Winnipeg, MB</i>	
Klinic 24-Hour Crisis Line	204-786-8686
<i>Toll Free.....</i>	<i>1-888-322-3019</i>
Manitoba Suicide Line	1-877-435-7170
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
Rainbow Resource Centre.....	204-474-0212
<i>170 Scott St, Winnipeg, MB</i>	
Mental Health Education Resource Centre of Manitoba	204-942-6568
<i>4 Fort St, Winnipeg, MB</i>	
Women’s Health Clinic.....	204-947-1517
<i>Toll Free.....</i>	<i>1-866-947-1517</i>
<i>419 Graham Ave, Winnipeg, MB</i>	

Appendix C- Participant Demographic Interview Questions

Participant Demographic Interview Questions

“Understanding Marginalized Youths’ Experiences with Social Media on Relationships”

Time for Administration= Approximately 5 minutes

1. How old are you?
2. What gender do you identify as?
3. What ethnicity do you identify as?
4. What is your level of education at this point in time?
5. Are you currently working?
6. What is your present living situation?
7. Have you ever been in a romantic relationship before?
8. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

Appendix D- Interview Questions

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Questions

“Understanding Marginalized Youths’ Experiences with Social Media on Relationships”

Time for Administration= Approximately 45 minutes

1. What kinds of social media do you like to use?
2. How do you access social media?
3. What does a typical day look like when you are using social media?
4. What do you generally use social media for?
5. Who do you tend to contact the most using different forms of digital & social media?
6. When do you think social media can become problematic in relationships?
7. How do you think social media can benefit relationships?
8. What’s your opinion on the role social media plays concerning jealousy in relationships?
9. How do you feel about people using social media to publicly share details about their relationships?
10. How do you feel about people using social media to meet new partners?
11. What’s your opinion on people using social media to break-up?
12. What’s something you dislike about how other people use social media?
13. What would you say is the biggest impact social media has on your relationships?
14. How different do you imagine your life and relationships would be without social media?

Appendix E- Themes by Code

Theme 1: Prevalence and Preferences

Facebook, Instagram & Snapchat (6); Facebook and Snapchat (7); Instagram and Snapchat (1); is Constantly Using It (1, 2); Uses it a Lot (6); Addiction (12); Uses phone or computer (4, 10); Uses Multiple Devices (12); Early Adolescent Use (2, 10)

Theme 2: Typical Activities

Contact with Existing Relationships (3,4, 5); Contacting Potential Partners (11); Hook-Ups (12); Impact on Sexual Behaviour (12); Making Plans & Scrolling (2, 12); Staying Up-to-Date (7, 11); Entertainment (10)

Theme 3: Negative Influences

Picture “liking” and Jealousy (7, 9, 12); Fear of Missing Out (10); Cheating (6); Mate Poaching (2, 7); Drama (3, 5, 6, 12); Trust & Loyalty (2, 11); Forced Password Sharing (2, 4, 12); Partner Behaviour Monitoring (4, 10, 12); Influence on Body Image (1,11); Attention Seeking (10)

Theme 4: Awareness of Risks

Risks of Meeting Strangers Online (6, 9); Catfishing (6, 11); Self-Sexualizing Photos (7, 10); Risks of Sending Nude Photos (12); Use Caution (11); Stalking and Harassment (12); Gender Related Risks (11); Missing Values (1); Potential for Misinterpretation (6, 11); Cyberbullying (4); Privacy (1, 2); Exposure to High-Risk Peer Content (4, 5, 12); Child Sexual Exploitation (9); It’s a Paradox (12)

Theme 5: Positive Insights and Suggestions

Protecting Children (1, 9, 11); A Tool to Meet New People (2, 3, 5); Bridging Connections (9, 11); Resource for Learning (1, 2); Resource for Support (2, 11); Learning from Others (2, 5); The Importance of Being Outdoors (7, 10); Healthier Without It (6, 9)

Theme 6: Break-Ups

Breaking- Up Online is Bad (4, 7, 9, 10, 12); Breaking-Up Online is Sometimes Safer (2, 5); Don’t Use it Maliciously (12)

Appendix F- Codes by Meaning Units

The following are direct quotes by participants organized by code:

A Tool to Meet New People

I mean if you're socially awkward I think maybe the net would work really good for you aha but like, I dunno, some people like don't go to school nowadays so. Especially youth actually, so social media is probably like the only way people meet each other.

(Participant 2)

Um well you could meet a lot of people I guess. Um, I dunno I'm not sure how it could be good...Hah yeah um, I guess it's a good way to meet people but then again you have to like take precautions with that too.

(Participant 3)

I met my boyfriend through Facebook...we had the same friends and then, I dunno I met him, started talking. And like that girl that was just here before me, I met her on Facebook haha.

(Participant 5)

Addiction

If I have any access to Wi-Fi and some kind of a device I could be on it day and night...Oh, it's an addiction. It absolutely is. Like emotionally, it can alter you emotionally if you don't have it if you're addicted to it. Oh yeah, for sure. Like it's something that I will strive to do in the day; like I will travel distances to find something to use it. Even if like, I'm sure lots of people have told you this, but yeah like even if I know that I don't have any inboxes or anything, just signing into it. It's like a relief, you know?

(Participant 12)

Attention Seeking

When they just like pour their life out and like what they, what they're doing at this moment and who they're chillin' with and like umm like every little single thing they're doing, like "oh, going for a walk" or "oh, seeing this person" or "oh seen this dog", like you know what I

mean? Like a play-by-play, and so that's really annoying. And I know I have this person on my Facebook that does that all the time, and she likes her own statuses and like no one likes her statuses or anything and like, she likes her own. Probably cuz people are annoyed and she wants attention. I dunno.

(Participant 10)

Breaking- Up Online is Bad

Um, then that's just an asshole move. Yeah, just like you can tell your partner in person instead of on social media, cuz that can like cause a big scene on there, and then you have a bunch of drama now.

(Participant 4)

I don't think that that's a good way, or even through text messaging, like that's not cool at all. But then again they could just be doing that to showcase and to let others know that the relationship's over and they want to make it public...cuz maybe there's somebody else that they want to see and not want to tell them directly. Or they might not want to break up with that person in person, and they just don't have the guts to do it in person.

(Participant 7)

Oh that's harsh hahah. You're heartless if you do that! I think I know guys who do that, but none of my friends have gotten dumped through social media. Well my friends do the dumping sometimes through social media, which is terrible I guess...but if you met who they're dumping, you'd understand.

(Participant 9)

I think that's like a really immature, cowardly way to break up with someone. Um and yeah they're just no good. For them to break up with someone and over the Internet instead of like going to them at least, or at least calling I dunno. At least to go to them to break up with them is a really pathetic way to do it, you know.

(Participant 10)

I hate it, I think that's such a scummy thing to do. If you're going to break up with someone, break up with them to their face. Don't hit the "block" button. That's shitty...my homies used to

do it all the time.

(Participant 12)

Breaking-Up Online is Sometimes Safer

But then sometimes it's better to break up online too, depending on how crazy they are. I've heard someone got stabbed because someone broke up with someone in person, so I was like "oh, you don't really know someone I guess...until you get them mad" haha.

(Participant 2)

Yeah, that was kind of another reason too...I never did but if I needed to, yeah.

(Participant 5)

Bridging Connections

I mean I honestly prefer hanging out with my friends, with them face-to-face. I would always choose that over just through a computer. But it's given us the option of talking to each other when we're not together. I have friends who are not allowed to leave the house at all, so I can talk to them through social media.

(Participant 9)

I think it's bringing us close together as a globe, you know what I mean? Yeah, cuz like we're able to talk to somebody like in China where a hundred years ago we wouldn't have been able to do that...or even like 15km away you wouldn't have been able to get in touch as easy as nowadays, so I guess that's really good. And it's like opening our minds to new ideas and stuff I guess.

(Participant 11)

Catfishing

A couple months ago, like before school ended, there was this cop that came and talked about like predators and stuff like that. And like after the cop talked to us about that, all of them [his friends] deleted that app cuz they all were like "yeah, I'm not doing this no more" and stuff like that. Like people legit like they didn't know people actually make fake accounts with all this stuff and they have all this information on them so then it just turns out that it's like an old man

or whatever.

(Participant 6)

Yeah, I've been catfished like twice haha. I know, the gay community is so bad for that like, really bad for that actually...Like, sometimes they even have like their own like new identity and shit like I've seen people who are like not even the same person and I was like "what the fuck?" Yeah, and like I had connections with them for years and then all of the sudden I'm like "daaamn" so like, really, it's pretty scary.

(Participant 11)

Cheating

I feel like social media like, there's like you could always be talking to somebody else and like, it's a lot of like cheating. Like back then, when you cheated, you had to go to the person and talk to them and stuff like that, but like now, what's it called, you can just sit there with your girlfriend and still talk to another girl like right next to her. Like, I have a lot of friends that like girls have done that to them or guys have done that to them, and I feel like it makes everything so much easier for people to get jealous and like not trust their partner. So I feel like that's something that's not good about social media.

(Participant 6)

Child Sexual Exploitation

Uh I remember one time I was here [at the agency] and these little kids, they were getting some pictures from this forty-year-old guy um what was it...Kick? [An app] They were showing it to me and I don't know it was, it looked like a weird thumb, but I think it was the guy's genitalia and these were kids who were eight years old. And that's the only thing I don't like about it...And little kids, they think it's fun so they just play around with it. When I was talking to them and they showed it to me, the guy he was like texting them "it's your turn", and I told them to block this guy! And they were like "wait, we just want to fool around with him; we want to see what he's going to do next". Kids I don't think really think about the consequences or anything, they just wanna push.

(Participant 9)

Constantly Using It

Every day, from when I wake up and then when I'm at school, during lunch, go home. Yeah, so it's constant.

(Participant 1)

Well, I mean not as much now, I probably use it about, maybe five hours a day because I go home. I don't have WiFi during school so, but when I have my phone it's literally constantly. Maybe, I think for at least eighty percent of the day.

(Participant 2)

Contact with Existing Relationships

Umm friends. Uh yeah just friends mostly...I have some family but I don't really talk to them, they just like ask me once in a while "how are you doing?", stuff like that. Um yeah, most of well like, I just have a few friends, I don't have a lot of friends. Most of them are like, I've already met them...Um well I just mostly have like family and close friends, because well like I used to do, well whatever everybody else used to do, was add everybody that they're like acquainted with and stuff like that so yeah...I dunno I guess you could say made Facebook more personal kinda, yeah.

(Participant 3)

Family and friends. Um just mostly my friends. Yeah cuz my sisters and brothers are not allowed to use devices in their home facility I guess, so yeah I just contact one of my friends and use it. (Participant 4)

Uh my boyfriend and like my best friend...like, friends of friends. I don't, I don't feel comfortable having people that I don't know, and people that I know don't know on my Facebook.

(Participant 5)

Contacting Potential Partners

Probably the people that like, the people who are like...people who I like I guess, like people who I want to like chill with, you know what I mean? Like, people that I like like. That's who I

mostly talk to on Snapchat, but I still have lots of friends.

(Participant 11)

Cyberbullying

I've seen um like bullying online and then it comes to the school and then it turns into a big problem after that. And then the kid doesn't want to come to school because he or she's going to get punched out or something. And it makes the kid feel bad and want to go do something to themselves or something. Like cy—cyber I can't even say that word...I just stayed home...it just caused more problems so I just took the, like the messages that they're sending to me and stuff to the station and showed them, and that person got arrested...they got arrested for assault...but like when I seen them at school, they like gave me dirty looks and stuff and yeah. I was just kinda shitty.

(Participant 4)

Don't Use it Maliciously

It doesn't matter how much someone hurts you, it doesn't matter what you feel inside or how intense your emotions might be. Never ever use social media as a tool to get revenge on somebody. Don't take people's nudes and put them on your status feed for everyone to see, don't spread rumors, don't tell people's personal dirty laundry—their secrets and stuff like that. Because you know what, from my experience I've learned that every human being is imperfect and we all do things that are messed up and screwed up, and we all screw up. And just because you get upset at them doesn't mean that you have the right to make them pretty much some kind of a taboo some kind of marked person, you know what I mean? Like don't use social media to hurt people, to blast them and to make them embarrassed and stuff like that. Don't—that's terrible. Like when I see people put people on blast on Facebook I don't laugh with people on the picture that's being talked about, I laugh at the people who posted it and I'm just like "you're weak". Yeah.

(Participant 12)

Drama

Well like, my last ex, I actually met him online too and then I met him in person and stuff like that cuz we lived in the same city and then his um ex or whatever found out that we were dating or something like that so she added me on Instagram, added me on Facebook, stuff like that. And then turns out that she had a baby so yeah it just became more of a big problem. Yeah haha lots of drama...Yeah she was like texting him, stuff like that and then she started talking to me, stuff like that.

(Participant 3)

I don't really share my relationship online...a long time ago that used to cause problems with me and my boyfriend so I kinda like grew out of that. Like when I, if I tell a joke like something funny happened between me and him and I post it, he'd be mad that I posted it cuz like, it embarrassed him but to me it was funny. Or when I was mad I would post a status about him and yeah, I don't do that no more... it started a lot of drama. Like they would stick up for me or they would stick up for him and then other people would start fighting about some other stuff on my status and it was just not worth it.

(Participant 5)

Like I play football and my coach told me "don't ever talk to people on social media" because like, what's it called, if somebody says "yeah, he wants to fight you" or what's it called, this, this and this, you're obviously not gonna back down and all this and stuff like that. And I feel like that's how everything escalates because people always want drama and they want to see a fight, and I feel like if somebody wants to see a fight you just start thinking "yeah, we should just fight", and like it just changes your whole view of like what the problem is and like, what's it called, how it can be solved.

(Participant 6)

Not only their personal lives—other people's personal lives which they have no business sharing. It's called "putting someone on blast". That happens all the time. I'm not too sure if it's a big problem really anywhere because people now know that it's bullshit. People just go on there for entertainment, cuz it's drama, you know?

(Participant 12)

Early Adolescent Use

Mmm grade six. My mom didn't want us to have Facebook but I first like, had one I just didn't tell her until like, I think I was in grade seven. And then yeah, and then I just been like, I've been on Facebook so much like I remember when I first had it how it looked, haha it's changed so much!

(Participant 2)

Probably when I was like, eleven...that's when I got my first phone, when I was eleven...Yeah, I've been in it for a while but like growing up like a little kid and like, yeah. And now like little kids like eight year olds, like me niece she's only six years old and she has a tablet and she's always asking for it, always on it and I don't like that at all, and so whatever.

(Participant 10)

Entertainment

Mmm I don't know, just like watch videos and pictures and I dunno, just yeah...I use it just to message people, stay in contact with people. Um just to keep in contact with people, that's about it. And if like I get bored, and if I need entertainment I'll watch videos.

(Participant 10)

Exposure to High-Risk Peer Content

Yeah, that's like a daily thing...Well I don't know about the fights, but like selling drugs and that is a daily thing. Um I feel that they're young and they shouldn't sell drugs, and they should be like getting their education instead of being on the streets.

(Participant 4)

When they like, Friday night or something when they're constantly posting them being all drunk on Snapchat, that bugs me...or like they do stupid things like "oh I stole this from this" or "I stole a car". It's just annoying. Or if I get involved somehow, like, if I comment on a status saying like "this was on the news" like, then they'd get mad that I said it was on the news. Meanwhile, like it's on the news, everyone already seen it. And like, the person that did it like I know and then that bugs me cuz like, they don't know like everybody knows it was that person

so like, yeah.

(Participant 5)

Uhh I see a lot of people trying to sell drugs, people rambling on about their dramatic nonsense—which is pretty usual for Facebook. I don't know, I have a pretty typical news feed.

(Participant 12)

Facebook and Snapchat

Um well Facebook is number one, uh Instagram is okay...Snapchat, I did have a Twitter but then no one used it anymore. So I would say Facebook is number one.

(Participant 7)

Facebook, Instagram & Snapchat

I use like Snapchat, Instagram, sometimes Facebook. I like that you can like, on Snapchat, I like that you can like talk to people and send them pictures of what you're doing. Like you can also have conversations, but it's mostly about taking pictures, like, yeah.

(Participant 6)

Fear of Missing Out

Jealousy is everywhere, especially with social media because like say you like someone's picture or whatever or you comment on there like if you're in a romantic relationship or whatever. Or even just as friends, like if you're hanging out with friends, and then like you're best friends and she's hanging out with other friends and like you wanna be there, and that's your best friend and like I dunno, whatever.

(Participant 10)

Forced Password Sharing

Or like, you, I dunno, people might think you're unloyal or something because they don't know your password and then that might cause a fight or something. But sometimes like the other partner doesn't want to do it or something, then I dunno; there's a lot of fights. when I'm in a relationship I don't really, I mean I would want their password to be honest hahaha, cuz I

would feel more like, I dunno I feel like I would trust the person more because then I don't have to wonder. But I also think like, you should already trust, like why are you in the relationship if you don't trust someone? You never know cuz like Facebook I want, if I want to be with someone I want to make sure I trust them so I would want their password if I think about it now so yeah. (Participant 2)

Yeah, you gotta like tell them your password and stuff like that...or else I guess you get your phone broken aha. Yeah, so I just gave it to him.

(Participant 4)

Pfft it's a problem in relationships in general because it'll cause trust issues. Like they'll start to be "I want your password, I don't trust you, blah blah blah" cuz I mean like, the majority of people in today's society have trust issues so, you know. Yeah, Facebook can definitely get you in trouble. Just, they think you're talking to another chick or whatever, you know. Maybe you are, maybe you aren't but whatever.

(Participant 12)

Gender Related Risks

Cuz as I said, I'm two-spirited so it's pretty hard to meet people so I have to go and like find strangers on like scary apps and shit hahaha. I've never had a bad experience where I like went to somebody and like anything happened cuz I like, I do to take measures to protect myself. Like I'd be going to a public place if I were to meet them and yeah I wouldn't be like, I wouldn't risk that. Yeah, but like I do get bugged on social media all the time, and like there are those old disgusting men or like those really pervert-y people and it's just like, yea so.

(Participant 11)

Healthier Without It

So I feel like, you get along with people, it's more healthier and a lot healthier mentally when you're not on social media. Cuz you have more time to do things, you're not constantly being in your room, on your bed...sometimes I don't even leave my room for days except for the washroom and food. I would like take a bunch of food to my bed and then not leave unless I had

to go to the washroom.

(Participant 9)

Hook-Ups

When I was younger the only thing that I cared about was girls. So it's an amazing tool to meet females—to meet anyone in general, but for me; girls. I don't care, I have my buddies on Facebook or whatever and stuff, but yeah...Not even necessarily new partners, just someone to hook up with, you know?

(Participant 12)

Impact on Sexual Behaviour

I don't think I'd be as sexually active as I am. Or I would be as, like I said, connected to people.

(Participant 11)

I think that it's amazing, and I love it, and I live for it. Yeah, for sure man. I'm always so happy for my boys or whoever if they're getting some. So yeah, social media's great man. Are you kidding me? Almost every day I'll be on Facebook and my buddy will be like "Bro! Check out this chick that I just slept with bro!" and he'll send me like two pictures of her and I'm like "Nice, nice!" It's awesome for that, that's a positive.

(Participant 12)

Influence on Body Image

Yeah, people get really influenced of social media, and it affects a lot of people cuz society on how the way you look, how the way you feel, and, you know. Everyone wants to be like everyone else. They don't want to be their own person because they're affected by social media, which is dumb aha.

(Participant 1)

I think the biggest thing that annoys me is the fact that the standards of beauty and masculinity and everything is so deadly. I feel so bad for all of us, really, because like we're being sucked into this fake world of like being fake and not ourselves, and not like how we are or how we look. We should be proud of who we are and how we look, you know what I mean? So I think

that's like the biggest problem. And it's like really hurting a lot of our people, well not "our" people, I mean like everybody haha.

(Participant 11)

Instagram and Snapchat

Umm Instagram, Snapchat, I used to use Facebook but not anymore.

(Participant 1)

It's a Paradox

You know what, I know that this study is about social media but in life in general, there's a flip side to everything. And there's a good and bad to everything. Social media can be extremely beautiful and extremely helpful, but it can also be a poison and a curse of society—depending on how you use it. Well, we make choices in life, right? So do you make the choice to be appropriate online or do you make the choice to use the Internet to say, slander people? Or bully people? Or steal from people using credit card information? Like, it really depends on how you use it.

(Participant 12)

Learning from Others

You see what other people go through and you're kind of "oh, I don't wanna go through that" so then you kind of like, learn. And then sometimes you see it keeps happening, so then you like, it kind of makes you learn more and it kind of sticks to you so that's what I kinda see. So I don't really like public school, that's why I like this school and there's not really—there's no drama here. So I don't really like public school, so that's why I just watch on my Facebook cuz the kids on my Facebook go through stuff.

(Participant 2)

Making Plans & Scrolling

If it's like a Friday or a Saturday or Sunday I'm talking to someone and like making plans, but if it's during the week I'll just be like scrolling down my newsfeed on like Instagram or Facebook cuz I don't usually talk to people. The people that I talk to mostly are at my school, so

then I just talk to them then.

(Participant 2)

I find that I could just sit there and scroll through the news feed, and sometimes I'll find in a weird way I'll actually like, like if I'm scrolling through and it messes up and goes back to the top I'll just keep scrolling right back down through. I do find that entertaining for some reason, it's like a fidget toy. It's just something to do.

(Participant 12)

Mate Poaching

Well um like on Facebook you, say if you're in a relationship with like a guy and then you don't know like, like say what if girls try adding him and you don't know if they're trying to talk to him because they don't like you, so they're tryna...or something like that. So I know a lot of that happens. I mean, that happened to me too.

(Participant 2)

I think, uh well if you're in a relationship and then you choose to showcase it online it shows others that you're together and that you want to make it public. So I think that would be a positive. But then I also notice that when other girls see that you're in a relationship they tend to uh, start addressing you more and they wouldn't have if you were single...I think it's all about like they see that you're doing okay and happy and then I don't know if they're like home-wreckers, but I think they want what they can't have. So yeah, I think that would be the main cause.

(Participant 7)

Missing Values

People spend way too much time on their phones...they don't see the value of things anymore. Like how it is back in the day haha.

(Participant 1)

Partner Behaviour Monitoring

When you're in a relationship and your partner doesn't want you on like social media, especially Facebook because that can like break up your relationship and stuff... cuz like the partner's like jealousy and immature and stuff. Right now I can't have like no boys on my Facebook or no nothing, I can only talk to certain friends and if I go like overboard then I don't know what would happen. Because he's jealous, he's like the jealous type of person and immature and I'm like tryna get him out of that, but it's not like working aha.

(Participant 4)

In a romantic relationship um the biggest impact it had on me was like with social and the relationship and whatnot was like, them um like being sneaky I guess and being a pathological liar and all that stuff... Yeah, he was messaging other people and he would delete the message but he wouldn't delete the history and yeah so I knew something was up. Like I'm not like fuckin... it's not rocket science to fuckin figure out how... so like, you know, whatever like I looked –cuz I just happened to look—and then sure enough I seen like everything and I was like “what the fuck?” So, whatever.

(Participant 10)

I dunno, that's just how people are. They won't feel comfortable unless they have access to their partner's Facebook. I don't personally follow into that, if somebody demands that I give them my Facebook information I tell them they can dip, they can go... like, no. Like, I have my privacy and my individuality and that's that.

(Participant 12)

Picture “liking” and Jealousy

I would say it becomes problematic when my girlfriend, or ex-girlfriend case, would notice me posting on other girls' walls or liking their photos. But I don't think it'd be that serious if I'm just like, if I just happened to like a picture, you know? It's just me saying “oh, that's a nice picture”. It's not me flirting in a type of way, it's just I don't know, not showing affection but kind of just telling them that they look nice. But then I guess the girl in a relationship would see

that as like, not a threat, but like, inappropriate.

(Participant 7)

Say when the guy likes another girl's picture or the girl likes another guy's picture or one of them is talking to somebody that messaged them out of nowhere. For example like, the creeps that would like send a random stranger nudes, like their partner might find it and yeah...Like I said, it can cause problems when a guy likes another girl's picture, the girl can say "does she look prettier than me?" or "do you prefer her?" and she'd get jealous of that. She'd probably be thinking "how dare he like her picture" or "is he going to leave me for her because she's prettier than me?" Stuff like that.

(Participant 9)

Hahaha. I think it's completely ludicrous that at the press of a button—hitting the "like" button—on a female or male's page can enrage someone to the point where they will want to kill you, or want to get you jumped and beaten up. But it's real, it happens. Like, people do get extremely angry and jealous in relationships when it comes to Facebook. Oh yeah. "Why is that girl liking your picture? Oh my god! What, are you fucking them?!"

(Participant 12)

Potential for Misinterpretation

For couples I feel like having a one-on-one, face-to-face conversation I feel like, you feel more connected, more than just like staring into a screen talking to somebody cuz like, yeah. I feel like, what's it called, when you're talking to somebody and it has more meaning to it when they're not just reading a text, so like yeah...but I feel like because when you're talking to somebody you can tell when something's wrong or something, but when you're talking on social media you never know.

(Participant 6)

It could help but it also could be like bad because last night I was talking to somebody who was like really suicidal, and their sister passed away and yeah. I don't know, it was really hard to talk to her through that way, and the fact that she doesn't like to be on the phone just like me, so yeah like it was pretty hard. Especially when you can't read context properly, that's like a huge

issue when you're trying to help somebody. And then there's that thing like where if you're going to help somebody you have to be careful about what you say. So yeah, social media I guess is kind of bad for that too.

(Participant 11)

Privacy

I think whatever's personal should stay to yourself. I don't believe anyone should know your business, and I don't really think people care about your business to be honest haha. Umm, that's something for you to know and only you to know, not other people.

(Participant 1)

Yeah, and I like to hide my things cuz I like to hide my things from my family. I dunno, I just, I go out and have a few drinks and I don't want my mom seeing that...like I know she won't get mad but like, I just feel like she'll just be sad, so I don't want her to be sad, cuz she's my mom. Yeah I tell my friends "don't tag me in anything, wait till I have a computer or something" cuz then I can change my settings but yeah.

(Participant 2)

Protecting Children

Uhh I don't like when people post things that are inappropriate, or that shouldn't be there because there's young children that use the Internet, right? And you shouldn't be posting inappropriate things knowing that other children may see them.

(Participant 1)

There's nothing I would change about social media except um, the fact that there are little kids that go on it. Kids that can be influenced in ways, and there's nothing really blocked from children on social media unless the parent stops them and most parents, they don't even know their kids have these things.

(Participant 9)

I don't know I just would want to try to help keep them more safe, cuz of like the Amanda Todd things and a lot of girls and boys getting sexually exploited. Especially like underage kids. I

think that's a huge problem that needs to be stopped. So tell those university peoples to stop that shit hahaha.

(Participant 11)

Resource for Learning & Support

Sometimes I'll just go on...I like doing Google searches just for anything, cuz then I learn more stuff and it's interesting. Like my cousin, she's all about YouTube, she watches YouTube all the time on like anything. She's like a walking dictionary and like Wikipedia or whatever. And so mine is Google, I love Google. I'll Google anything.

(Participant 2)

I'm able to connect more with them [their friends], and talk with them and like be able to reach out to them when they need somebody to talk to...like there's always that balance in everything. There's always that good and bad but, I think that social media has helped us a lot.

(Participant 11)

Risks of Meeting Strangers Online

A lot of my friends use that app [Hot or Not], and it's like it's crazy. They're like "yeah you should go on it, there's so much girls that are always like..." and I'm like nah, like you don't really want to meet somebody like through social media. Like you don't really know them that well...

(Participant 6)

They would message you, then there's a reason why they would message you. They'd want like, they'd send you nudes and they would try to like meet up with you and you don't know these people, and they're old—old men who would lie about their age. It was disgusting so I was like, "I'm not going to deal with" that cuz my mom would tell me horrifying stories, so I just deleted it.

(Participant 9)

Risks of Sending Nude Photos

If you send a photo of yourself over Facebook, other people are going to get it. Nudes? Yeah you bet your ass all your homies are getting those. If you're stupid enough to put naked pictures of yourself on the Internet, they're going to go around. So you'd better either have no shame to your game or be damn proud of your body if you're going to send people naked pictures of yourself. Everybody does it, are you kidding me? Everybody does it. Like, a girl will add me on Facebook, I'll talk to her for five minutes and boom, she'll send me a video of her masturbating. It's just like hooooooooo.

(Participant 12)

Self-Sexualizing Photos

Maybe less revealing photos, because that's on there forever. Like, even though they delete it, I'm pretty sure it's still somewhere in the archives of whatever media you're using. But I think again the people that post that type of stuff are just looking for attention. They probably are but I think they just crave it or something, I can't really explain it. But yeah, I think the people that post those kinds of pictures are just... yeah, I dunno. Hah.

(Participant 7)

Just be careful about what you post and, I dunno just because there's people out there that can hack you and like steal your pictures and like whatever and stuff like that. Especially like all these young girls that like are posting pictures that are like really revealing and that it's like, it's disgusting—it's really disgusting. And they're just young too, and they don't understand how like, how many people are in this world and, you know?

(Participant 10)

Stalking and Harassment

Like I have an ex-girlfriend, I actually do still associate with her, but for years and years I didn't because she would stalk me over social media. She would make fake Facebook account after fake Facebook account; she would somehow dig into my life and find out everything I was doing at all times. She would always know who I was dating and it was really, really creepy. And me and my girlfriends would call the police on this girl and they would say there's nothing

we can do; we can't prove it's her.

(Participant 12)

Staying Up-to-Date

Just to see what's going on with other people—the news feed—or if I need to get a hold of somebody I just message someone, or I check my messages if somebody's trying to get a hold of me. And basically just to see what's going on during the day, or whatever I missed in the past couple of days. Or if something happened I'll just check the news feed and that just basically shows me what's going on...If I can't get a hold of somebody I'll check Facebook but then Snapchat, you can get messages through that too. Instagram not so much, but kind of too, yeah.

(Participant 7)

I'd probably be on Snapchat most of my day. Like, when you walked in here I was on Snapchat talking to someone I was like, "oh this would be great to do" hahah. Yeah communicating with people going on, like news, and I don't know just finding out what people are doing with their day and stuff I guess.

(Participant 11)

The Importance of Being Outdoors

I think people would be less shy and then not so insecure about how they interact with other people [without social media]. Like, if I couldn't message someone or text someone then I think then, I dunno, visit or chill time would be longer and I think people would be outdoors more.

(Participant 7)

It would be totally different. We are so brainwashed right now I think, cuz we're always on our phone and don't even like, we don't even go out into nature you know what I mean? We don't even enjoy stuff anymore like we used to, like go out and play and ride a bike and play tag and something like that. I dunno, do something active and stuff like that, but we're always on our phone like even if like we go visit someone we're always asking for the Wi-Fi code just to be on your phone and like everything. And back when I was growing up, like when I was growing up we would always play outside all the time like, that's why I was so happy that I grew up in that

generation.

(Participant 10)

Trust & Loyalty

Umm I'd say it's had a big impact on my relationships. I guess...I don't know, it's social media, it's like it's just there and you can't really like take it away, cuz then, I dunno if someone told me to take away my social media I'd kind of be mad, or I'd say no, cuz I'd be like "I can't, I'm sorry". I guess it all comes down to the trust and like, do you really trust the person to have social media but you can't really tell them not to have social media, but it's like, I mean sometimes it can ruin relationships because of like, other people. Or like, even your partner can not be loyal or something they can like be talking to another girl, or another guy or something.

(Participant 2)

I think it's problematic from the beginning because I guess, cuz it's like people can see what you're doing...you can't really lie about what you're doing. Or like, I don't know just like there's lots of issues that get created with social media and relationships like trust issues and like the fact that you can talk to somebody for like a long time and like, not even be able to actually be next to them. That's huge, like, that's fucked up.

(Participant 11)

Use Caution

I think that all people should be cautious cuz it's like not just about sexual predators but like, people who are out there for credit cards for old people and squander people out of money. Or like those Nigerian Princes kind of deals hahahah.

(Participant 11)

Uses it a Lot

I think I use it a lot, cuz like at school I'm always sitting with all of my friends and we all sit in a row, and there's always a teacher walking by asking us why don't we talk to each other, we're like all on our phones just like not even talking to each other ha. Like, I notice it from other people telling me, like yeah...I always see people like bumping into poles because they're

always on their phones and stuff.

(Participant 6)

Uses Multiple Devices

Well I mean when I was a kid it was just computers but I've had mobile devices. I've had more things like iPods and stuff like that, but uh I've had phones and stuff like that, ya know. Laptops, I've used a tablet once or twice.

(Participant 12)

Uses Phone or Computer

Um with a phone haha. Or computer, or like any device actually.

(Participant 4)

Uh on my phone...I have both like if I'm somewhere without Wi-Fi I'll use my data, and when I've got Wi-Fi then I'll turn off my data.

(Participant 10)

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Kira Regan

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
2010-2014 B.A. Honours in Psychology

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2017 M.A. in Counselling Psychology

Honours and Awards: University of Winnipeg Entrance Scholarship
2010-2011

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Master's Scholarship
2016-2017

Related Work Experience: Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2016

Clinical Counselling Internship
Fanshawe College
London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2017