

The Psychology of Youth Social Media Use

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References

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Why Do We Care So Much
About Social Media?

Thesis

While social media has fundamentally changed the way that many humans across the globe live, issues arising in social media are not necessarily new. That is, social media at its core is a study in human behavior and development, and by applying what we already know about these topics to social media we will be able to greatly help our patients learn to become more successful users.

Thesis

For those whose patients do not have access to social media, the same information in this talk can be applied to other forms of communication, such as texting, or even everyday teen relationships

Components Involved in Social Media Competence

Psychological Development

Cognitive Development

Pro-social Development and Social-Emotional
Intelligence

Blank Slate

In the same way that Freud suggested a therapist can act as a blank slate onto which the patient projects his or her thoughts, feelings, wishes, fears and fantasies. In many ways our patients and clients may treat a computer screen as a canvas which they can use in the very same way.

Topographical and Structural Models of the Mind

- Structural
 - Id: primary drives (most commonly sex and aggression)
 - Superego: part of the mind ruled by morality and “right and wrong”
 - Ego: helps to regulate the conflict between the id and ego
- Topographical
 - Unconscious: part of the mind about which we are unaware
 - Preconscious: part of the mind that can be made aware to us, but is otherwise out of our awareness
 - Conscious: part of the mind that is in our awareness

Examples of the Structural Model in Social Media

- Id
 - Social media seems flooded with themes of sex and aggression
 - This can get teens in trouble who do not discriminate their use
 - Common pitfalls include Sexting and Cyberbullying
 - The false level of separation created by the computer screen can cause people to respond in ways that they wouldn't in the "real world"
- Superego
 - Users who see themselves as the "internet police"
 - Users who blog about their morality and ethical views
- Ego
 - Ultimately the most successful users are able to create a genuine experience while avoiding common pitfalls

Practical Question 1

A 15-year old male who is a poor student comes into your office for a therapy session complaining that he has lost a friend on a social media site. He replied to a post from this friend about a graduation with the comment, “wow, passed by the skin of your teeth, huh.” Which of the following therapeutic interventions would be more in line with Classical/Freudian psychodynamic theory?

- A) Present the patient’s behavior as a cognitive distortion and maladaptive behavior
- B) Ask the patient to fill out a chain of events surrounding this event
- C) Explore the root cause of this behavior in the patient by encouraging introspection
- D) Set up social skills training for the patient with a specific emphasis on social media behavior

Answer

C

Explore the root cause of this behavior in the patient by encouraging introspection

The practical application of Classical/Freudian psychodynamic theory is to help patients understand that there is a reason and motivation for all of our behaviors, and to make this conscious to the patient through the use of curiosity and introspection. In other words, what exactly are we trying to accomplish by our behaviors?

Anna Freud – Ego Psychology

Talked about the fact that people use a series of mature and sometimes immature or even pathological defenses to help them get through inner conflict

Social media is a series of actions and reactions (all about the “buzz”). For example, what good is a post which doesn’t inspire a comment or at least a “like” (thumbs up) on Facebook?

The quality of the response of an individual users to material posted through social media is HIGHLY predictive of competent social media use in kids

Common Defenses Seen in Social Media Use

- Immature
 - Projection: someone insecure about his/her own weight makes fun of the weight of others
 - Tasteless, Inappropriate Humor
 - Displacement: being mad at one thing and taking your anger out on someone/something else
 - Passive Aggressive Comments
- Mature
 - Altruism: saying nice things to others
 - Tasteful, Inoffensive Humor
 - Sublimation: having an aggressive impulse and “liking” a boxer’s facebook page rather than being aggressive with others
 - Suppression: consciously choosing to avoid something for a moment in time

Question 2

A high school student presents with social difficulties at school. What would you do to assess the maturity of the defenses this student is using within the world of social media?

- A) Ask the student about typical responses on social media
- B) View the patient's social media page with the patient for examples
- C) Show the patient a list of typical defenses used and their definitions, and ask about them
- D) Relate defenses that the patient uses while in therapy to the world of social media

(No right answer, interested to hear your thoughts)

Object Relations (Melanie Klein)

“Objects” refer to people in our lives, and Melanie Klein’s idea was that we carry these people with us wherever we go. The more important the person is to us, the more “real estate” they take up in our minds.

An example of this would be the guilt someone feels when not cleaning up after themselves as this may be a reflection of what their parents may have thought of this behavior.

Object Relations

Social media has completely changed the way we think about object relations. It used to be that patients could talk to their therapists about people in their past and present lives with a level of separation and privacy. Now, we are connected with these people all the time through social media.

For our patients, this could be potentially problematic. For example, a teenager could be “friends” with an ex-romantic partner through social media and not be able to get the separation required to properly heal.

Practical Question 3

What would you do if you had a patient in high school who couldn't stop looking up their ex-romantic partner, and this was causing significant distress to the point of making depressive symptoms worse?

- A) Encourage patient to stop using social media altogether
 - B) Suggest that patient only block or “unfriend” the ex
 - C) Work through the issues with the ex in individual therapy
 - D) Tell the patient that the symptoms will improve as they become “desensitized” to exposure to the ex
 - E) Bring the ex into a session for couple's therapy
- (No right answer. Want to get a sense of what you're thinking)

Self-Psychology (Heinz Kohut)

- **Mirroring**
 - A moment of shared experience, usually positive, between two individuals. For example, a mother smiling when a child is excited and smiles about an accomplishment.
- **Idealizing**
 - The development of the ability for people to be able to admire others that they respect and aspire to be like
- **Twinning**
 - Recognizing and admiring qualities in others that are similar to your own

How Many of You Know What “Trolling” Is?

Ruptures in Self Psychology = Pathological Social Media Behavior

- **Mirroring**
 - The inability to be empathic and share in experiences with others on the internet can result in significant ruptures in social relationships
- **Idealizing**
 - The inability to look up to others predisposes to “trolling” behavior
- **Twinning**
 - Low unconscious self-esteem inhibits users from being able to see a reflection of themselves in others, which again predisposes to “trolling” behaviors

The inability to engage in a healthy manner in mirroring, idealizing, and twinning predisposes users to “trolling” and other social media behaviors which ultimately results in less genuine and successful social media relationships.

These deficits are most typically seen in those who struggle with narcissism in the “real world”