Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers   School of Social Work

5-2015

Social Media, Relationships, and Young Adults

Emma Shields-Nordness
St. Catherine University

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers

Part of the Social Work Commons

Social Media, Relationships, and Young Adults

By

Emma Shields-Nordness, B.S.W.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
In partial fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D., LISW (Chair)
Jennifer Gervais MSW, LICSW
Joe Noble MA, LMFT

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to explore how young adults are experiencing relationships when using social media. Using a qualitative design young adults between the ages of 18-24 were asked questions about their experience with social media. The participants reflected on their experiences and reported back. The researcher analyzed the data by looking for themes within the participant's answers. The findings indicated that young adults between the ages of 18-24 prefer to use texting or social media as their main means of communication. The participants also eluded to the feeling of isolation that can happen when depending on these forms of communication. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for future research within the area of technology and young adults.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Social Media, Relationships, and Young Adults

Social media made its debut to the Internet in 1997. Since then it has boomed and influences almost every aspect of our lives; especially the lives of young adults. The first social media site, launched in 1997 called SixDegrees.com, allowed for a friends list and the ability to search for other friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Over the last decade, young adults have been one of the biggest groups going online (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). Within this age group (18-29-year-olds) 1.11 billion use social media (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). With the surge of online activity done by young adults it is important to ask how this is affecting creating a sense of intimacy, because at this stage of development for young adults creating intimacy is of the utmost importance. For purposes of this research, the following questions will be explored: does using social media make young adults feel a sense of intimacy or does it make young adults feel more isolated?

It is important to draw a distinction between technology and social media. Technology is the means used to access social media including using smartphones, tablets, laptops or computers. Social media is the means in which one communicates, whether it is through texting, sharing pictures, updating statuses or sharing other content. This is important because it has changed the way that young adults connect, communicate, and form relationships. This allows a young adult to have a connection with another person while avoiding face-to-face communication and may lead to this young adult isolate themselves from face-to-face interaction. Creating interpersonal relationships while using social media can be less fulfilling and less sincere than that of creating a relationship through interactions in person. It is also important to define what

is meant by young adult. Young adult refers to anyone between the ages of 18-24. The

stage of development young adults are in refers to Erik Erikson's' stages of development,

which will be explained in more detail.

There are many popular social media sites accessed young adults, these include

but are not limited to: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram,

Snapchat, Myspace, Flickr, WordPress, Blogger, Typepad, LiveJournal, Wikipedia,

Wetpaint, Wikidot, Second Life, Reddit, Lulu and many others (Curtis, 2013). These sites

provide a widespread ability to connect and communicate; this enables people to create

and share their own content, including pictures, audio, words, and videos (Social Media,

2010). While each social media site features different purposes they can all be broken

down to basically a place with a friends list, meaning they are places for people to gather

and establish connection with others by adding them as friends (Boyd & Ellison).

Smartphones have expanded social media use because they have put social media in the

pockets of young adults. They have also made communication faster with the

introduction of text messaging.

Social media has changed the way young adults communicate, communication

has traditionally been from one person to another and now people can communicate with

hundreds of people at one time (Social media, 2010). Social media has made

communication less meaningful and less personable. In research done by Sherry Turkle

(2010), she makes the supposition that there is no intimacy without privacy and as young

adults share more and more on social media there is less intimacy in their world. What

makes social media different is not only are strangers able to connect, but the people

using social media can make their opinions known making connections they may not

have otherwise made (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Within the family context when a young

adult experiences are not supported by the family and the young adult does not feel

accepted or trusted by their family, they often turn to social media to form relationships

in unhealthy ways (Aydin & Vokan, 2011). Strangers are now able to connect with

similar interests; most sites still are consistent with this format, but the cultures that are

created by these sites vary (Boyd & Ellison 2008). When a person joins a social media

site they often begin to identify these strangers or people they have outside connections

with as friends; the term friends can often be misleading when it comes to social media

sites because it doesn't always mean friendship in the traditional sense but for various

reasons, these people have connected (Boyd & Ellison 2008). Some sites, like Facebook,

are used to sustain friendships that were first established offline, instead of meeting new

people (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). These relationships tend to be weaker in the sense that

using a site like Facebook is less personal than sitting down to lunch and catching up with

a friend. Social media has grown and redefined relationships and friendships.

Through social media, users create and share content. They communicate who

they are in an effort to connect with others. Young adults are entering the stage of

development when they are beginning to either form intimate relationships or

experiencing bad intimate relationships and withdrawing into isolation. Social media has

the potential to promote intimacy or create more isolation among this generation.

Professionals argue that as a society, we have become more isolated with the rise in

social media. Research has suggested that psychosocial well-being, self-efficacy, and

personality are all impacted with social media use (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, &

Dennis, 2014). As clinical social workers, it is important to recognize that social media

can have an enormous impact on this stage in young adult development. Clinical social workers must ask: How do young adult's experience relationships through social media and their sense of intimacy or isolation as a result? What are their relationship skills and does social media limit or stunt their experience with intimacy and isolation?

Literature Review

Social Media Use

Social media, technology, and smartphones have changed the way of life for young adults. Social media, technology, and smart phones touch the lives of young adults in almost every way and changed the way they communicate and form relationships. For example, 81 percent of young adults own a laptop computer and 93 percent of young adults own a smartphone (Lenhart et al. 2010). Young adults use social media every day and influences many of the day to day tasks they perform. Society has been sending an affirming message of social media and technology use with the introduction of items like iPads to high school and college curriculum. Social media has become a huge part of the lives of young adults, with over 72 percent of all 18-29 year-olds using a social networking site (Lenhart et al., 2010). Some popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, Vine, YouTube, and Snapchat. Each of these sites has the unique capacity to allow young adults to interact and connect with each other in various ways. Facebook has been one of the most popular ways young adults connect; around 71 percent in 2013 had a Facebook profile (Lenhart et al., 2010). Facebook is also becoming an important communication tool (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009). The scale and use of Facebook is vast and continues to grow among young adults, e.g., "94 percent of undergraduate students were

Facebook users, spending 10–30 min online each day communicating with their "Friends List" of 150–200 people" (Ross et al., 2009). Facebook was created in 2004 and was geared towards college students to help them connect and maintain social ties (Ross et al., 2009). The introduction of wireless internet on the smartphone has now put Facebook in the pockets of young adults.

The biggest influence in social media use has been the rise in the use of the smartphone. 93 percent of young adults 18-29 own a smartphone which allows them to connect wirelessly to the internet. Smartphones are among the most popular ways for young adults to connect and have become the desired means of communication. They do this through both social networking sites and texting. Texting provides young adults with a way of talking to friends that is private. Texting can be used to carry out flirtation or just to talk to friends because it may be easier due to the anonymity it can provide (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005). More than 50 percent of young adults in the UK reported that they could not live without their phones and that they are much more likely to text someone rather than call them (Ananova, 2003). This has turned using a smartphone into more of a compulsion which can lead to many different clinical ramifications. Texting has become so popular among young adults that it could be considered an obsession (Faulkner & Culwin, 2003). As the availability of cells phones goes up, as well as the affordability, many young adults have turned to smartphones as a primary form of interpersonal interaction (Skierkowski & Wood, 2011). Skierkowski and Wood (2011) also found that texting is an essential aspect of young adults' communicative behavior. Young adults use texting the most out of any age group and they use their phones less than any age group for voice-to-voice communication (Morrill, Jones, & Vaterlaus,

2013). Within peer groups, texting can be considered the preferred means of contact (Skierowski & Wood, 2011). Texting is a way of communicating that is interesting because it combines written and oral communication; texting is also very interactive and takes place in real time (Holtgraves, 2010). Smartphones also play a huge role in contributing to an individual's emerging identity as a young adult. They can also be a status symbol and a self-presentation tool, and conveys information about the owner (Morrill, Jones, & Varerlaus, 2013). Other applications on smartphones allow for unique means of communication. For example, the sending and receiving of pictures, including Instagram and Snapchat.

Introversion, Extroversion, and Social Media Use

Young adults are beginning to form their own unique and individual personality. As they become more autonomous from their families and begin to explore the world on their own, their personality can impact the way they form interpersonal relationships, including the emphasis they put on social media to help create those relationships (Curtis, 2013). Being an extrovert or an introvert can play a role in how young adults use social media. The Five-Factor Model (FFM) is used to provide a way of studying human functioning as it relates to personality. "FFM is an empirically based conceptual description of the heretical structure of human personality traits." (Sutin & Costas, 2009). Using the FFM and the different personality traits it describes can be applied to studying how personality influences social media use among young adults. (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, Orr, & 2009). FFM includes five different traits which include neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Ross et al. 2009). Neuroticism can be described as a person who is

very anxious. One can also be extremely self-conscious and impulsive. Neuroticism

usually is referred to someone's lack of positive psychological development and

emotional stability (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Neuroticism can be seen

in extroverts and introverts and has a large impact on social media use. Extraversion is

someone who is much more social than a person who is more neurotic, in that a more

neurotic person is more concerned about themselves than others. They can be more

introspective and self-occupied (Judge et al., 1999). Openness as a personality trait refers

to some who is competent, strives for achievement, has self-discipline and feels a sense

of duty (Butt & Phillips 2008). Agreeableness refers to someone who is trustworthy and

are compliant; agreeable people can be very modest and unselfish (Butt & Phillips,

1999). Conscientiousness is when someone feels a sense of dutifulness (Butt & Phillips,

1999). Other studies use the FFM but will also add self-esteem as a contributor to social

media use. Levels of use and the impact of using social media can have an effect on a

young adult's self-esteem and largely this is due to the personality of the young adult

(Butt & Phillips, 2008). When a young adult is more prone to one of these personality

types, it can impact their experience with social media

When young adults personality tends to have more neurotic traits their experience

online can look very different. Butt and Phillips (1999) found that neurotic young adult

women used social media more than young adult men, and often for reasons to feel like

part of a group and to be less lonely. Introverted people would expose their real selves

more readily over social media; this may be hypothesized because of the anonymity of

social media (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002). Introverts are more likely to

use texting to communicate than extroverts would (Ross et al, 2009). Another risk factor

involved with introverts is they may not be forming the offline types of relationships that

an extrovert would be outside of social media. This is especially true when an introvert

who is low on the agreeableness trait (Ross et al. 2009). Using social media showed in

studies, done by Ross et al. (2009) and Butt and Phillips (1999), that social media could

make the introvert more introverted. This can lead to the introvert becoming more

isolated and also may make them more anxious in face-to-face social situations (Butt &

Phillip 1999).

Introverts can also be shy and more prone to be socially anxious (Judge et al.,

1999). Someone who is socially anxious may feel uncomfortable with face-to-face

interactions. Texting and social media sites may be used as an alternative to avoid these

situations that make them uncomfortable (Pierce, 2009). If this promotes the socially

anxious young adult to make connections online and then pursue those connections

outside of the internet, it can be a very healthy. When used as a replacement to face-to-

face interactions they can become more socially isolated and also hinder their skills to

interact face-to-face with other young adults (Pierce, 2009). Odaci and Kalkan (2010)

reported research in this area has proved that the more time a young adult spends online,

the greater the chance they are doing this to avoid social relations and experience more

loneliness as a result. Young adults that are prone to depression, shyness, and low self-

esteem have been shown to have greater dependency on the internet than young adults

who are not shy, depressed or have a low self-esteem (Odaci & Kalkan, 2009). There has

been a high prevalence in social anxiety and young adults that use social media to

regulate challenging social interactions or to escape the pressure and fear of social

interactions (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005). Social media can prove to be a very

appealing alternative for a young adult who has high social anxiety (Weidman, Fernadez, Levinson, Augstine, Larsen & Rodebaugh, 2012). Young adults with high social anxiety will view the internet as a place they are more comfortable self-disclosing, however, these young adults also report having a lower self-esteem, higher levels of depression (Weidman et al., 2012). A young adult who has a more avoidant personality can experience more social isolation (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). An introvert's use of social media differs greatly from the way extroverts use social media (Judge et al., 1999).

Extrovert's use and experience social media very differently than young adults with neuroticism do (Judge et al., 1999). A young adult who is extroverted may have a very positive experience using social media, meaning they experience a relationship which is fulfilling and successful, which contributes to supporting their pre-existing interests (Butt & Phillip, 1999). When using social media, an extrovert is more likely to make friendships but then also follow through with those relationships outside of the internet (Ross et al., 2009). It can also be noted that extroverts are most likely to reveal their real selves over social media (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002). Extrovism and introvism play a definite role in a young adult's social media experience. The other personality types are important as well and have an impact. The impact, however, is not as significant and is usually contributed to if that young adult's personality is more introverted or extroverted as a dominant factor (Butt & Phillip, 1999). The internet, social media, and texting can be a great tool for a young adult who is more extroverted. These types of interactions often promote the young adult to reach out and meet up for face-to-face interactions. According to Peterson, Aye, and Wheeler (2010)

extroverts "often linked to the use of online social networking tools such as Facebook,

which encourage peer-to-peer communication and can stimulate social connectedness."

(p. 12). Being an extrovert or an introvert plays an important role in social media use and

interpersonal relationships, but self-esteem is another motivating factor of personality

that contributes to the use of social media (Shepherd & Edelmann 2005).

Social Media and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an important area to explore when looking at the impact of young

adults social media use. The research is split in this area. Shepherd and Edelmann (2005)

found that social media use when regulated can have a good impact on a young adult's

self-esteem. Social media can give the power to a young adult to feel comfortable to be

less inhibited and, therefore, be more open leading to increasing their self-esteem

(Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005). Those who are shyer find power in using social media

because the anonymity can let them be more open (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005). While

Ehrenberg, Juckes, White and Walsh (2008) find the opposite to be true. They do agree,

however that personality type influences the young adults self-esteem as it relates to

social media use. When a young adult reported a lower self-esteem they also tended to

send more text messages, as opposed to when a young adult who reported having a high

self-esteem they tended to make more phone calls (Ehrenberg, Juckes, White, & Walsh,

2008). Young adults that are prone to depression, shyness, and low self-esteem have been

shown to have greater dependency on the internet than young adults who are not shy,

depressed or have a low self-esteem (Odaci & Kalkan, 2009). Young adults with high

social anxiety will view the internet as a place they are more comfortable self-disclosing,

however, these young adults also report having a lower self-esteem, higher levels of

depression (Weidman et al., 2012). This may be due to the fact that these young adults are trying to compensate for failure in social interactions face-to-face and turning to social media (Wiedman et al., 2012). Aydin and Vokan (2011) has found a strong correlation between low social self-esteem and home family self-esteem and excessive social media use among young adults.

There is a great importance in understanding how personality can influence the way in which a young adult uses social media. These personality factors can contribute to a young adult becoming more socially isolated or making more connections and following through with those connections outside the social media realm. Social media also plays a role in the way relationships are formed and how important these interpersonal relationships made through social media are to the development of a young adult.

Personality Formation in Young Adults

Young adults are still experiencing development in their personalities (Richard, Fraley, Brent, & Trzeniewski, 2001). It is normal for young adults to experience changes in their personality, most young adults experience some degree of change through maturation (Richard et al., 2001). In normative development the ability to demonstrate self-control has been found to increase and there is a decrease in negative emotionality (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). When considering the big five dimensions, many researchers find that openness to experience is a trait that appears to increase in young adulthood (Richard et al. 2001). Scollon and Diener (2006) report neuroticism has been shown to decrease significantly as a person ages and some studies go as far as finding a change in every big five personality traits. Neyer and Asendorpf (2001) find a comparison in

normative change when looking at the increase of conscientiousness and the decrease of

neuroticism. Richard et al. (2001) found that in a study of extroversion and how that

forms or changes in young adulthood are mixed.

The environment in which the young adult is a part is important to personality

development (Neyer & Asendorpf 2001). Often time's young adults at this stage of

development are leaving home, getting a job, and forming and maintaining intimate

relationships. Other changes young adults experience can be becoming a parent

themselves, becoming increasingly less involved in dyadic interactions with people such

as their parents and siblings (Neyer & Asendorpf 2001). When entering these new

environments it has been shown that there needs to be increased emotional stability,

agreeableness, and conscientiousness if the young adult is to succeed in the new roles

(Scollon & Diener 2006). If a young adult is prone to neuroticism that may lead them to

feeling less secure in their relationships, once in a relationship however can the

relationship itself can lead to a decrease in neuroticism (Scollon & Diener 2006).

Past research suggests that social media can influence psychosocial well-being,

self-efficacy, personality, and relationship formation. The stage of development young

adults are entering is very important because they begin forming intimate relationships

that may last their whole lives. Without the development of intimate relationships the

young adult may draw into isolation, this is the supposition. Social media may promote

and influence young adults to isolate easier, this can lead to social phobia, depression,

and anxiety. There is little research however as to how social media and to what extent

affects young adults experience with relationships and isolation. Therefore, the aim of

this present study is to examine the relationship between relationships/isolation

experiences and the use of social media.

Gender Differences in Social Media Use

Male and females use social media in different ways and for different purposes

(Muscanell & Guadago, 2012). Young adult men tend to use social media as a form of

entertainment (i.e. gaming) and young adult women use it more to talk with friends about

things like romantic relationships, secrets and feelings (Barker, 2009). Young adult

women will use social media to connect with friends they already have, whereas, young

adult men use it to make new friends (Barker, 2009). A surprising finding among young

adult men and young adult women and social media use is that young adult men were

more likely to seek social benefit and social identification when trying to learn about the

social world (Barker, 2009). This means that young adult men are using social media to

feel better about themselves. Young adult women will present themselves in ways that

revolve around others. However, they tend to post less personal information. Young adult

women are more preoccupied with their image on social networking sites than the content

of their posts, meaning they are more superficial in their social media use. (Muscanell &

Guadago, 2012). Young adult men tend to be riskier when it comes to social media,

posting pictures that could be self-incriminating or leaving inappropriate comments

(Muscanell & Guadago 2012).

When it comes to the amount of internet use, there is little difference between

young adult men and young adult women. What has found to be interesting about online

use in young adult men and young adult women is that even with the anonymity of the

internet young adult men and young adult women will stay within their gender roles.

Young adult men will engage in achievement-orientated activities (i.e. internet games), where young adult women will concentrate on relationships (Muscanell & Guadago, 2012). Personality can also lead to differences in social media use.

Young adult women 18-24 are much more likely to use social media than teen girls 11-17 (Mindlin, 2007). Young adult men are much more likely than young adult women to use social media to make new friends and use these sites to flirt (Mindlin, 2007). When it comes down to who uses social media the most women outright use social media the most. Women comprise 56% of all social media use, some studies speculate that this may be due to the fact that young adult women are more likely to like longer conversations as compared to young adult men (Lee, 2012). When young adult men log on they usually are using social media to get things done, rather than keeping in touch with others, for example men are more likely to use networking sites like Linkedin as compared to Facebook (Lee, 2012).

Relationships and Social Media Use

Social media is changing relationships among young adults, as it becomes increasingly more popular, more interpersonal relationships are being formed through this way of communicating and connecting (Pettigrew, 2008). Text messaging is thought to be having the biggest impact on young adult's relationships, with peers, parents and romantic relationships. It is the primary means of communication; romantic pairs and relational partners (peers and family) have different experiences when it comes to text messaging (Pettigrew, 2008). One of the more interesting concepts on the rise with social media and text messaging is how young adults form relationships without ever having to have face-to-face contact with the one another. Odaci and Kalkan (2010) found a positive

correlation between loneliness and dating anxiety with the excessive amount of time spent online. There can also be a lower level of peer acceptance, peer rejection as they become even more alienated from society (Odaci & Kalkan, 2009). Young adults need support from their peer groups and have the need to feel like they are part of the group; with the isolation of forming these relationships with peer groups online young adults are more prone to loneliness as the young adult searches for a sense of belonging (Odaci & Kalkan, 2009). Peer relationships are important for young adults and tend to be more meaningful when they are face-to-face. Young adults with low-quality friendships tend to spend more time on social media and develop depression over time (Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, Bogt and Meeus, 2009). When a young adult begins to spend more time on social media sites such as sites like Facebook to communicate or connect with others it can have a serious impact on healthy self-development (Blaising, 2014). As a teen moves into young adulthood, there is an increasing interest in forming romantic relationships. Romantic relationships formed over social media can look very different than that of those formed by face-to-face interaction.

In genuine romantic relationships establishing eye contact, speaking face-to-face, being in proximity to the romantic partner, and blushing are all important relationship builders (Gudagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2011). When a young adult experiences anxiety in these types of face-to-face interactions, they avoid making eye-contact, feel embarrassed when blushing in front of romantic partners, or just feel uncomfortable being near someone they are attracted to, they often turn to the internet (Odaci and Kalkan, 2009). Findings from Odaci and Kalkan (2009) show that when the internet is used to replace the romantic social interactions a number of psychological problems can be triggered.

One cause of forming a romantic relationship over the internet may be because of the young adult's uncomfortableness with direct social relationships, these young adults often find themselves feeling less attractive than their other peers and experience social anxiety (Odaci and Kalkan, 2009). Another reason young adults who find themselves anxious in forming romantic relationships face-to-face is because in a face-to-face situation they cannot control the situation and cannot take time to form the desired personality characteristics they would like to present (Weidman et al., 2012). In online dating a young adult can fabricate their personality characteristics, this can be an attempt to give off the desired impression, one they cannot display in face-to-face interactions (Gudagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2011). When the young adult attempts to meet the person they have been dating online, they can be rejected because the person they displayed themselves as online is not the person they really are. Often times when this rejection occurs the young adult will become less likely to try and form connections outside of social media and they can become more isolated (Odaci and Kalkan, 2009).

Relationship formation in Young Adults

When trying to understand how social media affects young adult's relationships it is important to know how young adults begin to form relationships. One of the biggest areas that develop during young adulthood is interpersonal relationships. Young adults move beyond the relationships with their families and begin to form intimate relationships with peers. At each stage of young adulthood, relationships begin to take different forms and the capacities to form relationships change (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Young adults are going through a transformation period of attachment relationships moving away from their families and becoming an attachment figure for

peers, romantic partners, and eventually their own children (Allen, 2012). Historically,

adolescent relationships have been viewed through socialization and acculturation

occurring in close relationships attributed to proximity and distal contexts (Collins &

Laursen, 2004). With the introduction of social media, an adolescent can now form a

relationship well beyond the proximity of their school or neighborhood and can connect

with different cultures.

Parent-Child relationships set the stage for peer relationships and management of

peer relationships (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Adolescents are striving for autonomy from

parents which leads to a decreased need for emotional dependence on parents and

increased need for emotional dependence on peers (Furnman & Buhrmester, 1992).

During adolescents more time is spent with peer groups than with parents; parenting style

and practice contribute to the quality and content of the parent-child relationship (Collins

& Laursen, 2004). These differences in parenting styles can lead to the young adult's

receptivity to socialization practices (Collins & Laursen, 2004). When it comes to making

long-term decisions adolescents will still turn to their parents and will look to their peers

for cultural influences like ways of dressing or what kind of music to listen to (Smetana

& Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006).

Family relationships remain important throughout all stages of adolescent

development, however, more time is spent on interactions with persons outside the family

(Collins & Laursen, 2004). In any other development period, the significance of

friendships is greatest in adolescents. Adolescents will form small groups of peers, these

are usually based shared activities, which usually provide the context for interaction

(Semtana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2012). Adolescent young adult women tend to

have more intimate relationships but also their relationships can hold a lot of jealousy

towards one another; young adult women will also internalize much more than young

adult men (Semtana et al., 2012). Parenting style while the young adult was much

younger, between 0-3 years old, plays an important role in the way a young adult forms

relationships with peers (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). The type of

attachment that is formed in the young adults early stages of life can be a strong predictor

of how he or she will form relationships in young adulthood (Sroufe et al., 1999)

　　　　Understanding attachment is important because it is a large contributor to

relationship formation in the developmental stage of young adults (Sroufe et al., 1999).

Those who formed secure attachment with adults in their life are less likely in an

ambiguous social situation to show hostile intent and are more likely to bring conflicts to

a successful resolution, see themselves are more connected to others and feel especially

connected to family members (Sroufe et al. 1999). When early experiences are disturbing

in attachment relations often can lay the groundwork for disturbances later on in

relationship formation with peers outside the family (Sroufe et al. 1999).

　　　　As peer relationships form and as the adolescent ages they become more

interested in forming intimate relationships. This developmental stage the young adult is

moving from same-sex peer groups to being interested in the opposite sex. Early

adolescents spent most of their time think about the opposite sex, middle adolescents

thinking about the opposite sex and spending time with them, and young adults begin to

form lasting romantic relationships (Richards, Crowe, Larson & Swarr 1998).

Relationships are very important at this stage of development and personality can have

much to do with how successful or unsuccessful the relationships are.

Conceptual Framework

Psychosocial Stages of Development

Erik Erikson developed his theory of the psychosocial stages of development to describe eight healthy stages that humans should develop (Erikson, 1963). Erikson used Freudian principles to create the stages of psychosocial development. Erikson challenged Freud, however; Freud believed that personalities were developed around the age of five and Erikson believed personalities continue to develop over time (Miller, 1983). These eight stages are: from birth to 2 years old trust vs. mistrust, at 2-4 years old autonomy vs. shame and doubt, at 4-5 years old initiative vs. guilt, at 5-12 years old industry vs inferiority, 13-19 identity vs. role confusion, at 20-24 and sometimes 20-39 years intimacy vs. isolation, 25-64 years old generatively vs. stagnation, and finally at 65 years until death ego integrity vs, despair (Erikson, 1963). Each stage builds upon the last stage. However, mastery of the previous stage is not necessary. These stages are considered psychosocial crisis' that one must go through; for example in the early stage of trust vs. mistrust the child is questioning whether or not the world is a trustworthy place and the relationship the child has with their mother is very important. If the child successfully obtains the more favorable attribute in the crisis, in this example learning the world is a trustworthy place, the child will emerge with the corresponding trait, trust (Erikson 1978).

For the purposes of this study, the development stage that is concentrated on is during young adulthood intimacy vs. isolation. This is a stage where relationships and romantic relationships are most important. An adolescent who developed a sense of identity in the earlier stage will likely be able to obtain intimacy at this stage and one that

has not developed a sense of identity may fear commitment and therefore retreat in isolation (Erik Erikson 8 Stages 2000). This is because to obtain intimacy the young adult must have a developed a sense of self and identity and then they can develop healthy romantic relationships (Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, Vaughn 2011).

Intimacy vs. isolation is a confusing and important stage that young adults go through. This stage is heavily impacted by the previous stage of identity vs. identity confusion. Adolescents who are moving through identity vs. identity can experience impacts from social media use on their developmental stage. In turn that experience follows the adolescent into young adulthood. Social media can have both negative and positive impacts on the stage on intimacy vs. isolation (Blaising 2014). A young adult who uses social media to reach out and make new connections and in turn follow through with those connections outside of the social media realm can experience intimacy (Blaising 2014). Those young adults who use social media to avoid outside face-to-face interactions might experience isolation (Blaising 2014).

Methods

Research Design

The primary research question is: How do young adult's experience relationships through social media and the secondary research question is: do young adults feel a sense of intimacy or isolation as a result? The hypothesis is that social media has changed young adult's relationships and young adults have become more isolated with social media use. Participates in this study were young adult individuals attending the

University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. The researcher utilized a structured questionnaire distributed through a Qualtrix survey software with open-ended questions.

This is a qualitative research design that is exploratory and inductive in nature. The research is exploratory because the connection between relationships and social media has not been clearly defined. Qualitative research is based on people's beliefs, opinions, experiences, and attitudes; qualitative research produces non-numerical data (Pathak, Jena & Kalra 2013). This research was inductive due to the fact that it will search for patterns and then codes were developed from those patterns, and finally turning those codes into hypotheses. This research design was chosen because qualitative questions will give more detail as to a young adults experience with social media.

Sample

A convenience sample of undergraduate students was recruited from The University of St. Thomas for this qualitative research project. This is a convenience sample they are being chosen because most undergraduate students fall within the desired age group for this study. The students were randomly selected by placing an advertisement in the St. Thomas weekly e-mail. Students were given an incentive for their choosing to participate. The incentive was three ten dollar gift cards given to three randomly chosen participants. The recruitment letter asked 18-24-year-olds to participate in a research survey with the incentive of winning the gift cards.

The students were given the option to complete a survey using the Qualtrics program as advertised in the weekly student email. This consisted of a consent form outlining the potential risks with completing the survey. Participates were asked to click a box saying they agree to consent to the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

This consent was presented to The University of St. Thomas (UST) Institutional Review Board (IRB). It complied with a level of exemption presented by UST IRB and protection of Human Subjects guidelines. This included an explanation of confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents during the research process. The students names were not asked, the only identifying information that will be taken will be age and gender. Copies of the surveys will be deleted by May 22, 2015.

Data Collection

The option to participate was advertised in the St. Thomas weekly email sent to students and the incentive of three 10 dollar gift cards will be stated. The surveys were given out using the Qualtrics software. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes and will contain 7 questions (see Appendix A).

The questions were created to answer the research question and were informed by the literature. The questions were formed in such a way as to get as much information about the participants experience with social media. Some of the questions are quantitative in nature as to collect data about the amount of social media use and how that impacts the relationships formed through social media. These questions were approved by Sarah Ferguson, Jennifer Gervias, and Joe Noble to ensure that the questions met the UST IRB and Protection of Human Subject Guidelines, for example not having questions of personal nature or unrelated to research question. The questions were open-ended and neutral meaning they are not leading in nature, guided by the overall research question, and supported by the literature related to young adults and relationship experiences with social media.

The questions were sequenced in such a way as to get more general information about the participant and then question their experiences with social media. The questions will be concentrated on what the participant feels their personality is like, extroverted or introverted. Then the questions proceed to ask about the preferred means of communication and the amount of time they spend communicating in this way. Following the means and amount of communication, the survey will ask about experiences with the use of social media. These questions were sequenced in this way as to the questions formed in the literature review.

The surveys were given out online. The setting took place wherever the respondents decides to complete the survey. This will provide the respondent with the power to choose where he/she would like to complete the survey.

Data Analysis

Sample

The demographic of the sample was students from the University of St. Thomas that are between the ages of 18-24. The age of the respondents will be measured through question one. Frequency distributions was conducted on this question to determine the mean, median and mode of the age of the respondents. The gender of the participants was measured through question two. A frequency count was conducted to determine how many men and how many women completed the survey. Participates were asked which form of communication they prefer to use when talking with their friends in question three. A frequency count will be conducted to determine which form of communication is preferred among young adults. The participants will respond to question four by indicating if they self-identify as an introvert or extrovert. A frequency count will be

conducted to determine which personality type is most common among respondents. Questions five and six ask about specific sites young adults use and how much they use the site.

The surveys were analyzed by doing an inductive analysis through a coding mechanism. This was done through an open coding process. These codes were then written down next to the corresponding respondent answers. These codes were then used to discover themes within the surveys. When themes were recognized, the researcher noted them in the survey. Themes the researcher predicts will be found are young adults are more comfortable contacting friends through social media sites, the more a young adult uses social media as their main means of communications they will feel more isolated,

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of this research include the diversity of the participants because of the random selection of university students. There was also diversity in participates self-identification such as race or socioeconomic status, among other differences. The scope of this study is small, but the participants are a generation that has had a substantial exposure to social media and has a lot of experience using social media. Another strength of this research is the fact that the survey was sent out to every university student and that these students have extensive experience with social media.

Limitations of this study include the researcher's bias due to the element that the researcher is the same age as the participants and has lived through the rise of social media. Another limitation will be the sample size. The sample size will be relatively small due to only reaching out to the University of St. Thomas students. Finally, the

demographics of the participants may not be diverse due to the population attending a

private university in St. Paul, MN. Also, the use of email and social media to reach out

and find participates may limit the results because it will not reach out to the people who

are not readily using these platforms.

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

The following sections outline the research findings and seek to answer the

research question. The research question being: how do young adult's experience

relationships through social media and their sense of intimacy or isolation as a result?

What are their relationship skills and does social media limit or stunt their experience

with intimacy and isolation? The findings indicate certain descriptive statistics, for

example, the distribution of age of the respondents and the distribution of the gender of

the respondents. Next, the themes identified throughout the process of analyzing the

respondent's answers to the survey question. Each theme identified comes from a specific

question in the survey. The themes are based on codes found within each question. Of the

seven questions asked of the respondents, seven themes were found within seven specific

questions. The first two questions of the survey were used to find descriptive statistics.

The seven specific questions where themes were identified are further explored. The two

questions that were not addressed within the themes did not present enough relative data

to the research question and, therefore, were left out. The survey is located in appendix

Descriptive Statistics

The first question in the survey asked the respondents to identify how old they

were at the time of taking the survey. Statistical analysis of this nominal variable

occurred through a frequency distribution and bar chart. The frequency distribution

shown below in Table 1 reveals the number of respondents who identify as (1) 18 years old, (2) 19 years old, (3) 20 years old, (4) 21 years old, (5) 22 years old, (6) 23 years old, (7) 24 years old, or (8) I am not between the ages of 18-24 years old.

Table 1. *Distribution of Age of Respondents*

#	Answer		Response	%
1	18		2	5%
2	19		4	10%
3	20		2	5%
4	21		8	19%
5	22		10	24%
6	23		8	19%
7	24		7	17%
8	I am not between the ages of 18-24		1	2%
	Total		42	100%

The second descriptive statistic addresses the question which asks the participants if they are (1) male, (2) female, or (3) other. Statistical analysis of this nominal variable was also done through a frequency distribution and bar chart. The frequency distribution shown below in Table 2 reveals the number of respondents who identify as (1) male, (2) female, or (3) other.

Table 2. *Distribution of Gender*

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Male	8	25%
2	Female	24	75%
3	Other	0	0%
	Total	32	100%

Table 2 shows that 8 of the 32 or 25% of the respondents were male, 24 of the 32 or 75%

respondents were female, and none of the participants identified as other. The majority of

the participants of the study being female. Moving forward through the evaluation of the

surveys the questions were asked in more of a qualitative formatted and reported in terms

of themes identified by the researcher.

Themes

Through careful evaluation of the respondents survey answers, seven themes were

identified. These themes were identified using a coding process. Each question was

analyzed for common themes which were then used to create a code. The seven themes

are ease of communication, staying connected, body language/facial expression/tone of

voice, time to think of a response, closeness, meaningful relationships, and isolation.

These themes were identified because they were determined to best help answer the

research question of how do young adult's experience relationships through social media

and their sense of intimacy or isolation as a result? What are their relationship skills and

does social media limit or stunt their experience with intimacy and isolation?

Ease of Communication

'Ease of communication' was one of the themes identified through the analysis of

the surveys. This theme was related to the respondent's answers when asked about what

type of communication you use on a daily basis and what is most appealing about using

these types of communication. More specifically this theme was identified in question

number seven. All of the 32 respondents said they used their smartphone to communicate

on a daily basis and 32 of the 32 respondents also said they use text messaging as a main

means of communication. The overwhelming reasons as to why these methods were

chosen were due to ease of communication. The following quotes highlight some of the respondent's thoughts on the topic:

- *"[Texting] is easy, fun, entertaining, and quick."*

- *"You are able to connect with people, media, efficiently without having to exert much effort."*

- *"Connecting with everyone instantly. Easy to stay in touch."*

'Ease of communication' was identified as a code by the researcher. After careful observation of the respondents quotes, the researcher determined enough codes (i.e., at least three) referring to the ease of communication were present to recognize it as a theme.

Staying Connected

'Staying connected' was another theme identified through the analysis of the surveys. This theme was related to the questions respondents answered which asked what is most appealing about using social media. This theme was also identified using the respondents answers to question number seven of the survey. Of the 32 respondents most explained in their answer, the reason as to why they find social media so appealing was because they could stay connected with friends, family, and their favorite celebrities. The following quotes highlight some of the respondent's thoughts on the topic:

- *"Connecting to people and keeping up to date with event, friends, and family members."*

- *"I like seeing what my friends are up to, and being able to feel connected to them even if I'm not physically with them. I also like using social medias like Instagram and Twitter to see what celebrities that I am interested in are saying."*

- *"Be able to connect with friends and family that live across the country and world without having to bother them every day to get updates on what's happening."*

'Staying connected' was an identified code by the researcher. After reviewing each survey, the researcher felt that there were enough mentions of 'staying connected' that it could be recognized as a theme.

Body Language/Facial Expressions/Tone of Voice

'Body language/facial expressions/tone of voice' is another theme identified by the researcher. After analysis of the surveys, the researcher found enough mentions to create this theme. This theme was found in question number eight of the survey. Question eight asks the respondents do you believe it is easier to be more open when communicating with social media/texting or do you find you are more open when communicating face-to-face? About half of the respondents felt that communication was easier and more meaningful when face-to-face because they can see the person's body language, facial expressions, and hear their tone of voice. The following quotes explain their reasoning behind this answer:

- *"[Face-to-face] because it is important to see facial expression and tone in communication."*

- *"I believe communicating face-to-face is easier because then you can gauge immediate feedback and it's a more polite way to address difficult subjects."*

- *"I feel I am most open with Face-to-Face communication. Being able to talk to someone that is directly in front of you makes it easier to get your moods and expressions across without your words being lost in the context. It's easier to*

> *understand what someone is trying to convey and how they are saying it when you*
>
> *are in person versus through texting."*

- *"I find it easier to understand people and get a better idea of their emotions face*
  to face. It's easier to read people and understand emotions."

It became clear through careful analysis of the surveys by the researcher that the
importance on 'body language/facial expressions/tone of voice' was a theme throughout
the respondents.

Time to Think of Response

About half of the respondents talked about using social media to communicate
because it gives them time to think of a response. This theme was also identified in
question number eight of the survey which asks do you believe it is easier to be more
open when communicating with social media/texting or do you find you are more open
when communicating face-to-face? For this reason 'time to think' was recognized as a
theme. The response was in light of the question, do you believe it is easier to be more
open when communicating with social media/texting or do you find you are more open
when communicating face-to-face. The following quotes highlight some of the
respondent's thoughts on the topic:

- *"I'm a rather shy person and (sadly) technology, texting, and social media, makes*
  it so much easier for me to think about my response and feel confident in what I
  say. Plus I don't have to deal with the embarrassment if I'm a failure in what I
  say."

- *"I personally believe it is easier to communicate via text message due to the ability to respond at your own pace and choose if you would like to respond and you may think about what you want to say for however long you choose."*

- *"Social media/texting because you have time to think of a response."*

'Time to think of a response' was a code identified by the researcher. After careful review of the responses to the survey question, it was identified as a theme.

Closeness Depends

'Closeness depends' was another theme identified by the researcher. When the respondents were asked does communicating through social media/texting make you feel closer to your friends, the theme of the answers was "closeness depends.' This theme was found in question number nine. The following quotes best illustrate this theme:

- *"[Social media] makes me feel up to date on their lives so yes. It doesn't replace them telling me about things in person and bonding, but I still feel as though I know what is going on in their lives."*

- *"When meeting someone new, I think it does make you closer to them. I think social media actually can ramp you up to becoming closer to a new person. It may start on the internet and as the relationship grows it moves from online to the phone and text, as you get to know the person. With current friends, I think it does keep you closer, but I think that it can split you apart as well."*

- *"There are friends that you might not see all the time, so you are able to still talk to them regardless of the distance between each other. It's nice to be able to keep in touch with people that you are unable to see as often."*

'Closeness depends' was a code identified through the analysis of the research and was present enough to create a theme.

Meaningful Relationships, it Depends

'Meaningful relationships, it depends' was another theme identified by the researcher. This theme was found when the respondents were asked to answer the question How meaningful are the relationships you make and maintain through social media/texting to you. The following quotes best illustrate this theme:

- *"Depends on the person, relationships maintained and made through social media are not too meaningful but usually who I am texting is."*

- *"Fairly meaningful, it's always nice to be able to keep up with friends that have gone away and social media does make it easier to keep in touch. Although I think that relationships should not be based purely off of what is said to each other through social media, and I think social media can send the wrong message to people when a comment made, is taking the wrong way. It can be much harder to get a message through to someone using social media, instead of telling them face to face."*

- *"Somewhat. Only meaningful due to the connections I make with them in the real world.*

- *I think the relationships aren't build and made through social media, but I do believe that it helps to maintain and keeping them is meaningful to me."*

- *"I would say that they have a different type of appreciation versus the friends and relationships you make in real life. The people you interact with on social media are only showing you what they want to show you, sometimes that's good,*

sometimes it's bad. It takes a level of trust to be able to remain friends with

someone you might not ever meet in person."

The overwhelming theme of 'meaningful relationships, it depends' was identified

through observation of the respondents answers in the survey.

Isolation, it depends

The final theme of 'isolation, it depends' was identified by the researcher. Nearly

all of the respondents felt that in some ways social media does isolate people but it

depends on how they use it. In answering the question do you think people become more

isolated because of texting/social media use, the overwhelming answer was it depends.

The following quotations best demonstrate this theme:

- *"I think if people do not limit or realize how often they are using then they can*

  definitely isolate themselves. A lot of people create social media accounts and talk

  to people that they do not know and think that they have relationships with them

  online and then feel alone when they are actually around people."

- *"Yes and no. Yes, because it's easy to stay in your room all day without social*

  interaction but sit on Twitter or facebook (etc) and write to others and consider

  that being (social). No, because social media allows connection with others so

  much easier to maintain and makes it easy to stay in touch with people."

'Isolation, it depends' was the final theme identified by the researcher, this theme was

very prevalent and interesting because if the respondent answered in this way they were

usually referring to someone else and not themselves.

Discussion

The following is a discussion and interpretation of the findings after reviewing the results of the surveys. After careful review of the results, the results are interpreted and also discussed in terms of other research findings. This discussion seeks to answer the research question of how do young adult's experience relationships through social media and their sense of intimacy or isolation as a result? What are their relationship skills and does social media limit or stunt their experience with intimacy and isolation? These findings also align with Erik Erikson and his findings about the developmental stage that these young adults fit in. It is clear that these young adult respondents are struggling with the development of isolation vs. intimacy from the review of the surveys. Many of the respondents feel like they are making close, intimate connections with friends but also understand that using social media to do so is not the best option. This has put these young adults in a unique spot. They want to make connections with friends and family but the society accepted way to do so is by using social media. Social media in itself, however, is an isolating act. This is putting them in a place that Erik Erikson and his developmental model could not have predicted and begs the question of what is really happening at this stage with the introduction of social media and technology. This point is further explored throughout the interpretation section. Finally, there is a discussion on the implications for practice and further research.

Interpretation of Findings

The seven themes identified and explained above express comprehensively the content of the respondent's responses to the survey. The first theme, ease of communication, was present in many of the respondent's answers. When answering many of the questions about how and why they use social media/texting to communicate,

the mention of making it easier to connect was talked about. It was also interesting that

every respondent said that they use texting/smartphone as their primary means of

communication. In research done by PEW (2011), they found "cell owners between the

ages of 18 and 24 exchange an average of 109.5 messages on a normal day -- more than

3,200 texts per month. And the typical or median cell owner in this age group sends or

receives 50 messages per day (or 1500 messages per month)." (p. 25). This is consistent

with the finding in the surveys that every respondent said they use text messaging as a

main means of communication. Another finding to be noted that over 75% of the

respondents were female. Research has shown that females in this age range are more

likely than males to use the internet and social media sites and they are shown to spend

more time on these sites (Muscanell & Guadago 2012). The survey was posted on the

University of St. Thomas Facebook page and took anywhere between seven and 20

minutes to complete. These factors are consistent with the result of 75% of the survey

takers being female.

        This makes this age group one of the most "connected" but does that mean they

feel closer to one another or more intimate with each other? What is interesting about this

theme is how easy it is for these young adults to be connected to not only their friends but

their family as well. These young adults are in a life transition that can be defined as

"launching" this is an extremely important time in the development of an adolescent into

an adult. At this point, young adults are moving away from their families and into the

adult world on their own. Smartphones and social media make it very easy for these

young adults to stay connected to their family. When in the past a young adult who ran

into some trouble may have had to navigate that on his/her, today it is easy as a text to

mom or dad and help is on the way. Is this ease of communication stunting these young adults ability to launch from their parents and become more independent? Other themes discussed better illuminate this question.

The second theme identified was the theme of staying connected. Staying connected and ease of communication are very closely related and often talked about together throughout the surveys. Many of the respondents felt like in order to stay connected with friends, family, and the world social media was very important. This becomes the main way in which they stay up to date with what their friends, family, and favorite celebrities are doing. This was often what was most appealing to them about using social media or texting. There is a deep need to feel connected to one another in this age group. In this way, this age group is beginning to overshare or feel like the only way they know what is going on in their families and friends life is to log on and see what they are up to. This is creating a false sense of intimacy because they are not truly understanding what is going on in their friends and family's lives but more are learning about what their friends and families want them to know. Young adults are also gaining this information in an informal matter i.e. 140 characters as required on Twitter or through a picture posted on Snapchat. This limited communication does not allow for depth or allow for intimacy to be developed. This is different than if they were in a face-to-face conversation because what their friends and family would be saying wouldn't be edited and calculated and would allow for more depth in conversation.

There is another important aspect of the staying connected theme and the impact that could have as to the feelings of intimacy this age group is striving for. As Erik Erikson stated in his discussion on the stages of development, every young adult is

striving for some sort of intimate connection during this phase. A failure to make an intimate connection in this stage of development would leave the young adult feeling isolated. What is so interesting about adding social media and smart phones into the mix is that this is the means by which these young adults are trying to make these intimate connections. However, the act of texting or posting a status update itself is an isolating act. Staying connected and ease of communication go very hand in hand in the respondents answers in the survey.

This is true in the research as well, Morrill, Randall, and Vaterlaus (2013) found in their studies about the motivations to use text messaging among young adults to be "a way to deepen existing relationships, typically by encouraging others and to meet other people, perhaps as a result of planning shared activities." (p. 12). This shows that Morrill, Randall, and Vaterlaus (2013) found in their study a pattern similar, that young adults are using texting and social media to stay connected to one another and to keep up with the happenings in their lives and the lives of their family and friends. Skierkowski and Wood (2011) found a theme similar to this in their research as well "results indicate that youth are not using socially interactive technologies to develop new relationships, but rather to reinforce the strength of existing social bonds." (p. 15). This type of act, using text messaging as a way to deepen existing relationships, can be seen as an act of avoidance of a situation which is a hallmark symptom in many anxiety disorders.

The third theme identified was body language/facial expressions/tone of voice. Many of the respondents talked about how important body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice are to communication. The respondents also talked about how that is lost when communicating through social media and texting. To some of the survey

takers, this is what made communicating via text or social media less meaningful to them and why they prefer to communicate with friends and family face-to-face. These respondents recognized the importance that face-to-face interaction have in getting their point across more effectively and with less miscommunication. Here within this theme it seems as though this age group understands the importance of face-to-face communication and how that leads to the making of more intimate relationships. What is interesting here is that all of the respondents knowing this still turn to social media or texting when wanting to stay connected with friends and family. Ultimately this can lead to a feeling of isolation because there is more emphasis put on the interaction online and less on the face-to-face interaction. Given this theme it appears that the respondents understand the need for face-to-face but because of their preference and socially acceptable form of communication, they use social media. This behavior then promotes a feeling of isolation and in turn fosters the inability to truly form intimate relationships with others.

The fourth theme identified was time to think of a response. This is referring to about half of the survey takers who felt it was easier to be open in communicating via texting or social media because it gives them time to think of a response. For many of the respondents texting and social media helped them communicate because it gives them time to think of what they want to say and also saves them from embarrassment if they feel like they cannot come up with something to say on the spot, like they would have to do in a face-to-face conversation. It allowed those who self-proclaimed themselves as shy to be more outgoing and say what was really on their minds. This theme was found in Pierce (2009) journal article about social anxiety and technology. In this article Pierce

found that young adults suffering from social anxiety would turn more often to

communicating through texting or social media and part of the reasoning was because

texting provided a means in which the user could take more time to develop an answer

that they felt like was appropriate for the situation (Pierce, 2009). Also, in a study done

by Wiedman, Fernadez, Levinson, Augustine, Laresen, and Rodebaugh (2012) found that

those who were more prone to feeling anxious in social settings would prefer to

communicate via text messaging because it provided them with time to evaluate what

they wanted to say. It was also mentioned by a few respondents that it helps them to

avoid conflict with others because they don't have to see how they reacted to whatever

they said. This theme presents potential challenge for young adults in learning the art of

personal communication in a face-to-face setting. By being able to edit and take time to

think about what to say allows a young adult to communicate with ease without the

pressures a face-to-face interaction can demand. Social media challenges the traditional

ways in which intimacy is developed in young adults. One could question then how are

healthy relationships formed in a world with social media and what are the implications

social media has on the mental health of young adults.

  The fifth theme identified was closeness, it depends. The respondents felt that in

some ways social media and texting did make them feel closer to others and in some

ways it does not make them feel closer. For example, many respondents felt that social

media and texting helps them feel closer to friends and family that live far away and that

they cannot see face-to-face easily. However, many respondents made the distinction that

with friends and family that did live close enough to see, using social media or texting

did not make them feel closer. More research is suggested to explore this phenomena of

"closeness" and use of social media and texting with your adults. These findings suggest that irregardless of proximity, young adults prefer social media and texting to communicate. However, they felt more connected to those that they did not see often to those that they saw more often.

The sixth theme identified was meaningful relationships, it depends. This theme was much like the previous theme, social media and texting can make relationships meaningful but not if that is the sole way they are maintained. Respondents felt that relationships solely made on social media or texting are not meaningful but when texting or social media is used to maintain relationships, those are more meaningful. With friends and family that live far away social media and texting helped respondents feel like they were still a part of those friends and families lives. Provided the previous themes and research, although respondents may feel closer to family and friends that they have had contact with previously and that live a distance away, more research is needed to explore the content of that relationship and how social media may only provide a certain depth of closeness. As a result, is the depth and closeness of intimate relationships being challenged with the use of social media. More research is suggested to explore this concept.

The seventh and final theme identified was isolation, it depends. Most of the respondents felt like isolation can happen when using social media or texting but it depends on how the person used it. For themselves, however, most of the respondents felt like social media wasn't isolating them, but they could see it happening to other people. They felt that when social media or texting becomes the only form of communication for someone they will become more isolated. There were also a few responses that eluded to

the fact that people would use social media to hide at times and this can make them

isolated. The respondents seemed torn between the feeling that social media could make

them feel connected, but it could also make them feel isolated at the same time. For

example, many of the respondents mention if they are shy, then using texting or social

media to communicate helped them be more open. This is also supported by Pierce

(2009) "For those who may be shy and feel inhibitions about talking with others in

person, various technologies provide a safe opportunity for them to interact with others."

(p. 17). Pierce (2009) also explains how it can really depend on how the medium for

communication is used if someone becomes isolated or not. This theme suggests that

respondents understand that social media and texting can lead to isolation but that many

did not feel that this was the case for them. More research is suggested to explore the

amount of time young adults engage in social media and texting versus face-to-face

communication.

The overall theme after reviewing the respondents answer on the survey was that

using social media can have its benefit, especially when it comes to staying in touch with

people that are far away, but it can also have downfalls when it becomes the only way to

communicate in relationships. Many respondents felt that social media and texting is a

great way to maintain relationships but should not be the only way a relationship is

carried out. The respondents interestingly enough do not feel isolated but they know

people who have become more isolated because of texting or social media or they can see

how someone could use social media and texting to isolate themselves.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of this study. The first limitation of this study is the manner of which the surveys were distributed. The surveys were distributed using a link that was posted on the University of St. Thomas Facebook page. The nature of the study was to target those in the age range of 18-24 but by posting it directly on a social media the survey is already limited to those using social media because they are the ones that would see it. Also, the case study research design of this qualitative study, qualitative studies can sometimes limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the strong connections between the respondent's comments and previous studies serve to support earlier research that has been done. Another limitation found in the study was that of the number of respondents that identified as female, there was an overwhelming number of females that responded compared to males. This could limit the results in that males are underrepresented, but the results are presented in such a way that it does not attend to that limitation.

Implications

Combined with previous research, there are some implications that can be extended to further research in this area. The first being that to draw any conclusions further research must be conducted. Further research is suggested to help develop ways to educate younger generations on the use of social media and texting and the implications it can have on their ability to connect and form healthy relationships with others.

This area of research will also be important for clinical social workers that work with young adults and their families. Family dynamics are changing with the use of social media and smartphones. Parents are now able to instantly communicate with their kids and stay in touch with them where ever they may go. Future research should explore what

impact does social media and texting have on the development of the family and the development of the children. How will social media and smart phones effect, more specifically, the launching of young adults into the adult world where they will need to make decisions and problem solve on their own? Is having mom on speed dial or needing to check in with dad every so often help or hinder the development of a healthy adult? This will be an important question for all clinical social workers who in some capacity work with families with children entering that launching phase.

Clinical social workers need to be aware of the biases towards the use of social media and texting. This is the main means of communication for this age group and that will not change. As the technology and the ability connected instantly grows the emphasis on using that technology as the main means will continue to grow. The technology isn't going away and it will become the new norm. It will be important to know how to connect with this age group and how to educate them on the importance of other means of communication.

Using only social media and texting can lead to a person becoming more isolated. The person doing so may not perceive it that way, however. This is where the education becomes tricky because many of those with social anxiety or some sort of social inhibitions will tell you that it is easier for them to get their point across when they can have time to edit their response. This poses several problems, first, it will be important for clinical social workers to help those people understand that by doing so they are not sharing their true self and neither is the other person to whom they are corresponding with. Secondly, young adults are not creating the same intimate relationships that like Erik Erickson outlined from the 1960's. Future research is suggested to look at how

relationships are formed in the age of technology and how has this impacted the ability

for young adults to form healthy and secure attachment with one another and with their

families. Clinical social workers need to be aware of the implications of social media and

texting and how this is impacting young adults perceptions of communication and

concept of engaging in relationships. Without this understanding, conflict between the

social worker and client may arise. Many clinical social workers were educated under

developmental models like Erik Erickson's. It is important that clinical social workers

stay updated on the research regarding the impact of social media on their clients and also

contribute to this research based on their practice.

Lastly, it is also important that clinical social workers explore with their clients

more in-depth the client's perceptions of their use of social media and texting. As shown

in this research study, participants were able to identify isolation in others but could not

see that as an issue for themselves. They also commented that that they felt more

connected with family and friends that lived far away but not with those that lived closer

and that they saw every day. This survey also suggested that social media and texting

provides young adults more time to respond to others. It would be important that clinical

social workers explore how and where young adults are able to learn and practice the art

of communication outside social media and texting. Is this being encouraged and taught

at home, schools, or in the community? Clinical social workers may want to consider

incorporating this into psychoeducation groups to help support learning how to

communicate with others face-to-face.

Technology has given us this wonderful gift, the ability to stay connected with

one another and stay connected with friends and family that we might otherwise lose

touch with. When it is not possible to physically be with a person technology is a great way to fulfill that void. When technology becomes the replacement for the face to face interaction or when one feels the anxiety associated with not knowing where their smartphone is in fear of a loss of connection, problems are created. Finding the balance between technology and physical interaction will be the challenge of future clinical social workers, teachers, and parents alike.

References

Alex Mindlin. (2007). Young adult men and young adult women use social sites

differently. *New York Times*

Amichai-Hamburger, Y., & Vinitzky, G. (2010). Social network use and personality.

Computers in Human Behavior, 26(6), 1289-1295.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.018

Anthony Curtis. (2013). The brief history of social media. Retrieved from

http://www2.uncp.edu/home/acurtis/NewMedia/SocialMedia/SocialMediaHistory.ht

ml

Blaising, S. (2014). *The relationship between facebook use and disorders of the self.*

(Ph.D., Institute for Clinical Social Work (Chicago)). *ProQuest Dissertations and*

Theses, Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/docview/1528550669?accountid=1

4756. (1528550669).

Butt, S., & Phillips, J. G. (2008). Personality and self reported mobile phone use.

Computers in Human Behavior, 24(2), 346-360.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2007.01.019

Camyron Lee. (2012). Social media gender divide: Young adult men v. young adult

women. Retrieved from http://newmediarockstars.com/2012/07/infographic-social-

media-gender-divide-young adult men-v-young adult women/

Collins, W. A., & Laursen, B. (2004). Changing relationships, changing youth:

Interpersonal contexts of adolescent development. *The Journal of Early*

Adolescence, 24(1), 55-62. doi:10.1177/0272431603260882

Erik Erikson 8 stages of psychosocial development: Stage 6 young adulthood. (2000).

Retrieved from http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/erik/stage6.html

Faulkner, X., & Culwin, F. (2005). When fingers do the talking: A study of text

messaging. *Interacting with Computers, 17*(2), 167-185.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.intcom.2004.11.002

Guadagno, R. E., Okdie, B. M., & Kruse, S. A. (2012). Dating deception: Gender, online

dating, and exaggerated self-presentation. *Computers in Human Behavior, 28*(2),

642-647. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2011.11.010

Hamburger, Y. A., & Ben-Artzi, E. (2000). The relationship between extraversion and

neuroticism and the different uses of the internet. *Computers in Human Behavior,*

16(4), 441-449. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/S0747-

5632(00)00017-0

Holtgraves, T. (2011). Text messaging, personality, and the social context. *Journal of*

Research in Personality, 45(1), 92-99.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.jrp.2010.11.015

Kim, M., Kyoung-Nan Kwon, & Lee, M. (2009). Psychological characteristics of internet

dating service users: The effect of self-esteem, involvement, and sociability on the

use of internet dating services. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12*(4), 445-449.

doi:10.1089/cpb.2008.0296

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media and young adults.

Pew Internet & American Life Project, 3

Michikyan, M., Subrahmanyam, K., & Dennis, J. (2014). Can you tell who I am?

neuroticism, extraversion, and online self-presentation among young adults.

Computers in Human Behavior, 33(0), 179-183.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2014.01.010

Miller, P. (1983). *Theories of developmental psychology*. San Francisco, CA: W.H.

Freeman and Company.

Morrill, T. B., Jones, R. M., & Vaterlaus, J. M. (2013). Motivations for text messaging:

Gender and age differences among young adults. *North American Journal of

Psychology, 15*, 1. Retrieved from

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA322563481&v=2.1&u=clic_stthom

as&it=r&p=HRCA&sw=w&asid=28d27ba05c81f890f738d201b7263a2f

Muscanell, N. L., & Guadagno, R. E. (2012). Make new friends or keep the old: Gender

and personality differences in social networking use. *Computers in Human Behavior,

28*(1), 107-112.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2011.08.016

Pathak, V., Jena, B., & Kalra, S. (2013). Qualitative research. *Perspectives in Clinical

Research, 4*, 192. Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?URL=http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.stthomas.e

du/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA339360639&v=2.1&u=clic_stthomas&it=r&p=HRCA&s

w=w&asid=5f263427c009d19887adac4711d134e4

Peterson, S. A., Aye, T., & Wheeler, P. Y. (2014). Internet use and romantic relationships

among college students. *North American Journal of Psychology, 16*, 53. Retrieved

from

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA362853580&v=2.1&u=clic_stthom

as&it=r&p=HRCA&sw=w&asid=d8e6fae2ed286259a70210d94d0468dc

Pettigrew, J. (08). Text messaging and connectedness within close interpersonal

relationships. *Marriage & Family Review, 45*(6-8), 697; 697-716; 716.

Pierce, T. (2009). Social anxiety and technology: Face-to-face communication versus

technological communication among teens. *Computers in Human Behavior, 25*(6),

1367-1372. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2009.06.003

Pittman, J. F., Keiley, M. K., Kerpelman, J. L., & Vaughn, B. E. (2011). Attachment,

identity, and intimacy: Parallels between bowlby's and erikson's paradigms. *Journal

of Family Theory & Review, 3*(1), 32-46. doi:10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00079.x

Richards, M. H., Crowe, P. A., Larson, R., & Swarr, A. (1998). Developmental patterns

and gender differences in the experience of peer companionship during adolescence.

Child Development, 69(1), 154-163. Retrieved from

http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/stable/1132077

Ross, C., Orr, E. S., Sisic, M., Arseneault, J. M., Simmering, M. G., & Orr, R. R. (2009).

Personality and motivations associated with facebook use. *Computers in Human

Behavior, 25*(2), 578-586.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2008.12.024

Selfhout, M. H. W., Branje, S. J. T., Delsing, M., ter Bogt, T. F. M., & Meeus, W. H. J.

(2009). Different types of internet use, depression, and social anxiety: The role of

perceived friendship quality. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*(4), 819-833.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.10.011

Social media. (2010, 05/01; 2014/10). *52* Retrieved from

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA226835315&v=2.1&u=clic_stthom

as&it=r&p=ITOF&sw=w&asid=0a83dbecf3289f5c0fe35f927179f086

Sroufe, A., Carlson, E., Levy, A., & Egeland, B. (1999). Implications of attachment

theory for developmental psychopathology. *Developmental and Psychopathology,

11*, 1-13.

Sutin, A., & Costa, P. (2009). Five factor model. *The encyclopedia of positive psychology*

() Lopez, Shane J. Blackwell Publishing.

Turkle, S., (2011). *Alone Together*. New York City, NY: Basic Books.

Appendix A

I am conducting a study about young adults, relationships, and social media. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are between the ages of 18-24. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is: This research is aimed to provide information on how young adults between the ages of 18-24 are experiencing relationships through social media (Facebook, Twitter, texting, etc.). Voluntary participants will be asked to fill out an online survey using the Qualtrics program software. I will use the online survey to collect relevant data and develop a theory about social media use among young adults.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: participation will involve completing an online survey that will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and if at any time you do not wish to complete the survey, you may exit. There will be no identifying information asked of you. The information collected from this will be kept confidential and in a password protected program. After completion of the research project, the data will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

No identifying marks will be included on the online survey. Online surveys will be stored in a password locked computer file accessible only by myself and my research chair while the data collection is on-going. Once all the data has been collected and analyzed, the computer file will be destroyed.

Participants that choose to be entered in the drawing for one of the three gift cards will be asked to tell where they would like the gift card to be sent if they are selected. The identifying data entered here will not be linked back to the previous online survey they had filled out and once the selection of the winners of the gift card have been made this data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality:

The results of this study will be downloaded from Qualtrics and stored in an excel spread sheet. This spread sheet will be kept in a password protected computer file that will be destroyed on June 1, 2015. The results will be reported in the aggregate, through a paper and a public presentation. Neither of these reports will contain information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to the submission of the survey, once the survey has been submitted you will not be able to withdraw and the data you have entered will be used. Should you decide to withdraw before submitting the survey data collected will not be used. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

If you have questions, you may contact me, Emma Shields-Nordness, at 952.201.5926 or my advisor, Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW at 651-690-6296. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6038 with any questions or concerns.

You may print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Appendix B

1.   Age_____

2.   Gender _____

3.   What are the primary means of communication you use on a daily basis?

4.   What social media sites do you use the most?

5.   How much time to you spend on these sites per day?

6.   What is most appealing to you about using social media?

7.   Do you believe it is easier to be more open when communicating with social media/texting or face-to-face? Please explain.

8.   Does communicating through social media/texting make you feel closer to your friends? Please explain.

9.   How meaningful are the relationships you make on social media/texting to you?

10.   Do you think people have become more isolated because of texting/social media?