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LGBT+ Teens, Social Media Use & Depressive Symptoms

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LGBT+ TEENS, SOCIAL MEDIA USE & MENTAL HEALTH

Megan Curtis, MSW Student, Danielle Ryder, MSW Student, Dr. Rachel Casey, Mentor

BACKGROUND

- Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr play a particularly important role in the queer adolescent self-construction process^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8}
- LGBT+ (an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and other non-heterosexual, non-cisgender sexual and gender identities⁹) youth access social media more frequently than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts:
 - to learn about their identities^{5, 9, 10, 11}
 - to create supplemental support networks online,^{1, 4, 6, 8, 9}
 - to explore new forms of self-expression^{1, 2, 4, 9}
- This increased use of SNSs exposes them to additional forms of discrimination, such as cyberbullying
- This can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression or lowered self-esteem^{2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13}

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the relationship between Social Networking Site use and the prevalence of depressive symptoms in the LGBT+ youth population?

METHODS

- The researchers utilized a snowball sampling method
- The measurement tool was an anonymous, 27-question online SNAP survey consisting of two existing quantitative measures:
 - the Social Network Sites (SNSs) Usage Questionnaire
 - the Pediatric Depressive Symptoms Survey
- Surveys were distributed via the researchers' personal social media accounts & emails to local support agencies
- The researchers received a total of 56 completed questionnaires
- Based on an initial assessment of the data & exclusion criteria, **n = 34**
- The researchers utilized SPSS 24 to conduct Pearson's Correlation Analyses

"Updated Status" & "Felt Unhappy" Crosstabulation

FREQUENCY OF TIME SPENT FEELING UNHAPPY

FREQUENCY OF STATUS
UPDATE POSTS

	2 (Almost Never)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Almost Always)	Total
1 (Never)	0	0	2	3	5
2 (Yearly)	1	2	0	0	3
3 (Monthly)	0	3	3	2	8
4 (Weekly)	0	2	8	0	10
5 (Multiple times a week)	1	2	1	1	5
6 (Daily)	1	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	3	10	14	6	33

Figure 1. A crosstabulation chart comparing how often respondents updated their status on social media vs. self-reported feelings of unhappiness over the past seven days

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"Updated Profile Image" & "Felt Alone" Crosstabulation

FREQUENCY OF TIME SPENT FEELING ALONE

FREQUENCY OF PROFILE
IMAGE UPDATES

	1 (Never)	2 (Almost Never)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Almost Always)	Total
1 (Never)	0	0	3	4	1	8
2 (Yearly)	1	2	1	1	5	10
3 (Monthly)	2	2	2	8	0	14
4 (Weekly)	0	0	2	0	0	2
TOTAL	3	4	8	13	6	34

Figure 2. A crosstabulation chart comparing how often respondents updated their profile images on social media vs. self-reported feelings of unhappiness over the past seven days

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"Used SNSs" & "No Fun" Crosstabulation

FREQUENCY OF MOMENTS WHERE IT FELT HARD TO HAVE FUN

FREQUENCY OF SNS USE

	1 (Never)	2 (Almost Never)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Almost Always)	Total
Weekly	1	0	0	0	0	1
Daily	1	2	4	1	0	8
Multiple times a day	1	7	7	6	3	24
TOTAL	3	9	11	7	3	33

Figure 3. A crosstabulation chart comparing how often respondents reported using Social Networking Sites vs. the number of times they found it hard to have fun within the past seven days

RESULTS

- The majority of respondents identified as 16 year old white, bisexual females
- There were a total of six moderate, significant correlations between the following variables:
 - "How frequently do you use SNSs?" & "In the past seven days, it was hard for me to have fun" ($r = .361$, $p = .039$)
 - "How frequently do you update your profile image?" & "In the past seven days, I felt alone" ($r = -.535$, $p = .001$)
 - "How frequently do you visit your friends' homepage?" & "In the past seven days, I felt unhappy" ($r = .452$, $p = .009$)
 - "How frequently do you visit your friends' homepage?" & "In the past seven days, I felt like I couldn't do anything right" ($r = .386$, $p = .029$)
 - "How frequently do you update your status?" & "In the past seven days, I felt unhappy" ($r = -.371$, $p = .033$)
 - "How frequently do you update your status?" & "In the past seven days, I felt alone" ($r = -.368$, $p = .035$)

DISCUSSION

- The research study findings, although tentative due to small sample size, support current literature stating that there is a significant link between social networking site use and the prevalence of depressive symptoms in LGBT+ youth.
- Replication with a larger sample is needed to confirm these findings
- The researchers recommend the use of a mixed-method approach to gain access to qualitative data on the subject

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