Art Therapy, Mass Media and Self-Acceptance with Adolescents: A Literature Review

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Art Therapy, Mass Media and Self-Acceptance with Adolescents: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature reviews provides a synopsis of art therapy its potential benefits in combating negative effects associated with social media and adolescents’ sense of self-acceptance. Using art therapy as a mode of self-expression is found to help negate negative effects of social media and provide adolescents with healthy tools to help them develop and grow. Social media provides a wealth of information that can be detrimental to the emotional growth of young adults. In this literature review lack of face to face connection, idealized beauty standards, instant gratification and social comparisons are correlated to depressive symptoms in adolescents. Through the use of art therapy interventions in group and individual sessions, art therapy poses as a successful method to help combat these depressive symptoms.
Art Therapy, Mass Media and Self-Acceptance with Adolescents: A Literature Review

Introduction

The use of social media by teenagers is on a rise in current culture (Savina, Mills, Atwood, Cha 2017). For example, according to Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield and Dapretto (n.d) “nearly 90% of American teens report being active users, and young people have continually outpaced other age groups in adopting new media” Adolescence is a developmental milestone where building a sense of identity is central to such development.

Burnett, Bird, Moll, Frith, and Blakemore (2009) completed a study explaining how, “this increase in self-consciousness after puberty, as well as the increased concern with others’ (especially peers’) opinions, might result in an increase in the frequency and intensity of the experience of social emotions” (p.1737). The influence of relationships in combination of the introduction of social media is not just a social and cultural phenomenon, but a psychological and developmental issue. Being exposed to different types of social media profiles provides adolescence the chance to learn about individuals who are different from themselves. Through social media teens are able to connect with people across the globe and be immediately updated on what is happening in their world. Social media users are even able to view celebrity’s social media profiles and see aspects of their lives that normally would not be seen. Unfortunately, the intake of such information at this developmental milestone can lead to a negative impact on an individual’s self-view. “The mass media, which includes electronic and popular forms, are part of a techno-digital culture that has been criticized for blurring people’s perceptions of what is lived experience and what is experience that is merely presented to us” (Potash, p. 52, 2009). Social media provides a platform for people to present a particular aspect of themselves, amplify it, minimize, it, or even lie about it (Sherlock, Wagtaff, p. 2, 2019). It shapes a world of multiple
versions, or some might suggest, distortions of what is reality and what is true (Mclean, Rodgers, Jarman, p. 515, 2019). As previously stated, teens are the largest users of social media and the cohort that can be most negatively affected by this idea of a warped perception of reality. As the largest population of social media users, they create and read the most content and therefore, are more susceptible to the misrepresentations of authenticity.

“Given unlimited access to other users’ profiles, people are likely to engage in social comparisons. Thus, we may compare ourselves with others on social media as an avenue to determine our social and personal worth. These types of social media-based social comparisons, however, may lead to negative outcomes, particularly as individuals present their most “ideal” selves on social media. (Sherlock, Wagstaff, p. 2019).”

Adolescents who are active on social media can view other people’s profiles regularly. Most social media platforms display likes, and any user has the ability to like someone’s posted content. The number of likes a user receives is correlated to how famous the user is. The more famous you are the more likes you acquire. This can be damaging for adolescences when they try to quantify their worth on likes when their social media profiles are not receiving the same attention. When using social media “Adolescents model appropriate behavior and interests through the images they post (behavioral display) and reinforce peers’ behavior through the provision of likes (behavioral reinforcement)” (Sherman, Payton,, Hernandez, Greenfield, Dapretto, (n.d.). This proposed idea creates an online culture that defines ideas of what is “desired” and what is not. This constant need for validation and approval is dangerous for adolescent’s self-esteem at a time where they’re just trying to find their own voice. “A recent study found that the people dependent on social media search for acceptance and a higher ego in these sites leading to depressive symptoms by comparing themselves to others’ popularity” (Jeri-
Yabar, Sanchez-Carbonel, Tito, Ramirez-del Castillo, Torres-Alcantara, Denegri, Carreazo, p. 17, 2019). Due to the need for social acceptance, regardless of what the content says or what the photo shows, the number of likes that a post obtains is influencing adolescences opinions and ideas. “We found that the popularity of a photo had a significant effect on the way that photo was perceived. Adolescents were more likely to like a photo—even one portraying risky behavior, such as smoking marijuana or drinking alcohol—if that photo had received more likes from peers” (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin, p.1031, 2018). In support of that finding, Burrow and Rainone (2016) found that when Facebook users with a higher sense of self purpose posted selfies, they were less effected by the amount of likes versus people with a lower sense of self purpose. However, when people with a high self-purpose posted about topics relating to their personal values and received less likes, they had a deficit in their self-esteem. “Individuals with the greatest sense of purpose may suffer the most when perceiving obstacles to pursuing it” (Burrow, Rainone, p. 236). The effects of this social media feedback are key to looking deeper into helping adolescents create a healthy relationship with themselves. As social media has become extremely prominent in today’s culture, one must consider the long-term effects and how to negate them.

With the incorporation of the expressive art therapy, people are able to use the arts as an avenue for self-expression and identify formation. “Art can serve as an authentic means of personal expression, whereby a client’s unique experiences, psychological concerns, culture, and worldview can be explored. Art can be a powerful meeting point as well as a primary source of identity in itself” (Parisian, p. 131, 2015). The concept described by Parisian implicates art as an avenue for adolescents to start to form a sense of who they are. Art, as a constructive exploration into one’s self gives a person room to play and explore themselves without the influence of social
media. Psychoanalyst D.W Winnicott talked about the need to bring the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play. He writes “It is in playing and only playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (Kossack, p. 32, 2015). Being able to play and create could be the way to help adolescences piece together who they are and want to be; therefore, forming a healthy view of self.

**Social Media**

**Historical Context**

History of social media can be traced back to a site created in 1997 called *Six Degrees*, which “enabled users to upload a profile and make friends with other users” (Hendricks, 2019). 1999, the first blogging sites became popular, creating a social media sensation that’s still popular today” (Hendricks, D. 2019). As the mid 2000’s approached more social media platforms emerged and the ability to access them increased substantially with the invention of the smart phone. “Four surveys completed by almost 7 million people in the U.S. concluded that Americans reported substantially higher levels of depressive symptoms, particularly somatic symptoms, in the 2000s–2010s compared to the 1980s–1990s” (Twenge, p. 437, 2015).” The work completed by Twenge implicates a correlation between depressive symptoms and the use of social media.

“Over the same time period that depressive symptoms and suicide related outcomes increased, screen activities such as electronic device use, social media use, and reading Internet news increased and non-screen activities decreased…Thus, the only activities that both (a) predicted higher depressive symptoms or suicide related outcomes and (b) increased
at $p \geq .05$ since 2011/2012 are electronic device use, social media use, and reading Internet news” (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin, p. 9, 2019).

This related work, also by Twenge, but including Rogers and Martin, explores the effect of other possible variables during that time period that could cause an outcome of increased reports of depression and suicidal events. The large $p$-value, or the calculated probability, supports the original hypothesis of social media causing increased depressive symptoms to not be rejected. This means that even with economic variables included in the studies as they relate to depressive symptoms, social media usage causes the rise in reports of depression and suicidal thoughts.

**Social Media Platforms and Teens**

As mentioned before, because of the accessibility of smartphones and computers, it allows continual access to the internet. (Lenhart, p. 2, 2015). Anderson and Jiang 2018 revealed that “95% of teens now report they have a smartphone or access to one…and 45% of teens now say they are online on a near-constant basis”(Anderson, Jiang, 2018). Therefore, unlimited access to internet allows users unlimited opportunity to social media sites. According to Ortiz-Ospina (2019) “Social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users.” In connection to this finding, according to Lenhart, “three-quarters (76%) of teens use social media, and 81% of older teens use the sites, compared with 68% of teens 13 to 14” (Lenhart, 2015, p. 25). For teens, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are found to be the most popular with 85% on YouTube, 72% on Instagram, and 69% on snapchat (Anderson, Jiang, 2018).

**Demographics of Social Media Use**

It is important to also look at how age, gender, socioeconomic status and race all play a part in technology and social media usage. According to Lenhart (2018), certain social media
sites attract certain age groups. Lenhart (2018) states that 13-14-year old’s are more likely than 15-17-year old’s to use Instagram, however Facebook Snapchat and Twitter is viewed more by 15-17-year old’s (Lenhart, p. 3, 2015). In terms of gender, girls are more likely to engage in “visually oriented social media platforms” whereas boys are more likely to engage in video games (Lenhart, p. 2, 2015). In regard to social media sites specifically “teen girls spend about 40 minutes more a day with social media than boys on average (1:32, compared with :52 among boys) (Common Sense Media, p. 14, 2015). For socioeconomic status, teens who are from homes with higher annual income are more likely to use snapchat and twitter. Teens that come from families with lower annual income use Facebook more often (Lenhart, p. 4, 2015). “Tweens and teens from lower-income families spend more time with media than those from higher-income homes. Among teens, it’s a difference of two hours and 45 minutes a day on average (10:35 vs. 7:50 of total media use)” (Common Sense Census, p. 18, 2015). As far as ethnicity goes, “African-American and Hispanic youth report going online with greater frequency than white teens” (Lenhart, p. 16, 2015) Looking at this data, minorities of both genders, ages 13-14, with lower annual income are more likely to engage in media usage and only girls are using sites that involve social feedback. Therefore, data regarding age, gender, and social media use could be in connection with the data of Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin (2018) which reports that primarily female adolescents 13-18 who spend more time on social media showed greater depressive and suicide related symptoms between 2010 and 2015 (p. 3). In turn making these demographics susceptible to negative effects from social media usage in comparison to white males with affluent backgrounds.

**Adolescent development of self-acceptance**
According to the Webster dictionary self-acceptance is defined as “the act or state of accepting oneself: the act or state of understanding and recognizing one's own abilities and limitations” ("Merriam-Webster, 2019). Being able to formulate a basis by which one can understand themselves is an important developmental stage. Without having an understanding of one’s self, making healthy decisions can be difficult. In the field of psychology, in gaining self-acceptance there is a theory of Personal Autonomy (Serdiuk, Danyliuk, Chaika, p. 86, 2018). The guiding principle of the theory highlights a person’s power over their own behavior based on their internal factors and self-determination. This, in turn, nurtures the person’s sense of freedom to make decisions based on external and internal factors (Serdiuk, Danyliuk, Chaik a, 2018).

**Impact of Parent’s Engagement on Development of Interpersonal Connection**

According to Brandell and Ringel (2004) early relationships between a mother are infant are vital to healthy development. Studies show that the relationships between mother and infant affect the formation of attachments patterns, as well as personality structure as they reach late childhood. To push this further, it was said that these patterns could even dictate their personalities in adulthood (p. 553). With that being said why are these early attachments so important for adolescents development of sense of self? “A child’s response to a parent’s patterns can be described as the child’s “internalization” of the parent. From a basic biological perspective, the child’s neuronal system—the structure and function of the developing brain—is shaped by the parent’s more mature brain” (Siegel, p. 311, 2012). Because the child’s taking in verbal and non-verbal information from the parent, the child’s development weighs heavily on the parent’s responses (Siegel, 2012). As Seigel goes on he establishes that the unity between mother and child is important to the child’s development. “The attunement of emotional states is
essential for the developing brain to acquire the capacity to organize itself more autonomously as the child matures” (Siegel, p. 311, 2012). Because of this when children begin to have these social interactions, the experience in interpersonal connections afford the child the “ability to regulate emotion” (Siegel, 2012.)

**Societal Pressures and Group Mentality/Dynamics on Adolescents**

For adolescents they are at a time in life where being with friends and fitting in is highly important (Colich, Eisenburg, Masten, Pfeifer, 2011). Depending on if adolescences are accepted into a peer group or dismissed plays a huge role in how they feel about themselves (Craig, 2010). According to Gibson 2019 “Being accepted is fundamental to the human existence.” (Gilboa-Schechtman, Eva, Galili, Lior, Yair, Amir, & Ofer, p. 1, 2014). When one does not feel accepted by peers, it can lead to an individual exhibiting negative response in social settings. (Colich, Eisenburg, Masten, Pfeifer, p. 980, 2011). The lack of acceptance influences human behavior such as “aggression, self-regulation, prosocial behavior, attentional processes, and attitude formation” (DeWall, Deckman, Pond, Bonser, p. 980, 2011). A study, completed by Baumeister, shows that the lack of social relationships is related to unhappiness and depression which can result in social anxiety (Baumeister, Leary, p. 506, 1995) According to Baumeister and Leary “anxiety ensues if people are excluded from social groups, but experiences of social inclusion appear to counteract the effects of exclusion and remove the anxiety” (p. 506).

**Development of Identity-Erikson**

According to Berk (2018), Erick Erikson was the first person to “recognize identity as the major personality attainment of adolescents and as a crucial step toward becoming a productive, content adult. Constructing an identity involves defining who you are, what you value, and the directions you choose to pursue in life” (Berk, p. 408,2018). To achieve this Erikson believed
that there are 8 stages of psychological development in a person’s lifetime and that you have to go through each stage to in order to achieve a healthy sense of self (Gibson, p. 33, 2018). Gibson (2018) describes psychosocial development as how the self develops in relation to society “with changes in behavior being a response to the interaction between our internal motivations and the demands of our culture (Gibson p. 33, 2018). This is described by Erickson in what he describes as the fifth stage of a person’s psychological development. This stage is referred to as the “identity versus role confusion” and is the stage that will be of focus. As Berk (2018) quotes from Erickson, “Identity versus role confusion” is described as the “psychological conflict of adolescence” (p. 408). Berk continues on, further defining this stage of development by stating that a step towards growth and completion of this phase “is resolved positively when adolescents achieve an identity through a process of exploration and inner soul searching “(Berk, 2018, p. 408). Therefore, allowing adolescences to explore themselves can lend the opportunity to develop a healthy sense of self as they move forward in life.

**Impact of Social Media on Development of Self-Acceptance**

**Impact of Social Media on Interpersonal Connection**

The average adolescent spends at least seven hours and 22 minutes a day viewing their screens, not including using computers at school or for homework (common sense census, 2019). The amount of time spent on the internet infringes on the time adolescents have to make in-person connections. This lack of in person social interaction effects adolescences social-emotional learning. According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health regarding social based media “… young people who were heavier social based media (SBM)
users were less likely to be happy and more likely to have socioemotional difficulties than youths who spent less time engaged with SBM” (Booker, Skew, Kelly, Sacker, p. 176, 2015).

**Impact of Social Media on Behavioral Cues and Social Behavior**

During in person interactions you are able to understand emotional responses from facial expressions and body language. When communicating over text message or social media messaging platforms, individuals are deprived of the ability to gain emotional insight from their peers’ facial movements. The importance of face to face interactions is illustrated by a parent teaching an infant different type of facial expressions and the associated emotions to help them understand emotions related to their behaviors and to connect with others (Franklin, p. 162, 2010). “Today, technology is redefining the fundamental cues, content, and cadence of our communication and the improvisational, uniquely human dimension of connection” (Savina, Mills, Atwood, Cha, p. 85 2017). This suggests that it is possible that the redistribution of fundamental cues, as well as other social pillars, is having a larger effect on the level of social emotional skills gained by those who use social media as a primary form of communication versus pre social media. Twenge notes that “It is worth remembering that humans’ neural architecture evolved under conditions of close, mostly continuous face to face contact with others (including nonvisual and nonauditory contact; i.e., touch, olfaction; and that a decrease in or removal of a system’s key inputs may risk destabilization of the system “ (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin, p. 4, 2018).

**Social Media and Instant Gratification**

Unlimited access of the internet allows for instant access to information. In the case of social media, it allows access of others information as well as the opportunity for instant feedback or gratification to or from those people. The question then raised is if people are
becoming used to receiving information so quickly, when they don’t receive that instantaneous gratification offline in their lives, how does that affect them? According to Khetarpal (2018) “Dopamine- the ‘reward molecule’ that gets released in the brain after an accomplishment” takes an active role in the usage of social media platforms because it is released in the brain “when their friends 'like' or comment on their post. This feeling of exhilaration from quick social reinforcement drives people to check new notifications…especially those suffering from insecurities and wanting external validation to make meaning of their lives” (Khetarpal, p. 1, 2018). In connection with Khetarpal (2018), French (2017) notes, “This instant gratification we seek may initially be motivated by a desire for pleasure, but once our brain has learned where we turn for pleasure, it will begin to use the same neural pathways as a response to pain, fear, anger, sadness” (French, 2017). If people looking for validation through the number of likes that they may or may not be receiving, it could lead to depressive symptoms. French (2017) also then says that because of this “children aren’t using dopamine correctly; they are just seeking happiness using unsocial methods such as technology to get that “natural high” — normally achieved through face-to-face interactions” (French, 2017). With this information it could be said that, instant gratification or lack thereof has the potential to effect self-control (Panek, p. 61, 2012) as well as increase negative emotions.

Boundaries using Social Media

Because of the unlimited access to others online, safety and boundary setting becomes especially important. According to a study done by Martin, Wang, Petty, Wang, and Wilkins (2018) “About 40% of students, both male and female in our study reported that they have accepted friend requests from strangers” (p. 223). The adolescent does not know them and there is no proof that these “friends” are even who they say they are. By opening up the option of
befriending strangers it creates opportunity for dangerous situations. In addition, Wurtele and Kenny (2016) states that there are risk factors that create a higher likelihood of inappropriate boundary crossing. Risk factors include “Lacking a close relationship with parents or peers may increase their loneliness and need for contact, resulting in more time spent online. Although being online can provide helpful support, it can increase the risk of sexual solicitation.” (Wurtele, Kenny, p. 335 2016).

**Mass Media and Societal Impact on Self-worth**

“Brief exposure to idealistic images can result in reevaluations of self-rated attractiveness, and therefore that chronic exposure may lead to more long-term changes in psychological well-being” (Sherlock, Wagstaff, 2018, p. 11). Examples of this from social media are accounts on Instagram such as an ideal family Instagram, or a health and fitness account. Corporations deeming appearance of great importance, all contribute to this societal value placed on appealing to the “ideal”. Gerber brand baby food for instance started launching a yearly search for the new face of Gerber 10 years ago via social media (Mcguiness, 2020). The first-place winner will then receive 25,000 dollars towards the child’s education however it does not have to be used for school. (Gerber, n.d). This winner is chosen based on the visual appearance of the child, the child’s expressiveness, as well as the child must align with Gerber’s Anything for Baby mission (Gerber, n.d). As this search has developed throughout the 10 years, Gerber has been diversifying their brand as well as including children with disabilities such as down syndrome. (Lafuente, n.d) This is a step towards a more inclusive brand view; however, the fact remains that 2/3 of the requirements are based on attractiveness of the child. This is turn could negatively impact how adolescences base their worth.

**Social media’s Impact on Self-Identity/Worth**
Healthy Identity formation is very important developmental milestone for adolescents (Jacobs, Colliair, p. 1, 2010). Part of identity formation however does not just involve their own views, but it involves the opinions of their peers. According to Gibson (2019) “The reactions of others around us is the biggest determiner of our self-image and subsequent self-esteem; we see ourselves as others categorize us” (p. 31). When using social media platforms like Instagram or Facebook, likes and comments that are given in response to pictures or status updates impacts adolescents view of themselves in relation to their peers. According to Mclean, Jarman, and Rodgers “qualitative studies have indicated the extent to which selfie posting, and responses and feedback, particularly in terms of the number of likes received, plays a role in social acceptance for adolescent girls” (p. 517). In further research Strubel, Petrie, T. A., and Pookulangara discuss the idea of the self-objectification theory, in that “women not only monitor their appearance in general, but more specifically, judge their physical and sexual appearance in relation to individuals in their immediate social groups (p. 330)” This statement is in line with the idea of the comparison theory and that humans have an inner drive to compare themselves to others on aspects of their lives in order to figure out where they stand amongst the crowd (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, Halliwell, p. 38, 2015).

In the world of Instagram, a photo based social media platform, you can find many profiles promoting health and wellness. One version of those accounts is very body positive, showing that it’s okay to be who you are, eat what you want and love the body you’re in. The second version of Instagram accounts are those with idealized bodies, who are promoting a “healthy lifestyle” and showing thin and strong muscular bodies (Sherlock, Wagstaff, p. 3, 2018). Bodies that can only be obtained through strict diets and intense workout regimens. These pages are being used to compare to one-self and diminishing the self-worth of those who buy into the
idea that they don’t have a perfect body like the one being presented to them on the screen and that therefore, they are less. According to Sherlock and Wagstaff, “Exposure to content of idealistic beauty and fitness standards could be harmful in the long-term, considering the achievement of many of these ideals is unrealistic. This may be of particular importance in adolescents, who are heavy users of social media and engage in more social comparisons than do older adults” (p. 3, 2018).

**Detachment and Screen Time.**

Because much of the way that the youth communicate is via social media there can be a sense of emotional detachment from the physical absence of being in a conversation. Adolescences are now able to hide behind screens, eliminating them from seeing the person on the other end’s physiological responses to their action. The invention of cyber bullying has created a societal phenomenon which removes the aggressor and the victim from the social situation in which they would see the psychological responses of their actions. “… the venue of cyber space, where victim and perpetrator cannot see each other, may lead some perpetrators to remain unconvinced that they are actually harming their target. Thus, they can protect themselves from the knowledge that they are doing anything wrong” (Brewer, Kerslake, p .28. 2015). This can stunt socioemotional development by creating a lack of understanding about the cause and effect of a person’s actions on a firsthand basis.

One study that looked at the “influence of self-esteem, empathy and loneliness on cyberbullying victimization and perpetration” revealed that “Empathy and self-esteem were significant individual predictors of cyberbullying perpetration, such that adolescents with low levels of empathy and self-esteem are most likely to engage in cyberbullying.” (Brewer, & Kerslake, p. 1, 2015). Given this information, if low self-esteem resulted in higher chances of
cyberbullying, and social media use results in low self-esteem, depression, and loneliness. What are some ways to support adolescents develop a healthy sense of self?

**Creativity, Self-Expression, Social Media and Identity**

In schools, art and music classes are considered specialty subjects and when budgets are cut for schools, are the programs first to go (Bartel, Bobby 2012). This leaves adolescents without time for the self-expression and learning processes that art making can offer. “Art therapists may be in a unique position to help adolescents establish their creative potential, integrate their virtual and physical worlds, and reclaim meaningful imagery though the art-making process” (Potash, p. 56, 2009). Art has represented human expression since pre-historic eras. According to Robert (2017) “the presence of these images in these particular places is a mark of their identity and of the heritage left by these ancient societies and their beliefs, ever since the first cultural manifestations of the Upper Paleolithic in Europe” (Robert, 2017). Human beings have always used art as a form of expression, according to Robert. This idea places an unrepresented importance of expression of lived experiences though the use of art in today’s schools.

**Self-esteem and Creativity as an Identity Resource/Builder**

According to Natalie Rogers “Any art form that comes from emotional depth provides a process of self-discovery” and that “we express our inner feelings by creating outer forms (Levine, Levine, p. 115, 1999). Natalie Rogers coined this phenomenon the “creative connection saying that this process helped her “reclaim vital parts of herself”, as well as gain “personal strength and power” (Levine, Levine, p. 116,1999). The question then remains, how and why did the “Creative Connection” help Natalie? According to Shaun McNiff, the idea of creativity is everywhere, and it starts with engaging and participating with what is already there and within us
He also notes that in order to liberate creativity, one must create with the “shadow”. With the shadow being referred to as the “force of life and the expressive potential we keep in the dark and try to suppress” (McNiff, 2015). McNiff also brings up that that negative and hard life experiences are considered fuel for creative expression and in turn lead to new discovery and change (McNiff, 2015). Therefore, engaging with the creative process can offer insight to oneself, in hopes of helping bring to light to the parts of ourselves that are less understood.

**Art Therapy and Social Emotional Learning**

According to Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) “Social and emotional learning involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain, positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (pg. 10). These are all skills that will not only benefit the child immediately, but as his/her life goes on. Within the realm of art therapy there are one-on-one or group sessions that support and/or focus on these aspects of social emotional learning. The use of art allows for the understanding of other perspectives and building empathy, by both sharing and hearing other people’s stories regarding their artwork and art making process (Gidcumb, 2018). According to Macpherson, Hart, and Heaver (2016) “qualitative research studies show that participation in a group visual arts activity can stimulate a sense of belonging, foster new social interactions and mirror pro-social experience lacked in a wider community setting” (p. 544).

**Art Therapy as a Current Treatment**
A possible treatment model to promote socioemotional skills as well as self-discovery leading to self-acceptance could be explained by way of Edith Kramer’s findings on affect regulation and mirror neurons using art therapy. “With careful attunement, art therapists can develop unique, aesthetic forms of empathic resonance that will help clients feel deeply seen and develop empathy for themselves and compassion for others”. In a group session done by Franklin (2010) he found that the responses to his work “sparked shared ideas on what the group members’ depression felt like. The sharing of experience furthered the group’s cohesion along with expanding the members’ willingness to allow me entry into the layers of their emotional fortification” (pg. 166). Using art as a tool allows individuals to understand themselves and those around them without the distorted view provided by social media. Allowing youth to formulate an understanding of their experience of depression as well as finding comfort and empathizing with peers in the group using art could lead to opportunity for learning social emotional skills. Franklin describes the theory behind this is due to mirror neurons, which become activated in the brain when watching another person engage in an action (Franklin, M, 2010, p. 163). Franklin (2010) goes on to explain that by him creating artwork based off the group, he was able to “manifest the narratives in visual form so that they could be seen and serve as a spring-board for conversation… and helped the youth locate their own capacities for empathy for themselves and for each other” (pg. 166).

Expressive Therapies, Identity, and Adolescents

Combining art with therapy can offer teens the avenue for self-expression and exploration. According to Potash (2009) “given that adolescents have the capacity for abstract thought and are actively developing their identities, art making may provide an outlet for
expression and the opportunity to view situations from a unique perspective” (p. 53). In art therapy there is a concept referred to as process versus product. When making artwork you are involving yourself in the creative process, allowing for self-reflection. After creating, the product also allows for self-reflection and serves as a symbol of the learning process and a reminder that one is able to change, grow and understand. An example of this could be using self-portraiture, in people with depression it is said to be a way to separate themselves from their diagnosis. “An artist or client can create an image of self, acknowledge the emotions expressed in the self-portrait, and distance the self from that feeling” (Muri, p. 333, 2007).

**Art Therapy and Community Engagement**

One of the many effects of social media use is the feelings of loneliness (Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2019). Implementing art therapy in a group setting can be helpful in counteracting feelings of social isolation. It has been shown that social acceptance with peers leads to changes in self-confidence/esteem (Gilboa-Schechtman, Galili, Sahar, Amir, 2014). Because of the nature of a group, it requires human interaction. Take the potential for human interaction, combine it with collaborative art therapy interventions and it makes room for meaningful interactions to occur. According to two case studies Potash (2009) found that “Realizing the ability to create something meaningful and to be understood by another reinforced each teen’s need for taking an active stance in their lives rather than assuming the passive stance that is involved in relating to electronic media” (p. 55) The art making process can facilitate positive interactions between adolescences, while empowering themselves in the meantime. This in turn can build social emotional skills and can positively impact one’s self-esteem.
Results

Looking at the negative impacts that social media has on adolescence sense of self-acceptance, the integration of art therapy could prove to be beneficial in combating those effects.

According to Anderson and Jiang (2018), 95% of teens have or have access to smartphones, 45% are using the internet on a “near constant basis” and internet use has increased from 24% in 2014-15 to 45% in 2018 (Anderson and Jiang 2018). Twenge (2015) showed that social media use from 1991 to 2012 had a direct correlation with emergence of depressive symptoms (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin, p. 2, 2019). One could hypothesize that the unlimited access to smartphones leads to the increase in internet use and the increase of depressive symptoms in adolescence since 2012 due to social media usage.

Contributing factors of depressive symptoms, such as low self-esteem, connected to the use of social media can be explained by the accessibility of social comparisons to idealistic beauty standards (Sherlock, Wagstaff, 2018) and through instant gratification/feedback from likes and comments (Khetarpal, 2018). Another contributing factor is the lack of human interaction (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2018). The negative aspects of social media are prevalent at this age group because adolescences are at the age where finding a sense of self and fitting in with others is vital to healthy development (Berk 2010, Craig 2018).

The body of literature highlights the issue around living in a world of informational overload. Adolescents need a way to learn without the influence of social media. The use of art therapy serves as a tool for decreasing the negative effects that come along with social media usage. The ability for adolescents to express themselves in a way with no influence of their peers is invaluable. Art therapy provides the ability of self-exploration in a safe environment while strengthening the skill to combat the negative effects of not only platform derived social
interactions but for the struggles for everyday life Implementing group art therapy helps
adolescences combat feelings of social isolation by fostering an environment where they feel
both accepted, leading to change in self-confidence, and are integrated into a positively
reinforced social situation. (Gilboa-Schechtman, Galili, Sahar, Amir. 2014). In addition, art
therapy allows for adolescents to view things in a different light allowing for their perspectives to
be broadened into a world of self-acceptance and social awareness (Potash 2009). With teens
who are involved in cyberbullying, it is shown that they tend to have a lower sense of self-esteem
and empathy. (Brewer, Kerslake, 2015) The use of art therapy could be an avenue to help
counteract that lack of empathy by giving that opportunity to view and understand others on a
different point of view. Art therapy also allows space for the youth to work individually through
their internal conflicts through creative expression and play (Parisian, 2015). As McNiff
explains, by harnessing that creative energy one can pull from our internal struggles within, and
can then use that as fuel for creative expression exploration (McNiff, 2015). Because of the
nature of therapy and art therapy sessions, the exploration process for the youth is all held in a
safe setting and allows for positive development to occur.

The information gathered throughout this review showed core areas of consideration; the
effects of social media, the depression that may occur as a result of social media, and art therapy
interventions as a potential treatment. The table below reflects these three areas as they are
related to the four specific core social behaviors.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Effects</th>
<th>Depressive Symptoms</th>
<th>Art Therapy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Instant Gratification</td>
<td>• Self-worth based on feedback from others</td>
<td>• Turn taking in group settings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dopamine receptors cause the reliance</td>
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Discussion

Instant Gratification

With regards to Instant gratification, when teens are receiving likes from peers on social media it releases dopamine in the brain. This very obtainable positive chemical release causes youth to continually seek that gratification (Khetarpal, 2018). As a long-term effect, using this technology as an avenue of happiness and gratification, can lead to social media being used to combat or escape negative feeling (French, 2018). This inappropriate use leads to the experience of depressive symptoms (French, 2018). This direct connection to the perceived happiness as likes and other types of social media recognition leads to addiction like behavior. With its continual use causing additive like behavior in relation to dopamine being released in the brain,
the self-control of social media using adolescences could be negatively affected. The findings of Panek (2012) connect with work completed by French (2018), the papers speculating that the amount of social media usage is persuaded by the level of a person’s self-control. In other words, if the youth’s self-control is being biologically influenced and socially reinforced, this could affect their impulse and regulation skills. Although there have been no studies completed with art therapy and social media effects on instant gratification, using art therapy in group settings can be beneficial in helping with impulse control. “Research suggests that emotional regulation ability is a product of two concepts: reactivity of behavioral, emotional, and physiological systems and control of reactivity to meet goals” (Augustyniak, Brooks, Rinaldo, Bogner, Hodges p. 330, 2009) conducting an art therapy group the therapist has a responsibility to hold the space and set the tone and intentions for the group (Haen, Boyd, p. 69, 2018). Odaci and Celik (2016) point out the nature of any group, it involves others. A group setting poses the challenge of multiple personalities that will react differently to certain stimuli and it is the responsibility of a therapist to inform and teach the members how to handle themselves in the group (Haen, Boyd, p. 69, 2018). Art therapy group sessions requires a heightened control of the group, as the participants will share their creations, expressing and sharing something that leaves a member with a sense of vulnerability. Respecting others space, time and art allows group participants to have to regulate their responses and work on their impulse control. (Haen, Boyd, p. 69, 2018). With this in mind further research could looked into creating art therapy groups for students to learn to regulate themselves and their impulses in a safe and structured environment.

**Lack of Face to Face Contact**

In regard to the lack of face to face contact, social media takes away the ability to see and understand what ones actions cause (Booker, Skew, Kelly, Sacker, p. 176, 2015; Savina, Mills,
Atwood, Cha, p. 85 2017). This loss of physical interaction causes deficits in socio-emotional development and increases risk of depression for teens. Although there are no studies done in relation to promoting social emotional skill building due to social media isolation, there has however been art therapy interventions aimed at strengthening these skills. As discussed by Franklin (2010) due to Edith Kramer’s findings on affect regulation and mirror neurons using art therapy, art therapy group settings allowed for youth to build connections with other students on a personal non-virtual level. The exchange of emotions from one youth to another, built empathy and increased social awareness. Further research could be done looking into the benefits of face to face interaction using art therapy techniques.

Social Comparison

Social comparisons according to (Gibson, 2019), (Mclean, Jarman, and Rodgers, 2019), (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, Halliwell, 2015), and (Franklin, 2010) show that due to the nature of social media, the usage of it allows for the social comparisons for human beings. In social comparison theory, humans compare themselves to others to gauge their status in the group. This ideology aligns with Gibson (2019) and his findings of how in identify building the reactions of others is the biggest determiner of how we see ourselves (p.31). With this information in mind, Mclean, Jarman, and Rodgers (2019) note that “qualitative studies show that the amount of feedback given to an online posting, especially regarding the number of likes given to a photo effects social acceptance for adolescent girls (p. 517)”. One could formulate that because of the constant access and usage of social media, the amount of social comparisons is higher causing lower self-esteem (Sherlock, Wagstaff 2019). Art therapy interventions have not been made in response to combating negative effects of social comparisons due to social media. However, art therapy does help with the side effects of this such as negative self-esteem. Being
in an art therapy group also offers opportunity for positive peer interactions in enhancing one’s self-worth (Franklin, 2010). This also gives opportunity for youth to use the artmaking to experience different viewpoints (Potash, 2009). Art therapists could choose to structure the sessions to work with creating positive self-talk and of supporting others. Future research on the effects of art therapy could give the opportunity for teens to shift their values from the importance of appearance or status to the importance of being recognized in other ways.

**Idealized Beauty Standards**

As stated by Sherlock and Wagstaff “Brief exposure to idealistic images can result in reevaluations of self-rated attractiveness, chronic exposure may lead to more long-term changes in psychological well-being” (p. 11). Social media sites created promoting the “ideal body” become harmful. It creates low self-esteem and depression, especially in women, (Mclean, Jarman, and Rodgers) (Jeri-Yabar, Sanchez-Carbonel, Tito, Ramirez-del Castillo, Torres-Alcantara, Denegri, Carreazo, 2019) as previously discussed in social comparisons (Sherlock, Wagstaff 2019). Social media creates the ability to “like” a post, generating the repercussions of not being “Liked.” When a youth relies on that for validation, it can lead to low self-esteem. (Jeri-Yabar, Sanchez-Carbonel, Tito, Ramirez-del Castillo, Torres-Alcantara, Denegri, Carreazo, 2019). In agreeance, a correlation of people that had higher self-esteem were found to be less effected by the number of likes received on a post. (Burrow, Ramone, 2016). The importance of building self-esteem early becomes a priority to negate the addiction like behavior as dopamine gets released in the brain. Presently, there are no completed studies looking at compensating for the negative effects on teens of idealized beauty found on social media. However, Art therapy can pose beneficial in strengthening one’s self esteem. According to Coleman and Mills, group settings “can result in an atmosphere of mutual aid. In this atmosphere, members learn to identify
and voice their own needs, realize similarities and differences, form connections with others, and practice new skills in an environment of inclusion and respect” (p. 6). Because they are in an environment where their own self is recognized and supported, the place for idealizing and comparing can start being reduced.

**The Major Challenges of Research and Social Media**

As rapidly as technology changes, the research from Lenhart (2015) could be outpaced by the continually changing informational landscape. Information from Common Sense Media (2019) has shown that there are in fact changes in technology usage. In regards to social media “The average amount of time 13- to 18-year-olds spend using social media each day has remained nearly exactly the same: 1:11 a day in 2015, and 1:10 a day in 2019” however the “frequency of social media use has increased: The percent of teens who say they use it “every day” has grown from 45% in 2015 to 63% in 2019” (Common Sense Media,p. 37, 2019). Therefore, although the same amount of time is spent on social media sites per day, the number of days social media is used in a week has increased. Although there was an increase in frequency of social media usage, interestingly was a 5% decrease in enjoyment of using these sites among 9-18-year old’s” (Mcclain-Delaney, p. 39, 2019). This could connect with findings of French (2017) of social media negatively effecting dopamine receptors.

**Recommendations for a Social Media Informed Art Therapy Model of Treatment**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that art therapists working with youth are aware of key underpinning and underlying social, environmental, and psychological issues related to social media usage and the certain benefits from specific art therapy techniques and methods.
Guiding Principles for a Social Media Informed Model.

1. Art therapists consider the four major areas of development and identity impacted by social media usage being Instant Gratification, Lack of Face to face contact, Social Comparisons, Idealized beauty standards

2. Art therapists are aware of the psychological impact on self-worth and self-confidence as at-risk behaviors and signs of depression.

3. Art therapists consider specific techniques related to each of the four major developmental areas as interventions with youth. Including specific clinical goals of, turn taking, group approach/settings, positive self-identity.

Because of the rapid pace of technology, it becomes important to understand the long-term effects technology, primarily social media has on adolescences and how we can best use the resources we have to combat these negative effects. The integration of art therapy provides as a promising way to combat the negative effects that come with social media.
References


Gibson, P. F. (2019). Young girls’ lived experiences of ’going online’: an exploration into the relationships between social media use and well-being for primary age girls. https://doi-org.ezproxy.flo.org/10.24384/kqtz-3f18


