The Report committee for Brianna Kathleen Livsey
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report.

Self-Concept and Online Social Networking in Young Adolescents:
Implications for School Counselors

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: ________________________________
Keisha Bentley-Edwards

______________________________
Christopher McCarthy
Self-Concept and Online Social Networking in Young Adolescents:

Implications for School Counselors

by

Brianna Kathleen Livsey, B.A.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the young adolescents I have worked with at Pok-O MacCready Camps and Murchison Middle School for enlightening me to the identity struggles now taking place online.

I would also like to thank my family: Mom, Dad, Caitlin, Geoffrey, James, and Waldo for your endless love and support.
Self-Concept and Online Social Networking in Young Adolescents:

Implications for School Counselors

by

Brianna Kathleen Livsey, M.A.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2013
Supervisor: Keisha Bentley-Edwards

ABSTRACT

The current report reviews the recent research on online social networking sites (MySpace and Facebook), and their impact on adolescent self-concept and identity development. This paper describes the history and recent expansion of social networking sites, followed by an overview of adolescent identity development. The literature suggests both positive and negative effects of social networking use on adolescent self-concept. Positive effects include the strengthening of group identity, the benefits of self-expression, and the ability to reinforce social relationships. On the other hand, negative effects include an intensified discrepancy between one’s ideal and actual selves, false representations of the self, and the risks involved with online disclosure. The relationship between personality factors and social networking use is also explored. Finally included are implications of this research for school counselors working with adolescents growing up in the digital age.
# Table of Contents

Self-Concept and Online Social Networking in Young Adolescents: Introduction………1

Chapter One: Definitions and Uses of Social Networking Sites (SNS)………………..5

Chapter Two: Adolescent Identity Development………………………………………9

Self-Concept…………………………………………………………………………….9

Theories of Identity Development…………………………………………………..10

Egocentrism and the Imagined Audience………………………………………..12

Chapter Three: Effects of SNS Use on Adolescent Self-Concept: A Review of the
Research…………………………………………………………………………………15

Positive Effects on Self-Concept Development……………………………………15

Negative Effects on Self-Concept Development…………………………………22

Personality and SNS Use……………………………………………………………27

Chapter Four: Implications for School Counselors…………………………………..31

Chapter Five: Conclusion…………………………………………………………….37

Directions for Future Research…………………………………………………..38

References……………………………………………………………………………42

Vita……………………………………………………………………………………50
Self-Concept and Online Social Networking in Young Adolescents: Introduction

With the assistance and ubiquity of technology, communication and social interaction is a constant in the lives of Americans. By 2012, over 1 billion people globally used e-mail services (Brownlow, 2012) and 66% of American adults were members of social networking sites (Brenner, 2012). This expansive usage contrasts sharply with earlier data. In 2005, only 8% of adults used social networking sites (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011). Given these shifts, it is clear that the spread of social media communication is significant and likely to continue. This documented growth is likely even more robust among adolescent populations, as young teenagers are often the first to embrace new forms of digitization.

Growing up in the digital age, current adolescents are substantial users of Internet communication. Concretely, 95% of teens age 12-17 are Internet users, and of these, eight out of ten frequently visit social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter) (Lenhart et al., 2011). Young adolescents (defined for this paper as 11-15 year-olds) access these sites through home and school computers as well as through most cell phones, allowing kids to be constantly “plugged in.” Based on this widespread use, social networking sites (SNS) have potentially significant implications for adolescent development.

To understand the theoretical developmental effects SNS have, it is important to first clarify significant terminology. A SNS is characteristically dynamic rather than static; the online content can be altered and adjusted, added to and taken away (Guzzetti, 2006). Essentially, a SNS is a “nonymous”, or user known, online website where users
create and update profiles in order to communicate personal information to others (Hum et al., 2011, p. 1829). Often used interchangeably, social media is the encompassing term used for any digital transmission of information to a large audience and does not necessitate interaction with other users (Hartshorn, 2010). Facebook and MySpace, actively used by over 1 billion people worldwide (Smith, 2012) are prominently featured in the literature and will thus be highlighted in this paper. The proliferation of social media has resulted in adolescents spending considerable time posting personal information, chatting with friends, and looking at others’ profiles on SNS. A new medium is now in place through which young people develop and construct ideas of the self.

Inside or outside the online domain, adolescent development is characteristically defined by a struggle with identity formation. A well-known and often cited theory of development, Erik Erikson’s stage model of identity development, labels the adolescent years as the period in life when individuals experience a crisis in the identity stage. The outcome of the crisis includes either a formed identity with a clear and positive self-concept or identity confusion (Erikson, 1968). Self-concept, defined as beliefs and thoughts about the self, is learned and amended over time as new information about the self is absorbed and new self-schemata are formed (Smith & Hung, 2010). Many pioneering identity theories discuss the complexities of behavior and development of young adolescents that could be augmented by online SNS use.

With the aid of Internet technologies, adolescents receive constant social feedback, which in turn, affects how teens view themselves. SNS allow adolescents to
directly witness others’ thoughts and opinions about them and further prompt positive or negative self-beliefs. Arguably, there are various reasons adolescents utilize SNS that may be influential in their self-concept. Predominantly, social media supplies adolescents with information about the social environment and an avenue through which to create identity (Lloyd, 2002; Davis, 2010). Adolescents have always looked to peers to validate or refute socializing behaviors when developing their self-concepts (Siegle, 2011). SNS allow this interaction to occur constantly and often immediately.

Research indicates that individual self-concepts are generally enhanced because of SNS use, although concurrent negative effects have also been documented. Positively, SNS can act as “online communities” for adolescents struggling to find a voice in live social interaction (Guzzetti, 2006, p. 162) and as places to develop and enhance group membership, especially regarding ethnic and racial identity (Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009). While SNS can act as a necessary outlet, some young teens misuse SNS and can get into trouble. For instance, young adolescents have been found to use online sites to impersonate other people and to engage in sexualized behaviors (Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005). In addition to misrepresenting themselves online, adolescents may develop a negative self-concept through the use of SNS by way of self-comparisons, judgments and cyber-bullying.

The online development of self-concept and adolescent identity has potential ensuing implications that are important for educators, counselors, and parents. As Walker, Krehbiel and Knoyer (2009) note, most SNS use and online experience in general are embraced more by generations younger than the scholars researching the
process and technology. Many people working and influencing adolescents of this
generation are unaware of the uses, misuses and developmental implications of SNS used
by young teens. In the same vein, adolescents are often unaware of the negative
consequences and risks that can result from divulging personal information in a setting
that lacks privacy (Siegle, 2011). School counselors need to understand this new forum
of identity exploration in order to facilitate its effects, but also to help educate students on
safe SNS practices.

To understand the development trajectory of 21st century adolescents,
understanding social networking and their implications on identity formation is essential.
The goals of this paper are to illustrate the complexities of self-concept development
through the use of online social networking sites and to discuss the consequent
implications for school counselors. Explicitly, this paper first reviews the uses and recent
growth of SNS like Facebook and MySpace, and second, presents an overview of
adolescent identity theories. From there, documentation of the research discussing
probable positive and negative effects of online identity and self-concept development for
young adolescents will be provided. Subsequently, implications for educators, with an
emphasis on school counselors, will be discussed and finally included are directions for
needed future research.
Chapter One:
Definitions and Uses of Social Networking Sites (SNS)

In order to fully understand the impending effects SNS use has on adolescent identity development, it is first necessary to overview the history of SNS and their purpose in society today. SNS are a form of social media in that they rely on digital technology to facilitate communication. These sites can further be explained as networked publics as they move the act of public socializing from face to face interaction to the online domain (Parker & boyd, 2010).

Four characteristics are important in distinguishing SNS from communication methods of the past: SNS are persistent, searchable, replicable and scalable (Parker & boyd, 2010). Respectively, the information shared on SNS will be saved long-term, individuals can be easily found by name and identifying characteristics, news and information can be shared and copied easily, and the material on the sites is not bound to specific domains—SNS can reach people all over the world (Parker & boyd, 2010).

SNS differ from other online websites in that their content is dynamic rather than static and the user is ‘nonymous’ rather than anonymous (Guzzetti, 2006; Hum et al., 2011). The term ‘nonymous’ (Hum et al., 2011) conveys that unlike anonymous websites in which “centrally controlled content providers” are anonymous authors of information (Ahn, 2011, p. 1435), the SNS author is known. SNS are ‘nonymous’ because the identity of the user is easily communicated with a profile picture and name. Furthermore, SNS are dynamic because the communication tools available (e.g., personal profiles, status updates and news feed pages) are constantly updated (Hum et al., 2011). This
fluidity results in users viewing new content with each log-in (commonly multiple times a day for adolescents).

Online social networking was first introduced in 1997 and an explosion of various sites was seen in the 2000s (boyd & Ellison, 2008). SNS are used for a variety of reasons and each are created with a different premise and purpose. Valkenburg (2006) distinguishes between common interest SNS (e.g., VampireFreaks, CafeMom, and CouchSurfing), SNS used to find potential mates (e.g., Match.com), and “friending” SNS which are used to connect with established friend lists and networks. Of these, “friending” SNS will be discussed in this paper (see Figure 1).
Two specific sites, Facebook (www.facebook.com) and MySpace (www.myspace.com), will be highlighted based on their widespread use throughout social networking history and their presence in current research.

Founded in 2004, Facebook was initially created for the students of Harvard University but quickly expanded to college students across the United States. Currently, over 1 billion (Smith, 2012) people of all ages use Facebook around the world to connect with friends by sharing photos and videos, commenting on posts, creating groups, and even playing games (Zuckerberg, 2011). Comparably, MySpace launched in 2003 and quickly gained popularity in the music world (MySpace, 2003). 25 million currently active members now use MySpace for connecting with others over “music, celebrities, TV, movies, and games” (Smith, 2012; MySpace, 2003, para. 1). Though both sites have been widely used, Facebook and MySpace membership today is loosely divided on social class lines, with groups of lower socioeconomic status migrating towards MySpace (boyd, 2009).

SNS use has proliferated in recent years and adolescents are palpable contributors to their growth. In 2011, more than 76% of young teens visited a SNS daily (Lenhart et al., 2011), and this percentage is only likely to increase. Adolescents use SNS because the online world is an exciting place for teens to communicate with one another. Many teens view the online world as “their space,” removed from adult oversight and rigid social norms (Livingstone, 2008, p. 396). Teens and adolescents use “friending” SNS for a variety of reasons. These could include developing online literacy (Guzzetti, 2006), supplementing real life relationships and friendships (Walker et al., 2009), sharing
academic information to complement the learning process and develop a student identity (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Selwyn, 2009), finding validation from peers (Siegle et al., 2011), and expressing the self in a socially mediated and easily adjustable manner (Parker & boyd, 2010).

Because of this new and prominent avenue of communication and socialization, adolescents develop outside the traditional visible realms of the school and the home. Young adolescents are the first generation to grow up completely in the age of digital technology, making them true “digital natives” (Siegle, 2011). Online communication is the ideal way for identity exploration tasks to take place because SNS are socially mediated venues that can be easily navigated (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Guzzetti, 2006). Understanding the possible effects of such media use is important when considering the cognitive and social development tasks typical of this population. The following section will explore traditional adolescent identity theories and their applicability to SNS using teens.

---

1 The author, using a variety of web-based sources listed under Figure 1, compiled data. Once gathered, data was separated by SNS and by year for the years 2008, 2010, and 2012. Finally, data was put in Microsoft Excel for Figure generation.

2 Data was compiled by author by searching four online databases (PsychInfo, Science and Technology Collection, Communication and Mass Media Complete and ERIC)
Chapter Two:
Adolescent Identity Development

Adolescence is a time characterized by developmental change and psychological growth. Prominently, identity development embodies the adolescent years. This chapter overviews varying theories and components of adolescent identity development to bring context to the struggles unique to this age group, as well as outline their implications and potential interactions with online social networking.

Self-Concept

The facets of an individual’s personality, experiences, and background compose identity. Self-concept is one’s cognitive identity and encompasses one’s views and thoughts about the self (Smith & Hung, 2010). Self-beliefs develop over time and change based on feedback received from the social world. The adolescent self-concept is especially dynamic because of the struggle to find a true identity while maintaining social acceptability. Over time, a person’s cognitive self or self-concept will become more stable and organized (Smith & Hung, 2010). A stable, accurate and positive self-concept is one of the goals of adolescent identity development. One main theory conceptualizes the process towards this goal.

Carl Rogers proposed that the self-concept includes a person’s real self, ideal self, and public self (as cited in Smith & Hung, 2010). A real self refers to the actual thoughts and beliefs one has of himself; an ideal self signifies the person one aims to become; and the public self is typically a combination of the two and represents the presentational
identity. Incongruence, or discrepancies, between these different selves will often result in a lower self-concept (as cited in Smith & Hung, 2010).

Today, adolescents give and receive feedback as well as display public selves constantly through SNS. These venues provide teens a place to be in frequent evaluation of the self and others, which thus promotes development of self-concept (Siegle, 2011). Because of the frequency with which teens use SNS, incongruences between presentations and feelings of the self are exacerbated and more consistently reinforced. Therefore, evaluations of the self potentially occur more frequently. Self-concept is one important feature of adolescent identity development, an area of research supported by many theoretical frameworks.

Theories of Identity Development

Erik Erikson’s dichotomous theory of identity development spans the life course. At each stage, a person faces two outcomes: one that will allow for a natural progression of identity development, and one that will restrict the possibility of an achieved identity. Young adolescents face two important stages: industry versus inferiority and identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1968). During the school age years (6-12 years old), children learn to develop skills in order to be industrious and hard working (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Today, many young teens demonstrate industry in their creation and construction of an SNS profile page. Young adolescents at this stage work hard to design an online profile they are proud of and one they want to display to other people. Upon successful resolution of the industry versus inferiority stage, adolescents develop
different aspects of identity through experimentation and sometimes rebellion in the identity versus role confusion stage (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). This stage is also realized online as young teens increasingly use SNS to experiment with identity markers, peer influence, and public disclosure. The conclusion of adolescence ideally ends with an achieved identity and healthy self-concept in which “past, present, and future are brought together to form a unified whole” (Erikson, 1968, p. 92).

Analogously, James Marcia proposed four stages of identity development: foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement (Marcia, 2009). Adolescents may be at any of these identity stages. Commonly, adolescents will experience moratorium, the stage in which they experiment with their identity by trying out different selves and new experiences (as cited in Muuss, 1988). Taken together, both Erikson’s and Marcia’s theories emphasize adolescent identity development as a complex process that forces a young adolescent to take steps in determining who they are.

This process is made more complicated by the presence of peers and made more ubiquitous with the presence of SNS. Teens use SNS to experiment with their identities by acting out the moratorium stage online. SNS provide constant information and reinforcement to adolescents as they strive for identity achievement (Davis, 2010). This phenomenon leads to both positive and negative effects on adolescent identity development.
Egocentrism and the Imagined Audience

Identity development in adolescence is greatly influenced by the social world. Many theories have demonstrated the significance adolescents place on social feedback. Goffman (as cited in Davis, 2012) theorizes that the adolescent self is manufactured by the relationship between the performer (individual) and his/her audience (peers). Furthermore, identity is subject to the adolescent belief in an imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967) and the personal fable (Elkind, 1967). Elkind’s imaginary audience (1967) refers to the group of peers and others whom the adolescent believes to be constantly watching him or her. Concretely, 12-16 year olds fail to differentiate between the cognitive concerns of others and those of the self (Elkind, 1967). Explicitly, teens fail to distinguish between thoughts about themselves perpetuated by them or their peers. The belief in the imaginary audience acts in combination with the personal fable, or the adolescent belief that he/she is special, unique and protected from harm, to influence adolescent egocentrism, or the overt preoccupation with the self (Elkind, 1967). While indicative of teen self-consciousness, the themes of egocentrism and the belief in an imaginary audience are self-admiring, too; teens care a great deal about themselves (Elkind, 1967).

Online, teens chose SNS content based on assumed preferences of the imagined audience. Adolescents are concerned with how they are represented on SNS because of who may access their information and see their profile. The act of updating profile information, pictures, or statuses plays into adolescent egocentrism; changes are made to appeal to the online audience whom teens believe are constantly looking at their
information. Davis (2012) argues that a common tension in identity arises in teens while they attempt to bridge consistency between what he deems the “four spheres of identity obligation” (p. 635). Teens must balance these spheres, which include their own self-concept, the identity important to interpersonal relationships, the identity dependent on online social norms as well as broader community values (Davis, 2012). This tension is pronounced in the networked era because the lines between these four spheres are blurred, and pressures to adapt identity are more pervasive.

Relatedly, Hoppe and Loevinger (1977) suggested that conforming behavior is very typical of young adolescents up to age 13. Young teens yearn to be accepted and liked by others and conforming to social standards may better achieve this goal. The idea of conformity is augmented by Erikson’s categorization of children under 12 as striving for approval and recognition in the industry versus inferiority stage of development (Erikson, 1968).

Furthermore, young teens conform in order to better fit in in particular settings. Schachter (2005) proposed that we actually have multiple selves because of the way we put together our identity elements in different contexts. Adolescents especially are always thinking about the context in which they are in along with the accompanying audience. Teens will adjust self-presentation and conform their behaviors to fit in in the different contexts. For example, on SNS, teens spend considerable time looking at friends’ profiles in order to inform them of what to include on their own (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).
The aforementioned stages and processes of identity development occur in young adolescents today, yet are done in a different venue than the past. Identity development and the formation of a positive self-concept are now facilitated with the use of SNS. Because of the nature of SNS, young adolescents receive feedback and information from the social world that enables them to develop identity. Marwick and boyd (2010) noted that with the help of SNS, adolescents have a clear sense of their audience and can construct the self to reflect the appropriate content. This results in a balance of being authentic to the self and with pleasing an audience, a dilemma between real and public selves (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Muuss, 1988). This new setting for adolescent identity development has potential implications for self-concept development. Having defined SNS and identity development, the next chapter turns to evidence on how the two interact; explicitly, to describing the positive and negative effects SNS use has on adolescent identity formation.
Chapter Three:

Effects of SNS Use on Adolescent Self-Concept: A Review of the Research

When compared to previous generations, teens today face identity struggles in a unique manner. Research indicates that SNS use influences and interacts with adolescent identity development in significant ways. Contradictions arise when determining if these influences are positive or negative. This chapter will explore the positive effects of SNS use on identity development in terms of belongingness, self-expression, and social learning as well as negative effects in terms of peer comparisons, self-concept discrepancies and safety issues. Finally, an overview of the recent research on personality characteristics and SNS use will be included.

Positive Effects on Self-Concept Development

Recent research documents important positive implications of using SNS early in adolescence. Foremost, SNS use has been beneficial in reinforcing group identity. Having a strong group identity gives young teens a sense of belongingness, which can further benefit self-conceptualization. This finding is true with different groups. For example, more than 60% of teens use SNS to discuss school and academic issues (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Students use the online domain to discuss assignments, complain about workload and stress, and to banter about teachers, thus fostering bonds with other learners (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Selwyn, 2009). These bonds help reinforce a shared academic identity that leaves young adolescents feeling less isolated in their scholastic struggles.
Similarly, marginalized teens use SNS to connect with like individuals in order to create a place of belonging. For example, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) teens use SNS to connect with similarly identified teens. Macintosh and Bryson (2007) acknowledge that young gay teens often use SNS to “learn how to be queer” and that the sites are often the first places young teens “come out” (p. 136). LGBTQ teens find solace in the online world as it provides a sense of community that many young gay teens lack in live social interactions. This feeling of belongingness allows teens to view themselves more positively. Sexual identity is only one minority identity population that witnesses positive effects from SNS communication.

Teens with psychological disorders also find support in online SNS communities. In a Facebook search, Gajaria, Yeung, Goodale, and Charach (2011) found 25 groups, each with 100+ members, created as support groups for teens with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Teens with ADHD use the groups for sharing advice on coping and medication, telling jokes, mitigating stereotypes, offering support, and sharing stories (Gajaria et al., 2011). Clear in-group identity was seen with the exclusion of those not meeting criteria for ADHD (Gajaria et al., 2011). Overall, SNS groups may help those with ADHD reframe their group identity in a positive light and thus foster a sense of needed belonging.

Ethnic minorities and international/intercultural teens also greatly benefit from SNS use. In a study analyzing profile pages, Grasmuck et al. (2009) found that displays of ethnic identity (among 83 African American, Latino, and Indian American college students) were very salient. Ethnic identity was evidenced with group specific quotes and
ethnically significant pictures (e.g. known cultural figures and popular images) displayed on profile pages (Grasmuck et al., 2009). This visual evidence allowed the students to feel empowered by a positive group identity. Pictures and quotes demonstrating important aspects of ethnic identity make it easier for teens to find similar peers and thus an online community is created (Grasmuck et al., 2009).

Furthermore, McLean (2010) recognized that SNS facilitate the growth of multiple cultural identities for young migrating or immigrating students. Contextually, McLean (2010) described a young 15-year-old girl named Zeek who moved from Trinidad and Tobago to the United States in her freshman year of high school. In an interview, Zeek noted that with the help of SNS, she was able to develop a unique ethnic identity that included cultural aspects from both Trinidad and Tobago and the US (as cited in McLean, 2010). Through SNS, Zeek kept in touch with old friends from Trinidad and Tobago and talked with new friends in the US (McLean, 2010). Because of this she was able to use SNS to keep up with the trends and language in both locations (McLean, 2010). With examples of student, LGBTQ, ADHD, and ethnic group identities, it is clear that SNS greatly benefit teen’s development of self-concept and well-being by giving young adolescents a place to communicate with like others.

A second positive implication of SNS use is the notion that teens benefit from the ability to express themselves online. In part due to adolescent egocentrism and the belief in an imaginary audience, adolescents thrive on self-expression. Because of the ease of use and ability to constantly adjust, SNS provide optimal conditions for self-expression (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Whereas 10 years ago teens used a decorated school locker or
their bedroom walls to express interests and passions, teens now use the online SNS profile (Parker & boyd, 2010). With photos, colors, “wallpaper”, and images of preferences, younger teens especially relish the opportunity to decorate and stylize their online identity and enjoy the ability to change it at any time (Livingstone, 2008). Self-expression online is constructive for self-concept development because it gives teens control over how their identity is displayed, therefore providing a sense of empowerment (Ward, 2010). Furthermore, online construction allows teens to successfully display the industry versus inferiority stage of psychosocial development according to Erikson (1968). Successful resolution of this stage is beneficial in overall identity achievement (Erikson, 1968).

Young adolescents need a place to express themselves and increasingly that space is being found online. In a survey of 1,340 adolescent SNS users ages 10-18, Schouten, Valkenburg, and Peter (2007) found that users disclosed more about themselves online than offline. This is attributed to having both a higher confidence in navigating the online world and lower inhibitions when communicating online. The survey indicated that young teens had particularly increased confidence in communicating with members of the opposite gender online rather than off (Schouten et al., 2007). Social barriers present in live adolescent interaction may not be present online and thus teens feel comfortable engaging interpersonally in such settings.

This benefit is especially seen in socially anxious and introverted teens who may lack the skills or confidence to interact successfully in live interaction. With SNS, these teens can build interpersonal communication skills, expand their social network, and
gather information necessary to forge interpersonal relationships (Courtois, All, and Vanwynsberghe, 2012). With SNS enhancing their ability to communicate in a safe place, socially anxious adolescents can learn skills to begin using offline.

Expression in social interaction is important for teens as they develop their identities, and the ease in which SNS facilitate this expression is beneficial. In interviews with 15-25 year olds, Davis (2012) found that adolescents relished in the ability to express themself online because of the increased freedom. Furthermore, younger teens noted that SNS allowed for a space to deal with and process issues that they were not ready to deal with in outside life (Davis, 2012). People, and teens especially, can gauge responses to self-disclosures online, thus helping them to deal with issues in real life. In other words, SNS provide a means for feedback that teens desire while expressing themselves and developing identity.

Although self-expression is valuable for individual self-concept development, it is always mediated by others’ opinions. Adolescents use feedback from other users as a way to monitor and control online profile content and to resist their vulnerability to critique. Pempek et al. (2009) reviewed 92 college students’ Facebook use over a week and found that of all Facebook activities, students spent the most time looking at other people’s information on SNS. The authors (2009) termed this phenomena “lurking” (p. 227). Looking at what peers reveal in their online profile gives information on popular and current trends and further influences what others disclose (Pempek et al., 2009). Because peers constitute the imaginary audience, it is them teens aspire to please. Positively, teens gain a sense of control when they are able to depict themselves exactly
as they want online. There are also a number of negative consequences that stem from “lurking” that will be addressed in the following section of this paper.

Research indicates an additional encouraging finding in that most people have a positive experience using SNS. In a national phone survey, 85% of SNS users were found to believe that SNS are kind places where friendship is reinforced (Finn, 2012). Accordingly, Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012) consider Facebook to be a setting in which information is shared proactively because users aim to hold up a positive image. In contrast to what many think, SNS are most often used to supplement real relationships rather than to forge bonds with unknown individuals (Walker et al., 2009). In a survey of 13-19 years olds, adolescents reported a strong overlap between their best friends online and offline (Reich, Subrahmanyam, and Espinoza, 2012). Furthermore, in studies comparing observer ratings and self-ratings of profile information, most people represented themselves in ways that reflected their true selves (Back et al., 2010; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). This finding is particularly accurate among older adolescents and adults. Overwhelmingly, SNS users communicate with established friends and represent themselves truthfully online, making SNS primarily positive places.

As evidenced, adolescents use SNS to gain information about the social world. Moreover, online SNS may provide a safer environment for learning about and discussing topics that cause stress and embarrassment in real life. For example, a topic such as sexual education that causes anxiety and fear amongst teens may be more easily explored online. Brown, Keller and Stern (2009) found that using digital media (SNS) as a sex educator successfully reaches young teens. Adolescents can be more open and
explore their questions without engaging in uncomfortable face-to-face discussions with counselors and parents. Now, many influential resources even have Facebook pages (e.g., STD clinics) (Brown et al., 2009). Teens can easily and anonymously access these pages to find viable information that they may be too anxious to find elsewhere. As also described with anxiety provoking social situations, SNS provide teens with a place to navigate relationships and seek information that adolescents are concerned about. When apprehension is partly controlled for, teens have room to develop a positive self-concept.

Finally, learning how to set up a SNS profile and navigate the online world helps teens develop digital skills important for digital literacy in the 21st century (Guzzetti, 2006). Moving forward in today’s society, the familiarity with technology is necessary for professional life. SNS serve not only a social purpose, but also act as a technological tool. High-school students perceive it a disadvantage to be prohibited from SNS (Read, Shah, O-Brien, & Woolcott, 2012) because of the benefits it affords. Young adolescents’ frequent use of SNS gives them an advantage in digital citizenship (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Encouragingly, this positive effect has been found in all teens, with no displayed “digital divide” based on socioeconomic class or race (Ahn, 2011, p. 1438). With the advent of smartphones, the reliance on Internet communication is profound and only likely to increase. Thus, young students now have the opportunity to practice the digital skills that will be integral to their future career and social identities.

While positive implications of SNS use on self-concept development are apparent, there are important potential negative effects particularly in regard to self-comparison, identity representation, and online safety to consider as well. As
Livingstone (2008) suggested, online opportunity and risk frequently overlap. This is particularly true for young adolescents experiencing a volatile period of identity development.

**Negative Effects on Self-Concept Development**

Because SNS rely on visual representations of identity and because of the importance teens place on their imaginary audience, opportunities for peer comparison and critique online are endless. While research by Parker and boyd (2010) suggests it is advantageous to look at peers’ profile information in order to gain knowledge about the social world, teens risk lowering their self-concept when constantly comparing to others. Issues of body image abound especially among girls (Marwick & boyd, 2010). For example, after looking through profile pictures of friends and peers for a “Fantasy Facebook” art project, a seventh grade student asked if she could make her profile picture skinnier than she was (as cited in Ward, 2010). As Ward (2010) explained, young teens are under constant pressure to appear in socially reinforced ways. While this has always been true, SNS have begun to dictate aesthetic choice in a pervasive way. The pressure to keep up with others online often leaves teens feeling inadequate.

As teens are constantly comparing themselves online, detrimental effects on self-concept have been perceived. In an empirical study analyzing Facebook communication, Zwier, Araujo, Boukes, and Willemsen (2011) found that young teens use SNS to display “hoped for possible selves” rather than truthful self depictions (p. 571). By representing idealized versions of the self, a gap emerges between one’s real and ideal selves.
Explicitly, teens are comparing their own real selves with peers’ idealized online representations (Zwier et al., 2011). Young adolescents may not realize that their friends’ online representations are idealized, rather than real, versions of themselves. In other words, young teens may feel badly about their real selves, as they do not comprehend that their friends could be lying online. When thinking about their own self-representation, teens lose the sense of a coherent self when representations online differ from the ways they act in real life. This can foster a negative self-image because the adolescent withdraws from accepting him/herself for who he/she is (Davis, 2012). As previously mentioned, Rogers suggested that a lowering of self-concept results as a gap between the disparate selves grows.

It is important to note that there are contradictory findings to the claim that teens represent idealized versions of the self, online. Specifically, a previously mentioned study found contrasting results. Back et al. (2010) found evidence, in a sample of 236 college students, that SNS users represent portrayals of their real selves online. This was evidenced by a high correlation between observer and self-reports of personality both online and off. The discrepancy between this result and that of Zwier et al. (2011) could be attributed to the fact that the study analyzed college students and adults’ use of Facebook. The finding that many people represent themselves truthfully online may not hold as true for younger adolescents striving to fit in. Of note, the Zwier et al. (2011) study consisted of a smaller sample of 89 adolescents, which may have led to a lack of representation. Nevertheless, more research is needed on this topic in order to truly understand how accurate self-representation is on SNS.
Barring this contradiction, evidence has been found that SNS exert pressure on young adolescents to project a positive and attractive persona—a “face worthy of Facebook” (Boon & Sinclair, 2009, p. 102). Because identity can be so easily assembled online, it becomes an artificial stage of identity performance (Barnett, 2009). Oftentimes SNS can subtly reinforce gendered expectations. In an analysis of 100 Facebook profiles’ content, girls were more likely to include pictures and references to a significant other than boys were, even though all participants were in a relationship (Magnuson, 2008). This finding implies that young girls are more dependent on others and use relationships to reinforce a sense of self in online presentation more often than young boys do.

SNS have been found to reinforce gender stereotypes in additional ways. Unfortunately, overly sexual and exaggerated representations of the self are commonly found in girls’ online profiles. Explicitly, 10 to 20% of teens share inappropriate images of themselves online (Brown et al., 2009), with young females being more likely than young males to include reference to sexually risky behaviors (Pujazon-Zazik, Manasse, & Orrell-Valente, 2012). As a society, we value what garners public attention. Regrettably, sexualized representations of young girls are displayed because young girls have internalized the social norms that value female sexuality (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Pujazon-Zazik et al., 2012). Young adolescents use SNS to display themselves according to popular standards, which often include the valuing of risky behavior. Furthermore, teens lose sight of the risks associated with sex when sexuality and sexual innuendos are
portrayed as glamorous and funny online (Brown et al., 2009). This can be detrimental both to individual self-conceptualization as well as individual safety and well-being.

The pressure to use alcohol and other substances is also ameliorated by online SNS use among adolescents. Social media allows risky adolescent behavior such as experimentation with drugs and alcohol to be portrayed as normative. 25-37% of older adolescents (high school juniors and seniors) post alcohol related content in the form of pictures and posts on their Facebook profiles (as cited in Litt & Stock, 2011). Because teens spend considerable online time looking at what peers post, there exits a peer pressure online to act in accordance with what others are doing. For example, when young adolescents (13-15 years old) viewed sample profiles of older adolescents, the depiction of alcohol use influenced how the young teens viewed drinking behavior (Litt & Stock, 2011). Explicitly, adolescents who viewed profiles with alcohol use portrayed as normative were more likely to report a higher willingness to use alcohol, more favorable images of alcohol users, more positive attitudes about alcohol use, and less vulnerability to the consequences of drinking than were adolescents who viewed profiles without alcohol depicted (Litt & Stock, 2011). Clearly, exposure to normative alcohol-use online influences young adolescents’ attitudes and perceptions about drinking behavior. SNS illustrate the social norms of the time and because of how widespread and pervasive the reach of SNS, teens could be at increased risk for alcohol and substance use because of them.

Recent media coverage has exposed some of the problems of self-presentation online. For example, presenting oneself in ways that contradict or exceed standards of
popularity (whether in regards to alcohol use or sexuality) can result in cyber-bullying. 88% of teens have seen some sort of bad behavior online (Chang, 2011). Christofides, Muise, and Desmarais (2012) found that young teens report bullying, unwanted contact, unintentional disclosure and misunderstandings as the most common negative experiences online, with bullying being the most prevalent. SNS have become a venue for bullying because of the lack of face-to-face interaction. Overtly, bullies cannot see the painful reaction they cause their targets (Parker & boyd, 2010). The lack of face-to-face interaction results in young teens abusing the power of anonymity. Though cyber-bulling often occurs between teens that know each other, young teens may also get unwanted attention from unknown users. Unfortunately, teens who value popularity and have lower self-esteem tend to disclose more personal information online, making them a target of attention from acquaintances they do not know well as well as unknown users (Christofides et al., 2012). Adolescents’ self-concepts are affected by how others treat them online.

When adolescents choose how to present the online self, there are great risks to consider. Privacy and security settings on SNS are consistently cited as the biggest negative aspect of the sites for parents and adolescents (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Livingstone, 2008) and are increasingly difficult for new users to find (Christofides et al., 2012). Many users are unaware of how to set privacy features and do not consider who may be looking at their information. Paradoxically, SNS encourage users to disclose personal information. In a random sample of 400 Facebook users, 63% of people included birthday, gender, network information and location in their online profile.
As age increases, this percentage drops, indicating that young people are more likely to display personal identifying information online (Nosko et al., 2010). Optimistically, the privacy settings for users under the age of 18 are more restrictive, though the ease of lying about one’s age tends to negate this protection (Christofides et al., 2012). Because SNS are so scalable, one can never know who has access to information and teens may find themselves the recipients of unwanted attention.

Clearly, there are both positive and negative implications of using SNS as a young teen. While adolescents’ self-concepts benefit from online self-expression, the forming of group identities, and social learning, they may be compromised by constant comparison, exaggerated representations of the self, and safety risks. While these effects have been noted across teens, personality characteristics play a potentially large role in how SNS are used by different people.

**Personality and SNS Use**

Recently, research focused on understanding the link between personality characteristics and online behavior has increased. Primarily, people use SNS because of the intrinsic need to belong and as a way of self-presentation. Understandably, these factors are greatly influenced by a user’s personality (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012). Understanding the correlation between personality and SNS can serve as a lens through which to view other research.

Foremost, extraversion, the personality characteristic defined as getting energy from other people, (Neukrug & Fawcett, 2010) has been found to predict SNS use in a
number of ways. Multiple studies of SNS users aged 12-18 found that those high on extraversion were more likely to use Facebook in conjunction with live social activities (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012). Interestingly, extraversion is also positively correlated with number of Facebook friends (Gosling, 2011). It is currently unclear in which direction this relationship goes. In other words, it is unknown whether extroverts are more likely to excessively “friend” others or if others are drawn to “friend” extroverts.

Additionally, Facebook is seen as a fairly accurate representation of the self (Gosling, 2011), though extraversion is one personality trait that is found to be most inflated online (Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Ultimately, people present themselves as more extraverted online than they are in real life interactions. This is seen in being more forward in communication and by the frequency of posting pictures and status updates that indicate social interaction. In teens, this is potentially due to conforming to standards of popularity online as those who are outgoing and have many social interactions are considered popular.

Neuroticism, or the tendency to experience negative emotions, instability, anxiety and anger frequently, (Neukrug & Fawcett, 2010) is also correlated with SNS use. A study by Ross et al. (2009) compared personality results from the NEO-PI-R personality assessment tool to Facebook use (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012). The results demonstrated that those high in neuroticism liked and used the wall component of Facebook communication more and those low in neuroticism spent more time viewing photos (as cited in Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Theoretically, people high in neuroticism enjoy reading and writing as interactions while people low in neuroticism enjoy viewing others
through pictures of positive activity. Neurotic teens have negative emotions more often and may experience the negative implications of SNS more frequently than non-neurotic teens. Explicitly, Facebook is more of an ideal setting for interaction among self-assured teens, though teens with low self-esteem tend to use the site more. Neurotic adolescents spend more time on Facebook potentially in hopes of finding a sense of belongingness and fostering a more positive self-concept (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012).

Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that narcissism predicts Facebook use. As defining features, narcissistic people tend to have a “grandiose sense of self-importance” and are unable to tolerate criticism (Carpenter, 2012, p. 482). Among 294 survey participants, users high in narcissism used Facebook profiles and online photos for self-promotion more often than those low in narcissism (Carpenter, 2012). Other self-promoting behaviors such as retaliating against negative comments, getting angry when people do not comment on one’s status and using Facebook more for seeking social support than for providing it, were evidenced as well (Carpenter, 2012). Additionally, narcissism predicted friend count on Facebook because narcissists were more likely to accept strangers as friends (Carpenter, 2012). Because of the adolescent belief in an imaginary audience and teen egocentrism, narcissistic use of Facebook may be typical of younger adolescents.

Finally, in accordance with research on Internet addiction and frequent use of SNS, loose associations have been found with academic achievement. Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012) reported a study by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) in which a high amount of Facebook use was linked with lower GPA and fewer hours a week spent
studying. This is supplemented by the finding that people low in conscientiousness use Facebook more frequently, possibly as a way to procrastinate (Gosling, 2011). Evidently, personality has interesting implications for SNS use and potential consequences for social and academic behavior.

It is important to use caution when interpreting the results of personality characteristics and their relation to SNS use. In the previously mentioned studies, participants’ personalities were determined with the NEO-PI-R, one self-report assessment of personality that measures personality traits and is not meant as a diagnostic tool. Keeping in mind that only one measure was used, and that there are limitations inherent in self-report assessment, it is essential for research to continue in this field before making broad generalizations about SNS use and personality factors. Additionally, most of the personality research has been done on college students, though important implications are noted for younger populations. Knowing the relations between personality and online SNS use can provide better understanding of both the motivation to use SNS and the consequences of such use, an important aspect for counselors and future researchers to consider.
Chapter Four:

Implications for School Counselors

Undoubtedly, SNS use effects how young adolescents view and represent themselves. While often adept and comfortable navigating online SNS, teens are unaware of the potential effects these sites have on development and identity formation. Educators and school counselors have the opportunity to play a key role in helping to understand SNS in order to facilitate important discussion around the potential implications. This chapter seeks to highlight the school counselor’s role in helping teens use SNS.

School counselors have an important role as leaders of social emotional learning in the school environment. In the past, social emotional learning was confined to areas such as the playground, school hallways, and the mall, and school counselors were able to focus guidance discussion around observable behaviors. Today, SNS are the new, less conspicuous, venue in which social emotional learning takes place. Though online interaction is second nature to most teens, many adults and educators are just now beginning to understand SNS as the media exposes their potentially harmful effects. Parker and boyd (2010) stress that counselors can no longer deny SNS use by young adolescents, and that counselors should take an active role in understanding and explaining their uses and misuses. When counselors better understand SNS, they can better address social emotional and online identity issues in guidance discussions with students, as well as educate parents and the other stakeholders in students’ lives on how to safely navigate the online world.
A suggested first step to understanding SNS is for counselors to set up a profile page on the school’s website (Parker & boyd, 2010). With a school counselor page, both helpers and students become more visible. Unequivocally, some adolescents feel more comfortable in the online setting (Davis, 2012; Schouten et al., 2007) and counselors can facilitate interaction with these students by using SNS as a means of communication. Ethically, there are many things to consider as school counselors begin using online means of communication with their students. School counselors must learn to balance students’ needs with privacy concerns and confidentiality. Additionally, because school counselors will be witness to the discussions and issues brought up on SNS outside of school, a process must be in place for which to bring concerns into the physical school environment for processing and understanding with students.

The importance of understanding SNS use as a school counselor is evidenced by the newly released Facebook guide from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). In April of 2012, ASCA, with the help of Facebook and the iKeepSafe Coalition, released “A School Counselor’s Guide to Facebook.” The guide places great importance on counselors gaining confidence in using and realizing the effects that SNS produce. Specifically, ASCA (2012) recommends four actions school counselors today should take when working towards a comprehensive school-counseling program.

First, school counselors need to help develop school policies surrounding SNS use (ASCA, 2012). This includes setting policies on accessibility on school grounds and rules for use in the school. Working with the administration and the school district, school counselors must decide which websites should be blocked on school computers
and when during the school day students are allowed to access their cell phones.

Secondly, counselors must respond to negatively impactful online incidents such as cyber bullying or any interactions that inhibit the learning process (i.e., dishonest behaviors, cheating) (ASCA, 2012; Selwyn, 2009). Clear punishments for those caught initiating hurtful or dishonest things online must be in place. Additionally, school counselors need to ensure school wide action on policing online behavior. Teaching students how to report abuse, suspected imposter, and bullying behavior to Facebook authorities can help in this process (ASCA, 2012). Thirdly, counselors can assist the school community in detecting at-risk behavior by keeping up with what is going on in the social media world (ASCA, 2012). If counselors keep up with online tendencies, such as sexting, cyberbullying, and unwanted picture sharing, they can better address important issues in the school. Relatedly, through guidance curriculum and student meetings, school counselors should begin addressing online discrepancies in identity presentation (i.e. how the online public self can be idealized and is different from the real self). Finally, school counselors should take an active role in addressing issues of digital citizenship and safe practice online (ASCA, 2012). This process includes understanding SNS scalability and helping students personally adjust privacy settings. For example, school counselors should encourage students to think about their online reputations and the long-term effects these will have (ASCA, 2012).

As Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012) found, frequent use of Facebook is linked to lower GPA and fewer hours spent studying each week for young students. SNS are affecting teens’ lives in numerous ways. As school counselors begin to address social
and personal implications of adolescent SNS use, they must also consider the academic consequences and begin to work with students on time-management and appropriate Internet usage.

Taking an active role with students and the school community is a necessary step in facilitating the role of SNS in young people’s lives. Another important role school counselors have is to educate parents of young adolescents. Many parents do not know how frequently or to what extent their young children are participating in SNS communication. Because potentially significant effects are being reported, parents should be educated about the uses and misuses of the sites. Additionally, parents may need help setting rules in the house on how frequently and when their children may access these sites. Parents should monitor their child’s SNS profile in a couple of specific cases: when plans are made for the parents to be going out of town, and when their child’s behavior is causing concerns and the child will not talk to anyone about what is going on (Wiseman, 2009). Older siblings, if used appropriately, may be used as monitors in between those specific cases (Wiseman, 2009). Additionally, it is suggested that children and parents initially set up online profiles together so that privacy settings and boundaries are decided upon jointly, and consequences for disobeying agreed upon rules are discussed (Wiseman, 2009). Furthermore, parents may help teens depict themselves in real, rather than idealized ways, thus fostering healthy self-conceptualization (Smith & Hung, 2010). With community meetings and parent trainings, school counselors can dispense proactive tips, like the ones mentioned above,
and inform parents about the potential social and academic implications of SNS use and how to promote safe practices online.

Interestingly, the important issues surrounding Facebook and MySpace use have been observed outside of the school and the home and have become important for helpers aside from school counselors to consider. Recently, conversations about SNS have been brought into mental health counseling with young adolescents (Clemens, Shipp & Pisarik, 2008). Explicitly, mental health professionals benefit from using the site in order to better understand young clients. For example, Clemens et al. (2008) described using MySpace as a stimulus for conversation with a young teen on how he was representing himself. In this case, the counselor was able to frame conversations around the inaccuracy of the client’s idealized online representation and compare that to his own self-conceptualization or real self. From there, the young boy was able to express negative feelings and social problems he was having based on inauthentic interactions on MySpace (Clemens et al., 2008). The authors note that using MySpace in the therapy session as a reference tool and also as a homework assignment between sessions is useful in helping young teens acknowledge discrepancies in how they portray themselves (Clemens et al., 2008). Because SNS use is pervasive in the lives of teens, adults working with this population in any capacity should address issues associated with their use.

Counselors need to keep in mind that teens often struggle between their own need to fit in and the need to remain true to the self and safe; their need to display public selves disparate from their real selves (Clemens et al., 2008). Mental health professionals and
educators must continue to promote healthy SNS use especially as teens struggle with
personal values. Siegle (2011) notes that self-monitoring is difficult for young
adolescents to understand in the real world, and the SNS world is no different. As
exemplified, adolescents will benefit from adult guidance on how to act appropriately
online as well as how to be safe and private with their information.
Chapter Five:

Conclusion

Adolescent identity development has long been a topic of research interest. The interaction between one’s real, ideal, and public selves has been studied while considering the imaginary audience, social comparisons, and conforming behavior typical of young populations. The adolescent self is most conceptualized in relation to others, because of the importance teens place on peer feedback.

While still true, online social networking use has changed where and when the process of identity formation takes place. Teens are using SNS in increasing percentages in order to connect with friends, share photos and posts, and get feedback on current trends. Research shows that teen use of SNS has both positive and negative effects on self-concept and identity development. Positively, teens are afforded a place to enhance group identity, express themselves, connect with others in a safe space, and develop digital communication skills. Negatively, adolescents are subject to pervasive comparison, evaluation, and the tendency to over-disclose. More than anything, SNS create space for a more constant self-evaluation process because of the ubiquitous presence of SNS in our lives. Furthermore, SNS research has found links between frequency and type of online use and personality characteristics such as extraversion, narcissism and conscientiousness.

Because of the implication of these associations, it is important for school counselors and other educators to begin addressing SNS use with the adolescents they work with. School counselors can work with the school on policies concerning use and
behavior, with students on accurate online representation and processing, and with parents on how to help their children use these sites effectively and appropriately. As counselors and parents assist young students in using SNS, more research in the field is needed to better understand the process as a whole.

**Directions for Future Research**

Clearly, the recent proliferation and subsequent implications of SNS is a growing area of research. The last four years particularly have seen an incredible development of diverse study (see Figure 2). While this paper has described SNS and explored the implications of using SNS on young adolescents’ self-conceptualization, it has also

![Research on Social Networking Sites](image-url)

*Figure 2. Growth of research on Social Networking Sites over 12 years.*
identified a lack of data on the connection between SNS and identity development research. Furthermore, there is a general lack of research on dynamic website use (Guzzetti, 2006).

At this time, the literature on SNS use is evidently descriptive, explorative, and case-based. Because SNS is a recent phenomenon and educators and counselors are just starting to investigate and understand the effects, more empirical research is needed. Additionally, while case studies and qualitative research has spiked within the last few years, experimental data with prominent samples is lacking. Furthermore, the features of SNS change consistently and research exploring how specific features (e.g. the “like” button, timeline, tagging photos, and web-design features like pull down menus) relate to how teens view themselves and how and what they disclose is important. Further, the number and variety of SNS is also rapidly changing, forcing researchers to stay abreast of the newest trends. Finally, research dissemination (i.e. journal articles and books) needs to be more efficient to accommodate the fast-pace nature of SNS trends.

While recent research interest lies in college age populations, personality, and Internet addiction, young adolescents have been partially ignored. Prior to September 2006, Facebook use was limited to those with an .edu or .org e-mail address, meaning use among high school students and younger individuals was limited (Gajaria et al., 2011). After 2006, Facebook policy allowed any user 13 years and older to join, however, this policy is not readily enforced and many adolescents under the age of 13 are Facebook users. As a result, research on SNS use among young populations is just taking off and should pursue further exploration of this unique population. Siegle (2011) suggests that
more research is needed on SNS use in middle school populations because these students are the first “digital natives”. As the first generation of true digital natives, young adolescents face a new venue for development as well as socialization processes. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine what differential effects this generation of digital natives will face when compared to previous generations. For example, research should look at how communication skills and personal expression are affected by more constant SNS use. Research in this area has the potential to influence educators in better facilitating change to the online arena as well as helping to reduce negative influences on academic and social outcomes.

Likewise, research should focus on bringing digitization into school classrooms in order to better communicate with students of the digital age (Siegle, 2011). Twenty-first century teens learn in different ways than students of the past, because of their access to technology and worldwide communication. Bringing aspects of digital life into the classroom and schools may prove beneficial for student achievement and success. With the present day emphasis on accountability and school achievement, this area of research is especially needed.

Finally, many other factors have the potential to influence SNS uses that have not been investigated yet. For example, Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012) noted that no study has looked at the difference of Facebook disclosure between collectivist and individualistic cultures. Potentially, self-representations and subsequent self-conceptualizations are greatly influenced by cultural background. While SNS are used worldwide, cultural factors may also play an important role in how SNS are used and
discussed. Research comparing young teens from multicultural backgrounds is currently lacking.

While continued research in the field is clearly needed, there is current evidence to support ongoing implications of adolescent SNS use on self-conceptualization, peer interaction, and communication. This paper does not intend to decide if SNS are good or bad. SNS are proliferating rapidly; thus, it is not important to consider how to thwart their use. Undeniably, current and future teens will use SNS. It is now the role of educators and researchers to promote the research and understanding of SNS, and to foster adolescent advocacy in using them in a safe and effective way. Adolescents are unique in their use of SNS because of their developing identities. More research needs to be pointed towards this population in order to decipher the long-term effects of SNS use on such development. While interesting implications have been found through anecdotal and qualitative research, more empirical work is needed to further clarify identity development effects from SNS use.

Data was compiled by author by searching four online databases (PsychInfo, Science and Technology Collection, Communication and Mass Media Complete and ERIC) through the University of Texas at Austin online library system. Author searched by terms Social Networking Site and by year for 2000-2004, 2004-2008, and 2008-2012. Figure was created in Microsoft’s Excel.
References


3(2),158-169.


VITA

Brianna Kathleen Livsey was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts on May 26, 1987, the daughter of Melissa Jane Livsey and Mark William Livsey. After completing her high-school work at St. Stephens’ Episcopal School in Austin, Texas in 2005, she attended the University of California at Berkeley. In May 2009, Brianna graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The University of California at Berkeley. Upon graduation, she received a Teaching Grant from the Department of Education in Spain to teach English to Elementary and Middle School students in Logroño, Spain. Following that, she was employed as an Assistant Teacher in a first grade classroom at Trinity Episcopal School in Austin, Texas. In 2011, she entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent E-mail Address: bklivsey@utexas.edu

This report was typed by the author.