YDi youth development initiative

SEQUOR

Social Media's Influence on Youth
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INTRODUCTION
While young people have always been influenced by media, social media's impact on youth is creating additional challenges and opportunities. A recent study by Nielson found that nearly 80 percent of active Internet users visit social media sites (Nielson, 2011). The National School Boards Association found that youth aged 9 to 17 spent an average of nine hours a week on social networking sites (National School Board Association, 2007). For young people, technological changes, such as the Internet on cell phones, iPads and other tablets, and better computer capabilities make access to social media easier.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS
1. Time spent on social media sites is increasing.
2. Cases of cyberbullying — bullying through social media sites — are escalating.
3. Age limitations on social media sites are inadequate.
4. Parental controls on access to social media are lacking; monitoring youth online is becoming more difficult for parents.

DETAILS ON RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS
Time spent on social media sites is increasing.
Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are becoming more popular with youth. In 2009, 15.8 percent of time spent on the Internet was on social networking sites. By 2010, the percentage had risen to 22.7 percent (Nielson, 2011). The ability to access to social media sites through cell phones, iPads and other mobile Internet devices has increased the amount of time youth spend on these sites. For example, nearly 40 percent of social media users access their accounts from a mobile phone, and social networking apps are the third most-used among U.S. smartphone owners (Nielson).

Cases of cyberbullying — bullying through social media sites — are escalating.
Cyberbullying is the "electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person" (Cyberbullying, Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The anonymity of social media sites offers cyberbullies a vehicle. Even cyberbullies who choose not to be anonymous do not have to confront their victim face-to-face, and instead hide behind their computer screens, which is believed to make these attacks easier. A survey conducted by The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 39 percent of social media users had experienced some form of cyberbullying, as compared to 23 percent of non-social media users (Lenhart, 2007).

Age limitations on social media sites are inadequate.
Currently, Facebook requires users to be at least 13 years old. However, a study by Boyd found that 31 percent of 10-year-olds, 44 percent of 11-year-olds, and 55 percent of 12-year-olds reported using a social network site (Boyd, 2011). Social media sites cannot verify a user's age. If the user has a valid email address and indicates that he or she is at least 13 years old, access is available. Other sites, such as Twitter, have no age limit.

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Parental controls on access to social media are lacking; monitoring youth online is becoming more difficult for parents.
Parental controls, especially for younger adolescents, are a necessary evil. Youth may feel that parental controls are an invasion of privacy, while parents feel that they are protecting their children from dangers in an on-line world. Sites such as Facebook and Myspace currently do not have any direct parental controls. Parents can "friend" their children to watch what they are posting; however, new privacy settings allow a young user to block people, including parents, from seeing what is posted.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
Parents need to work with their children on using safety precautions when on social media sites. Thirty-one percent of youth surveyed by the National School Board Association (2007) reported posting inappropriate pictures and sharing personal information with strangers. Youth need to be taught of the dangers of putting their personal information online. Information that is posted online can never be permanently erased. Parents and their children should establish privacy settings, and the children should learn to check to be sure that their privacy settings have not changed. Updates on social media sites involve changes to privacy settings. Parents should also discuss with their children the impact of cyberbullying and the importance of not engaging in this behavior.

Social media sites need to create parental controls and impose more severe penalties for cyberbullies. Changes in privacy settings should also be easier to recognize so youth can keep their privacy settings on private.

AREAS WHERE ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IS STILL NEEDED
Social media sites are still relatively new. Current studies show the immediate effect of social media in the life of youth; however, long-term effects have not been studied. Social media is expected to be a part of young people's lives for the foreseeable future, and more communication and media options are likely to become available. Further research on creating ways for parents to successfully talk to their children about social media should be conducted.

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