Sex, Drugs ‘N Facebook: Social media and adolescent health

Megan A. Moreno, MD, MSEd, MPH
Seattle Children’s Research Institute
Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development
PI: Social media and adolescent health research team (SMAHRT)
Associate Professor, University of Washington
Division of adolescent medicine
Outline: Part 1

• Who r u?
• Setting the stage
  – Adolescent health
  – The social media landscape
• Sex, Drugs ‘N Facebook: What information do adolescents post about health on social media?
• Challenges and Opportunities

• The Healthy Internet Use Model
Learning Objectives: Part 1

- Discuss ways in which the technology of social media can be used towards improving adolescent health
- Determine the risks of social media use to adolescent health
- Discuss key components of the Health Internet Use model for clinicians to use when advising teens.
Who r u?

• Adolescent medicine specialist
  – Pediatrician with extra training to care for adolescents age 12-22

• Clinician scientist
  – Research ideas come “from the patient bedside”
Social Media and Adolescent Health Research team (SMAHRT)

• Our mission is to advance society’s understanding of the relationship between media and adolescent health towards
  – Educating adolescents and their families
  – Providing better health care for teens
  – Developing innovations in adolescent healthcare
Our research team

Our values include

-An interdisciplinary approach with emphasis on using ethical and sound research practices
  • Trainees include undergraduates, graduate students, post docs, residents, fellows
  • Trainees with backgrounds in public health, education, communication, marketing, sociology
Our research team

Our values include

• Partnering with other researchers, educators, clinicians and community members in the development and translation of our research projects

• A diverse and collaborative research team
Our core areas

**Our vision** is to provide education to adolescents and families towards safe internet use, to develop tools to assess internet use and define problematic internet use, and to both create and interpret messages within social media to promote healthy behaviors.
Adolescent health
Risks and precursors

- Behaviors
  - Substance use
  - Risky sexual behaviors
- Co-morbidities
  - Depression
Adolescent Development
Challenges of adolescent and young adult health

- They don’t go to the doctor
  - Among the healthiest members of our population and are least likely to see a doctor
- If they do go to the doctor, many are not asked about these risks
  - Less than half of teens are screened for substance use and depression when visiting a pediatrician
Gifts and opportunities of adolescence and young adulthood

- They are
  - Resilient
  - Strong
  - Curious
  - Always capable of surprising us….
What new risks does social media present to adolescents?

Can social media offer new opportunities for early identification, prevention or intervention?
The social media landscape
Teens and social media

• Across the globe, youth are the early adopters and the trendsetters
Top sites

• Still.....
  – Facebook
  – Twitter
United States

India

Facebook use
Twitter use

- Twitter age demographics
  - 15-19 (31%)
  - 20-24 (35%)
  - 25-29 (15%)
  - 30-34 (7%)
  - 35-39 (4%)
  - 40-44 (3%), 45-49 (2%), 50-54 (2%) and 55-60 (1%)
Twitter use

• **Top 10 Twitter countries, per capita use**
  – Kuwait, Netherlands, Brunei, UK, USA, Chile, Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Puerto Rico

• **Top 10 Twitter countries, number of users**
  – USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Netherlands, France, India, South Africa

• **Top Twitter accounts**
  – Katy Perry *(over 50 million followers)*, Justin Bieber, Barack Obama, Lady Gaga
Diverse social media sites

- Netherlands: Hyves
- Norway: Bijp
- Russia: Vkontakte
- India: Orkut
- Korea: CyWorld
- Japan: Mixi
Diverse social media use

• While many adolescents use Facebook and Twitter, many also use indigenous social media sites to
  – nurture local networks
  – communicate in their own language
  – share content that relates to local culture

Current trends

• The social media “portfolio”

• 72% of youth are “constantly connected”
What information about health risk behaviors do adolescents post on social media?
• 500 randomly selected public MySpace profiles of 18-year-olds
  – Substance use 41%
    • Alcohol 37%
    • Tobacco 13%
    • Drugs 10%
  – Sex 24%
  – Violence 14%
  – Any of these 54%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of reference</th>
<th>Example from Web profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behavior</td>
<td>Listed “sex” as a hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use</td>
<td>“Friday night I drank until I pissed 80 proof.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco use</td>
<td>Answered survey question “how do you deal with stress?” with “Cigarettes, man”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>“My favorite Friday night date is Mary Jane.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>“And if you think you’re a playa I’ll kick your ass.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Memes and downloaded icons

Let’s pre-drink until we’re too wasted to go out!

iHookah

MakeYourSpace.com
Status updates
  – Problem drinking
    • really hungover, should not have been driving last night!
• Status updates
  – Substance use
  • *Smoking in my room and my mom knocked, thank goodness for sliding glass doors*
Personal pictures
Challenges

1. Population level
2. Individual teens
Population concerns

- Negative influence on teens
  - Traditional influences on teen behavior include peers and the media
Population concerns

• Negative influence on teens
  – Traditional influences on teen behavior include peers and the media

Studies have shown that perception of peer use is among the strongest predictors of substance use and initiation of sexual activity.
Population concerns

• Negative influence on teens
  – Traditional influences on teen behavior include peers and the media

Studies have shown that seeing representations of substance use or sex in media such as television and movies are associated with initiation of these behaviors
Population concerns

• Negative influence on teens
  – Traditional influences on teen behavior include peers and the media
  – Social media is peer generated media!
Population concerns

• Negative influence on teens
  – Example studies
  • One study found that teens felt that representations of alcohol on social media were “believable” and worried they would influence younger teens (Moreno et al, 2010)
  • One study found that teens who viewed alcohol references on teen profiles stated they were more interested in trying alcohol (Litt et al, 2011)
Patient concerns

- Anna is a 15 year old female who is overweight and has depression. She recently stopped going to school because of bullying that happened on Facebook. She received Facebook messages telling her she should “just kill herself and save us all a lot of trouble.” Her parents don’t know what to do and Anna refuses to talk about the bullying.
Patient concerns

• Her family is at a loss for what to do so they allow her to stay home from school.
• She has not been to school for 2 months.
• What can we do for her?
Opportunities?

• Studies of traditional bullying have shown that interacting with even just one person can reduce distress related to bullying
  – Can this interaction happen online?
• Stopbullying.gov
• Thatsnotcool.org
Opportunities

1. Social support
2. Interventions
Social support

• What ways are youth finding to use social media for support in tough situations?
Social support

- A panel of teen and young adult cancer survivors was interviewed about the role of social media during their diagnosis, treatment and recovery
- A few themes emerged
Social support
Theme 1: Information distribution

• “I was diagnosed with cancer on vacation, I went to Florida for spring break and ended up in the hospital being told I had a brain tumor. I had a suitcase full of bathing suits and no family around and was heading into a 14 hour surgery. I needed to get information out there fast so people would know what was happening and how to help. I used Facebook.”
Theme 2: Social connection

• “I was in active treatment and in patient isolation for 28 days. I used Facebook and Twitter to keep up with friends and family so that I didn’t feel so isolated.”
Theme 3: Missing out but keeping up

• “I had a hard time looking at photos of what my friends were doing at the holidays, it really showed me how different my life was at that time. But I decided to be positive about it and be glad I could let them know what I was up to.”
Theme 4: Support from unlikely places

• “I found other teen cancer patients on Twitter and got information from them, now I use it to try to find newly diagnosed patients and help mentor them.”
Interventions on social media

• What other potentials for interventions are possible?
Interventions on social media

- People identifying concerns based on youth posts
  - Reaching out, offering resources
  - Parents, resident advisors, peer leaders, trusted adults
  - Teens are open to this but HOW they are approached is critical
Interventions on social media

- People identifying concerns based on youth posts

  - Example study:
    - Young adults were open to being approached about depression symptoms posted on Facebook
    - “I’d want them to approach me in person and ask questions, not judge”

Interventions on social media

• **Automated responses**
  – Automated response to keywords on profiles
  – Example programs:
    • National suicide hotline
    • Message pops up if post about suicide on Facebook
Interventions on social media

• **Automated responses**
  – Upsides: Promising approach at population level
  – Downsides: Not all people post about suicide by calling it “suicide”
  – Possible conditions: Depression, anxiety, bullying, addiction
  – Alternatives: Consider linking keywords to Facebook ad to pop up: Inexpensive and wide reach
The Healthy Internet Use Model
What key risks should an approach address?

- Exposure/exposing inappropriate information
- Overuse and lack of balance in offline/online time
- Inappropriate interactions and communications
Exposure to inappropriate information: viewer

- Health risk behaviors
  - Substance use, sexual behavior
  - Cinnamon challenge, rooftopping
- Inaccurate information
  - Cure cancer with licorice!
- Information that is not age appropriate
Exposing inappropriate information: poster

- Digital footprint begins at birth
- Negative content is
  - Published
  - Persuasive
  - Portable
  - Permanent!!!
Overuse and lack of balance

- Problematic internet use
- Online more: more likely to be exposed to inappropriate information
- Lack of opportunity to develop offline communication skills, peer groups, identity
- Physical health: obesity, eyesight, sleep, headaches
Inappropriate communication

- Sexting
- Cyberbullying, electronic harassment
  – #badmove
Key concepts in promoting internet safety

• Social media is influential:
  – Consideration of boundaries in what information teens are exposed to online
  – Consideration of boundaries in what information teens share online and to whom

• Social media presents new opportunities to identify at-risk teens:
  – Communication strategies in talking with teens about what they post
Key concepts in promoting internet safety

• Problematic internet use
  – Internet addiction
  – Overuse of the internet
  – Problem of balancing online and offline time

• Cyberbullying
  – Electronic harassment
  – Problems with boundaries in what to say and communication failures
Healthy Internet Use Model

• Developed with the American Academy of Pediatrics
  – Balance
  – Boundaries
  – Communication
Balance

- Balance refers to appropriate balance between online and offline life
Balance

• Example tips
  – Create a family media use plan
  • Set times that are “off limits” for media use
    – Family dinner
    – Media curfew

Parents: Make sure you follow these rules too!
Balance

• Example tips
  – Create a family media use plan
  • Designate places in the house that are media-free zones
    – The “sacred bedroom”
Balance

• Ideas from teens:
  – 19-year-old: “I think that for every hour online, you should have to read for one hour and do something else for another hour”
Balance

• Ideas from teens:
  – 12 year olds: “I think you should get 3 hours on weeknights and 6 hours on weekends”
  • “No WAY! In my house we get 1 ½ hours on weekdays and 3 hours on weekends!”
  • “In my house we just have to shut everything off at 10pm”
Balance

• Ideas from teens
  – 16-year-old: “It should be really clear whether TV is included in this”
  – 15-year-old: “Homework shouldn’t count”
  – 13-year-old: “This should probably be different once we get to high school”
Boundaries

• Boundaries refers to setting limits around what information the youth seeks online, and what information he/she displays
  – Setting boundaries early in what a youth posts is great prevention for internet safety risks such as cyberbullying, unwanted predation, posting inappropriate material
Boundaries

• **Example tips**
  
  – Set “dates” or “appointments” to review the Facebook page together
  
  • Ask questions in an inquisitive manner
    
    – “I haven’t heard you mention this friend before, tell me about him”
    
    – “I see that this friend posted a joke about pot, what do you think about posting about pot on Facebook?”
Ideas from 12-13 year old teens

- “If you click something and it’s yucky you gotta click that red X real FAST and then tell your mom what happened”

- “Younger kids should focus on sites that are safe for kids, like watching videos on Sesame Street and not YouTube”
Boundaries: What you post

• Ideas from teens
  – 19-year-old: “If you are signing up for a new site and information is optional that means you don’t need to put it in. It’s not like school where you need to complete every section.”
  – 18-year-old: “My friend showed me how to set privacy settings on my Facebook”
  – “I’m 12 now and when I got my Facebook a few years ago I didn’t really know how to do this stuff…now I’m kind of an expert”
Best quote ever

• “HEY! I think I have a METAPHOR! So here it is. You shouldn’t do things online that would be weird in real life. Like, you wouldn’t walk up to a stranger on the street and tell them your address or show them your cleavage, so don’t do that online! And you wouldn’t go looking in a dumpster for something gross just for fun, so don’t go looking for gross stuff online!”

(12 year old)
Communication

• Regular and open communication is a key to internet safety
  – Have these conversations “early and often”
• Listen for prompts from a youth on when to re-open communication
  – Media stories: local news
  – “This happened” stories: “At school today a kid got in trouble for posting about beer on Tumblr.”
Communication

• You don’t have to be a techno-wiz or social media guru….you don’t have to even “like” technology!

• Try a “shared expertise” approach
  – Let the youth be the tech expert
  – You can then apply your clinical and mentoring skills to talk about safety, friendships and enjoyment of life offline

How is Twitter different than Tumblr?
Communication

• Ideas from teens
  – 18-year-old: “I like it when my dad let me show him how Instagram works, it made me feel important and it was cool that he liked my photos”
  – 16-year-old: “My school counselor asks us about our Facebook privacy settings…..that’s ok, I know she cares about us”
  – 20-year-old: “I talk to my aunt a lot, she doesn’t know much about technology but she, like, has good advice on life and stuff”
Communication

• Rolling with resistance
  – Ask questions, show curiosity
    • “I know this is important to you, that’s why I’m interested”
  – Try again
    • “Let’s touch base on this again next time”
  – Let them be the teacher/expert
    • “I’d love for you to teach me about this”
    • “I have other teens I see who talk to me about this, would you mind teaching me so I can help them better?”
Take home points

• For today’s teens social media is woven into the fabric of their daily lives
  – New source of information about what’s normal

• Reflecting on adolescent development can help provide perspective and understanding

• We can support teens and parents in providing internet safety education
Outline: Part 1

• Who r u?
• Setting the stage
  – Adolescent health
  – The social media landscape
• Sex, Drugs ‘N Facebook: What information do adolescents post about health on social media?
• Challenges and Opportunities
• The Healthy Internet Use Model
Resources

• AAP Media Use Plan: www.aap.org
• Commonsense media: www.commonsensemedia.org
Media Time Family Pledge

At the beginning and end of the day, the best way to keep our kids safe online is to parent them. Kids learn best with small lessons over time as opposed to one big lecture or sit-down talk. Looking for teachable moments when your kids are using the computer will have much more staying power than talking about the issue out of the blue. Similarly, bringing up a headline from the news about a child in the same peer bracket can pack a powerful teaching punch.

The following is a Family Time Media Pledge that you can use for your family. Use this as a starting point and modify as needed for your family’s needs. The goal is to incorporate technology into our lives in a meaningful way that allows us to have a healthy balance of online and off-line time.

Kids and Teens

- I will never give out personal information online or by text and will avoid all chat rooms except ones my mom and dad have looked at and approved.
- I understand my parents have a right to check into my media history on my computer and phone and other devices such as iPod Touch, games, and whatever else I use regularly. I will try and keep my total screen time to 2 hours a day except when doing a project for school, or when my parents give me permission.
- I will not watch shows or play games that are inappropriate for me or for friends and family watching or playing with me.

Parents

- I will check what my kids are doing online and on their phones, consider using parent controls, and use them judiciously.
- I will let my kids know before I check their computers or enable parent controls on their computers or gaming units.
- I will take the time to be interested in what my kids are doing online and in the digital world and talk to them about that world.
- I will help them make good media choices.
- If my child makes a mistake, I will ask questions and learn what happened before I punish or take away technology.
- I will only take away technology as a last resort for defying our family pledge when other consequences have failed to work, such as reinforcing the rules and increase off-line chores.
Prevention

• Quote from a school administrator:
  – “Who has a stake in this? Well, society does. We want a society in which we use technology in a balanced and productive way. So we all---teachers, counselors, health care providers, law enforcement, community workers, even churches and sports coaches---have a role in teaching and modeling appropriate technology use. We all have a role to play.”
Keep in touch

Website: www.smahrtresearch.com

Follow us on Twitter @SMAHRTeam

Like us on Facebook!