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Katherine Wiscomb
Face to Face: The Impacts of
Facebook on Young Adults' Self-
Esteem

ABSTRACT

This study explored the possible implications social media sites, such as Facebook, have on young adults' self-esteem. The phenomenon of online friend-networking sites has increased over the past decade, and utilizing such sites has become a part of daily living for many individuals. This study also examined how individuals present themselves online--whether they post photos or status updates that represent who they are, or by presenting their *hoped for* self, their *best* self, or who they think others want them to be. While the findings indicated that participants experience a range of feelings while utilizing the Facebook networking site, the majority of individuals reported experiencing an increase in self-esteem and feelings more connected to their 'friends' while utilizing the site.

Two hundred and ninety six individuals completed an original mixed-methods online survey to examine how young individuals selectively present themselves on Facebook, and on whether they received the validation and support they expected to receive through their use of Facebook. The implications of Facebook interactions on their self-esteem was also examined. Generally, the findings revealed that individuals experience an increase in self-esteem and feelings of connectedness to their "friends" while utilizing the Facebook networking site.

**FACE TO FACE:
THE IMPACTS OF FACEBOOK ON YOUNG ADULTS' SELF-ESTEEM**

A project based upon independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2013

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Theo, I'm breaking up with you for the final time.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 2004 Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in an effort to “make the world more open and connected” (*Key facts about Facebook*). Social media sites such as Facebook and MySpace offer ubiquitous opportunities for instantaneous connections with friends, classmates, and strangers who share similar interests (O’Keeffe, G., & Clarke-Pearson, K, 2011, also cited in Ellison, N, B., Steinfield, C., &Lampe, C 2007, also cited in Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J, 2010). At the end of March 2012, there were more than 901 million monthly active users, and on average 398 million active users on Facebook for least six out of seven days (*Key facts about Facebook*). The phenomena of online *friend*-networking sites has increased dramatically in the United States over the past decade (O’Keeffe, G., & Clarke-Pearson, K, 2011), leaving people wondering what the possible implications are on users’ psychological, emotional, and social development.

In prior clinical work with young people, I observed how social media sites impacted young individuals in connecting with one another, influencing identity development, and having both positive and negative impacts on self-esteem. Individuals I have worked with have boasted about the number of “Likes” they received on a photo, described feeling threatened by their “friends” appearances and desirability on sites, and discussed feelings of rejection from seeing photos from parties they were not invited to. The purpose of this study is to explore the possible implications social media sites, such as Facebook, have on young adults’ self -esteem.

Although friend-networking sites have become tremendously popular among individuals of all ages, there is a significant gap in research focused specifically on the possible consequences these sites have on young adults' (ages 18-30 years) self-esteem (Valkenburg, P., & Schouten 2006). I believe this research will illuminate a vital clinical issue that will continue to grow in significance as the reality of instantaneous connections, and rejections, takes root in every day interactions between individuals. Examining the link between Facebook and self-esteem is valuable to the social work profession because one's own beliefs "influence how they act in particular situations, the goals they pursue in life, how they feel about life events and relationship partners, and the way in which they cope with and adapt to new environments" (Robins, Tracy, Trzeniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001, p. 425). As young adults continue to increase the amount of time spent on social media sites, their self-esteem is greatly affected and could directly impact their perception of self, their perception of others and the world, and their ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships.

It may be possible that more young adults will seek out therapeutic services due to experiencing mental health symptoms correlated with extensive Facebook use, rejection from Facebook "friends," or struggles to create and maintain face-to-face friendships. My hope is that the findings from this research will help educate social work professionals about possible clinical implications of social media use, guide social work professionals in their interventions, increase professionals' understanding of young adults and their generational insistence to be continually interconnected with peers, and lead to a larger discussion of ongoing identity development on young adults' self-esteem.

The following chapters will explore research related to the topic of social media and its impacts on individuals' feelings of connectedness and self-esteem. The majority of research

examined in the following chapter focuses on social media and the impact it plays in one's adjustment into different life phases (transitions from high school into college), and possible impacts on adolescent development. Due in part to the lack of literature on social media and its impact on psychological well-being, the intent of this study is to examine the following questions:

- 1) How does social media impact individuals' self-esteem either positively or negatively?
- 2) Is young adults' self-esteem affected by the validation they receive or do not receive on information and photos posted on social media sites?
- 3) As young adults utilize Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with others, are they in fact becoming more isolated from people around them?
- 4) Are individuals presenting information or pictures on Facebook that portray them differently than how they view themselves in effort to feel more connected or accepted by their "friends"?

My hope is to expand the knowledge base of social work clinicians, parents, and individuals of all ages about the possible implications social media has on young adults' self-esteem.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

A recent poll conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that young people log on to their favorite social media sites more than 10 times per day giving evidence that a large part of “social and emotional development is occurring while on the internet” (O’Keeffe, G., & Clarke-Pearson, K, 2011, p. 800). With the onset that young adults are using *friend*-networking sites more frequently, I hypothesize that much of one’s identity and self-esteem are created and impacted within the electronic walls of Facebook. However there is a significant gap in the existing literature on the implications of social media on young adults’ self-esteem (Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. P, 2006). This research study aims to address this issue, which has clinical implications in treating and supporting young adults.

In this chapter I will examine the following categories: social media and its implications on self-esteem, photo sharing and the impact of receiving feedback, self-psychology theory, and ego psychology. This research study will be focused on the following questions:

- 1.) How does social media impact individuals’ self-esteem either positively or negatively?
- 2.) Is self-esteem affected by the validation young adults receive or do not receive on information and photos posted on social media sites?
- 3.) As young adults’ utilize Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with others, are they in fact becoming more isolated from people around them?

4.) Are individuals presenting information or pictures on Facebook that portray them differently than how they view themselves in an effort to feel more connected or accepted by their “friends”?

I hope to demonstrate through this quantitative study that when individuals do not receive feedback and validation on the information and pictures they selectively choose to share on Facebook, one’s self will be destabilized leading to a diminished self-esteem.

Social Media

Social networking sites have increased drastically in the United States over the past decade (O’Keeffe, G., & Clarke-Pearson, K, 2011). Social networking sites vary in the types of relationships they focus on, ranging from *dating* sites, *interest* networking sites, *professional* networking sites, and *friend*-networking sites. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on *friend*-networking sites, specifically focusing on the Facebook networking site. Although *friend*-networking sites have become tremendously popular among individuals of all ages, there is a significant gap in research focused specifically on the possible consequences these friend sites have had on young adults’ self-esteem. While there is a range of ages in the term “young adults,” I focus on individuals who are 18 to 30 years of age in this study.

In 2004 Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in an effort to “make the world more open and connected” (*Key facts about Facebook*). At the end of March 2012 there were approximately “901 million monthly active users, and on average 398 million users who were actively on Facebook for at least six out of seven days” (*Key facts about Facebook*). Having worked with young adults in my internship placement last year, it became evident to me that social media sites are shaping how young individuals are connecting with others, impacting their identity development, and having both positive and negative effects on their self-esteem.

The Facebook Newsroom, a website launched by Facebook to keep users updated on the latest Facebook news, announcements, and media resources stated that by the end of March 2012, more than 125 billion friend connections were created through Facebook (*Key facts about Facebook*). In a study created to examine the difference between real life and internet social networks in order to explore how both types of social networks affect one's ability to connect with others, one's view of self, and one's personality style, Acar (2008) suggests that through the availability of social networking sites, individuals are able to establish relationships with others that they would like to know for professional or personal reasons. With an increase of social networking sites, and the opportunity for individuals to become "friends" with strangers on the rise, Acar (2008) argues that interactions with strangers may increase self-esteem as it allows the individual to feel accepted, and part of a larger social group.

In his research study of 451 undergraduate college students, Acar (2008) found that "self-esteem significantly predicts the number of strangers in the network and a corresponding anxiety level" (p. 78). The findings revealed that individuals with higher self-esteem had a smaller number of friends on social networking sites who were people they barely knew or did not know at all. Individuals with higher self-esteem also reported experiencing lower levels of anxiety. This may suggest that anxious individuals utilize social media sites differently than others. Individuals who are anxious or who experience lower levels of self-esteem may utilize Facebook in an effort to create friendships in a less threatening way. It may be possible they are becoming friends with strangers to create meaningful relationships from a safe distance, in order to minimize the risk of rejection. Acar (2008) suggested that college-age individuals with high self-esteem would have a lower percentage of stranger "friends," meaning the majority of friend requests accepted were peers the individual already knew, as opposed to people they did not

know. While Acar's research focused on self-esteem in relation to the type of relationships individuals create through Facebook, I am interested in examining the psychological implications of these relationships on young adults' self-esteem, and what role the Facebook networking site is playing in young adults' overall evaluation of the self.

On the Facebook networking site, an individual creates a profile that displays information about him or herself. Individuals may choose to display information regarding current and past places of employment, interests and hobbies, places traveled, relationship status, and educational level. It is possible for an individual to "Like" pages relating to hobbies, interests, musicians, celebrities, local shops, and sport teams. An individual may upload photos directly on their "Wall," write status updates, and "check in" at certain locations such as restaurants, gyms, sporting events, and concert arenas. Individuals have the opportunity to "Comment" on or "Like" their "friends'" Facebook pictures, "Wall" posts, "check ins", and information. I postulate that through the mirroring experiences of receiving feedback and validation on the information and pictures one selectively chooses to share on Facebook, individuals' will have opportunities to create a strong and vibrant self and an increased feeling of self-esteem. Conversely, if individuals do not receive feedback and validation on the information and pictures they selectively choose to share on Facebook, I propose that a young individual may feel dejected leading to a diminished self-esteem.

Social Media: Implications on Self-Esteem

Examining the link between Facebook and self-esteem is valuable to the social work profession because "individuals' belief about themselves influence how they act in particular situations, the goals they pursue in life, how they feel about life events and relationship partners, and the way in which they cope with and adapt to new environments" (Robins, Tracy,

Trzeniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001, p. 425). As young adults continue to increase the amount of time spent on social media sites, their self-esteem is affected either positively or negatively, their perception of self may shift, and their ability to create meaningful relationships may change.

Joinson (2003) compiled a list of motives for using the Internet, one of which was the reality that many users turn to the Internet for self-enhancement, self-protection, and self-esteem purposes (Joinson, 2003). Others get online to find meaning in their lives, to affiliate with other people, and to find a sense of self-control and self-efficacy (Joinson, 2003). Zywicka and Danowski (2008) state “Affiliation can provide Internet users with pleasure from mental stimulation, heightened self-esteem from praise, an opportunity to compare one’s self to others to gain more self knowledge, and can also provide social support” (Zywicka & Danowski 2008, p. 8; also cited in Joinson, 2003; Hog & Abrams, 1993).

In 2002, a study was conducted to test whether the Internet has had any negative effect on users (Shaw & Grant). Researchers conducted five Internet chat sessions examining loneliness, depression, self-esteem, and perceived social support among undergraduate students. The results showed that participants who chatted anonymously on the Internet experienced a dramatic decrease in depression and loneliness over the course of the eight-week study. One reason participants experienced such a dramatic decrease in loneliness and depressive symptoms was attributed to the participants’ perception of social support, which then led to an increase in self-esteem. While Facebook lacks anonymity, it may be possible that Facebook users also experience a decrease in depression and an increase in self-esteem due to feeling more connected with individuals, creating a sense of community, and feeling accepted from their Facebook friends. Shaw and Larry argue, “anonymity allows people to express and experiment with

aspects of their identity that they might feel compelled to suppress or keep hidden in their everyday lives” (Shaw & Grant 2002, p. 169). I hypothesize that although Facebook is not an anonymous venue, its users feel a similar ease in expressing “hidden” aspects of their identity. As an international networking site, individuals may feel more comfortable sharing aspects about themselves, in hopes that they will discover other individuals who share similar beliefs. With the reality that Facebook draws individual users from various countries around the world, individuals may utilize the site in an effort to find others that they can relate to or connect with in ways that they do not feel comfortable doing within their own or local community. Connecting with others internationally or in remote parts of the United States may allow individuals the opportunity to express their *true* self, aspects of themselves they keep hidden from those living within their community out of fear of rejection, isolation, or damage to the self. It may also be true that individuals use Facebook to connect with others in an effort to keep “hidden” aspects of their identity hidden. Facebook allows its users to selectively present themselves, thus leading to individuals presenting aspects of their “*hoped* for self” in an effort to reduce humiliation, alienation, and to “fit in”. Thus, Facebook may be alluring to individuals of all ages, especially young adults, due to the ability one has to selectively present desired aspects of their *best* self, *hoped* for self, and true identity. It may be possible that through Facebook, individuals can be whoever they want to be, and project aspects of themselves that they feel may connect them to others.

A study conducted by Kalpidou, Costin, and Morris (2011) investigated how college adjustment and students’ self-esteem is impacted by Facebook use and students’ attitude toward Facebook. Seventy undergraduate students answered questionnaire packets, discovering that those who spent extended periods of time on Facebook experienced low self-esteem. It may be

possible that low self-esteem is found among college age students due to difficulty adjusting to a new life phase, moving to new cities, or transitioning out of high school. Facebook use may increase an individual's feeling of low self-esteem when used to compare themselves to their "friends," in terms of accepting new "friend" requests, posting photos with new people, and accepting invitations to parties. Deborah Serani (2012) reports that "reading stories or viewing photos of friends' activities could cause a user to feel left out or question the value of his or her own social status" (p.1). It may also be true that while transitioning into a new life phase, an individual who is lonely and/or socially anxious will use social networking sites to establish online relationships (Acar 2008; as cited in McKeena & Bargh 2000). Having the ability to connect with individuals from class, the dorms, or from around campus through Facebook may provide individuals with a level of emotional safety that cannot be guaranteed during face-to-face interactions. In his article titled "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" published in the Atlantic magazine, Stephen Marche (2012) stated the following:

The beauty of Facebook, the source of its power, is that it enables us to be social while sparing us the embarrassing reality of society-the accidental revelations we make at parties, the awkward pauses, the farting and the spilled drinks and the general gaucherie to face-to face-contact. Instead, we have the lovely smoothness of a seemingly social machine. Everything's so simple: status updates, pictures, your wall (p.8).

Individuals find comfort in the ease that Facebook provides when initiating and maintaining connections with others. Individuals can instantly request new friendships, post photos with friends, write on the walls of "friends" and strangers, join groups, and post status updates. With the reality of instant connection and acceptance, also comes the reality of increased opportunities to be "unfriended," blocked, and rejected by "friends" and strangers on the networking sites.

Mirror, Mirror on my Facebook Wall: Effects of Exposure to Facebook on Self-Esteem examines contrasting hypotheses that were posed to test the effects of Facebook exposure on

self-esteem. The authors argue that positive affect and self-esteem typically decrease when people are exposed to stimuli (such as a mirror) that evoke self-awareness (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). The Internet allows people to selectively self-present themselves, using language, and pictures to expose certain aspects of themselves. The authors hypothesized that “selective, online self-presentation affects attitudes about the self. Facebook profiles may provide sufficiently positive biased stimuli to counter the traditional effects of objective self-awareness, and instead prompt a positive change in self-esteem” (Gonzales & Hancock 2011, p.80). In their study, Gonzalez and Hancock asked 63 college-age students to examine their self-esteem while using Facebook under three conditions: while looking at oneself in a mirror, only looking at one’s own Facebook site, and in a control condition in which participants used the same room without any treatment and without any regulations as to their Facebook use. Researchers found that participants who viewed only their own profile reported having *higher* self-esteem than participants who also viewed their “friends” profiles of others.

With the notion that while people are selectively self-presenting their *best* selves on social media sites in an effort to increase the positive stimuli which evokes objective self-awareness, why is it that just looking at another individual’s profile *decreases* self-esteem? It may be possible that individuals experience a decrease in self-esteem by looking at another individual’s profile because they feel inadequate compared to their “friend.” They may feel that even their selectively self-presented *best* self is not receiving the validation or feedback that their “friends” are receiving, leading them to question themselves as a person, their interests, and their self worth. Adolescents report that they often disclose more about themselves on social networking sites than they do in person, selectively choosing what aspects of their identity they wish to display and those they wish to avoid presenting in the public (Moreno et al. 2011).

Social Media: Photo Sharing

Facebook reports “users upload in excess of 2.5 billion photos to Facebook each month” (*Key facts about Facebook*). Photos are another aspect of social media sites that influence or impact individuals’ self-esteem. Photos do not just document the important events in our lives, but in today’s highly connected world record our everyday lives and social interactions. In fact, photo sharing, by means of social media sites, serves to enhance one’s social presence, helps establish group cohesion, and may signify the existence of relationships and/or the desire for relationships. People generally engage in behaviors that enhance self-worth, which can be expressed through identity construction and maintenance (Stefanone et al., 2011). Social media sites have become a venue where individuals can build relationships that will then become tools to “validate the self, as opposed to an opportunity to give to and support others in equitable, reciprocal relationships” (Stefanone et al., 2011, p. 43).

It may be possible that individuals post pictures of themselves in the company of others to “communicate the importance of particular relationships because these bonds may provide security regarding one’s appearance and self-worth” (Stefanone et al., 2011, p. 48). Park (2007) notes that many individuals experience anxiety over expectations of being rejected or accepted by others based solely on appearance. People are concerned about their appearance because feeling attractive boosts self-esteem and feeling unattractive diminishes self-esteem. Individuals vary in their sensitivity to appearance-based rejection, leading to implications on their mental health, feelings of rejection, and self-esteem (Park, 2007). In an attempt to examine Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity (Appearance-RS), Park conducted three studies to develop the construct of Appearance-RS (Study one), examining the effects of Appearance-RS on reactions to an appearance threat (Study two), and to assess the impact of self-affirmation as a

response to self-threat (Study three). Individuals participating in Parks' study answered a Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, indicating their anxiety or concerns about the outcome and their expectation of rejection based on possible interpersonal situations provided by the surveyor. While the researchers in this study focused primarily on face-to-face interactions, examining social media relationships and the correlation between them and rejection sensitivity is extremely important. With the option of "friends" "Liking" or "Commenting" on photos, Facebook users are subjected to appearance-based rejection continuously. Whether an individual perceives threats of rejection from "friends" through not receiving validation on photos, or actual rejection through declined friend requests, users are continually subjected to appearance-based rejection.

During Park's second study, 100 participants completed questionnaires assessing Appearance-RS, attachment styles, self-esteem, and Appearance Contingencies of Self-Worth (Appearance CSW) to assess whether listing negative aspects of one's appearance would be sufficient enough to make high Appearance-RS people feel more alone and rejected than those with low Appearance-RS. In her research, Park defines Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity (Appearance-RS) as one's personality processing system characterized by anxious concerns and expectations about being rejected based on one's physical appearance. Appearance Contingencies of Self-Worth (Appearance CSW) are crucial in studying whether self-esteem of a participant is high or low. Researchers have begun examining domains on which people base their self-worth, or contingencies of self-worth. Individuals differ in their bases of self-worth and are motivated to protect and enhance their self-esteem in domains of contingency. Findings suggest that people who are sensitive to rejection based on their appearance also are likely to invest their self-esteem in appearance (Park, 2007). Park also hypothesized that because the core feature of Appearance-RS and Appearance CSW is concerns about rejection, reminders of

negative aspects of one's appearance would lead to feelings of loneliness and rejection among participants who anxiously expected rejection based on their appearance. Findings showed that sensitivity to rejection based on appearance influences feelings of loneliness and rejection following an appearance threat which may include: noticing physical flaws about oneself, going on a date and not hearing back from the individual to set up another date, posting a photo on a social media site and not receiving any validation from peers, your partner considering to break up with you, a significant other comments of physical changes such as weight gain, etc.). Also, being reminded of negative aspects of one's appearance tended to increase feelings of loneliness and rejection. Park's research is particularly valuable, as individuals turn online to create relationships.

On Facebook individuals with Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity may post photos of themselves on Facebook with friends in order to reduce their anxiety and "show the world" who they are connected to in order to increase their level of social desirability. It may be possible that individuals experience an increase in self-esteem through seeming more connected with individuals who are popular, or well received within their Facebook community. It also may increase individual's self-esteem to post a photo of themselves with friends at an event or party, demonstrating their ability to have fun, be social and in demand. Receiving "Likes" or "Comments" on the photos published may increase self-esteem. Moreno et al. (2011) reported that adolescents who "received positive feedback on their social networking site profiles reported enhanced self-esteem and sense of well-being" (p. 453; also cited in Valkenburg et al. 2006). It may also be possible that individuals may perceive a lack of "Likes" or "Comments" as threatening, and experience low self-esteem due to appearance-based rejection. If an individual does not receive the amount of "Likes" or "Comments" they were hoping to receive on a photo

or an updated status, feelings of loneliness may increase and the individual may distance themselves from online “friends” due to feeling unaccepted, or not validated.

In a study conducted in Australia examining Facebook users in relation to the “big five” personality traits comprised of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, Ryan and Xenos (2011) found that “Facebook users tend to be more extroverted and narcissistic, but less conscientious and socially lonely, than non-users” (p. 1660). During the study 1,324 participants completed a 124-question online survey answering questions regarding narcissistic tendencies, shyness, loneliness, and the specifics of their Facebook usage (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

The researchers report a significant relationship between time spent on Facebook per day and two of the personality variables: neuroticism and total loneliness. Through status updates, posting photos of themselves, and receiving “Likes” or “Comments,” Facebook offers a venue for individuals satisfy their craving for attention. Facebook may gratify the narcissistic individual’s need to engage in self-promoting behavior by providing opportunities for instant updates to personal Walls. I hypothesize that it is not only looking at one’s profile that satisfies the narcissistic needs of an individual, but also receiving validating feedback on the constructed self one displays on Facebook. Researchers also found a significant correlation between the amount of time spent on Facebook and total loneliness. It may be possible that as individuals spend extended amounts of time on the networking site, their feelings of isolation and loneliness increase due to comparing negative aspects of themselves to the *best* self that their “friends” are presenting. Users may begin to question their social desirability and connections, life accomplishments, and level of happiness as they look at their “friends” Walls, pictures, and status updates.

Self-Psychology Theory: Mirroring

Self-psychology is a useful theoretical lens in outlining how the phenomenon of online identity shaping may affect a young adult. According to Heinz Kohut, the structure of the self is made up of three distinct poles that enable *selfobjects* to become vibrant and strong (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2008). Heinz Kohut postulates that *selfobjects* are understood as “people or things outside of the self, vitally necessary to every individual as source of mirroring, sources of perfection and grandeur to merge with, and as similar selves to feel at one with” (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2008, p. 171). According to self-psychology, selfobjects are needed to fulfill these functions throughout the life cycle and are called selfobjects because they function to give the self what it needs in order to become and remain energetic and cohesive.

The first pole of the self is the pole of the grandiose self, which needs “mirroring selfobjects in an effort to feel special and full of well-being” (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2008, p. 172). The second pole, the idealized parental imago, also known as the pole of ideals, postulates that the selfobject’s needs can and should be met by a variety of people and experiences throughout the life cycle. The third pole, the pole of twinship, refers to the needs individuals experience to “feel that there are others in the world who are similar to oneself” (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2008, p. 176). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the first pole relating to the grandiose self. The grandiose self includes specific characteristics of the self and forms the core of identity and individuality. Social media sites such as Facebook provide individuals with opportunities to have mirroring experiences in an effort to develop a strong, cohesive self. Pines (1984) asserts how young adults utilize Facebook to have mirroring experiences:

“...[A] person sees himself, or part of himself - often a repressed part of himself - reflected in the interactions of the other group members. He sees them as reacting in the way he does himself, or in contrast to his own behavior. He also gets to know himself- and this is a fundamental process in ego development- the effect he has on others and the picture they form of him” (p. 2 as cited in Foulkes, 1964, p.10).

Thus, individuals can experience mirroring experiences through the way in which they selectively self-present themselves in photos, and by receiving positive feedback from peers. As Pines suggests, individuals use Facebook as a tool to have mirroring experiences in an effort to validate and strengthen their ego and self-development.

Another way individuals strengthen their self through Facebook is by selectively presenting their *best* self. Facebook provides an ideal environment for the expression of the hoped-for possible self (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Individuals emphasize realistic socially desirable identities that they would like to establish, and create mirroring experiences during which they can strengthen their self through receiving validation on their “hoped-for” self. Gonzales & Hancock (2011) argue, “Selective, online self-presentation affects attitudes about the self. Facebook profiles may provide sufficiently positive biased stimuli to counter the traditional effects of objective self-awareness, and instead prompt a positive change in self-esteem” (p.80). Self-esteem is an outcome of the self-verification process that occurs within a group. Facebook provides a place for individuals to instantly receive self-verifying feedback within a group (by receiving “Likes” or “Comments”), and may promote feelings that one is accepted and valued by others within the Facebook network. When an individual experiences feelings of acceptance and love from “friends” on Facebook, they may experience a rise in self-esteem. However, when individuals do not receive self-verifying feedback on their *best self* presented on the network, the opportunity to be mirrored may be rejected, possibly causing damage to the individual’s self (Cast & Burke 2002, p. 1047 as cited in Brown & Lohr 1987, Burke & Stets 1999, Ellison 1993).

As Facebook use among young adults increases, so does the opportunity for individuals to receive instant self-verifying feedback within the group through receiving “Likes” and “Comments” on photos, status updates, and location “check in’s.” From January to March 2012, more than 300 million photos were uploaded to Facebook, with an average of 3.2 billion “Likes” and “Comments” generated by Facebook users per day during the first quarter of 2012 (*Key facts about Facebook*). Pines (1984) suggests that objective self awareness operates in the cooperative mode: the social world in which we live is comprised of standards which determines one’s sense of well-being, the regulation of one’s self-esteem, and one’s critical self-awareness based on how well or how badly we fulfill a task. Pine asserts, “In this mode of Objective self-consciousness we are constantly comparing ourselves to others, learning with and from them: corrective feedback is a built-in mechanism” (Pine 1984, p.19). In other words, Facebook provides a venue in which individuals can compare themselves to their friends, learning what personality characteristics are valued, what is normative behavior, and what is necessary for social success. Through learning opportunities and feedback provided through Facebook, identities are created. Individuals post photos, status updates, and comments on their Wall in an effort toward identity creation and maintenance and through reactions from friends. The individual will make corrective changes in order to elicit a desired connection or acceptance within the group.

The selfobject need for mirroring is a need to be “admired for one’s qualities and accomplishments” (Banai, Mikulincer, and Shaver 2005, p. 5). Facebook provides an environment for individuals to post status updates about new job opportunities, college acceptances, and other accomplishments, while also posting photos of themselves. Satisfaction of this selfobject need includes being “valued by others and feeling pride in one’s qualities and accomplishments, which in turn contributes to what Kohut viewed as a healthy sense of

‘grandiosity’” (Banai, Mikulincer, and Shaver 2005, p. 5). It may be possible that through receiving instant positive feedback on status updates and published photos and comments on their Facebook Wall, individuals are feeling more valued, which is leading to a healthy sense of self. With satisfaction of selfobject needs, an individual’s feelings of healthy grandiosity, idealization, and connectedness are strengthened, and he or she gradually acquires the ability to self-regulate. Specifically, the person can internally regulate self-esteem instead of requiring constant admiration from others. It may be possible that through mirroring experiences on Facebook, individuals receive the validation and support they need to strengthen their self, and acquire self-regulatory experiences.

Facebook provides an environment for individuals who are searching for mirroring experiences to obtain love and support from others within the network from both known individuals and strangers. Young adults who have an underdeveloped sense of self may rely on Facebook for love, support and admiration. Reliance on Facebook for support may be seen through how often one checks Facebook for updates, how often one posts status updates, or how often and how many photos one publishes on Facebook. These individuals may feel the need to have a continual presence on Facebook and create opportunities for mirroring experiences multiple times a day to satisfy their lack of a cohesive self-structure.

In self-psychology, a healthy and cohesive self-structure is the outcome of normal development of the three poles. Banai, Mikulincer, and Shaver (2005) argued that a sense of self-cohesion is achieved when “people possess a stable, positively valued, and congruent set of qualities, ambitions, ideals, and values, and are able to accomplish their goals without being rejected or isolated from significant others and important reference groups” (p. 3). When one experiences difficulties in the development of a cohesive self, they may lack the capacity to

maintain a steady level of self-esteem (Banai, Mikulincer, and Shaver 2005; also cited in Kohut & Wolf 1978). Facebook may indeed provide a constructed space and opportunity for young adults to develop and achieve a cohesive self-structure.

Ego Psychology: Young Adulthood

Erik Erikson examined how the ego maintains coherence over the course of an average life cycle. He theorized that the “ego itself is shaped and transformed, not only by biological and psychological forces but also by social forces” (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008, p. 99).

Erikson developed a psychosocial developmental timetable that examined important life stages that shape identity over the life cycle (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008). He created a developmental theory that suggests that people grow, change, and develop throughout their entire lives. Erikson’s stages include: Infancy, Early Childhood, Play Stage, School Age, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood, and Old Age (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008). For the purpose of this paper I will focus on the Young Adulthood: Intimacy vs. Isolation stage of Erikson’s development, which correlates with individuals between the ages of 18 to 30 years.

Erikson suggests that during the Young Adulthood stage of life, individuals are struggling between intimacy and isolation. He states that in order to achieve intimacy in relationships during the young adulthood years, a solid sense of identity is needed. Erikson states that “when identity is shaky, attempts at intimacy become desperate attempts at delineating the fuzzy outlines of identity by mutual narcissistic mirroring: to fall in love often means to fall into one’s mirror image” (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008, p. 112, as cited in Erikson, 1964, p. 18). The virtue of this stage is love, which Erikson defined as “the strength of the ego to share identity for mutual verification of one’s chosen identity while taking from this supportive relationship the opportunities to be a separate self” (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008, p. 113, as

sited in Erikson 1964, p. 129). As the phenomena of Facebook increases, the availability and accessibility for individuals to share personal and intimate information about themselves increases dramatically, providing instant opportunities for individuals to feel more intimately connected to and supported by others. Facebook allows a way for young adults to stay intimately connected to their friends online, while also allowing individuals to retreat from face-to-face contact. Less effort is needed in maintaining friendships and connections. Instead of meeting up with a friend at a local coffee shop, one has the ease of chatting with, or posting on a “friend’s” Wall to maintain connection. During this developmental phase, young adults are eager to blend their identities with that of their friends’. Through Facebook individuals can do just that: they can post information, pictures, and comments that relate to and foster a group identity, while also strengthening their sense of self.

During this phase, as well as other developmental stages, individuals are afraid of rejection. On the Facebook networking site, rejection can be experienced through someone not accepting a “friend” request, someone seeing pictures of “friends” at an event that they were not invited to, not receiving “Comments” or “Likes” on a status update or photo posted. With the reality that Facebook provides increased opportunities for individuals to engage in connections, comes the increased opportunities for rejection. It may be possible that if individuals experience rejection on Facebook, they will isolate themselves from online “friends” as well as face-to-face connections. I hypothesize that while young adults use Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with others, they are becoming more isolated from people, which may be decreasing their self-esteem.

This chapter examined social media and its implications on self-esteem, photo sharing and the impact of receiving feedback, self-psychology theory, and ego psychology. The next

chapter will discuss the research project in extensive detail, examining the methodology by which the research was conducted, the sample population, and data analysis.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study was designed to deepen clinical understanding of social media on young adults' self-esteem. The research examined how individuals use Facebook by directly accessing young adults' experience through the Facebook networking site, and sought to ascertain how they felt while using the site. A mixed-method survey was utilized to examine how young individuals selectively present themselves on Facebook, whether they received the validation and support they expected to receive through their use of Facebook, and the implications of Facebook interactions on their self-esteem. Finally, this study also examined how individuals present themselves online--whether they post photos or status updates that represent who they are, or by presenting their *hoped for* self, their *best* self, or who they think others want them to be. A mixed-method survey was chosen to capture the diversity in experiences that exist among individuals who utilize Facebook and to collect both the young adults' impressions of possible impacts on their self-esteem while also comparing differences in Facebook use.

Sample

Eligibility requirements included the following: 1) individuals had to be in between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age 2) individuals had to have active Facebook accounts 3) individuals were United States citizens. To screen out non-eligible participants, all respondents were asked to confirm that they matched the above criteria at the beginning of the survey before continuing the remainder of the survey.

Non-probability, snowball sampling was used in an effort to obtain a diverse sample of participants. By using the Facebook networking site, and my own “public” profile (meaning one does not need to be my “friend” to view my Wall) as a way to recruit participants, my aim was to receive feedback from a diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and age.

In total, 299 respondents completed the survey for this study. All of the respondents accessed the survey through the Facebook networking site.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this survey was done through the Facebook networking site during the month of February 2013. My recruitment strategy consisted of: 1) changing my Facebook privacy setting to public and 2) posting my Facebook recruitment message on my Facebook Wall (Appendix A). The recruitment message that was posted on my public Facebook Wall contained a link to Survey Monkey where potential participants would have access to the survey. In addition to completing the survey, individuals were asked to re-post the recruitment message on their Facebook Wall in effort to distribute the survey in a snowball fashion.

Within the first two weeks of data collection, 150 respondents completed the survey. Ninety-nine respondents did not complete the informed consent of the online survey but went on to complete some of the remainder of the survey. After realizing this issue in mid-February, I changed the setting on my online survey to require respondents to sign the informed consent *before* continuing the survey. By the end of February, I had a total of 296 responses.

Ethics and Safeguard

The thesis proposal was submitted and approved by the Human Subjects Review (HSR) board at Smith College School for Social Work, to ensure all possible efforts to maintain confidentiality (Appendix H). The HSR committee further reviewed the proposal to certify that

all efforts were taken to consider and minimize the risks of individuals participating in the research.

The informed consent outlined the study design, including the potential risks and benefits of participation, the ethical standards, and measures to protect confidentiality as well as the researcher's contact information for questions and comments (Appendix G). All participants who met eligibility requirements consented to the Informed Consent; surveys from participants who did not complete the Informed Consent were destroyed.

Participation in the study included minimal risks. Risks included participants experiencing feelings of sadness and loneliness in response to not feeling as connected to peers. Although the survey was not intended to be triggering, it may be possible that through responding, participants experienced feelings of depression that they wished to discuss further with a clinician. Thus, a referral list (Appendix F) was included in the informed consent form, including resources for participants needing additional support.

Participants may have benefited from this research, by having had the opportunity to share their experience using social media websites, such as Facebook. Participants could also experience excitement about contributing to social work research on the possible impacts such websites have on young adults. Participants may have also increased their awareness around the role social media plays in their lives and have gained a new understanding of the implications on their self-esteem.

The online surveys were anonymous since Survey Monkey does not collect names or addresses of participants. The online surveys submitted were only accessible to the researcher by password. At the close of analysis, all online surveys were downloaded as a file to a portable media device that was stored in compliance with research standards.

All materials from the study will be kept secure for three years as required by the Federal government and will be destroyed at that time or kept in a secure location until no longer needed and then destroyed.

Data Collection

Interested participants had access to the online survey during the month of February 2013. The data for this research study was collected through the use of a mixed method survey that was created by the researcher. An anonymous, online version of the survey was constructed and managed using the Survey Monkey online program. Recruitment for this survey took place through the social media website, Facebook. Interested participants selected the recruitment message on my public Facebook Wall, or on the Wall's of their "friends" which contained the Survey Monkey link, giving access to the survey (Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of two sections with a combination of 34 multiple choice, Likert scale and open-ended questions (Appendix E).

The first section of the survey asked the following screening question (Appendix B): Are you between the ages of 18 and 30? Are you a citizen of the United States of America? If an interested participant answered "no" to any screening questions, they were redirected to a screen that explained their ineligibility to participate in the study (Appendix C). If an interested participant answered, "yes" to any screening questions they were directed to the informal consent page (Appendix G).

The informed consent form (Appendix G) explained the nature of one's participation, the risks and benefits of participating in the study, and provided a list of referral sources. Interested participant who gave informed consent, by selecting "I agree" were subsequently directed to the questionnaire. Those who did not agree to the informed consent and selected "I do not agree"

were redirected to the ineligibility form. Participants were encouraged to print a copy of the informed consent to keep for their records. The questionnaire consisted of two parts and took no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

The first section of the survey solicited participant's demographic information including age, gender, and race or ethnicity (Appendix D). In the second section, the survey asked participants about their Facebook use and any implications it may have on their self-esteem. The survey consisted of Likert scales to inquire about individuals' self-esteem while using Facebook (Appendix E). Many Likert scale questions included sections for respondents to elaborate on their responses in their own words. Having the ability to add additional information into these sections enabled participants to share personal experiences, life stories, and explanations for their responses. All questions were developed based on themes prevalent in some of the literature reviewed on this topic as well as from the researcher's professional experience.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the mixed-method survey consisted of four parts: descriptive statistics for age, along with frequencies and percentages for all other demographic questions; frequencies and percentages for all other questions; Spearman Rho correlation tests; and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses. Details of these analyses are provided below.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the age of the sample population and subsequent frequencies were run on all other demographic questions. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category of all Likert scale questions asked on the survey. Since many questions offered opportunities for participants to provide multiple responses, frequencies were calculated in an effort to better understand the data and experiences of the participants.

Inferential statistics were used to compare and contrast two subgroups grouped together. Spearman's Rho correlation tests were run to examine the presence of a significant relationship between two variables, as well as examine the direction and strength of the relationship. The goal of this study was to examine the impact of Facebook on young adults self-esteem. Spearman's rho correlation tests were imperative in understanding the relationship between Facebook and self-esteem. Through examining two variables, we were able to determine if there was a relationship between them and the strength of the relationship. Marjorie Postal, Smith's statistical consultant, provided the analysis support for these statistics.

Thematic analysis was utilized for the open-ended questions. The researcher manually entered responses to each open-ended question of the survey into separate text tables. The researcher read through the responses, analyzed any possible themes/categories, and summarized the data.

The following chapter will describe the major findings from the research project described in this chapter. The next chapter will include the survey results as well as detailed descriptions of participants' responses, and highlight evidence supporting or challenging the hypotheses presented above.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study was designed to deepen clinical understanding of the possible implications social media has on young adults' self-esteem. By directly accessing young adults' experiences through the Facebook networking site, this study examined how individuals use Facebook and how they felt while using the site. Participants completed a mixed-methods survey (Appendix E) designed to examine the following questions:

- 1) How does social media impact individuals' self-esteem either positively or negatively?
- 2) Is young adults' self-esteem affected by the validation they receive or do not receive on information and photos posted on social media sites?
- 3) As young adults utilize Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with others, are they in fact becoming more isolated from people around them?
- 4) Are individuals presenting information or pictures on Facebook that portray them differently than how they view themselves in an effort to feel more connected or accepted by their "friends"?

This chapter will be comprised of major findings from this study, beginning with a presentation of the sample demographics of the sample and descriptive statistics that represent how social media impacts individuals' self-esteem either positively or negatively in relation to validation, or the lack thereof, received on the information and photos posted on the Facebook networking site. Next, I will discuss the relationship between young adults' utilization of

Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with one another, and the implications on interpersonal relationships utilizing participants' descriptions and short answers. I will then discuss the way in which individuals portray themselves on Facebook. The chapter will conclude by illustrating how social media use in general impacts young adults' self-esteem by assessing participants' narrative responses from survey results.

Demographics

A total of 296 participants participated in this study. Although 395 participants completed the survey, 99 of those responses were excluded from the study due to human error, which will be explained in more detail in Chapter Five.

The sample of 296 respondents was diverse in terms of age range, but mostly homogenous in terms of sex, race and/or ethnicity. Approximately 79% of the respondents identified as female, 17.9% as male, 0.3% as transgender, and 0.4% as other ("genderqueer"), and 2.0% (n=6) chose not to identify their sex. From the results, 87.8% of the respondents identified themselves as White or Caucasian, 3.4% multiracial, 2.7% as Hispanic/Latino (a), 2.4% as Asian, 1.7% as African American/Black, 0.3%, and 1.7% (n=5) chose not to identify their race or ethnicity. As the table below describes (Table 1), the age of the respondents showed a more even distribution.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

		<i>n</i>	%
n=296	Female	235	79.4%
	Male	53	17.9%
	Transgender	1	0.3%
	Other	2	.4%
	Missing systems	5	2.0%
Race and Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	260	87.8%
	Hispanic/ Latino (a)	8	2.7%
	African American/Black	5	1.7
	American Indian	1	0.3%
	Asian	7	2.4%
	Multiracial	10	3.4
	Missing systems	5	1.7%
Age	18	8	2.7%
	19	5	1.7%
	20	15	5.1%
	21	17	5.7%
	22	18	6.1%
	23	12	4.1%
	24	22	7.4%
	25	38	12.8%
	26	41	13.9%
	27	27	9.1%
	28	20	6.8%
	29	10	3.4%
	30	13	4.4%
Missing Systems	50	16.8%	

Of the 296 participants, 58.9% reported checking Facebook “more than five times per day” (Table 2), and 33.2% reported checking Facebook at least one time per day. Fifty-four percent of the participants disagreed, and 32.5% of respondents strongly disagreed with the following statement, “I feel pressure from my friends to check Facebook daily” (Table 3), further illustrating how social media use has been incorporated into daily routine for many individuals. Approximately 72% of participants indicated that their Facebook “friends” are comprised of

“people from High School and/or college, people I have met a couple of times at parties or events, and coworkers” (Table 4).

Facebook Validation and its Impact on Young Adults’ Self-Esteem

The first major finding from this study was in regard to how individuals select the photos that they choose to publish on the Facebook networking site. Approximately 58.9% agreed and 24.9% strongly agreed that they upload photos on Facebook as a way of documenting events and sharing information with their family and friends (Table 5). About 52% of participants reported that when selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, they choose photos that they think people will respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting” (Table 6). Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between individuals selecting photos in which they feel individuals will respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting” and one feeling socially desirable (Table 7), with 61.7% of participants feeling socially desirable by simply uploading a photo that included friends (Table 8).

Participants reported that when they receive validation by means of “Likes” or “Comments” on their photos they feel happy (21%), connected to their “friends” (20.6%), and popular (10.5%; Table 9). However, when photos are posted with the anticipation of receiving validation, and no one clicks “Likes” or “Comments,” some participants experience feelings of disappointment (28.3%), feel less connected to their “friends” (11.2%) and feel some sense of rejection (9.1%). Other participants (26.8%) reported that it does not impact them when their “friends” do not “Like” or “Comment” on photos and/or information they share on Facebook (Table 10). When looking at their “friends” Facebook Walls and photos, participants reported experiencing a range of feelings including connected to others (34.1%), happy (19.5%), proud (4.7%), less connected (4.1%), accepted (3.4%), valued (2.3%) and sad (2.5%). While many

participants reported experiencing a change in feeling states while looking at their “friends” Wall and photos, some participants (13.6%) report that it does not impact their feelings (Table 11).

Facebook as a Tool to Connect with Others

A total of 34.1% of participants reported feeling “more connected to others” by simply looking at their “friends” Facebook Walls or photos (Table 11), and 20.6% reported feeling connected to others when they receive validation such as “Likes” or “Comments” on their photos and status updates (Table 9). While 19.2% of participants reported feeling more lonely and isolated from friends while on the Facebook networking site, 63.1% disagreed and 17.2% strongly disagreed, reporting that using Facebook allows them to feel more connected (Table 12).

While participants reported generally feeling connected to others while using the Facebook networking site, they also reported not utilizing the site for additional support when feeling sad. Approximately 51% of the participants strongly disagreed and 36.3% disagreed with the following statement, “when I am sad I update my status seeking support from my ‘friends’” (Table 13). When asked how they utilize the Facebook networking site when feeling sad, participants reported playing Facebook games (2.5%), updating their Wall (3.3%), “Liking” or “Commenting” on their “friends” Walls or photos (24.8%), and looking for new “friends” (0.4%). While some individuals engage in all of these behaviors (1.2%), 67.8% of respondents reported that they “do not get on Facebook when feeling sad, I get support from friends offline” (Table 23).

Participants utilized short answer comment boxes to share more insight into the Facebook use and activities they engage in when feeling sad. One participant stated, “I usually look at

acquaintances that I knew from school and see what they are doing with their lives, and compare myself to them. It usually doesn't improve my mood, it makes me feel worse."

While 48.8% disagreed, and 32.9% of participants strongly disagreed with the statement "when I use Facebook I compare myself to my friends and I do not feel proud of who I am as a person," a common theme within the short answer responses related to the ubiquity of individuals looking at "friends'" Walls and comparing themselves to others' experiences and accomplishments. Approximately 16% of respondents reported experiencing a change in their emotional state or their perception of self-accomplishment when viewing "friends'" Walls (Table 14). One respondent stated, "It depends on what kind of mood I am in. Even when I am happy though-it can sometimes bring me down to see what others are doing and how successful they are (either in love or careers)."

A common theme between respondents related to individuals comparing the activity they receive on their Wall, to the activity their "friends" receive on their Walls. While some report feeling "jealous" and "sad" when not having as much activity on their Wall (not receiving as many "Likes" or "Comments" on photos, or not having as many individuals post on their Wall), one participant reported the following:

I do make comparisons between the activity on my Facebook Wall versus my friend's, but it does not change my self-worth. In fact, I am almost more proud of who I am as a person when my Facebook seems inactive in comparison to others because I know it means I am having meaningful interactions with others offline.

As social media becomes an integral aspect of daily routine, it may be possible that individuals will start utilizing the site in ways to promote opportunities to be seen. One participant stated, "Liking and commenting on people's Walls is my attempt at being seen." Facebook allows individuals immediate opportunities to connect with, or "be seen" by "friends,"

which may lift a user's mood as a result of instantaneous interactions, and knowing that their "friend" will be notified of their action.

While some participants reported engaging in some kind of Facebook activity when feeling sad, the most common theme within the short answer responses was that participants do not change the way in which they utilize the Facebook networking site when experiencing different feeling states. One participant stated,

Most of my emotional support comes from in person and/or phone/text conversation. However, I also might use Facebook as a distraction or minor for forms of emotional support by writing something on a friends Wall who I miss or checking pictures to see what my friends are up to these days.

Individuals utilizing friendships offline for emotional support was a common theme within the research findings. While individuals feel connected to others while utilizing the site, they do not make use of the site to receive additional support when feeling sad or less connected to others.

Selective Presentation as a way of Connecting with Others and Receiving Validation

While 48.5% disagreed and 31.2% strongly disagreed with the following statement "I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates," 17.7% agreed and 2.6% strongly agreed suggesting that pressure to maintain a social presence on Facebook is a reality for many individuals (Table 15). While 43.6% agreed and 13.9% strongly agreed with the following statement "I will delete a photo of myself that someone else has posted on Facebook if I don't think I look pretty/handsome/cute," 33.8% disagreed and 8.6% strongly disagreed with the statement (Table 16).

The majority of participants strongly disagreed (69.7%) with the following statement "Sometimes I post information about myself on Facebook that is not true" (Table 17). However, a Spearman's rho calculation verified there to be a significant weak positive correlation between individuals feeling pressure to keep up with friends by posting photos or information on

Facebook and individuals posting information that is not true about themselves due to feeling pressure from Facebook “friends” to maintain a certain appearance (Table 18). While the majority of participants strongly disagreed (76.8%) or disagreed (20.5%) with the following statement “I post information that is not true about myself on Facebook because I want other people to like me”, some individuals report agreeing (1.5%) and strongly agreeing (1.2%) with the statement (Table 19).

Approximately 96% of participants reported, “I do not post information on Facebook that is not true about myself,” however 2.7% report that they post information that is not true in effort to get positive feedback (“Comments” or “Likes”) from their “friends,” and 0.4% report feeling more connected to others if they pretend to like certain things (music, food, sports, etc.) (Table 20).

Facebook and its Impacts on Young-Adults’ Self-Esteem

While using the Facebook networking site, 60.9% of respondents answered that they feel satisfied with whom they are as a person. However, 29.5% of respondents answered that they do not feel satisfied with who they are when using Facebook (Table 21). When asked to respond to the following statement “when I am on Facebook I feel like my life is worthwhile,” 56.8% disagreed and 16.6% strongly disagreed, suggesting that when they use Facebook they feel like their life is not worthwhile. Just 25.1% of respondents agreed, indicating feeling like their life is worthwhile when using Facebook (Table 22).

When asked to use the short answer comment box to finish the following statement “When I am on Facebook, I feel ____,” a common theme participants cited was feeling “connected” and “happy.” One participant stated, “[I feel] happy that I have been able to use Facebook to continue strong offline relationships with my busy friends by setting up events and

communicating ways to meet up with them in person”. While the majority of participants shared similar experiences of increased self-esteem and feeling states while using the Facebook networking sites, some participants described feeling “sad,” “bored,” “disconnected,” “addicted,” “insecure” and “depressed.” One participant described, “In dark moments, I feel jealous of my ‘successful’ friends, embarrassed that my job position posted next to my name isn’t more prestigious.” Another participant described the impact Facebook use has on her self-esteem by sharing:

[I feel]...depressed. A lot of my friends are getting engaged and married and posting a ton of happy pictures online. Comparing my life to their “highlight reels” makes me feel extremely depressed. Even though my life is going well, and I have a wonderful boyfriend, Facebook pictures always have a way of making me feel jealous of the lives my friends are leading.

From the results of this study, Facebook seems to impact young adults in various ways. The results from this study found that while Facebook use does lead some users to feel happy, it can make others feel depressed. While some users feel connected, others feel isolated and lonely; and while still other users feel proud of whom they are, some feel ashamed and jealous. However changes in emotional states, and self-esteem are not necessarily based on the validation one receives, or does not receive on their photos and status updates. One participant described their experience with Facebook in this way:

Sometimes I feel it connects me stronger with my friends, and other times I think it has strongly deteriorated interactions offline and peoples’ ability to focus on the present. I sometimes think about suspending my account indefinitely, but having Facebook and looking at it is engrained in me. I first got Facebook when it was only for college students with an edu email address. It actually was helpful in connecting me with other incoming freshman before classes started at my University. But now it’s become something totally different, and on most days I don’t like what it is and how I feel when I am on it.

As the Facebook networking site continues to grow and is incorporated seamlessly into the lives of young adults, many participants in my study seemed to recognize the importance of continuing research into this phenomenon. The personal experiences of participants provided in response to the feedback questions reflected feeling happy, connected, and an increase in self-esteem when one receives validation from their peers but also feelings of dissatisfaction when comparing themselves to others.

In summary, this study found that Facebook use affects young adults' positively. The research also found that it affects different people in different ways based on how individuals utilized the Facebook networking site, why they used Facebook, and how much time they spent on Facebook.

The following Discussion chapter will further elaborate on these findings in relation to the current literature, explore the limitations and biases involved in this study, and offer key recommendations on how further research can be conducted.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The phenomenon of online *friend*-networking sites has increased dramatically in the United States over the past decade (O'Keeffe, G. & Clarke-Pearson, K., 2011), leaving people wondering what the possible implications are on users' psychological, emotional, and social development. The purpose of this study is to explore the possible implications social media sites, such as Facebook, have on young adults' self-esteem.

The specific and stated goals of this study were to examine the following:

- 1) How does social media impact individuals' self-esteem either positively or negatively?
- 2) Is young adults' self-esteem affected by the validation they receive or do not receive on information and photos posted on social media sites?
- 3) As young adults utilize Facebook to create and maintain intimate connections with others, are they in fact becoming more isolated from people around them?
- 4) Are individuals presenting information or pictures on Facebook that portray them differently than how they view themselves in an effort to feel more connected or accepted by their "friends?"

This research differs from the majority of current literature on this subject, which tends to examine Facebook as a way of connecting to others during major life transitions, and a focus on personality characteristics associated with Facebook users.

This study augments existing literature in that it makes a burgeoning attempt to understand the reality of *instantaneous* connections and rejections that take root in every day interactions between individuals. Examining the link between Facebook and self-esteem is valuable to the social work profession because “individuals’ beliefs about themselves influence how they act in particular situations, the goals they pursue in life, how they feel about life events and relationship partners, and the way in which they cope with and adapt to new environments” (Robins, Tracy, Trzeniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001, p. 425). As young adults continue to increase the amount of time spent on social media sites, their self-esteem is greatly affected and could directly impact their perception of self, their perception of others and the world, and their ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships. In short, this study strives to explain the impact of social media use on young adults, an age group where research is quite limited (Valkenburg, P., & Schouten 2006).

This chapter will begin with a brief consideration of the study’s major findings with regard to the literature. Next, the chapter will examine implications of the findings for mental health clinicians, and how clinicians might incorporate this knowledge into their practices with clients. Subsequently, it will summarize key recommendations for further studies, address limitations, and note the influence of bias on the study. Finally, the chapter will close with a brief statement of conclusions.

Consistency of Study Findings with the Literature

Facebook validation and its impact on young adults’ self-esteem. This study found a positive correlation between individuals selecting photos in which they feel their “friends” will respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting” and one feeling socially desirable (Table 7), meaning that simply receiving a “Like” or “Comment” on information posted on Facebook leads

individuals to feel socially desirable. This finding supports previous literature by Stefanone et al. (2011) which asserts photo sharing, by means of social media sites, serves to enhance one's social presence, helps establish group cohesion, and may signify the existence of relationships and/or the desire for relationships. People generally engage in behaviors that enhance self-worth, which can be expressed through identity construction and maintenance. Approximately 61.7% of participants reported feeling *more* socially desirable by simply uploading a photo that included friends (Table 8), further supporting the notion that individuals post pictures of themselves in the company of others to “communicate the importance of particular relationships because these bonds may provide security regarding one's appearance and self-worth” (Stefanone et al., 2011, p. 48).

The majority of participants who completed the survey agreed that they would delete a photo of themselves on Facebook if they didn't think they looked pretty, handsome, or cute (Table 16). This finding supports Parks' hypothesis correlating to individuals Appearance Rejection Sensitivity and concerns about rejection. Facebook provides opportunities for individuals to experience instantaneous rejection, whether it is *perceived* rejection due to lack of “Likes” and/or “Comments,” or *actual* rejection in the form of Facebook de-friending. From the findings, it has become evident that the majority of young adults who responded to this research are limiting opportunities to be rejected by their friends through selectively presenting the *best* version of themselves in an effort to build and strengthen their core identity and have positive mirroring opportunities. By eliminating the photos others post of them on Facebook in which they do not feel pretty, handsome, or cute, young adults are limiting the reminders of negative aspects of their appearance, which may lead to feelings of loneliness and rejection among those who anxiously expect rejection based on their appearance (Park, 2007). Through eliminating

such photos individuals are *selectively* presenting the *best* version of themselves in effort to create mirroring opportunities to strengthen the grandiose self, which constructs the core identity and individuality of a person.

Moreno et al. (2011) reported that young individuals who “received positive feedback on their social networking site profiles reported enhanced self-esteem and sense of well-being” (p. 453; also cited in Valkenburg et al. 2006). Supporting previous literature, participants in this study reported that when they received validation by means of “Likes” or “Comments” on their photos they felt happy (21%), connected to their “friends” (20.59%), and popular (10.55%) (Table 9). However, this study augments recent literature in examining how young adults’ self-esteem is impacted when photos are posted with the anticipation of receiving validation, and no one “Likes” or “Comments.” When this occurs participants reported experiencing a range of feelings including disappointment (28.27%), feeling less connected to their “friends” (11.22%) and rejection (9.11%). This finding further illustrates that when individuals do not receive self-verifying feedback on their *best* self presented on the Facebook network, the opportunity to be mirrored may be rejected, possibly causing damage to the individual’s self (Cast & Burke 2002, p. 1047 as cited in Brown & Lohr 1987, Burke & Stets 1999, Ellison 1993). While it is possible that an individual will experience a decrease in self-esteem upon not receiving validation, some participants (26.87%) reported that it does not impact them when their “friends” do not “Like” or “Comment” on photos and/or information they share on Facebook (Table 10), suggesting that a lack of validation does not impact all young adults’ self-esteem or identity development equally.

Individuals can create mirroring experiences through the way in which they selectively self-present themselves in photos, and by receiving positive feedback from peers. As Pines suggests, individuals use Facebook as a tool to have mirroring experiences in an effort to validate

and strengthen their ego and self-development. Approximately 52.1% of participants reported that when selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, they choose photos that they *think people will respond to* by “Liking” or “Commenting” (Table 6). This finding further illustrates that individuals are creating mirroring opportunities during which they will be successful in receiving the validation necessary to create a strong and vibrant self and an increased feeling of self-esteem.

Selective presentation as a way of connecting with others and receiving validation.

Through learning opportunities and feedback provided through Facebook, identities are created. Individuals post photos, status updates, and post comments on their Wall in an effort to move toward identity creation and maintenance by receiving validation from friends. An individual will make corrective changes in order to elicit a desired connection or acceptance within the group, as well as maintaining an idealized constructed self. While the majority of participants report only posting information that is true about themselves on Facebook (Table 20), the findings revealed a significant correlation between individuals feeling pressure to keep up with their friends by posting photos and information about themselves on Facebook and individuals feeling pressure from their friends to maintain a certain appearance on Facebook (Table 18). Facebook allows its users to selectively present themselves, thus leading to individuals presenting aspects of their *hoped* for self in an effort to reduce humiliation, alienation, and to fit in. As a result, Facebook may be alluring to individuals of all ages, especially young adults, due to the ability one has to selectively present desired aspects of their *best* self, *hoped* for self, and true identity. The findings suggest that through Facebook, young adults can be whoever they want to be, and feel pressure to project aspects of themselves that they feel may connect them to others or help them maintain a certain social appearance (Shaw & Grant 2002).

Facebook as a tool to connect with others. In 2002 a study was conducted to test whether the Internet had any negative effect on users (Shaw & Grant). Researchers conducted five Internet chat sessions examining loneliness, depression, self-esteem, and perceived social support among undergraduate students. The results showed that participants who chatted anonymously on the Internet experienced a dramatic decrease in depression and loneliness over the course of the eight-week study. One reason why participants experienced such a dramatic decrease in loneliness and depressive symptoms was attributed to the participants' perception of social support, which then led to an increase in self-esteem. While Facebook lacks anonymity, it may be possible that Facebook users also experience a decrease in depression and an increase in self-esteem due to feeling more connected with individuals, creating a sense of community, and feeling accepted from their Facebook "friends." Approximately 34.1% of participants reported feeling "more connected to others" by simply looking at their "friends'" Facebook Walls or photos (Table 11), which further demonstrates how Facebook can be a tool to decrease loneliness and increase self-esteem.

Deborah Serani (2012) reports that "reading stories or viewing photos of friends' activities could cause a user to feel left out or question the value of his or her own social status" (p.1). Approximately 19.2% of participants agreed with this researcher and reported feeling more lonely and isolated from friends while on the Facebook networking site. However, 63.1% disagreed and 17.2% strongly disagreed, reporting that using Facebook allows them to feel *more* connected (Table 12). As mentioned previously, Facebook provides a space for individuals to be a part of a larger community and network of peers. With little effort, individuals can create, and maintain friendships through simple acts of "Liking" or "Commenting" on photos. An

instantaneous ability to feel connected to peers is leading individuals to experience an increase in self-esteem and an increased feeling of connection.

While participants reported generally feeling connected to others while using the Facebook networking site, they also report not utilizing the site for additional support when feeling sad. Approximately 51.1% strongly disagreed and 36.3% disagreed with the following statement, “when I am sad I update my status seeking support from my ‘friends’” (Table 13). While there is a significant gap in current literature exploring individuals using social media sites for mental health support, or additional support in general, more research is needed to fully understand where individuals receive additional support when needed. While a common theme in this research was that individuals feel more connected to their “friends” while using the Facebook networking site, 67.8% of participants reported that they “do not get on Facebook when feeling sad, I get support from friends offline.” This suggests that the young adults who participated in this research have been successful in creating and maintaining meaningful relationships both online and offline. Furthermore, offline relationships are seen as valuable and essential during difficult moments in life, and young adults are utilizing offline connections in order to obtain support, receive comfort and increase feelings of connection. This also demonstrates that healthy participants may be more able to discern between virtual and real communities, while the more impaired or mentally ill patients may struggle to see the two worlds as different.

Facebook and its impacts on young adults’ self-esteem. Joinson (2003) compiled a list of motives for using the Internet, one of which was the reality that many users turn to the Internet for self-enhancement, self-protection, and self-esteem purposes. Findings from this research support Joinson’s conclusion, illustrating the reality that participants report using Facebook in a

way to promote certain aspects of themselves, receive validation, and create cohesive senses of self. The majority of participants (52.1%) reported selecting photos to upload on Facebook that they think others will respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting” (Table 6). Receiving positive validation by means of “Likes” or “Comments” on their photos resulted in participants experiencing the following feeling states: happy, connected to their friends, and popular (Table 9), further highlighting how individuals experience an increase in self-esteem and social self-enhancement. Through these positive mirroring experiences during which individuals selectively share aspects about themselves and then are positively validated by their peers, young adults experience an overall enhancement in self-esteem, and have opportunities to strengthen and build a cohesive sense of self, or identity.

When photos are posted with the anticipation of receiving validation, and no one “Likes” or “Comments” on posted photos, participants do not experience positive mirroring opportunities (Table 10). In fact, this experience leaves individuals feeling disappointed, less connected, and rejected, and the opportunity to be mirrored may be rejected, possibly causing damage to the individual’s self (Cast & Burke 2002, p. 1047 as cited in Brown & Lohr 1987, Burke & Stets 1999, Ellison 1993). While over a quarter of participants, (26.87%) reported that it does not impact them when they do not receive validation on their *best* self, other young adults experience negative impacts on their self-esteem and identity creation (Table 10). Individuals may continue to search for positive mirroring opportunities to strengthen their possibly fragmented self. As Pine (1984) suggests, individuals are continually comparing themselves to others, and learning with and from one another. Facebook provides a venue in which individuals can compare themselves to their friends, learning what personality characteristics are valued, what is normative behavior, and what is necessary for social success. Through these learning

opportunities, individuals may make corrective changes in an effort to receive positive feedback from their peers, and create mirroring opportunities to strengthen the self and create a cohesive identity. Individuals post photos, status updates, and comments on their Wall in an effort to move toward identity creation and maintenance and through reactions from friends. The individual will make corrective changes in order to elicit a desired connection or acceptance within the group, and experience an increase in self-esteem.

This research found a positive correlation between young adults selecting photos in which they felt their friends would respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting” and one feeling socially desirable (Table 7), with the majority of participants (61.7%) feeling socially desirable by simply uploading a photo that included friends (Table 8). Furthermore, young adults experience a boost in self-esteem by being perceived as socially desirable and creating a group identity within the Facebook networking site. Maintaining a social presence through uploading photos and receiving validation allows individuals to feel connected to a larger group, which serves as a means of self-protection and counteracts rejection sensitivity. By feeling socially desirable, and connected to others within the Facebook community, young adults experience an increase in self-esteem due to the perceived support, instantaneous reactions from peers, and through experiencing a sense of belonging.

Researchers Gonzales & Hancock (2011), found that participants who viewed only their own profile reported having *higher* self-esteem than participants who also viewed their “friends” profiles of others. Individuals who only view their own profile may experience higher self-esteem because they do not look at “friends” Walls and compare themselves to a selectively chosen, and thus unrealistic, presentation of their friends’ *best self*. While 48.8% disagreed, and 32.9% of participants strongly disagreed with the statement “when I use Facebook I compare

myself to my friends and I do not feel proud of who I am as a person,” a common theme within the short answer responses related to the ever-present reality of individuals looking at “friends” Walls and comparing themselves to others’ experiences and accomplishments (16.7%) and experiencing a change in their emotional state or their perception of self accomplishment (Table 14). This finding adds to the current literature in beginning to explain how Facebook creates a venue for continuous comparison (through photos and status updates) and how doing so impacts one’s sense of self, one’s self-esteem, and feelings of connectedness. Individuals are continually comparing themselves to their peers, both in real life interactions and in online interactions with friends. However, when comparisons occur on Facebook, the issue shifts because individuals are using *selectively* presented images of another person to compare him or herself to. This presentation may or may not represent who the person posting is in reality, and therein lies a specific problem associated with Facebook use that may potentially lead to negative effects on self-esteem. As Facebook use continues to become a part of individuals’ daily routine, and comparisons occur automatically, individuals may begin to believe that all of their peers are prettier, funnier, and more socially desirable. Individuals may struggle to remember that their peers are *selectively* presenting desirable aspects of themselves to share online, thoughts that may lead individuals to continually feel less than their peers and can decrease self-esteem. While using the Facebook networking site, 60.9% of respondents reported feeling satisfied with who they are as a person, and 29.5% of respondents “do not feel satisfied with who they are” (Table 15), further illustrating the possible impact of instantaneous comparison, and feeling inadequate when compared to their Facebook “friends.”

Implications and Recommendations for Mental Health Clinicians

Although friend-networking sites have become tremendously popular among individuals of all ages, there is a significant gap in research focused specifically on the possible consequences these sites have on the self-esteem of young adults ages 18-30 years (Valkenburg, P., & Schouten 2006). I believe this research illuminates a vital clinical issue that will continue to grow in significance as the reality of instantaneous connections and rejections takes root in every day interactions between individuals, especially young adults or the younger Internet generation. Examining the link between Facebook and self-esteem is valuable to the social work profession because “individuals’ beliefs about themselves influence how they act in particular situations, the goals they pursue in life, how they feel about life events and relationship partners, and the way in which they cope with and adapt to new environments” (Robins, Tracy, Trzeniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001, p. 425). As young adults continue to increase the amount of time spent on social media sites, their self-esteem is greatly affected and could directly impact their perception of self, their perception of others and the world, and their ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships.

The examination of the impacts of social media use on individuals of all ages is a new area of research for mental health professionals. The findings from this research demonstrate the importance for mental health workers to incorporate conversations about social media use into clinical work with clients. Due to the reality that Facebook impacts all individuals differently, it is essential for mental health workers to gain an understanding of how their clients are utilizing this site and other sites, how it is impacting their self-esteem and connections with others, and how the individuals are bridging friendships online and in the real world.

The findings suggest that individuals find comfort in the ease that Facebook provides when initiating and maintaining connections with others. Individuals can instantly request new friendships, post photos, write on the Walls of friends and strangers, join groups, and post status updates. With the reality of instant connection and acceptance, also comes the reality of increased opportunities to be de-friended, blocked, and rejected by friends and strangers on the networking sites. As *friend*-networking sites continue to grow, and young adults increase the amount of time spent on such sites, individuals may turn to therapy in an effort to cope with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression possibly caused by comparing themselves to others on Facebook, not receiving positive validation from peers, and not feeling connected to their friends.

Clinically, one helpful change would be the development of new social media assessment tools that will help clinicians better understand the nature of their clients' problems in this area and gain insight into how to better assist them. In an effort to assist their clients and provide psycho-education within their sessions, clinicians will need to expand their own understanding of social media sites; theories associated with social media use, and be up to date on current research.

Future Study Related to Social Media Use (with a Clinical Focus)

The literature review for this study addresses many previous research studies that were conducted to expand our understanding of possible implications social media sites play on the lives of individuals. However, while Facebook was originally designed for individuals enrolled in a college or university, the literature's emphasis on individuals transitioning into that life phase, or on personality traits of individuals within that age range does not accurately portray the possible impacts for Facebook users today who range drastically in age. Today Facebook users

range in all ages, and individuals utilize the site for a number of reasons. While some individuals still utilize the site for its original purpose, it also allows individuals of all ages to connect with others who share common interests, remain connected with friends who may live far away, find romantic partners, and as a way of reconnecting with friendships from previous life stages.

It will be important to conduct research on Facebook users of all ages in an effort to gain a more accurate understanding of how the implications shift depending on the age of the user. The findings from this study and previous literature state that Facebook impacts all users differently; some positively by increasing self-esteem, and some negatively by decreasing self-esteem. As Facebook continues to grow and change in order to attract different types and ages of users, research examining the possible impacts on different age groups will be essential.

It may be beneficial to conduct longitudinal research to examine long-term impacts in areas of psychosocial development and relationship impacts. Current research, including this research study, finds that Facebook use impacts identity development, self-esteem, and relationships. While the long-term impacts are unknown at this time, future longitudinal research studies will be essential.

While this study was the first step in examining the impacts of Facebook validation on young adults' self-esteem and identity development, it will be important to explore this further. Future qualitative studies may be beneficial in demonstrating young adults' experiences with utilizing the Facebook networking site, and the need for clinical research. Qualitative studies, in the form of case studies, could further illuminate individual experiences and areas of potential concern for Facebook users.

It will be important to conduct research into what clinical theories and practices are most helpful for addressing the impacts of social media use. Furthermore, it will be important to

determine which theories and practices can be implemented and are most effective in short-, medium-, and long-term treatments.

Generalizability

This study revealed some of the ways in which Facebook use may impact self-esteem, identity development, and one's feeling of connectedness. Although the sample size, lack of diversity in terms of sex, and race or ethnicity of the participants limits the generalizability of this study's data, the conclusions and recommendations presented above are worthy of consideration in terms of the findings' considerable consistency with existing literature on social media use. Nevertheless, further research would be warranted in order to expand the profession's understanding of the issues related to Facebook use and self-esteem.

Bias

In previous clinical encounters I witnessed young individuals experience negative mental health symptoms due to lack of validation from Facebook "friends," or due to feeling less socially desirable than their Facebook "friends." Conversation surrounding social media use, and Facebook in particular, was prominent within my clinical work. Due to my understanding of the limited research currently available, and personal clinical experience with those who had experienced negative symptoms, I wanted to expand the clinical understanding of social media use and its impact on self-esteem, knowing that the research could impact and inform clinicians and educators as they work with young adults. My hope was that it would also impact and inform young adults who use Facebook and give them insight into examining how utilizing social media sites impacts their sense of self, relationships, and ultimately their self-esteem.

Because I am part of the young adult age group and have personal experience as an active Facebook user, my views of this topic cannot help but be informed by these findings. My

personal experiences, along with the experiences of my friends, and the young individuals I have worked with shaped the survey questionnaire provided in this research experience. However, in conducting this research I wanted to gather broad ranging data that would cover experiences that are both similar and very different from mine, and the experiences of those whom I have worked with clinically. I encountered a bias demographically since I solicited participants from the Facebook networking site by posting a recruitment message on my personal Facebook Wall. Future studies could attempt to achieve more diversity by posting flyers at college campuses, recreation centers, bus stops, and campus centers in addition to posting recruitment messages on the Facebook networking site.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of online friend-networking sites has increased dramatically in the United States over the past decade (O'Keeffe, G., & Clarke-Pearson, K, 2011), and will continue to grow exponentially in the future. While impacting all individuals differently, young adults' self-esteem, identity development and feelings of connectedness are impacted by Facebook use. Fortunately, there is much that can be done to combat the negative impacts and create positive experiences for users. Helping young adults' learn how to manage their experiences on Facebook can be accomplished through increasing awareness, acknowledgement of possible implications, and education.

Helping young adults and individuals of all ages have healthy experiences on social media sites will include increasing the awareness of those individuals who utilize social media sites, such as Facebook, to the potential impacts on their self-esteem, and relationships. Education should include an increased awareness by both the Facebook users and clinicians of the possible mental health symptoms that may be attributed to or amplified by extensive social

media use. Consequently, both users and clinicians must acknowledge the potential impact, to varying degrees, for all individuals who use social media sites. Furthermore, it will require clinicians to acknowledge the importance of addressing these impacts within a clinical setting, and the possible crises individuals may experience if these impacts are not addressed.

Furthermore, helping young adults have positive interactions within social media use will include taking the time to educate and be educated on how to utilize social media sites in a way that promotes positive self-regard, as well as healthy development of relationships with peers. Education must occur both within the professional setting and beyond the clinical walls, in order to strengthen individuals who currently use social media sites, as well as future users. Education beyond the clinical walls could be conducted within peer support groups, counseling centers, online groups, and psycho-education for teachers. This thesis was conducted in order to further that education: to expand the knowledge of mental health clinicians, young adults who currently use Facebook, and individuals who will use *friend*-networking sites in the future.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

		<i>n</i>	%
n=296	Female	235	79.4%
	Male	53	17.9%
	Transgender	1	.3%
	Other	2	.4%
	Missing systems	5	2.0%
Race and Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	260	87.8%
	Hispanic/ Latino (a)	8	2.7%
	African American/Black	5	1.7
	American Indian	1	0.3%
	Asian	7	2.4%
	Multiracial	10	3.4
	Missing systems	5	1.7%
Age	18	8	2.7%
	19	5	1.7%
	20	15	5.1%
	21	17	5.7%
	22	18	6.1%
	23	12	4.1%
	24	22	7.4%
	25	38	12.8%
	26	41	13.9%
	27	27	9.1%
	28	20	6.8%
	29	10	3.4%
30	13	4.4%	
	Missing Systems	50	16.8%

Table 2

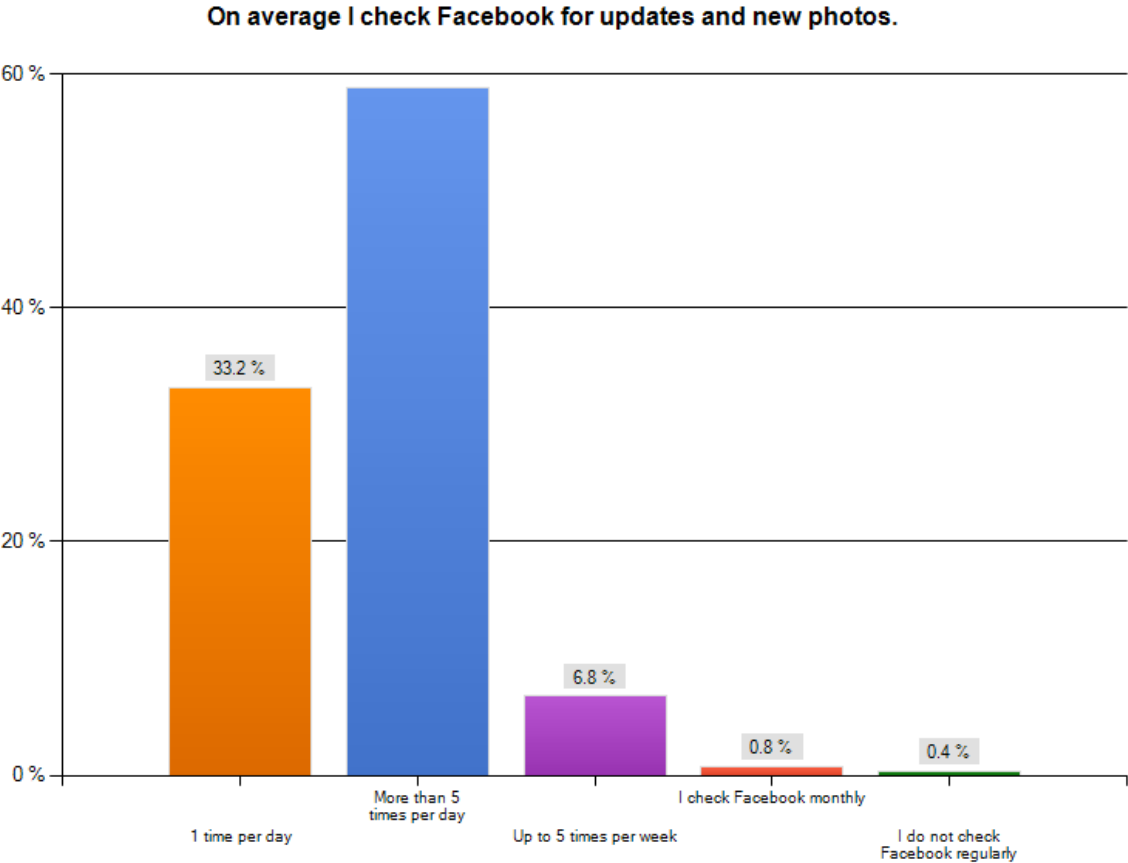


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 3

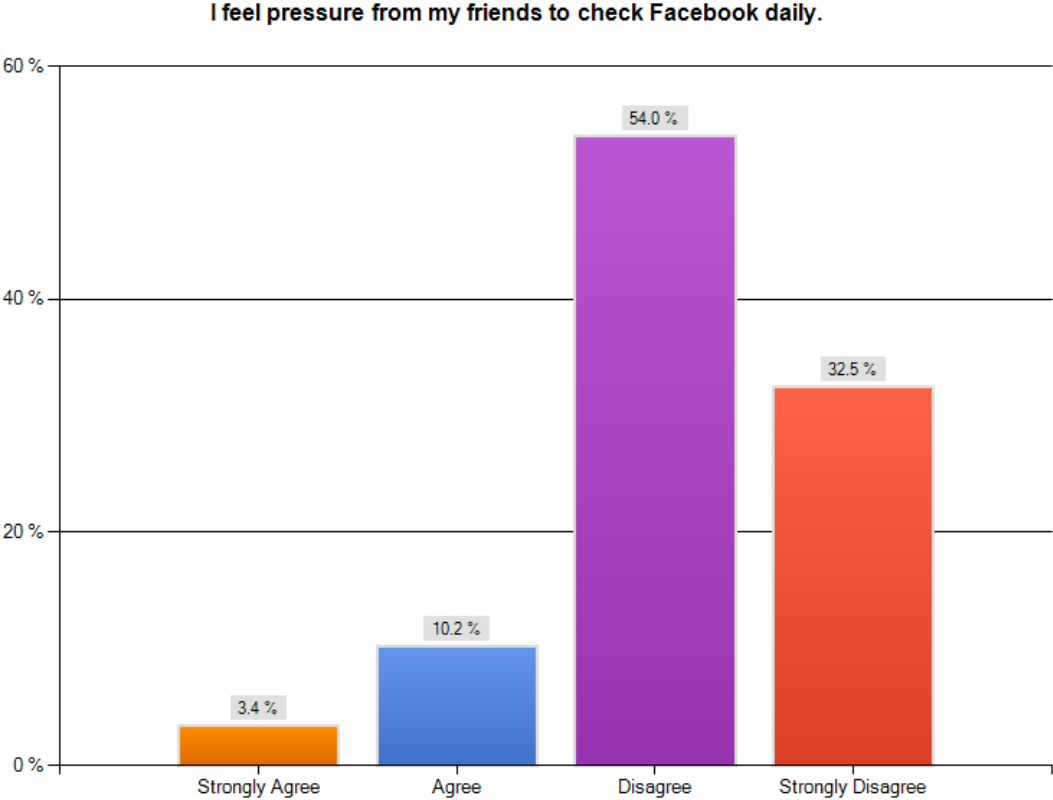


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 4

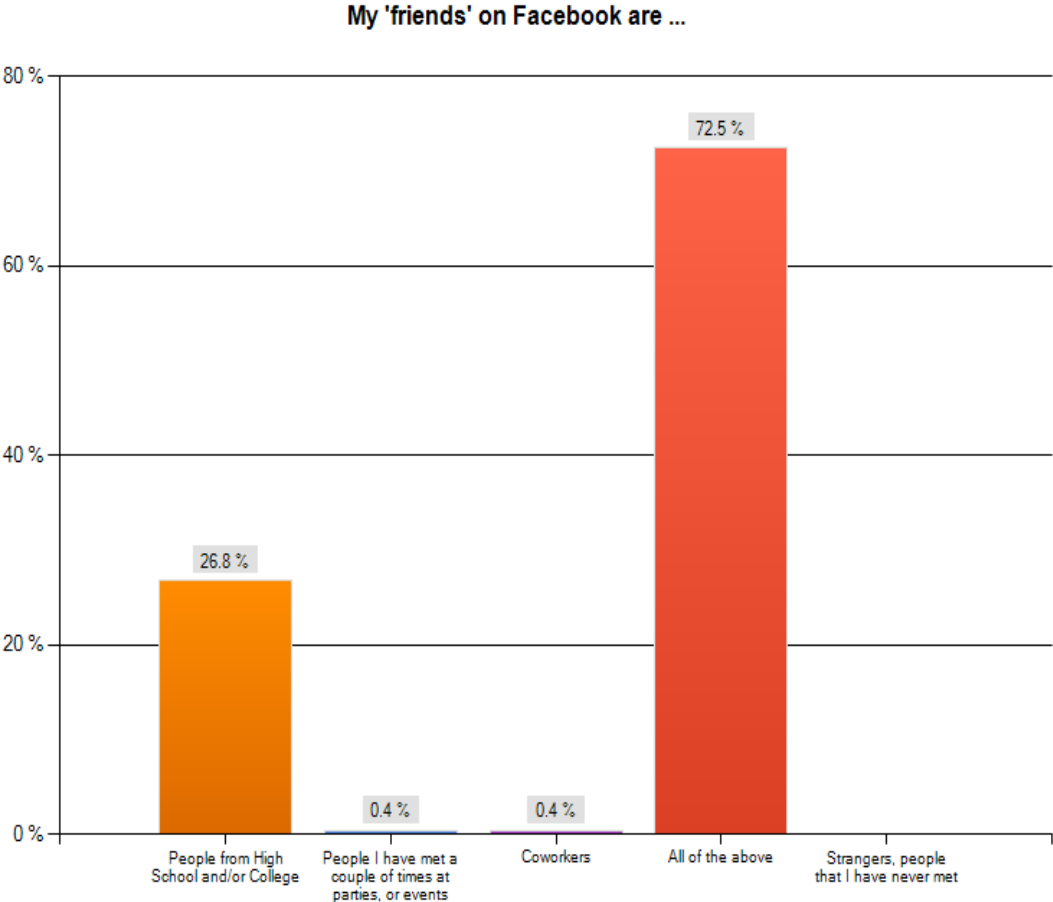


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 5

I upload photos on Facebook as a way of documenting events and sharing information with my friends and family.

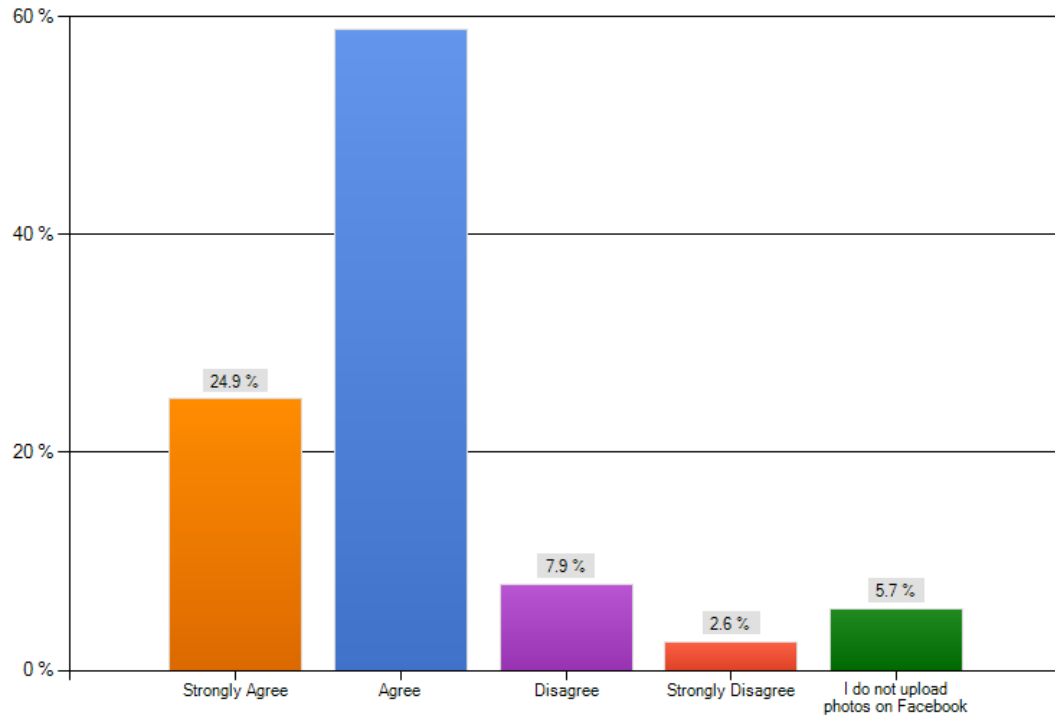


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 6

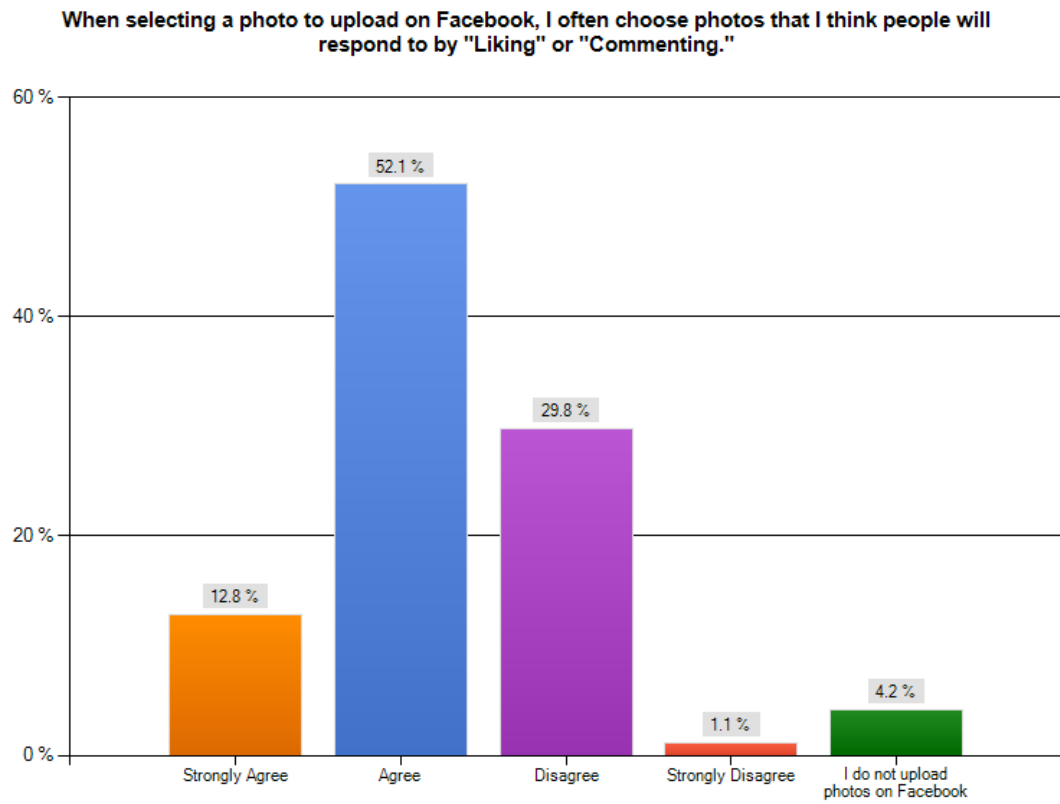


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 7

Spearman Rho

			When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.
Spearman's rho	When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.413**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	254	250
	When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	Correlation Coefficient	.413**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	250	251

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Crosstabs

When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting." * When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable. Crosstabulation

			When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.				
			strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Total
When selecting a	strongly agree	Count	10	20	3	0	33

photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."		% within When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	30.3%	60.6%	9.1%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	62.5%	12.3%	5.2%	0.0%	13.2%
	agree	Count	6	101	25	3	135
		% within When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	4.4%	74.8%	18.5%	2.2%	100.0%
		% within When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	37.5%	62.0%	43.1%	23.1%	54.0%
	disagree	Count	0	42	30	7	79
		% within When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	0.0%	53.2%	38.0%	8.9%	100.0%
		% within When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	0.0%	25.8%	51.7%	53.8%	31.6%
	strongly	Count	0	0	0	3	3

Total	disagree	% within When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	23.1%	1.2%
		Count	16	163	58	13	250
		% within When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by "Liking" or "Commenting."	6.4%	65.2%	23.2%	5.2%	100.0%
		% within When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8

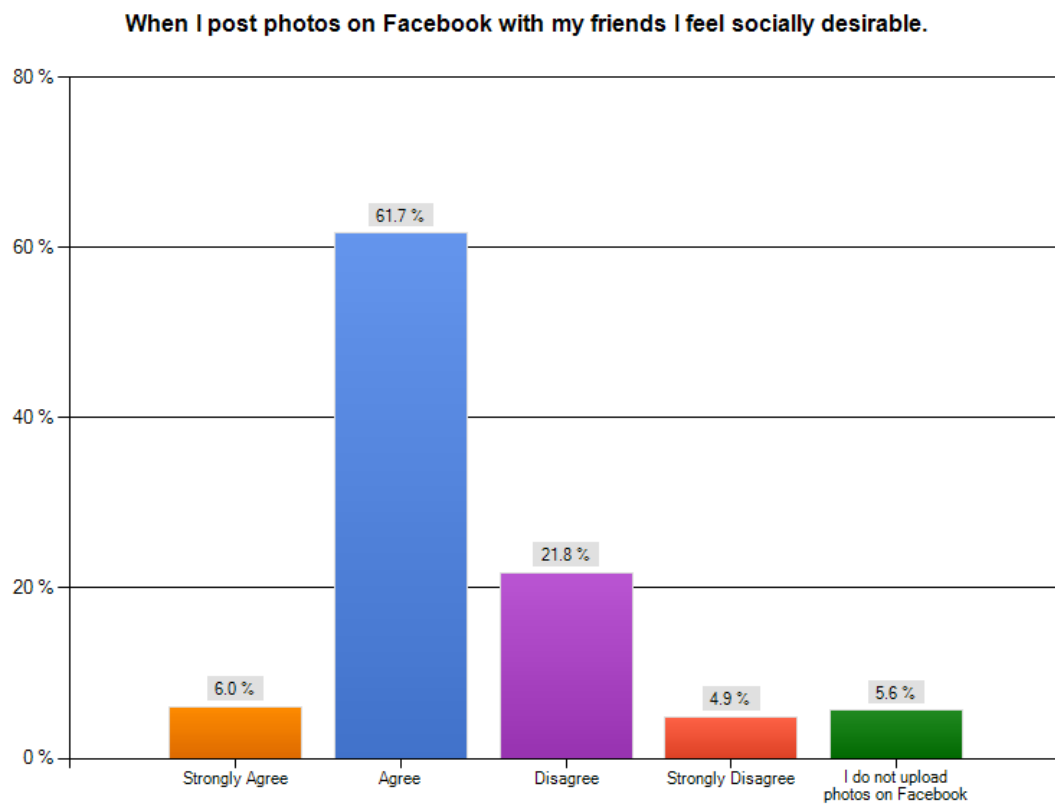


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 9

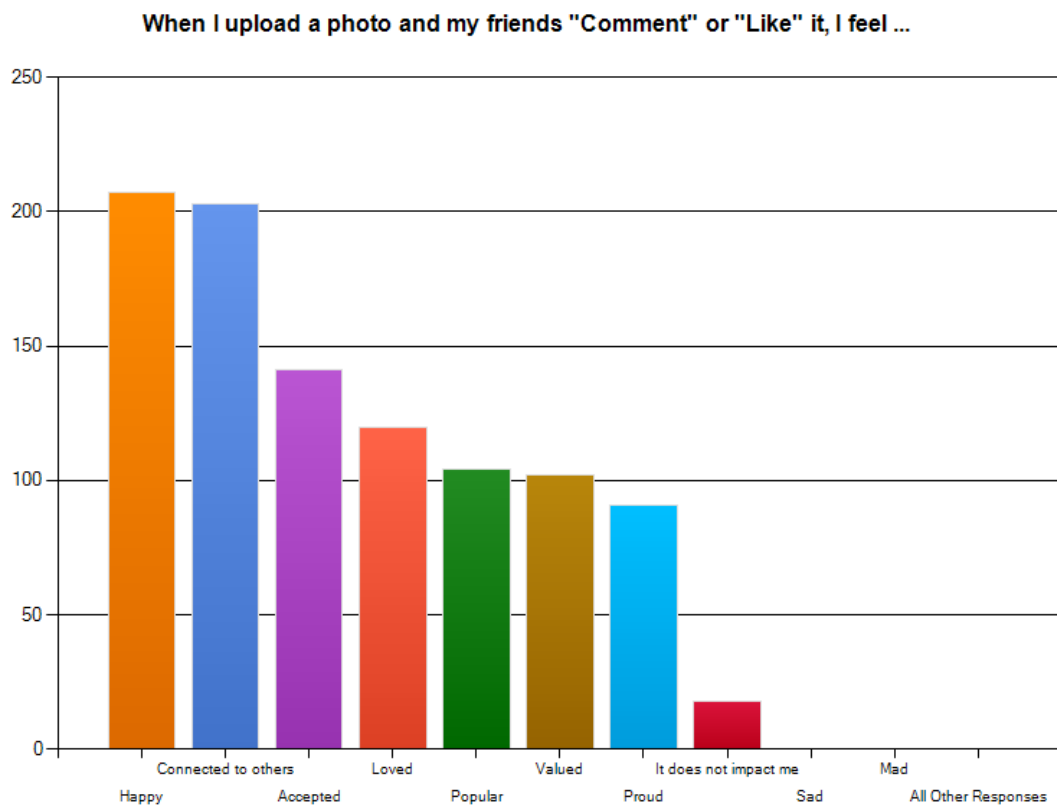


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 10

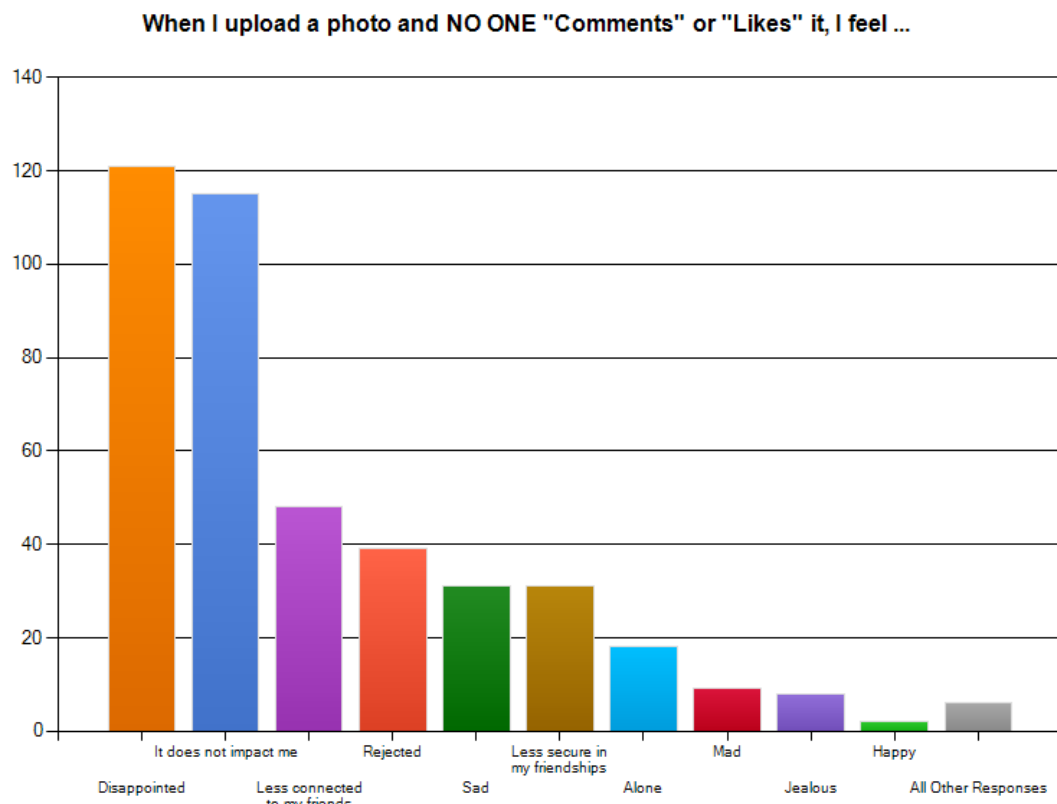


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 11

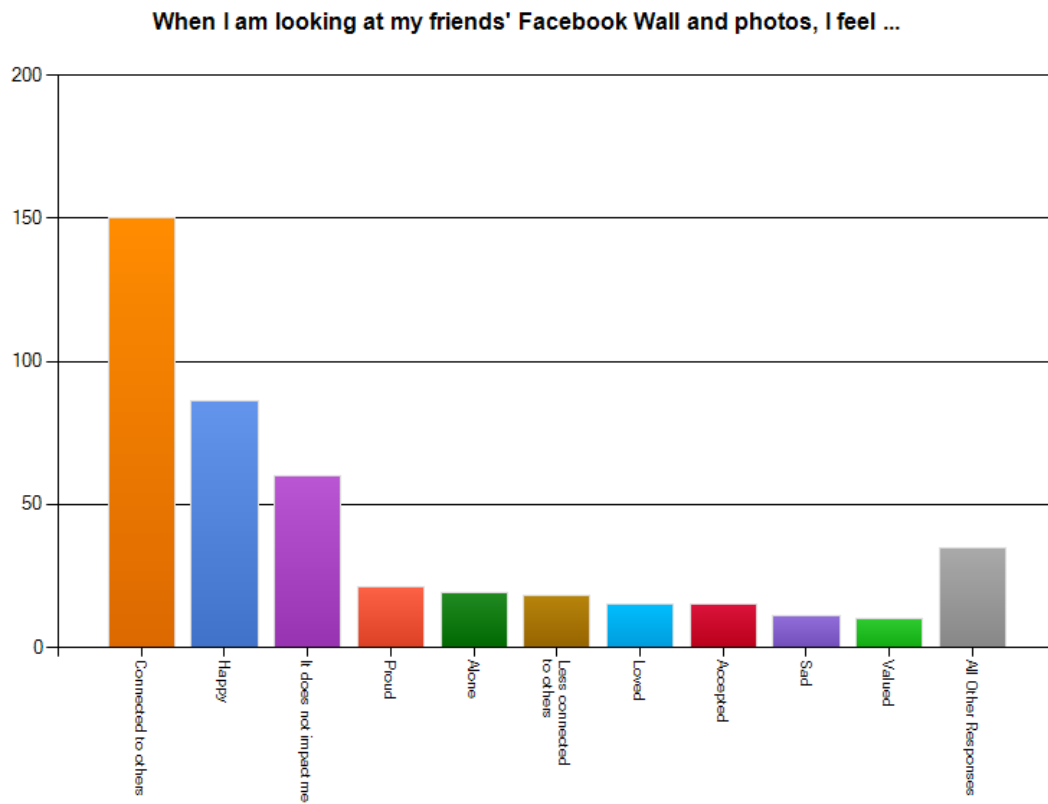


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 12

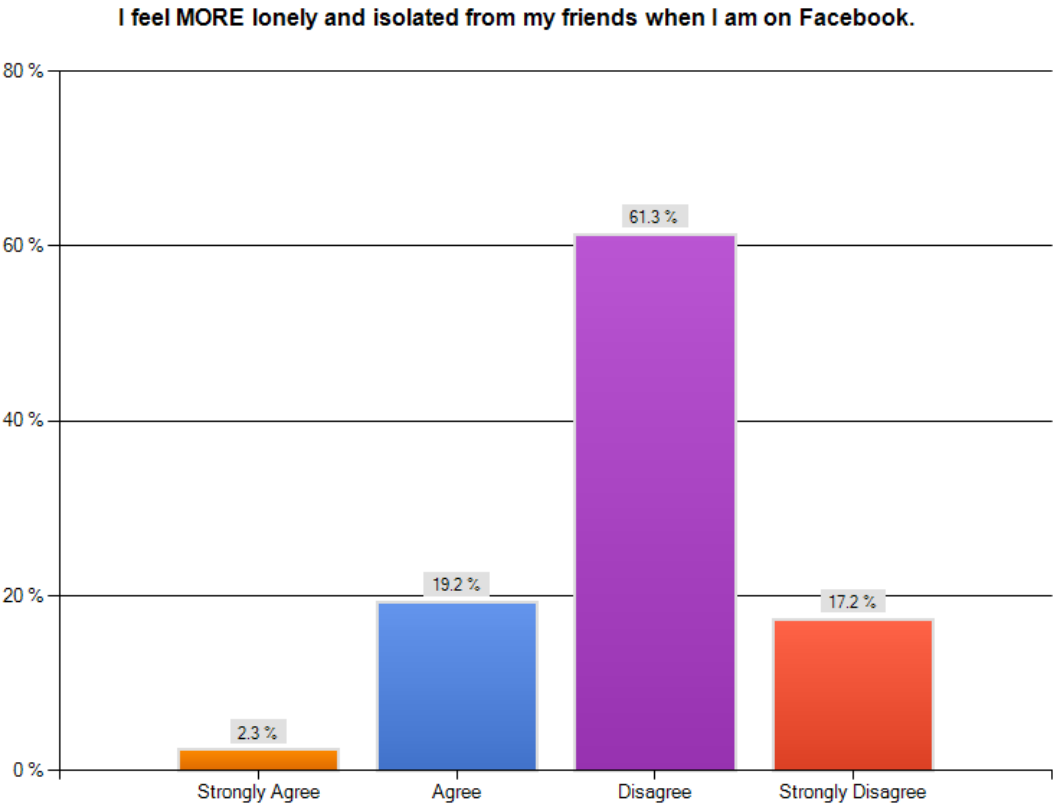


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 13

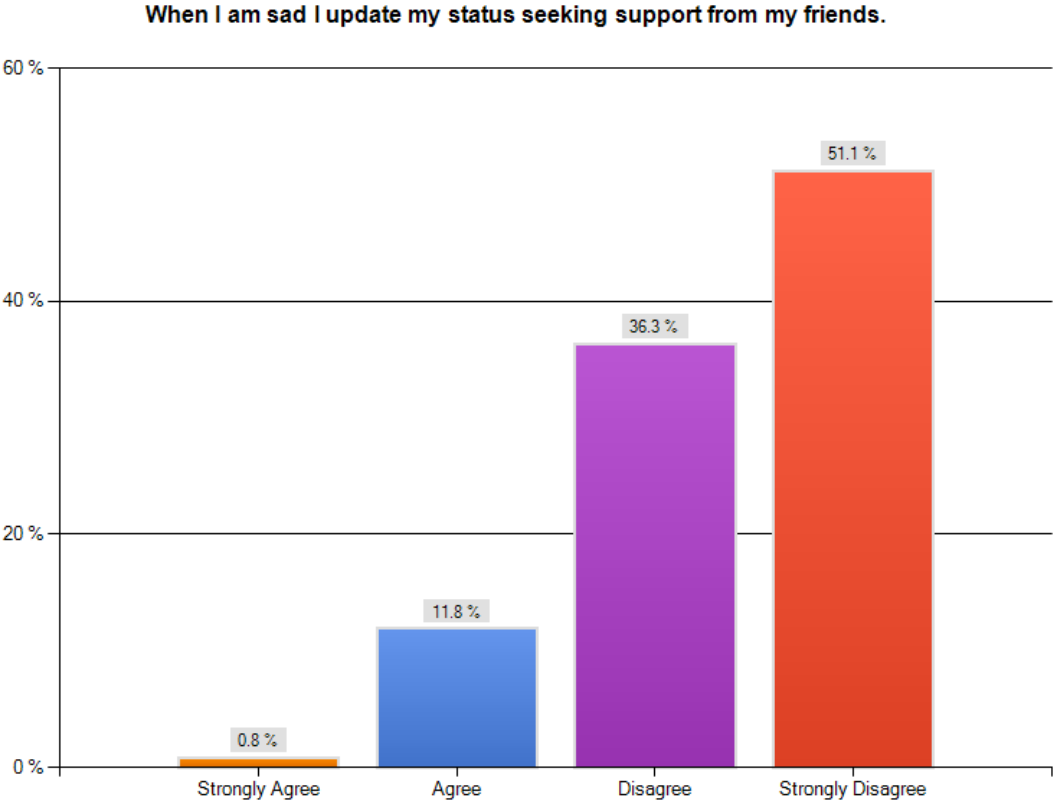


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 14

When I use Facebook I compare myself to my friends and I DO NOT feel proud of who I am as a person.

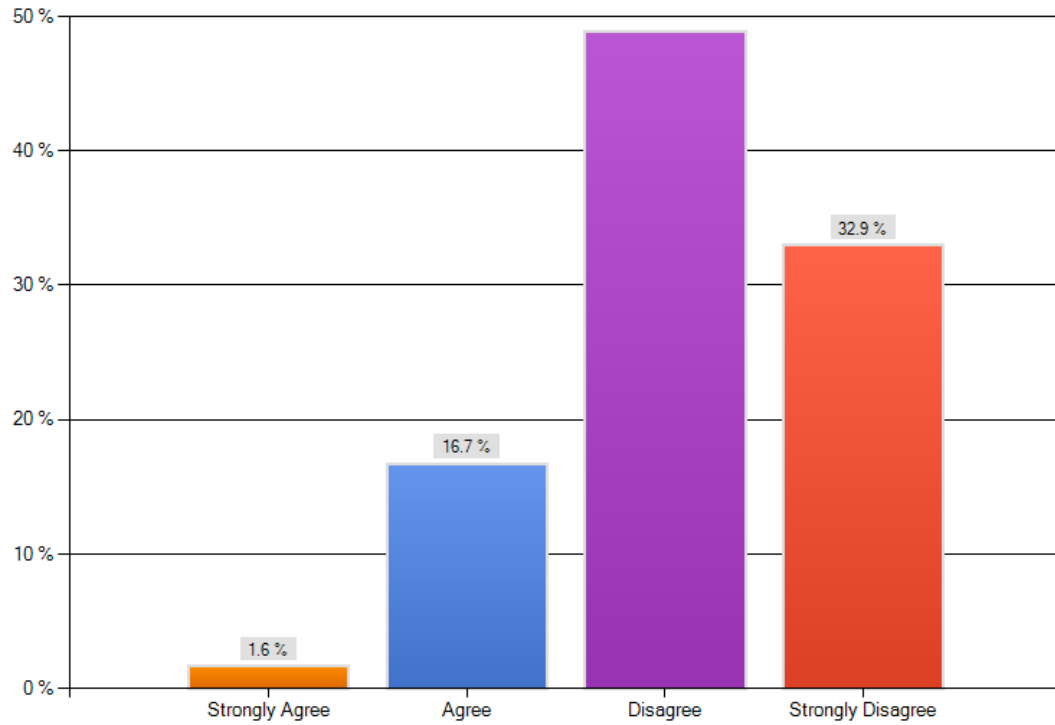


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 15

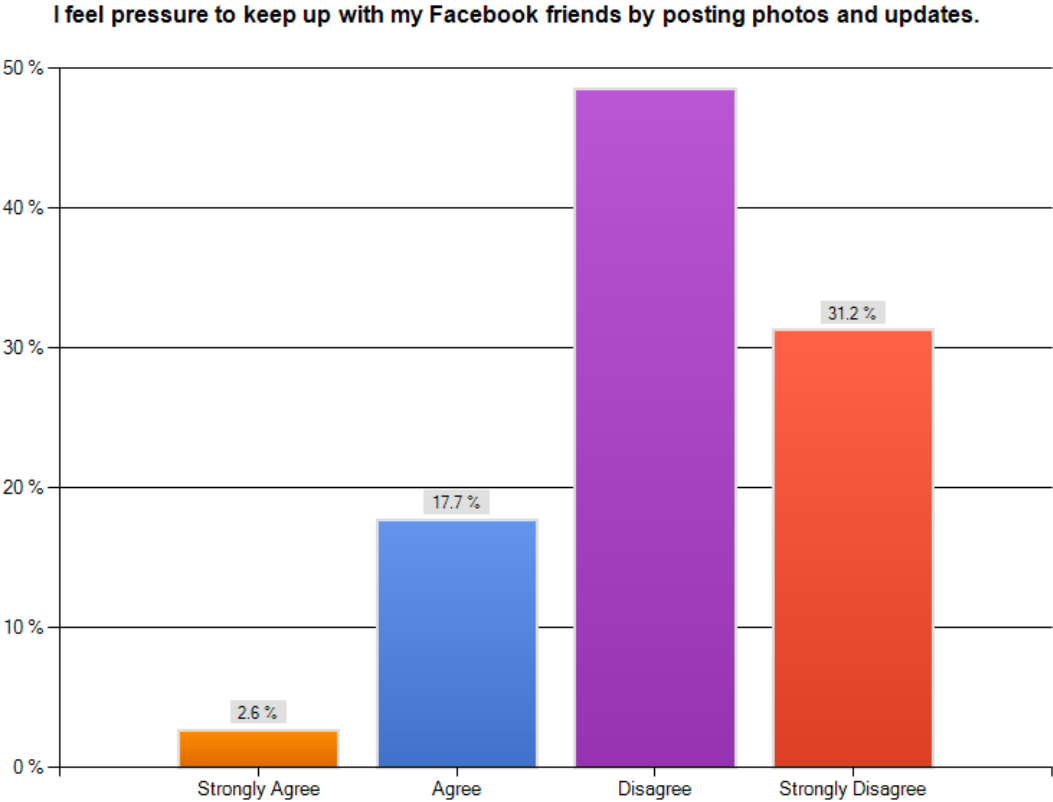


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 16

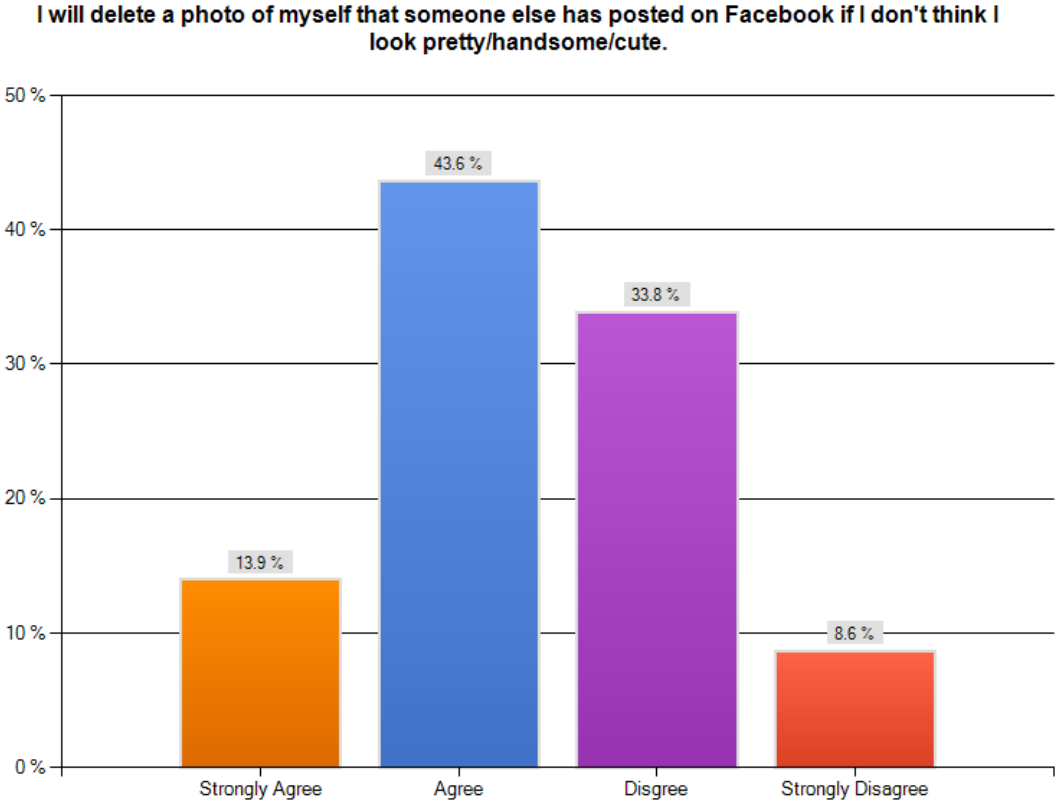


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 17

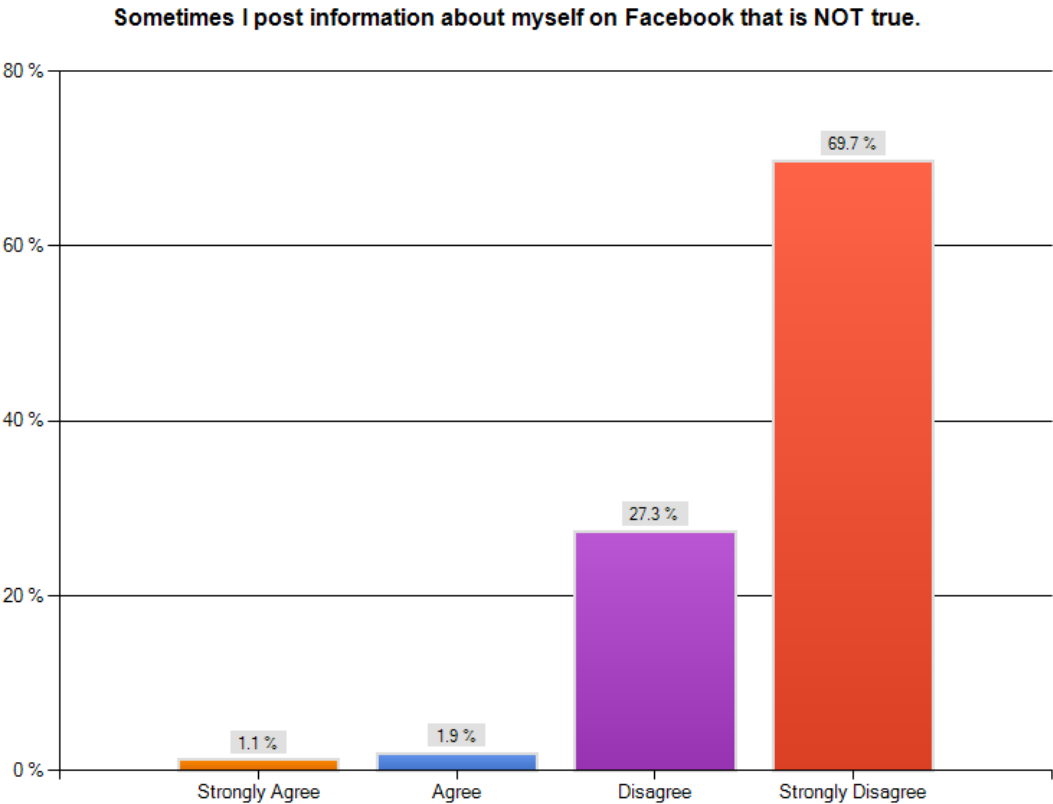


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 18

Spearman Rho

Correlations

			I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.
Spearman's rho	I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.172** .005

updates.	N	266	259
I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	Correlation Coefficient	.172**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	259	259

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates. * I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance. Crosstabulation

			I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.				
			strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Total
I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	strongly agree	Count	2	0	2	3	7
		% within I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	28.6%	0.0%	28.6%	42.9%	100.0%

	% within I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	66.7%	0.0%	3.6%	1.6%	2.7%
agree	Count	0	3	8	33	44
	% within I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	0.0%	6.8%	18.2%	75.0%	100.0%
	% within I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	0.0%	42.9%	14.3%	17.1%	17.0%
disagree	Count	1	4	35	87	127
	% within I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	.8%	3.1%	27.6%	68.5%	100.0%
	% within I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	33.3%	57.1%	62.5%	45.1%	49.0%
strongly disagree	Count	0	0	11	70	81

Total	% within I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	0.0%	0.0%	13.6%	86.4%	100.0%
	% within I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	0.0%	0.0%	19.6%	36.3%	31.3%
	Count	3	7	56	193	259
	% within I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and updates.	1.2%	2.7%	21.6%	74.5%	100.0%
	% within I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook friends to maintain a certain appearance.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 19

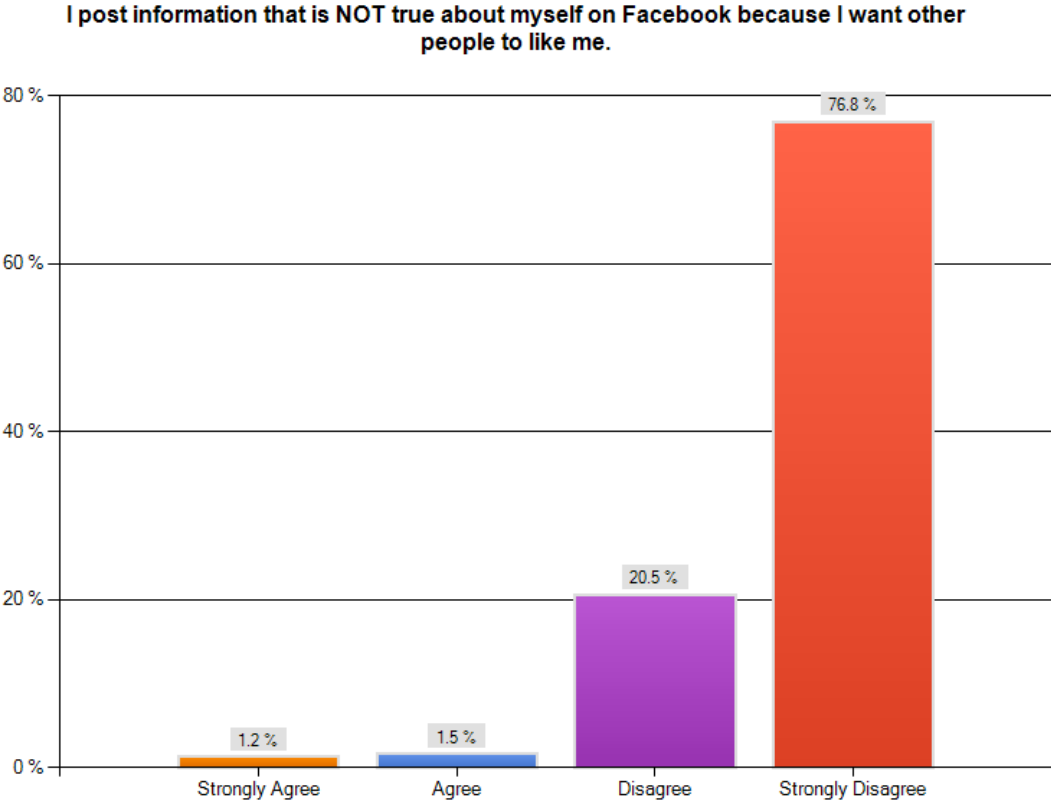


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 20

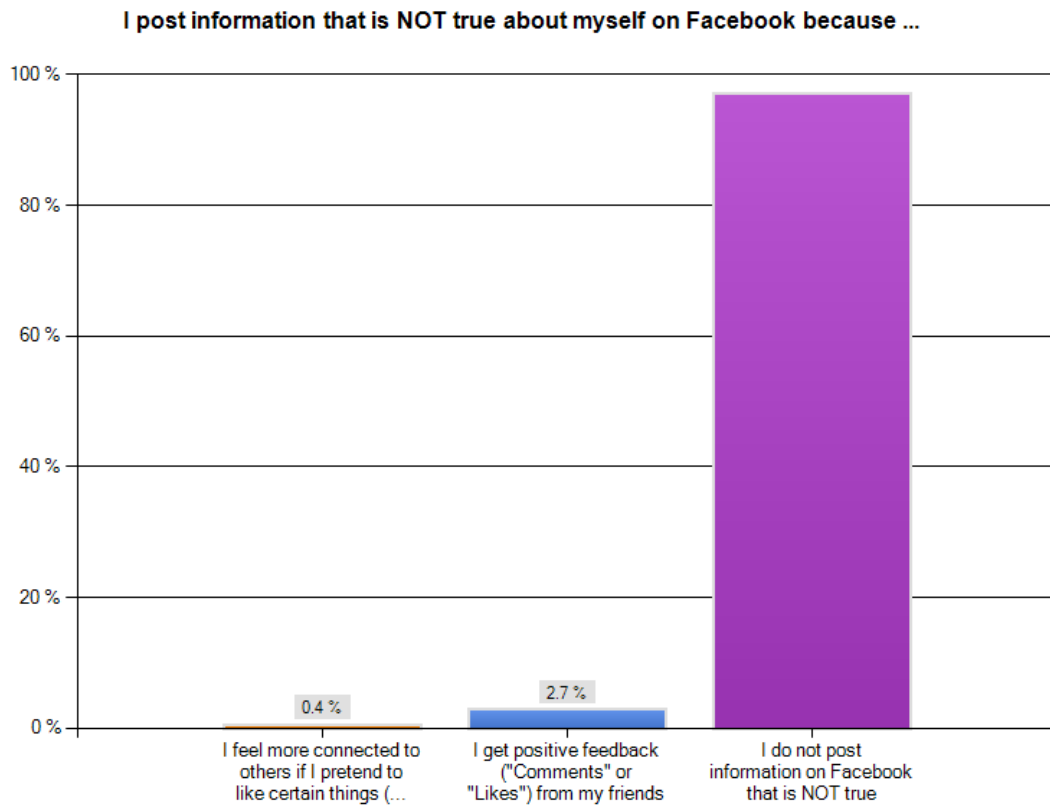


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 21

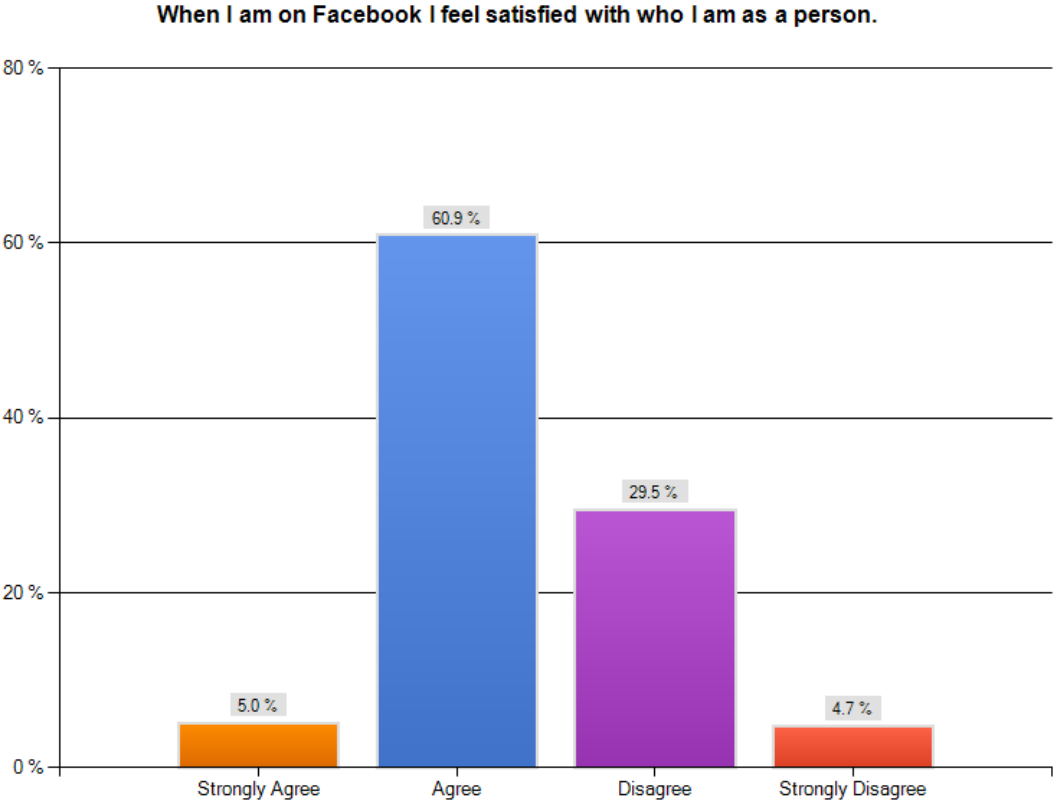


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 22

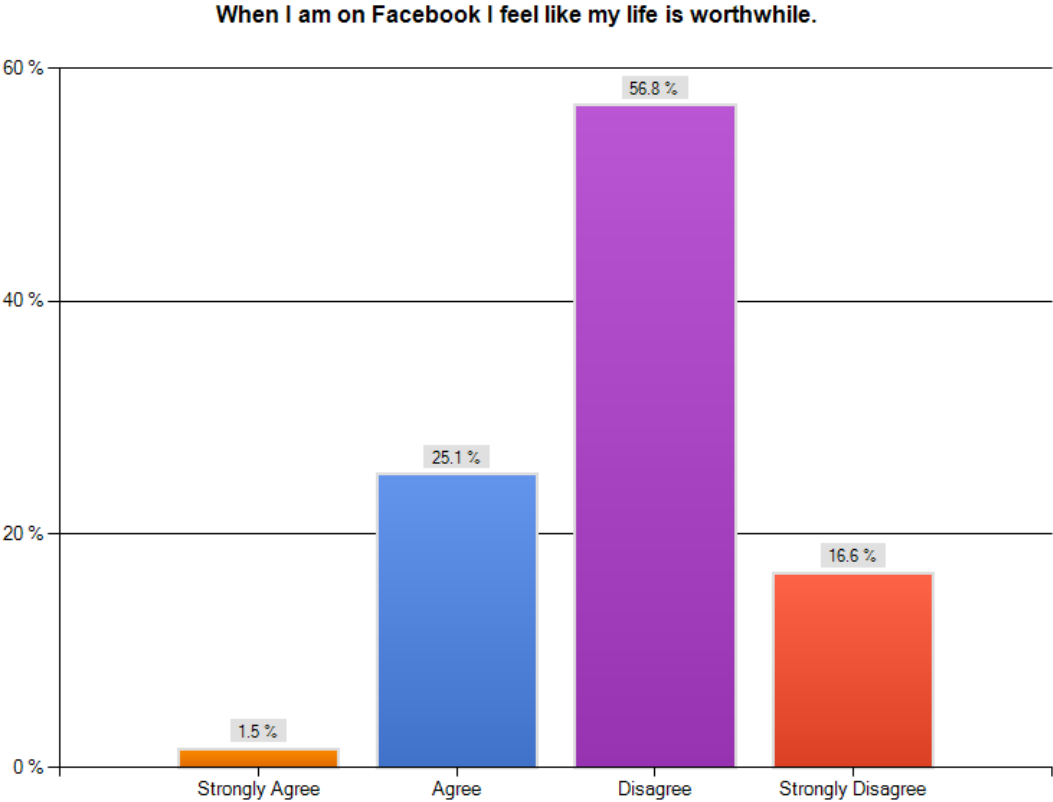


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Table 23

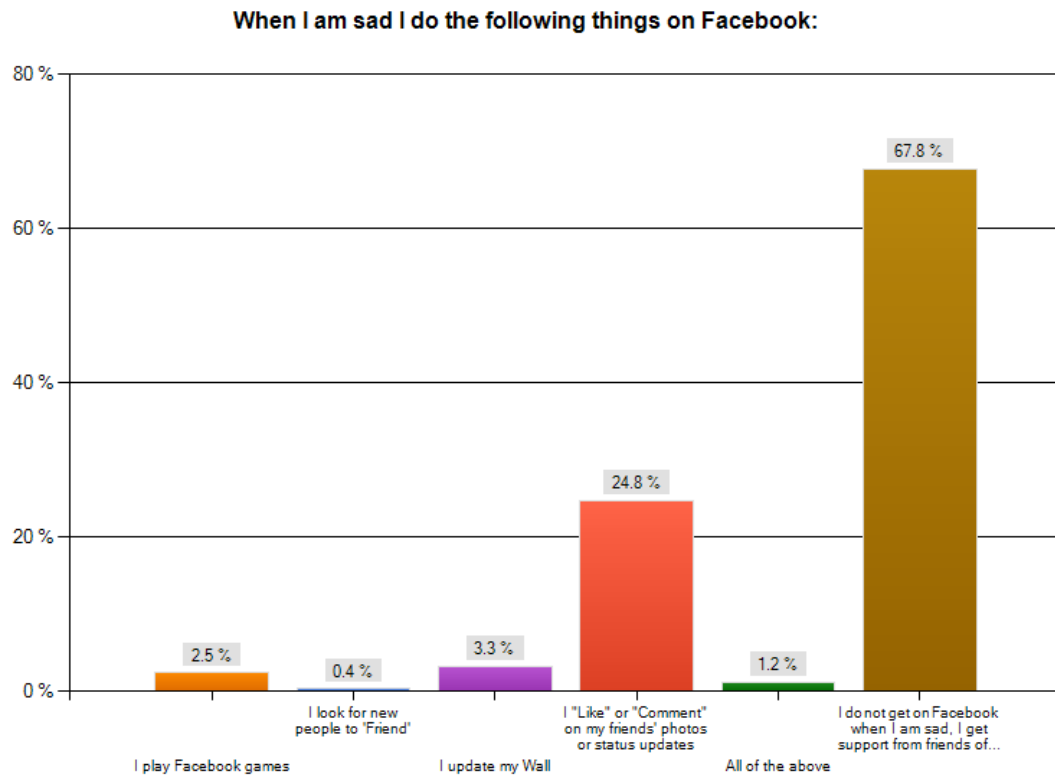


Table provided by SurveyMonkey

Appendix A

Facebook Recruitment

Facebook Friends:

Are you between the ages of 18-30 and use Facebook regularly? If so, please take a few minutes to help with my research project! I am currently working on a thesis for my Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, MA. Please click on the link below and take a brief survey answering questions about why you use Facebook and how you feel while using it. The survey will take no more than 20 minutes. Your feedback is important! In addition to taking the survey, I am asking that you please post this message and the link to my survey on your Facebook Wall. Thank you!

Appendix B

Screening Questions

1. Are you between the ages of 18 to 30?

Yes

No

2. Are you a U. S. citizen?

Yes

No

3. Do you use Facebook regularly?

Yes

No

Appendix C

Disqualification Page

Thank you!

Thank you for your time and interest in this study. Unfortunately, your answer to the previous question indicated that you are not eligible to participate.

Please share this survey with others on Facebook by posting the link on your Wall.

To exit, simply close the browser window.

Appendix D

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30

2. Which of the following best describes your sex?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Other (please specify):

3. Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic identification?

- White or Caucasian, not Hispanic
- Hispanic or Latino (a)
- African American or Black
- American Indian
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and/or Asian pacific Islander
- Multiracial
- Other (please specify):

Appendix E

Survey

- 1. I use Facebook to...**
 - Make new friends
 - Keep connected with old friends
 - Post photos
 - As a way of staying socially connected (to find out about parties, publicize parties)
 - All of the above
 - Other:
- 2. My 'friends' on Facebook are...**
 - People from High School and/or College
 - People I have met a couple of times at parties, or events
 - Coworkers
 - All of the above
 - Strangers, people that I have never met
- 3. On average I check Facebook for updates and new photos.**
 - 1 time per day
 - More than 5 times per day
 - Up to 5 times per week
 - I check Facebook Monthly
 - I do not check Facebook regularly
- 4. I feel pressure from my friends to check Facebook daily.**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 5. I feel pressure to keep up with my Facebook friends by posting photos and new updates.**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 6. I upload photos on Facebook as a way of documenting events and sharing information with my friends and family.**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 7. I will delete a photo of myself that someone else has posted on Facebook if I don't think I look pretty/handsome/cute.**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

- 8. When I post photos on Facebook with my friends I feel socially desirable.**
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - I do not upload photos on Facebook
- 9. When selecting a photo to upload on Facebook, I often choose photos that I think people will respond to by “Liking” or “Commenting”.**
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - I do not upload photos on Facebook
- 10. When I upload a photo and my Friend “Comments” or “Likes” it, I feel...**
- Happy
 - Loved
 - Connected with others
 - Accepted
 - Valued
 - Proud
 - Popular
 - Sad
 - Mad
 - Alone
 - Disappointed
 - Rejected
 - Jealous
 - Less connected to my friends
 - Less secure in my friendships
 - It does not impact me
- 11. When I upload a photo and NO ONE “Comments” or “Likes” it, I feel...**
- Happy
 - Loved
 - Connected with others
 - Accepted
 - Valued
 - Proud
 - Popular
 - Sad
 - Mad
 - Alone
 - Disappointed
 - Rejected
 - Jealous
 - Less connected to my friends
 - Less secure in my friendships

- It does not impact me

12. When I see a photo of my Friends on Facebook at an event/party that I WAS NOT invited to, I feel...

- Happy
- Loved
- Connected with others
- Accepted
- Valued
- Proud
- Popular
- Sad
- Mad
- Alone
- Disappointed
- Rejected
- Jealous
- Less connected to my friends
- Less secure in my friendships
- It does not impact me

13. When a friend and I post a photo from the same event on Facebook and s/he receives more “Comments” or “Likes”, I feel...

- Happy
- Loved
- Connected with others
- Accepted
- Valued
- Proud
- Popular
- Sad
- Mad
- Alone
- Disappointed
- Rejected
- Jealous
- Less connected to my friends
- Less secure in my friendships
- It does not impact me

14. I look at my friends’ Facebook Wall or Photos when I am feeling sad

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. When I am looking at my Friends’ Facebook Wall and Photos, I feel....

- Happy
- Loved
- Connected with others

- Accepted
- Valued
- Proud
- Popular
- Sad
- Mad
- Alone
- Disappointed
- Rejected
- Jealous
- Less connected to my friends
- Less secure in my friendships
- It does not impact me
- I do not look at my friends' Wall or photos

16. I check Facebook more often when I am feeling sad or lonely

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. I feel MORE lonely and Isolated from my friends when I am on Facebook

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. When I am sad, I upload photos of times when I was feeling more happy, or connected to my friends

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. When I am sad I write on my Friends' Wall, or chat with my friends on Facebook

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. When I am sad I update my status seeking support from my friends

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. When I am sad I do the following things on Facebook

- I play Facebook games
- I look for new people to "friend"
- I update my Wall
- I "Like" or "Comment" on my friends' photos or status updates
- All of the above

- I do not get on Facebook when I am sad, I get support from friends off line
- **Drop box**
- 22. When I use Facebook I compare myself to my friends and I DO NOT feel proud of who I am as a person**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - **Drop Box**
- 23. I check Facebook more often when I am happy**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 24. When I am on Facebook I feel like my life is worthwhile**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 25. Sometimes I post information about myself on Facebook that is NOT true**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 26. I post information that is NOT true about myself on Facebook because I want other people to like me**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 27. I post information that is NOT true about myself because I feel pressure from my Facebook Friends to maintain a certain appearance**
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 28. I post information that is NOT true about myself on Facebook because...**
 - I feel more connected to others I pretend to like certain things (music, food, sports, ect)
 - I get positive feedback (“comments” “Likes”) from my friends
 - I do not post information on Facebook that is NOT true
 - **Drop Box**
- 29. When I post information that is NOT true on Facebook and my friends “Comment” or “Like” it, I feel**
 - Happy
 - Loved

- Connected with others
- Accepted
- Valued
- Proud
- Popular
- Sad
- Mad
- Alone
- Disappointed
- Rejected
- Jealous
- Less connected to my friends
- Less secure in my friendships
- It does not impact me
- I do not post information about myself on Facebook that is NOT true

30. When I am on Facebook I feel satisfied with who I am as a person

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

31. When I am using Facebook, I Feel

- **Drop box**

Appendix F

Referral List

1. **24-hour Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**
2. **24-hour support: 866-920-2952**
3. **Suicide Prevention Service and Depression Hotline: 630-482-9696 or visit the website at [http: www.spsamerica.org](http://www.spsamerica.org)**
4. **Suicide Hotline Listings by State: <http://www.suicidehotlines.com>**

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form

Dear Prospective Survey Participant,

My name is Katherine Wiscomb and I am a graduate student working toward my master's degree in social work at Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, Massachusetts. I am conducting research to learn more about how Facebook is related to young adults' feelings of self-worth. Having worked with adolescents in my internship placement last year, it became evident to me that social media sites are shaping how young adults are connecting with others around them, their identity development, and having both positive and negative implications of their self-esteem. This study will be presented as a thesis and may be used in possible future presentations, and publications.

If you choose to participate in this study I will be asking you to respond to an online survey. Your participation in my study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions. The questionnaire will first ask you some general questions about yourself. You will then be asked several questions about feelings you experience while using Facebook. Along with the questions, drop boxes will be available for you to share your personal experiences, feelings, and history with Facebook. The questionnaire will take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

One risk in participating in the survey is the possibility that you may experience emotional discomfort while completing the survey. If you feel that you would like additional support at any point while answering the questionnaire or following your participation, I have provided a list of mental health resources at the end of this letter that you may use.

Although there is no financial benefit for participating in this study, one possible benefit is that your response to the questionnaire will allow you to share your personal experiences using Facebook. It is my hope that you will gain a new perspective and understanding of who you are and the relationships you have with other people through using Facebook as a result of completing my survey.

Your participation in the survey will be confidential. The survey software does not collect names, e-mail addresses, IP addresses, or any other identifying information. Your responses, but not your identifying information will be available only to me through the use of password protection. My research advisor will have access to the data after any identifying information has been removed from the write-in responses. After any identifiable information has been removed from open-ended questions my research advisor and data analyst will see the information you provide. All data collected for my study will be kept in a secure, password protected location for a period of three years as required by federal guidelines. After that time, if the data are no longer needed for research purposes they will be destroyed. If it is needed for further research purposes the data will continue to be kept secured for as long as needed and when no longer needed, they will be destroyed.

If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the questionnaire at any point by exiting the survey and you may choose not to answer any or all of the questions, simply skipping them. For purposes of this study, only surveys that have been completed at least 50% will be analyzed. If you choose to withdraw from the survey, or not to answer 50% of the questions, your responses will not be used. Once you have submitted your data it will be impossible to

withdraw from the study, as your data will be encrypted to ensure that you remain anonymous, and I will be unable to identify your survey responses from those of others who that have participated in my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, you can contact me at ----- and may phone the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Thank you for your interest in the study.

Sincerely,

Katherine Wiscomb

BY CHECKING "I AGREE" BELOW, YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION. AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Please print a copy and save it for your records. (Drop box to select "I agree" or "I disagree")

Appendix H

HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 23, 2013

Katherine Wiscomb

Dear Katie,

Thank you for making all the requested changes to your Human Subjects Review application. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett / Shaw'.

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mariko Ono, Research Advisor