

## Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying is linked to suicide.
- Cyberbullying can take on many forms:
  - **Overt**: name-calling, insults, threats
  - **Covert**: rejection, exclusion, gossip, spreading rumors, or threatening to end a friendship
  - **Identity-based**: based on salient aspects of self (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, etc)



John et al., 2018; Nesi et al., 2021

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## Rates Among Girls and LGBTQ+ Youth

### LGBTQ+

- Rates of cyberbullying are estimated to be 3x higher among LGBTQ+ vs. to non-LGBTQ+ youth
- Almost half of LGBTQ+ youth report cybervictimization with highest among those who are younger, trans, indigenous, and multiracial

Trevor Project, 2021




### Racial/Ethnic Identity

- Online racial discrimination for teens identifying as Black, Hispanic/ Latine, Indigenous, or Asian:
  - 79% Direct discrimination
  - 94% Vicarious discrimination

Del Toro & Wang, 2023; Tao & Fisher, 2022

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## Exposure to Racism on Social Media and Suicide Risk

Weeks of Exposure to Racism on SM


N= 35 youth of color

→

$B = 1.81, SE = .61, p = .003^{**}$



Weekly Passive Death Wish  
Weekly Suicidal Ideation



Linda Oshin,  
PhD- GSAPP

**Key takeaway:**  
Exposure to identity-based cyberbullying is related to suicidal thoughts, even if it's not directed at you!

Oshin, Boyd, Jorgensen, Kleiman, & Hamilton, JAACAP, In Press


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## Identity-Based Cyberbullying and Suicidal Ideation

**Exposure on social media in the past month:**

- 47% saw others being teased, bullied, or called nasty names because of their identity
- 52% saw sad or upsetting news about people who share my identity
- 45% saw images or videos of violence against people who share my identity

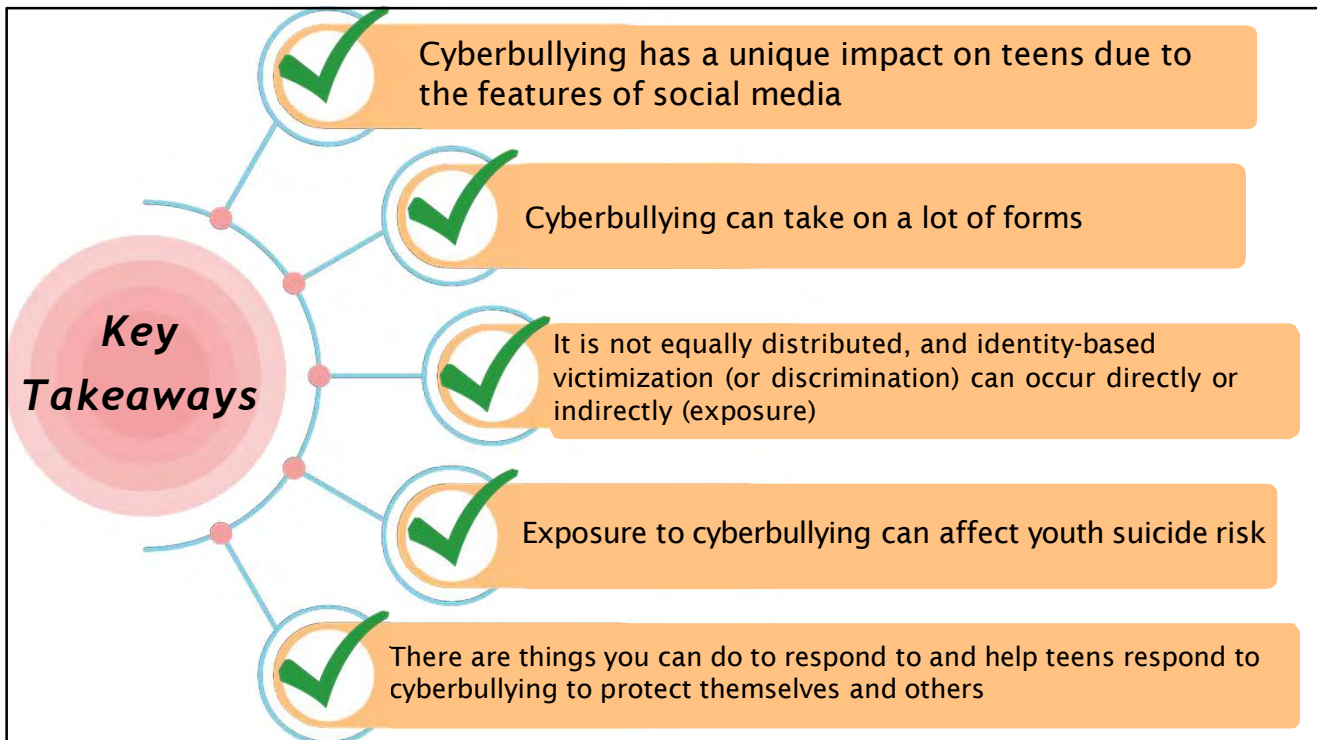
Higher overall levels of exposure to identity-based cyberbullying was linked to higher past-month suicidal thoughts ( $B = 0.13, p < .05$ ).



Aijia Yao, PhD

Yao et al., in prep; Preliminary data based on our Teen Social Media Experiences Study

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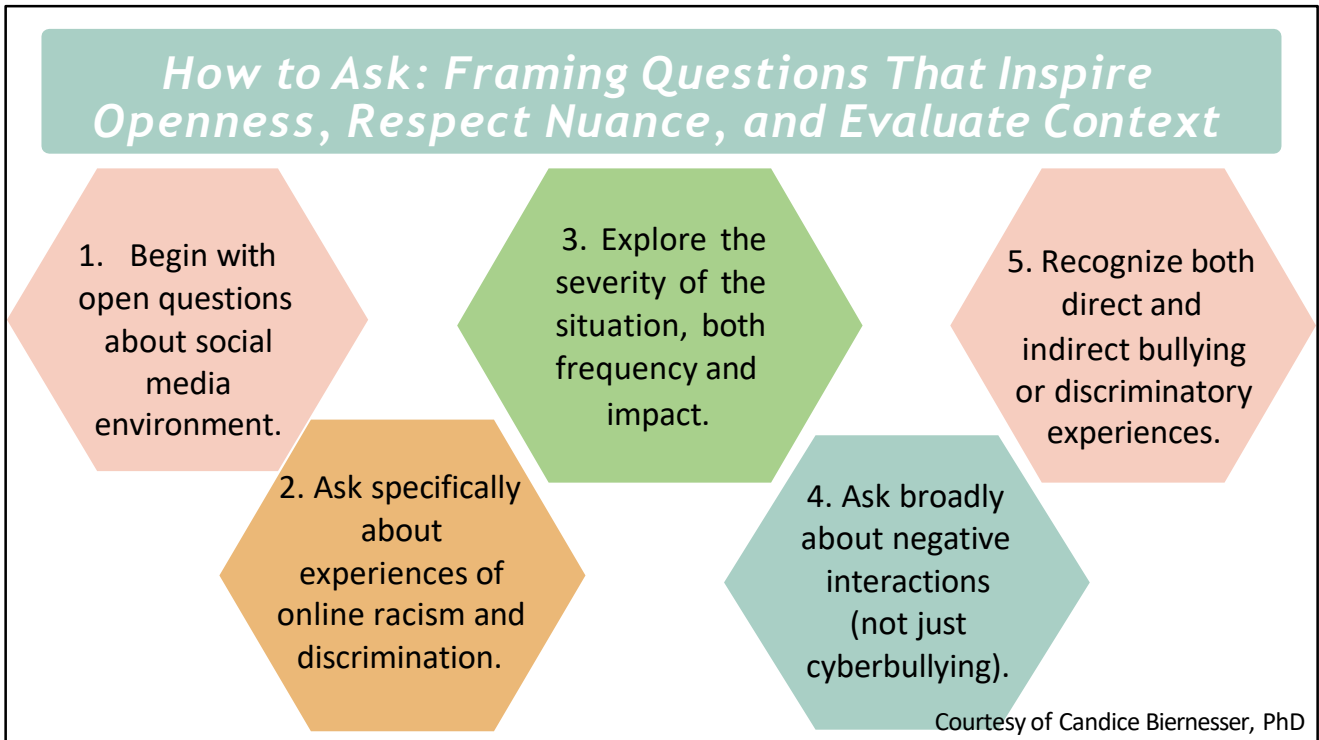


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## Cyberbullying: Current APA Guidelines

To minimize psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to **"cyberhate"** including online discrimination, prejudice, hate, or cyberbullying especially directed toward a marginalized group (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, ability status), or toward an individual because of their identity or allyship with a marginalized group ***should be minimized.***

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## Cyberbullying: Resources

**Stronger than online hate** 



**Flourish**

<https://flourish.pitt.edu>

**Library of brief digital coping skills:**

- Distraction
- Self-soothing
- Dealing with Negative Thoughts
- Dealing with Emotional Crises
- Breathing
- Taking Care of Your Sleep and Health
- Low-Impact Exercise
- High-Impact Exercise
- Creativity and Self-Expression
- Music

**Resources on social media and teen mental health:**

- Resources for LGBTQ+ Teens
- Resources for Mental Health
- Resources for Navigating Social Media Wisely
- Resources for Parents
- Resources for Positive Identity

**Collection of stories (teen lived experiences):**



Courtesy of Candice Biernesser, PhD

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# What experiences and content matter most?



Self-harm content



Cyberbullying



Violence Exposure



Mental Health Promoting

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## INVEST: Investigating Negative Violence Exposure on Social Media in Teens



Funded by NJ GVRC & Rutgers Office of Chancellor Provost

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## How often are teens exposed to gun violence on social media?

- 73% of teens reported gun violence exposure on SM within 3 months, with most teens reporting weekly exposure
- More frequent exposure (in past three months) is associated with a greater likelihood of suicidal thoughts in past month ( $B = .43, p = .01$ ), and suicidal behavior in past month ( $B = .85, p < .001$ )



Shipp et al., in prep; Preliminary data based on our Teen Social Media Experiences Study

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### Quotes from Teen Focus Groups (N=35)

**Unprompted:** *"Sadly, I see it pretty much every day... so many people post it every day ... and ... you can't follow anyone and not see it."*

**Mental health:** *"There are a lot of people who feel genuinely scared ... And a lot of people are also kind of desensitized ... because it is something that comes up a lot."*

**Not discussed:** *"I'd say that like sharing it... you kinda think a lot more about like how ... it's been so normalized because it happens so often. The more you talk about it, the less normalized it gets."*

**Key initial takeaway:**

**ASK ABOUT & TALK TO TEENS ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**

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Cyberbullying



Violence Exposure



Mental Health Promoting

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## Peer Support & Connection

Social media can offer space to strengthen existing friendships and form new friendships ones, which reduces isolation and loneliness, and improves mental health.



Over 70 studies have shown an inverse relationship between supportive online interactions and both depression and anxiety (Seabrook et al, 2016).

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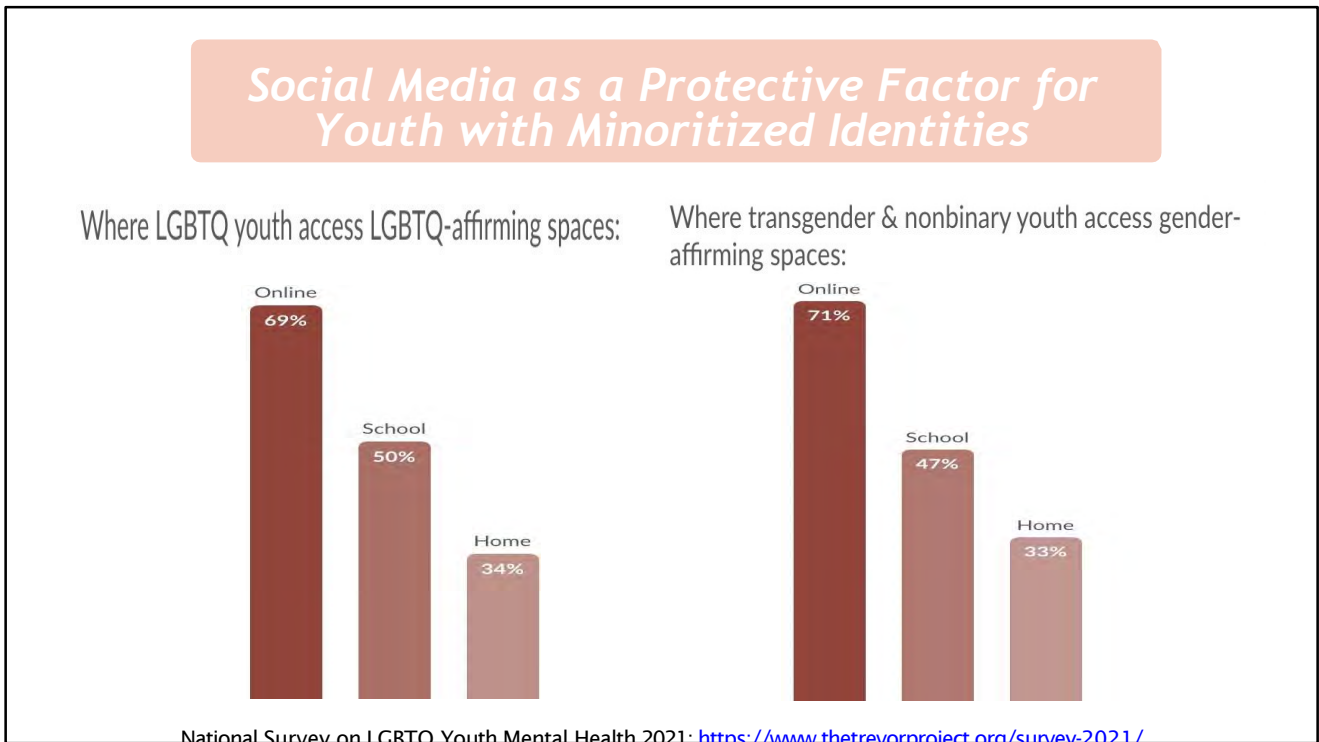
### Types of Social Support

The infographic is titled "Types of Social Support" in a light orange rounded rectangle. Below the title are three orange rounded rectangles, each with an icon and a list of support types. The first is "Emotional" with a smiley face icon, listing Reassurance, Feeling loved or cared for, Feeling valued, and Belongingness. The second is "Informational" with a lightbulb icon, listing Information, How to access resources, and How to navigate situations. The third is "Tangible" with a hand icon, listing Material support, Access to goods & services, and Financial assistance.

- Emotional**
  - Reassurance
  - Feeling loved or cared for
  - Feeling valued
  - Belongingness
- Informational**
  - Information
  - How to access resources
  - How to navigate situations
- Tangible**
  - Material support
  - Access to goods & services
  - Financial assistance

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## Identity-Based Supportive Social Media Experiences

- **Identity-based support/acceptance exposure in the PAST WEEK :**
  - 62% saw posts that highlight or celebrate people, communities, or events related to my identity
  - 60% saw advocacy or uplifting news that supports people who share my identity
- **Identity-based support/acceptance engagement in the PAST WEEK:**
  - 50% posted about positive experiences that I have had related to my identity (e.g., connection, pride, cultural celebration).
  - 65% had a meaningful conversation about my identity with someone I care about (e.g., friend, family member)
  - 47% posted to get support from a community (people I don't know) who share my identity.



Yao et al., in prep; Preliminary data based on our Teen Social Media Experiences Study

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## 24/7 Accessibility Can Also Help!

- Social media as distraction and support
- Access to mental health information and resources
- For teens at high risk for suicide, social media can be *life saving*.




Vidal, 2020; focus groups

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# Final Reminders and Takeaways:

## Social Media and Suicide Risk




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### Key Takeaways of Social Media-Suicide Research

- 1**


**Move away from the focus on “screentime:**  
We do not have enough studies to indicate social media causes death by suicide in teens (or even thoughts or behaviors).


- 2**

**Social media experiences and content:**  
Social media is associated with increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors for teens who experience cyberbullying or those who engage (or are exposed to) more suicide and self-injury content.


- 3**

**Social media also has benefits:**  
It may have benefits for adolescents, particularly those who are high-risk for suicide (or not using it may actually indicate social withdrawal), so *not* using it is not necessarily a good thing!



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# What we do (and do not) know about social media and suicide risk



Scan here for blog!

**SUICIDE**

**The Messy Truth About Teen Social Media Use and Suicide Risk**

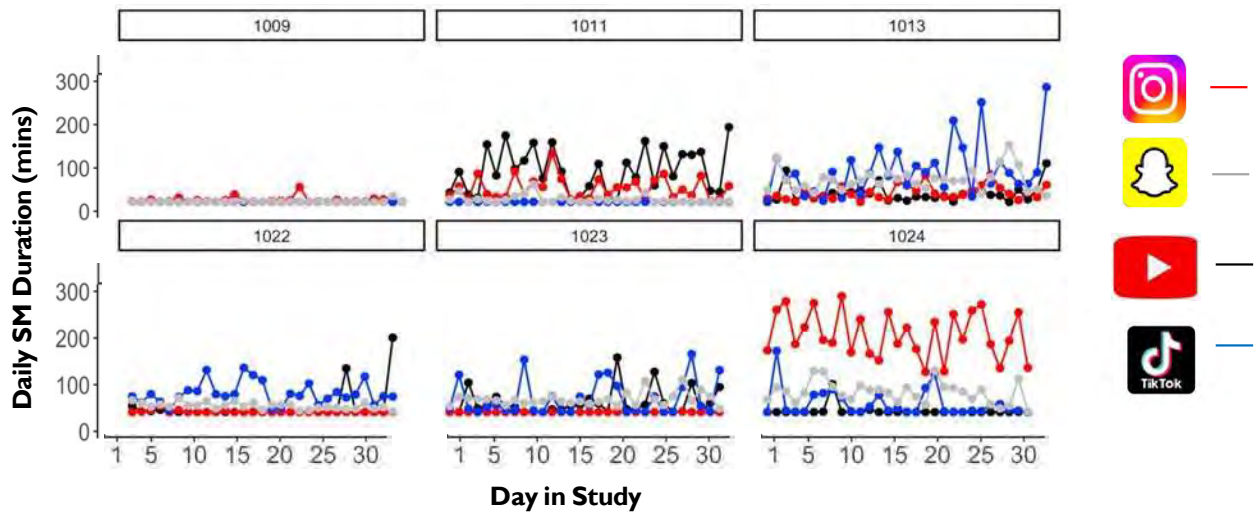
Looking beyond simple truths about social media to embrace its complexity.

When I tell people my research focuses on social media, sleep, and suicide prevention, they often assume I'm going to tell them that social media is harmful or simply "bad" for teens. They expect me to agree that social media is the root cause of why rates of depression and suicide are increasing among teens today. In reality, I won't say this, because this conclusion is not supported by existing research. But, here are a few things we do know about social media and suicide risk so far:

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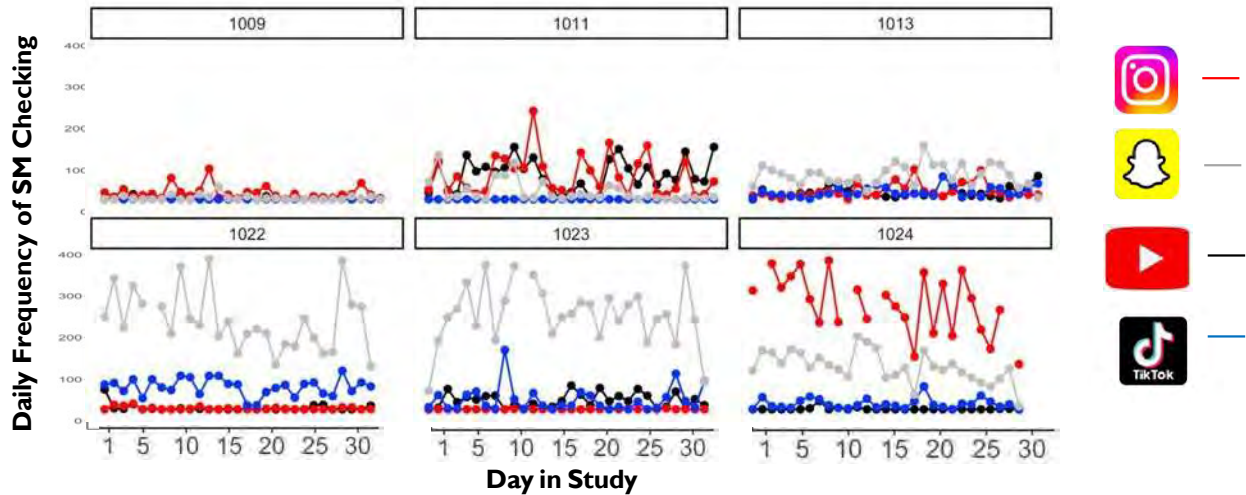
## 4

### Teens use social media differently!



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# Social media daily checking behaviors



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## TIP: Let Teens Define Their Social Media

- Be clear when discussing 'social media' what you mean
- Understand what teens use as social media
- Recognize this changes over time as a function of time (SM evolving) and development



Example: Pinterest more recently has SM functions and often used by younger teens (typically those who are not yet allowed to have "social media" as traditionally defined)



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## How social media affects teens is different!



**Role of social media:**  
How do you use social media in your life? At different times?



**Emotional state:**  
How do you feel during and right after using social media? Notice when this shifts, or isn't helpful



**Challenges:**  
What challenges do you experience? Do you feel like you can't stop at times? What negative experiences or interactions do you have?



**Knowledge:**  
How do you monitor your usage or make changes based on how you feel? How can you be intentional with it?



**Support:**  
How and when does social media support you? When is it useful and make you feel good? How are you using it?

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## Think about your own perceptions about social media and work with teens




“I’m so glad that I didn’t grow up with all this social media.”

“I had social media, but it’s so much worse now.”

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## Key takeaways for clinical practice (& for parents)



### KEY TIPS FOR PARENTS

The first step in having a conversation with your child about social media is to think about your **own** thoughts and beliefs about it.

**WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA...**

### KEY TIPS FOR PARENTS

**LEARN ABOUT YOUR TEENS' SOCIAL MEDIA USE:**

### Resources

**How can we begin thriving with technology?**

Less fear, more intention.  
Less isolation, more support.  
By replacing helplessness with agency,  
And stagnant debates with better conversations,  
We can begin to digitally thrive.

Let's start having better conversations about technology that are both critical and optimistic. This enables us to see a more complete picture of what living in a hyperconnected world really means for each of us.

Our resources can help you:

Tech + Values

Design Tricks

Thinking Traps

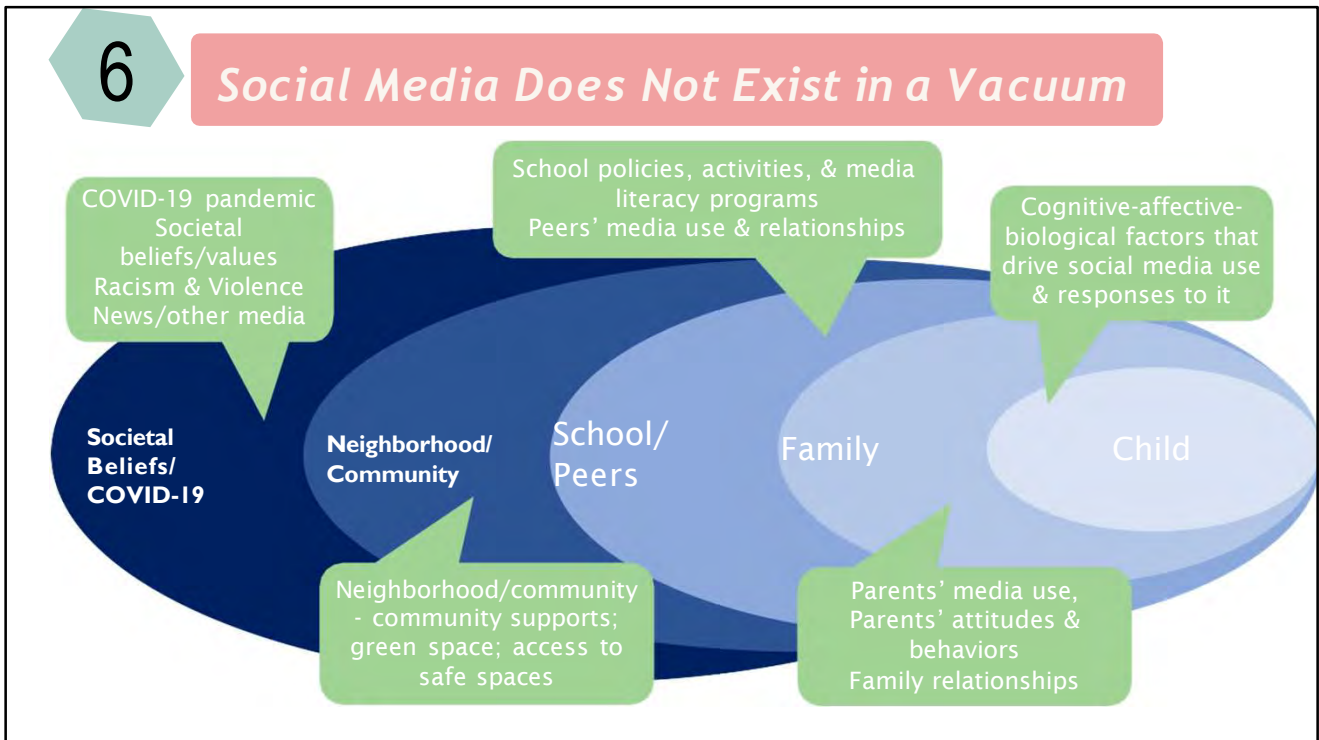
Tech Habits

Upcoming Resources

<https://digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu/resources/>

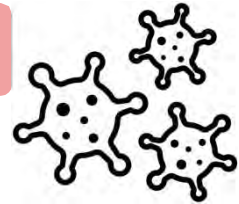
Handouts: [www.thehamiltonlab.org/mentalhealth](http://www.thehamiltonlab.org/mentalhealth)

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# Social Media for Generation COVID



Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

Journal of Adolescent Psychology

Review

### Social media as a bridge and a window: The changing relationship of adolescents with social media and digital platforms

Jessica L. Hamilton, Melissa J. Dreier and Simone I. Boyd

**Abstract**  
Social media use became central to adolescents' lives and development during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some adolescents first initiating social media use in this period. The unique circumstances of the pandemic contributed to changing patterns of social media use among teens and popularity of features. The pandemic also facilitated use and engagement with social media to strengthen social connection, emerging identities, and access to information and resources. It also impacted teens' online experiences and exposure to broader societal problems on SM. Recent research, with a focus in the United States, is presented on how the pandemic has shaped adolescents' experiences with social media in meaningful ways across development. We argue that research on adolescent social media use needs to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the use and influence of social media in adolescents today.

adolescents could interact with their peers, explore and express their emerging identities, and stay abreast of pandemic news and world events [3]. SM became a space where normative activities and milestones occurred, amplifying its role during a period of rapid neurobiological and social-emotional development [4,5]. Some adolescents are not only "digital natives," but also "Generation COVID of SM." Their first interactions and experiences with SM were during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentally shaping their perceptions of, interactions with, and responses to SM. In this article, we review research on adolescents' patterns with SM use during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily focused in the United States (U.S.), and present research on how the pandemic has shaped teens' SM use for connecting with peers and the broader world in new and potentially lasting ways (Figure 1).

Reexamining Social Media and Socioemotional Well-Being Among Adolescents Through the Lens of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Theoretical Review and Directions for Future Research

Jessica L. Hamilton<sup>1</sup>, Jacqueline Nesi<sup>2,3</sup>, and Sophia Choukas-Bradley<sup>4</sup>

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Key Takeaway: Take a step back and consider/ask about COVID impacts and media use.

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## Teens are central in research & conversations about social media!

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Inform  | Inform our research to make it more applicable (and better!)                                     |
| Support | Support teens in improving mental health in schools and communities through teen-led initiatives |
| Build   | Build teens' academic and professional growth/development!                                       |



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# THANK YOU!

Adolescent research participants

Many amazing collaborators & mentors (at Pitt!)

NIMH (K01MH121584)

STAR Conference



The Hamilton Lab Team!!



Lab Website with Mental Health Resources & Tips

All pics/icons made by Freepik on [www.storyset.com](http://www.storyset.com) and Canva.com

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## Participation Opportunities



SCAN ME

### Project SLEEP

Ever wondered how you can **improve your sleep**? Take part in our brief 20-30 minute intervention to learn more about your sleep and how you can make it better!

*Ages 16-19  
Fluent in English  
Have sleep problems/want to improve sleep*



SCAN ME

### PLUS-2

Help us learn more about how **social media, sleep and suicide** are related in teens, using daily surveys, wearing a sleep monitoring watch and downloading an app!

*Ages 14 - 17 (in high school)  
Android Phone  
Fluent in English  
Uses social media regularly*

### COMING SOON!



### INVEST-US

Help us learn more about how teens' **exposure to gun violence on social media** affects mental health. The survey portion will be launching soon!

*Ages 13 - 17 (grades 8-12)  
Fluent in English  
Uses social media regularly  
Located in the U.S.*

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