


Where are we now?

Reflecting on the positive and negative impacts of the online world for student mental health.

Aisling O'Brien

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- * Some global themes
 - * Impact in general
 - * Some impact on students
 - * Implications for Student Counselling

Unifying

The online world can act as a unifying force that brings people together and give them a voice:

- * #MeToo
- * #BlackLivesMatter
- * Arab spring
- * #JeSuisCharlie

Polarisation

The nature of the online world can stoke a more negative form of polarisation:

- * Twitter spat
- * Outrage
- * Threats

Why?

- * Online mode of communication is frequently text based.
- * Normalising effect of face-to-face engagement is removed.
- * Non verbal cues that moderate interaction are missing.
- * Leaves a large blank space to project fears/ideas/anger into
- * Can lead to extreme reactions that would not happen otherwise e.g; Aoife Dooley
- * Tribalism: 'A very strong feeling of loyalty to a political or social group'
- * Polarising effect, entrenching people in extreme positions against 'the other'.



This can also be open to manipulation:

- * Zeynep Tufekci. Techno-sociologist. Social implications of emerging technologies.
- * Youtube algorithms throwing up progressively more extremist videos.
- * Dark posts. Use of dark posts in advertising and political campaigns.

Connecting with others

The online world can offer a platform for people to feel connected to others:


- * Advice
- * Special interests
- * Normalising experiences and feelings
- * Feeling heard/understood


The downside of connecting through devices

Sherry Turkle

Professor of social studies at MIT. Specialises in the psychology of human relationships with technology for 30 years. Being constantly connected to devices has some negative consequences:

- * Silence, alone time and boredom are important. Quiet time helps us to reflect, learn and grow emotionally. Clarity and realisation can happen when we are alone. Time alone to process and regulate our emotions. Boredom helps us learn how to tolerate frustration etc..

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- * Students preferring to e-mail questions and receive e-mail answers rather than meet. ‘Perfect question’. Editing and filtering perfectionism of the online world can create an anxiety around regular human interaction.



Holbrook middle school asked her to advise on problems with students. The school dean was concerned about a disturbance in their students' friendship patterns and observed the following:

- * “Students don’t seem to be making friendships as before. They make acquaintances, but their connections seem superficial.”

- * “These kids aren’t cruel. But they are not emotionally developed. Twelve-year-olds play on the playground like eight-year-olds. The way they exclude each other is the way eight-year-olds would play. They don’t seem able to put themselves in each other’s place..”
- * “They are not developing that way of relating where they listen and learn how to look at each other and hear each other.”
- * Both the school teachers and Turkle noted the overuse of devices as playing a role in the problems.

‘Five days at outdoor education camp without screens improves preteen skills with nonverbal emotion cues’

Yalda.Uhlsa, MinasMichikyan, JordanMorris, DebraGarcia, Gary W.Small, Eleni Zgourouf, Patricia M.Greenfield

Preteens spent five days in a device free nature camp without access to screens. They took pre- and post-tests on reading nonverbal emotional cues. A control group in a school were given the same tests. The device free camp group’s scores improved significantly after the five days compared to the control group.

General decrease in empathy?

- * University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. University students 40% less empathetic compared to 30 years ago. Biggest drop since the year 2,000.

Konrath conducted the meta-analysis, combining the results of 72 different studies of American college students conducted between 1979 and 2009, involving 14,000 students.

Alone Together

- * Turkle has also written about the impact of being 'Alone Together'. When we turn from each other to engage with devices, we are losing positive connection rather than gaining it. Connecting in the online world can increase loneliness and have negative impact.

Alone together





‘No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression’

Melissa G. Hunt, Rachel Marx, Courtney Lipson, Jordyn Young


Hours on social media (Instagram, snapchat, facebook)
Vs 10 minute limit. Limited group showed reduction in loneliness and depression.

Social comparison and the lack of reality on social media forums

‘Seeing Everyone Else's Highlight Reels: How Facebook Usage is Linked to Depressive Symptoms’

Mai-Ly N. Steers¹, Robert E. Wickham², Linda K. Acitelli¹

- * More time spent on facebook resulted in more depressive symptoms.



‘The grass is always greener on my Friends’ profiles: The effect of Facebook social comparison on state self-esteem and depression’

Yitshak Alfasi

- * Time spent on Facebook correlated with lower self-esteem and greater depressive symptoms.

'The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women'

Jacqueline V.Hogue. Jennifer S.Mills

- * State body image differs after social media engagement based on relationship type.
- * Social media engagement with attractive peers increases negative state body image.
- * Active social media engagement with family does not affect state body image.

Narcissism



Social Media and Narcissism



Narcissistic Traits

- * Block development of the personality, emotional maturity and ability to form healthy, meaningful relationships with others. People with narcissistic traits are more vulnerable to developing other mental health issues e.g; depression, anxiety.

Increase in narcissistic traits?

- * US national Institutes of Health study on lifetimes prevalence of narcissistic traits. 35,000 people structured interview.
- * 6.2% in the general population. 3% people in 60s. 10% people in their 20s.
- * Higher percentages than found in previous studies, especially in younger adult.

Impact of the online world within the Student Counselling context

** 'It was nice to know it wasn't just me. I got tips that helped me'*

Transgender student using supportive online forums

Within the Student Counselling context

- * *'I look around and everyone else's life is perfect. I'm nothing'.*

Student using social media platforms

Within the Student Counselling context

- * *'They really understand me.'*
- * *'It might give me the courage to go through with it'*

Student using suicide websites

Online supports already being used


- * Helpful source of information; websites,
- * Exercises, techniques, supportive apps online, TEDTalks
- * Niteline online listening service
- * People with similar issues have spoken openly about their challenges
- * Online booking systems, forums and programmes

Opportunities of the online world within student counselling

- * Low-intensity interventions for students with low levels of difficulty
- * Could be a support to those on waiting lists.
- * Can help encourage students who need a higher level of service to move onto face to face services.
- * Provides an option for students who can't come in person

Limits and risks

- * Counselling is a very particular setting where highly sensitive and complex issues are explored. Removing the face-to-face nature of the interaction also limits the level of intervention that can be attempted.
- * There is a potential to increase anxiety by enabling avoidance.
- * Using online services to counsel students with significant difficulties and/or high levels of distress could be harmful.
- * It could be promoted by those with no training/expertise in the area to serve their own agenda (sounds/looks good) or for financial gain.

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- * ‘For mood disorders and depression, the review suggested that predominantly self-help technology-based CBT-type interventions are efficacious for sub-threshold mood disorders but therapist-assisted treatments remain optimal for clinical levels of depression,’ (eMental-Health-State-of-the-art-Opportunities-for-Ireland-Full-Report, May 2018, Pg. 30).

Thank you

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