

Virtually Indoctrinated: An investigation into the effects of antisocial media on adolescents

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Abstract

This project takes an in-depth look at how media on social networking sites (SNSs) affect adolescents. The findings are relevant to our current social media-saturated world. Individuals have access to SNSs at younger and younger ages. This prompts concerns for an adolescent's well-being since their brains are developing during this period. It is crucial to understand how adolescents absorb antisocial content from SNSs. This project examines how adolescent thinking develops and the role antisocial media content has on that development. I examine the 2014 Slenderman stabbing as a case study of an extreme instance of a negative impact from social media. The main findings from this investigation show that the adolescent period is the most important stage in life for brain development affecting emotional, social, and mental capacities. Findings also show that adolescents have more access to the Internet and are spending more time on SNSs than ever. Research continues to be inconclusive whether or not this affects adolescents in a negative or positive way, but most agree there are both benefits and risk to SNSs.

To examine these issues, I produced a long-form journalism piece of 4,000 words that focuses on the case study and how social media affect multiple parts of an adolescent's life, an animated video to explain the case study, graphics for data visualization, and a website to display the project in a way that is uniform with digital journalism. Through the creation of the creative project, I have gained an understanding of the amount of work that must go into a digital story. Although the digital components of this project took the most time, planning, and coordination, multimedia components are an important storytelling aid and are crucial in capturing the audience's attention.

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I have never pursued an independent project of this magnitude before. I could not have done it without the support, guidance, and motivation from the people in my life who were there since the inception of this project.

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Chapter One: Literature Review and Rationale

Introduction

The summer before my senior year I became very interested in the Slenderman case. I was interning at a reality television company. The development team was working on proposing a documentary-style television show to explain the incident and depict the trial. The trial began in October and continued to unfold as this project did.

The Slenderman case was a heinous crime that occurred in 2014 in a suburb of Milwaukee - Waukesha, Wisconsin. Two 12-year-old girls, Anissa Weier and Morgan Geyser, lured a friend to a park where Geyser stabbed her 19 times while Weier looked on. The two girls left their injured friend to die, but she managed to crawl to a nearby bike path and get the attention of a passing cyclist. The victim survived but not without permanent mental and physical scars.

Weier and Geyser attempted to murder their friend because they believed in Slenderman, a sinister fictional character born on the Internet. He is a faceless man in a dark suit, sometimes portrayed with octopus-like tentacles. The girls learned about him on the Internet site Creepypasta, which is formatted like an encyclopedia. It presents stories, images, and videos to viewers in a documentary style as if they are true. Weier introduced Geyser to the site and the character and soon, they became obsessed. Slenderman started to become more real to them over time. At one point he was so real that they both worried Slenderman was going to kill their friends, family, and them. However, everyone they cared about could be spared, they read, if they killed one person on his behalf. This paranoia about imminent death, paired with a desire to prove that Slenderman was real, led to the plan to kill their friend.

Both girls were ruled mentally incompetent by mental disease or defect during trial. Geyser was diagnosed with early onset schizophrenia and Weier with a ‘shared psychotic disorder.’ Their mental illness clearly played a role in their crime, nevertheless this case serves as an extreme example of negative consequences that can come from exposure to antisocial media.

The following project studies the impact of social media on adolescents in order to understand if antisocial content on social networking sites (SNSs) influences whether or not they engage in antisocial behavior. In the case of Weier and Geyser, if they did not have access to the media about Slenderman during their adolescent years, would they still have committed the crime?

A series of terms will appear throughout this project. They are: social networking site, antisocial, and adolescent.

The term social networking site (SNS) is defined as “Web sites that allow people to stay connected with other people in online communities” (Kim, Jeong & Lee, 2010, p. 217). This may be interchanged with the term social media site, which O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) define as “Any website that allows social interaction is considered a social media site, including social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter; gaming sites and virtual worlds such as Club Penguin, Second Life, and the Sims; video sites such as YouTube; and blogs” (p. 800).

The term antisocial refers to the type of media content on SNSs discussed in this project. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, antisocial means “averse to the society of others” also “hostile or harmful to organized society; especially being or marked by behavior deviating

sharply from the social norm” (“Antisocial,” 2017). Illegal activity, violence, cyberbullying, and provocative images and ideas are regarded antisocial media content. This project analyzes antisocial media because it encompasses a broader classification of media with less limitations.

The term adolescent refers to the group that is studied in this project. While there are many terms to describe young people, this project will use the term adolescent because it describes both an age range (10-19 years old) and a stage of life (“Adolescence: a period needing special attention,” 2014). Adolescence is a recognizable stage of life. It is when an individual is between childhood and adulthood. The age range is flexible and the end of adolescence is marked by the acceptance of an adult identity and corresponding behavior (“Age limits and adolescents,” 2003). The words juvenile, teen, child, and variations of those also appear in this project. When discussing past research, I retain the term the author uses.

This project is important to research because it is crucial to understand how adolescent development occurs in the digital world. Through understanding the complexities of the influence of media on SNSs, we can try to manage how today’s adolescents interact with and think about social media. Daily news reports prove violent crimes, like school shootings and stabbings, are committed by adolescents. It is imperative to evaluate if the advent of media on SNSs and the societal change towards the importance of SNSs contribute to antisocial and violent behavior by adolescents.

The past research relevant to this topic comes from a number of disciplines. The majority of studies pertaining to this topic include: adolescent development, time and manner spent on SNSs, how adolescents interpret antisocial media, and the influence of traditional and modern media on adolescents. The research for this project is a logical extension of what has been previously investigated. Studies regarding traditional media, like television, give insight into

possible effects of modern media. The Internet is more pervasive now than ever; therefore, this research is extremely relevant and current. This project is valuable because it synthesizes materials that have not yet been analyzed together. Additionally, by doing a journalistic investigation there will be trends and patterns that become clear. This information will be presented in a way that is accessible and consumable by parents, educators, doctors or any lay person who is interested in this topic. The background research is imperative in understanding how to approach the future investigation.

Adolescent Development

Research on adolescent development suggests the adolescent stage is the most important stage for brain development. Neuroscience research has shown adolescent brains are in a continuous state of maturation. Several factors, like age, sex, disease, nutritional status, and substance abuse have an impact on the maturation of the adolescent brain (Arian et al., 2013).

Not all adolescents engage with the Internet in the same way, have the same experiences, nor develop at the same rate. Some results discussed in this section may seem generalized but this discussion reflects the findings of past studies and scholarly conversations.

Online development. One aspect of youth development often leads adolescents to desire to be part of a community (Lalonde, Castro & Pariser, 2016). Research indicates adolescents use SNSs to create a community for themselves. A community is often most accessible and approachable for adolescents in online spaces for two reasons. First, they are able to shape their identity in a way that fits within a desired group without the consequences received in real life. Second, they can manage threats differently than they would in reality (Lalonde et al., 2016). Additionally, adolescents tend to spend more time and effort reinforcing their place in an online

community once they establish themselves in it. They establish their place in the community through active participation on forums, chats, or their own page or profile. Since adolescents have always had access to the Internet, this commonly happens at a young age on SNSs.

Research has shown, the time period between high school and college changes an individual's relationship with social media and depression. A study conducted by Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) investigated the relationship between frequent use of social media and psychological functioning among children and adolescents. They surveyed 753 students, grades 7-12. First, they asked students to report how many hours a day they usually spent on SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and Instagram, either posting or browsing. Then, they administered a self-rated mental health questionnaire in which the students rated their mental and emotional health with the options: "poor," "fair," "good," "very good," and "excellent." This was followed by a question that determined whether or not the students felt they had unmet needs for mental health support in the last 12 months. Next, the researchers used the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10) to measure symptoms of depression and anxiety occurring over the most recent 4-week period. They also assessed suicidal ideation by asking if they had seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months. Lastly, they used Taylor series linearization methods to account for the complex sample design of the survey and obtain unbiased variances and point estimates. In the end, the study found there is an association between the frequent use of social media and depression in high school students. However, past research indicated that when the same tests were also given to university students, there was no such relationship among them. This shows that high school students, whose age aligns with the adolescent stage, are more prone to being affected by content on SNSs than students who are more mentally and socially mature.

As we get older, we have more experience with viewing and interpreting media. We learn how media function. The more experience we have, the more media literate we are. Media literacy is the ability to evaluate media based on their merit. W. James Potter frames media literacy as a source of individual empowerment saying:

Becoming more media literate gives you a much clearer perspective to see the border between your real world and the world manufactured by the media. When you are media literate, you have clear maps to help you navigate better in the media world so that you can get to those experiences and information you want without becoming distracted by those things that are harmful to you (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 343).

Adolescents have not come in contact with enough different genres of media nor do they have a fully developed brain yet. As a result, they are not as able as an adult to judge the soundness of media content. Thus, it is easy for them to become distracted “by those things that are harmful” since they are unable to adequately recognize harmful media.

Adolescents as a risk group. Researchers claim adolescents are a “risk group” because they are in a vulnerable stage in development. Poor judgment, paired with the accessibility of many kinds of media online, cultivates an environment which exposes adolescents to the negative effects of the Internet (Catalina Garcia, Lopez de Ayala Lopez & Jimenez, 2014). Adolescents are part of a generation regarded as being “born digital,” meaning they never knew a time when they did not have access to the Internet or digital devices (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). This creates a new vulnerability for adolescents due to the dramatic social, cognitive, biological, and psychological changes that characterize the adolescent period (Giedd, 2012). Adolescents are also considered heavy Internet users; therefore, making them a risk group. They are most likely to be affected by antisocial media on the Internet because they are perceived as “immature,

emotionally unstable and irresponsible” (Catalina Garcia et al., 2014, p. 463). Adolescents are more likely to do something in real life after seeing it done online as an acceptable practice.

Adolescents are also at risk to be cyberbullied. The Internet is pervasive and accessible 24-7. If an individual is afflicted by a cyberbully, the bully could have access to the victim 24-7. This can harm the victim because they can feel like there is nowhere to go and they are unable to escape the cyberbully. Other effects of cyberbullying will be discussed in a later section.

Other possible risks include access to age-inappropriate content like pornography, information about drugs, online gambling, and downloading pirated material (Catalina Garcia et al., 2014). Adolescents are also allowed to enter into online contracts when signing up for SNSs. However, when they are under the age of 18 they are not recognized as adults under the law (Costello, McNiel & Binder, 2016). Adolescents under the age of 18 are not allowed to purchase alcohol, tobacco, firearms, or vote. Yet they are able and legally allowed to send information about themselves and enter into contractual agreements on SNSs. Adolescents are protected from their immaturity in many ways. This is not always applied to online activity. The customer is bound by a website’s contract terms once they have been informed about the terms and agree to them. Many times this takes the form of a click box. Many adolescents encounter these contracts daily but do not understand the magnitude of them (Costello et al., 2016).

How Adolescents Learn

Social learning. When we view or interact with media we are viewing a message. The form of the message, also called the medium, is important because it is packaged in a deliberate way. The unique ways messages are packaged influences how the viewer interprets them. The form trains us how to think. Because of this, scholars claim the medium is more important than

the message itself. It tells us not only what to think, but it trains us how to think (Ott & Mack, 2014).

However, the nature of the content adolescents interact with on SNSs still matters. Social learning theory suggests children learn by watching, imitating and assimilating what they observe others doing (Earles, Alexander, Johnson, Liverpool & McGhee, 2002). Therefore, when applied to the present research topic, social learning theory suggests adolescents may learn antisocial behavior if they interact with antisocial media.

Learning violent behavior. A study by Boxer, Huesman, Bushman, O'Brien and Moceris (2009) examined the relationship between exposure to violent media and shaping violent and other serious antisocial behavior. They surveyed two groups of adolescents: juvenile delinquents and high school students. In addition, they obtained data from parents and/or guardians and teachers and/or staff to provide converging criterion information on the adolescents' antisocial and violent behaviors. They were asked questions that measured the adolescents' criterion indicators of violent and aggressive behavior, violent media content preferences, and common personal and social-contextual risk factors for antisocial behavior. The results confirmed exposure to violent media is a risk factor for learning violent behavior.

Adolescents who have been previously victimized. Research has also shown, exposure to antisocial media content is a risk factor for cyberbullying behavior. A study by den Hamer, Konijn and Keijer (2014) examined cyberbullying as a cyclic process. It consisted of a questionnaire given to adolescent boys which included evaluations on cyberbullying behavior, antisocial media exposure, victimization, and anger and frustration. In order to test the theoretical cyclic process model, the researchers used structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood. Their results showed adolescents can be victimized through cyberbullying and be

exposed to antisocial media content around the same time. The pairing of the two can produce future cyberbullying behavior from the victim. Another activity observed was sometimes an individual would actively seek out antisocial media after being cyberbullied. This can lead to the individual now becoming a cyberbully. A victim of cyberbullying could also unknowingly be exposed to antisocial media content and due to the past online harassment, have a heightened awareness and sensitivity to antisocial media. This can lead the individual to begin to partake in cyberbullying behavior.

This cyclic model connects to the aggressor effect. It suggests exposure to media violence or personal violence triggers arousal and promotes aggressive behavior (Ott & Mack, 2014). The cyclic process of the recipient becoming the actor, reveals the intersection of human activity and content on social media. The general strain theory also connects to this cyclic process model because it states people who feel angry or frustrated as a result of strain are more likely to engage in deviant behavior (den Hamer, Konijn & Keijer, 2014). This selection of studies shows the type of content adolescents interact with on social media matters and affects how adolescents learn online behavior.

How Adolescents Interact with Technology

Mobile devices are becoming more popular, especially with adolescents. According to the 2015 Pew Research Center's Technology Overview, 88 percent of adolescents in the United States indicated they owned or had access to a mobile phone. Ninety-one percent of adolescents reported going online from these devices at least occasionally, with 24 percent saying they go online "almost constantly" (Lehart, 2015). Facebook is the most popular and frequently used SNS and 71 percent of adolescents reported using more than one SNS.

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) claim although young people spend much of their time connected to one another through digital technologies, the data do not suggest the world is a more dangerous place for them. However, there are two main risks they claim affect adolescents. First, psychological harm can occur from exposure to harmful images or having damaging experiences online (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). This includes things like cyberbullying and cyberstalking. These are things that could occur before the Internet was created, but now it serves as a new platform for this behavior. The second main risk is physical harm that can occur offline due to the possibility of someone finding the victim and their corresponding information, like phone number and home address, online. This implies anything posted online can have real-world, offline consequences.

Time adolescents spend on social media. The amount of time adolescents spend on social media matters. The Internet is pervasive and anyone can access it 24-7 (Miller, 2017). This can affect learning, mental health and cyberbullying.

The accessibility of the Internet allows ample time for adolescents to use it for activities other than learning. Electronic media overuse is legitimate and can lead to Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) or Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). IAD has been shown to cause neurological complications, psychological disturbances, and social problems (Cash, Rae, Steel & Winkler, 2012). The persistent use of Internet games leading to distress or problems functioning has led the American Psychiatric Association to add IGD as a potential diagnosis (Gentile et al., 2017).

Both of these are associated with several health issues including sleep deprivation, mood alteration, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), alcohol consumption, substance use disorders, and family conflicts (Touitou, Touitou & Reinberg, 2016). Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) found that students with poor mental health use social media more

frequently. Their study revealed using social media can also lead to poor mental health in students who did not have indications of poor mental health prior to using social media.

Adolescents in the United States are online often. According to the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 41.7 percent of adolescents in the United States spent more than three hours online not dedicated to school work on an average school day (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015).

The more time adolescents spend on the Internet, the more vulnerable they are to online harassment. According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008), adolescents who spend more time on the Internet, especially content creators like YouTubers and bloggers, are at a higher risk for cyberbullying. A recent study showed that one-third of adolescents who use the Internet reported experiencing online harassment of some form and girls are more likely to be targets than boys (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

How adolescents create their identity online. We are able to create and cultivate our individual identities through everyday talk. But now our daily activities are conducted on the Internet and through SNSs. Since the Internet has become increasingly important to our daily life, we must create and cultivate our identities online. The form and function of our online identity can be very different from our real-world identity. We do not necessarily need to be the same person online. A fifteen-year-old boy can go online and create a profile for himself on a new SNS and present himself as someone strikingly different than who he is in reality. He can even create an avatar in a virtual environment, like the Sims or World of Warcraft. He is able to do all of this in a single space and a short amount of time. This gives him the ability to reinvent himself many times in the comfort of his own bedroom, or wherever, with the use of a mobile device. This flexibility allows adolescents to explore facets of their true identity or multiple

identities simultaneously, instead of over time. In the “Internet age” adolescents are able to experiment and reinvent their identities in a way that pre-digital generations could not (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Adolescents are growing up with digital technology, SNSs, and the Internet. They must work to create an online identity at a young age. This creation of identity by adolescents is both a passive and an active act.

Adolescents face involuntary access to age-inappropriate content (Catalina Garcia et al., 2014). This includes advertisements, unwanted contact by peers and adults, harmful images, cyberbullying, and other forms of online harassment. A study by Catalina Garcia et al. (2014) points out adolescents lack the knowledge of what is legal and illegal online. As a result, adolescents may access sites that host illegal activities, like under-age porn and gambling. The information they absorb from this type of content could lead to the perception that it is normal and lead them to become desensitized to that type of content and the message it sends. This all contributes to the creation of an individual’s online identity. The content an individual views, establishes who they are as a person on the Internet and SNSs.

On the other hand, some academics claim the creation of an online identity for adolescents is an active process. Miller (2017) explored the idea of creating an anonymous account online. If someone purposefully created an anonymous account with the goal to engage in cyberbullying activities, they would be actively creating the identity of a bully online. Miller (2017) argues it is deliberate. This poses further issues because it creates a power imbalance when a cyberbully is anonymous while the victim is personally identified. If adolescents are able to create anonymous accounts in addition to personal accounts, they can actively participate in

different types of behavior depending on which identity they take on in a particular instance. This can lead to the experimentation and creation of multiple online identities.

Another way adolescents actively form their online identity is through SNSs like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube where they can express their opinion with the click of a button. Adolescents create their digital world by “friending” and “de-friending,” connecting and establishing relationships (Michikyan & Suarez-Orozco, 2016). Lalonde et al. (2016) claimed identity is something that is performed and influenced by past experience. An individual's identity is constructed by the way they internalize experiences and use them to develop a sense of self.

Creating an intimate space on the Internet. Adolescents don't only create an identity online, but they also create a sort of intimate space on the Internet. It is an activity that can be compared to decorating a bedroom (Lalonde et al., 2016). Adolescents will perform activities online that make them comfortable and feel like they have ownership of a space, much like putting up posters or photos in a bedroom. They fill it with visual artifacts and use it as an anchor to represent their identity (Lalonde et al., 2016). Adolescents are able to do this by “showcasing” their relationships online through status updates, comments, use of emojis and “liking” content (Michikyan & Suarez-Orozco, 2016). They do these actions as a way to obtain, maintain, and strengthen social and emotional support.

Miller (2017) claims increased privacy is available with cyber-communication that did not previously exist. This goes back to the anonymity factor that is feasible through the Internet. Lloyd (2002) claims SNSs allow adolescents new opportunities to practice appropriate and inappropriate behavior online without risking peer rejection. The adolescent years are a time when individuals are self-conscious about identity and hyper-aware of friends. The creation of

the Internet has allowed adolescents to experiment with certain actions to see how others react before they perform the acts in the real-world. This acts as a safeguard against their real-world identity. Lalonde et al. (2016) claim that the shift to mobile technology has blurred the distinction between the physical and virtual world for the user and allows the user to have access to both simultaneously.

How Adolescents Interpret Antisocial Media

The way in which adolescents interpret antisocial media is important. The media portray violence as a quick fix for conflicts and the hero is often depicted carrying out the violence. The frequency of viewing violence desensitizes adolescents to violence (Earles et al., 2002). Violence on television also teaches children that aggressive behavior is an acceptable way of problem-solving (Lloyd, 2002). Although this project is investigating the effects of antisocial content on SNSs rather than on television, it is important to consider all forms of media. Similar and sometimes compounding effects could be inferred about antisocial content on SNSs as well.

According to reception theory, the audience's interpretation of media is a primary source of meaning. This means the interpretation of the viewer helps create meaning and a fuller picture of the media text. The viewer has the ability to add in their own understanding and fill in the details that they see left unaddressed. Ott and Mack (2014) describe it as, "it is audiences who determine what a text ultimately signifies to them and how it actually functions in their own lives" (p. 247). By taking into account reception theory, we see that every person can have a different understanding and interpretation of the same media text. Adolescents also react differently to media, especially violent media, due to differences in personality, gender, family functioning, and other community support (Earles, Alexander, Johnson, Liverpool & McGhee, 2002).

Adolescents and Violence

Research on media violence suggests there are four primary effects: the aggressor, victim, bystander, and catharsis effects (Ott & Mack, 2014). While these four effects have been acknowledged by researchers, the relationship between media violence and audience actions are complex. Social-environmental factors and individual characteristics influence the effects of media violence. Ott and Mack (2014) claim the most studied consequence of media violence is the aggressor effect, which suggests “exposure to media violence triggers arousal and promotes aggressive behavior” (p. 101). The victim effect is described as when “people develop and experience a heightened fearfulness of violence” (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 101). Researchers suggest watching shows like *Law and Order* and *CSI* can lead to an exaggerated view of reality and mistrust about the world which leads to the victim effect. The bystander effect claims that individuals become desensitized from violence and become insensitive toward violence directed at others (Ott & Mack, 2014). The last effect is the catharsis effect. This means that “it can reduce and alleviate feelings of aggression” (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 101). This effect leads to less real-world violence because an individual is relieved of any aggressive or violent feelings by watching and interacting with violent media. While these are four primary effects of violent media, different forms of media can have different effects, especially on adolescents.

Chapter Two: Creative Work

The creative work I have completed for this project includes an investigative long-form journalism piece, an explainer video geared for the Internet, and graphics for data visualization. These components are hosted on a website to display the story in a way that audiences typically view them. This work targets a national audience in the United States, expected to be stakeholders in adolescent development and how it relates to social media. The project seeks to invite parents, educators, doctors, and academics to engage in this conversation.

My literature review and rationale informed my journalistic work by providing an ample understanding of past research in related fields. Through this background research, I gained knowledge of where academia stands in terms of this issue. The research also raised questions which I was able to pursue in my journalism piece. My literature review and rationale was able to provide me with background information on this topic, which helped me understand what was possible for my journalism piece.

When I set out on this project, I wanted to pursue the angle of whether or not antisocial media content contributed to antisocial and violent behavior. While my literature review and rationale addresses this, the following journalism piece looks at it in a broader context. I intentionally wrote to an audience with a broader scope of the issue. I evaluated the effects of antisocial media on adolescents without putting special emphasis on whether or not it has contributed to antisocial or violent behavior, but instead the risks and benefits adolescents face on the Internet.

If you would like to view my creative work, email me at tessadiestel@gmail.com.

Chapter Three: Discussion

Description

This project was broken into two pieces: academic research and creative work. I performed research for my literature review and rationale to establish a foothold in the conversation and to understand where current research stood. The literature review and rationale allowed me to examine different facets of this broad topic. This helped me determine the scope and angle of my creative work. I wrote a long-form journalism piece, created an explainer video and interactive timeline, and coded and published a website for the creative aspects of my project.

The purpose of the research was to determine whether antisocial media on social networking sites (SNSs) have a negative effect on adolescents. I used the Slenderman stabbing as a case study to depict an extreme negative outcome from antisocial media exposure on adolescents.

The purpose of my creative work was to showcase my multimedia and journalistic abilities. By writing a long-form journalism piece I have demonstrated my abilities to do research, interviews, and synthesize a number of studies and other findings. In creating the explainer video, I have proven my abilities to collaborate with colleagues, aid in storytelling through sound design, and illustrate information by utilizing templates. I have also demonstrated my proficiency in the video and audio editing software systems of Adobe After Effects, Adobe Premiere and Audition. I created the interactive timeline by assessing the audience's needs and utilizing a template to enhance storytelling. Through coding my website where the creative project is hosted, I have demonstrated my abilities as a project manager.

The multiple multimedia facets of my creative project are important in telling the story in a way that is accessible and engaging for the intended audience.

This project is especially important to parents. They must consider how to manage the way in which their child interacts with the Internet. This is difficult because many parents did not grow up with the same technology that their children have access to now.

Feelings

This is the first independent project of this scope that I have completed. The Slenderman case peaked my interest and drove my interest in this topic. When I embarked on this project, I was curious about past cases involving adolescents committing violent acts as a result of antisocial media on SNSs. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find other cases involving young people and violence with a similar motive. This caused my research to evolve and include other branches of the overall topic. As my research changed, so did my topic. After preliminary research, I realized this topic is more complex than I initially thought. Although my completed project took a slightly different form than what I had imagined when I began, I am excited to contribute this work to the academic community and interested audience.

Evaluation

One challenge I encountered in the early stages of my project was a lack of access to other cases similar in nature to the Slenderman case. I was unable to find other cases because juvenile records are often sealed, limiting my access. Another issue was finding cases that directly linked a violent act to the influence of media on SNSs. The Slenderman case is unique because Morgan Geyser and Anissa Weier's court files remained open. This is because they were charged with attempted murder in the first degree. In the state of Wisconsin, anyone over the age

of ten who is charged with attempted murder is tried as an adult. This legal obscurity allowed for their files to remain open. They are filled with transcripts of hearings, exhibits, and videos of police interviews. It is rare for a young person's life and mental state to be so thoroughly catalogued.

Another challenge was the way I chose to tell this story. I am a broadcast journalism major and proficient in storytelling using broadcast style. This project pushed me out of my expertise and comfort zone. The nature of the story itself required me to tell it in a way that was different than broadcast style. I intended to create a short, broadcast style video for this project, but based on the topic, I elected to tell the story through illustration and narration style. Using After Effects to animate audio and information was fairly new to me.

Analysis

This project has some limitations, among them is the lack of data and lack of other applicable cases. In an ideal setting, data from a longitudinal study on the effects of antisocial media exposure would be available. Since people have access to the Internet from a young age now, it is doubtful that there could be a study that controls for Internet usage. All people encounter and access the Internet at some point that it is difficult to take that away. As a result, it is challenging to obtain data on the correlation between media and behavior.

As mentioned above, no other cases could be found that were directly applicable to this topic in the way the Slenderman case is. Another limitation to this project is, it is not accurate to generalize entire generations. For the purposes of this project, I needed to focus on an age group to study.

In light of the limitations, there are strengths that this type of project boasts. This project offers an overview of relevant research and data on the topic. It does so both in an academic way and a way that is more approachable and understandable to an everyday audience.

Conclusion

This project is part of an ongoing conversation. There is no hard and fast rule on how people should or should not interact with others via the Internet. Social networking sites are still considered new. There is no comprehensive research on the correlation between adolescent use and behavior. We do not, and perhaps never will, have evidence to determine whether adolescents are more or less at risk in the digital age. Behavior is difficult to measure, especially for this topic. When engaging with this topic, researchers must be flexible in their expectations and creative in their approach.

If I were to do an extension of this project, I would investigate the angle of what parents can do for their child to have the best positive experience with the Internet. Many parents feel powerless when it comes to SNSs and the Internet because there is no standardized way to approach usage. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers guidelines for parents but I think it would be beneficial to research what other guidelines are offered by scholars, doctors, and other sources.

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Appendix A

This thesis has been modified for the the CU Scholar repository. If you would like to view my creative work, email me at tessadiestel@gmail.com.