Stop social network pitfalls

It is possible this new generation of technologies is creating a new breed of mental disorders.

Katina Michael

BORN TODAY
August 24
Petria Thomas, Australian swimmer (1975- )
Thomas made her debut for the Australian team in 1995 and three years later competed in her first Olympic Games in Atlanta, winning silver in the 200m butterfly. She retired from professional swimming following the 2004 Athens Games.

HISTORY
1793 - First church built in Sydney.
1940 - The British Air Force drops first bomb on Berlin in an unprovoked raid in WWI.
1994 - Australian swimmer Karen Perkins (picturred) smashens 800m and 1500m world records in same race in 1994 and in Commonwealth Games 150m freestyle.

ASK a group of teenagers how they spend their spare time and most will mention Facebook, YouTube, World of Warcraft or Second Life. "Virtual" social networks that bring millions of people together online. The benefits of social networks have been touted, but what about the pitfalls?

Some teens will share everything about themselves to hundreds of online friends, most of whom they have never met.

Twitter style prompts like where you are, what you are doing, and who you are doing it with reveals a lot about behavior, inner thoughts, even vulnerabilities.

Some teens upload hundreds of photographs and videos that can be shared publicly, without comprehension of the repercussions for themselves or others involved.

Given how often carry smart phones, interacting with applications like Facebook is so easy.

"Instant" ability to point, click and uploaded means trigger happy teens may be "reveling" way too much. It also means someone who takes footage of you can use it as they see fit without your permission. A single drunken episode or event showing a teenager in compromising behavior, freely distributed within a classroom of mobile phones, can drive a teen to despair, and in some extreme cases even to suicide.

There is a room for error in this kind of world where everything is public. Personal space to make our mistakes in private, learn from them, and errors, and move on is increasingly diminishing.

Teenagers who do not fit the established community can face humiliating consequences and become targets of cyberbullying, financial scams or getting "unfriend" online can cause feelings of isolation, loneliness, and even depression. When a teen realizes the friends they once entrusted with everything meaningful to them have the power to misuse this private information, it may not take long for anxiety behaviours to set in.

It is possible that this new generation of technologies is creating a new breed of mental disorders. While there are now established clinics where teenagers are seen by heavy internet usage - some relearning bodily functions like eating, sleeping and going to the toilet - there are many who deny these kinds of side effects exist.

Ask a teenager how often they update their status entry in Facebook, or how often they text a "friend", and you will probably be astonished. Some even provide fake status updates to look like they are busy, others develop obsessive behaviors like leaving endless notes on people's online wallpaper or constantly looking up a friend's physical location.

Online references like "you are tagged" or "you are being followed" or "you are currently sharing your location" may some might become increasingly paranoid, finding it difficult to distinguish between the physical and virtual worlds they live in.

The study of the negative effects of social networking on teenagers is still in its infancy. Resources are needed to fund mental health projects which investigate the impact of internet based social networks on young people, particularly those who are insecure, prone to depression, suffer with obsessive compulsive disorder or some form of personality disorder.

The negative fallout from social networks upon the community also has to be measured and effective programs to specifically help educate school children on how to explore these applications, and not be exploited by them, must be made available.

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ASK a group of teenagers how they spend their spare time and most will mention Facebook, YouTube, World of Warcraft or Second Life—“virtual” social networks that bring millions of people together online. The benefits of social networks have been touted but what about the pitfalls?

Some teens will share everything about themselves to hundreds of online friends, most of whom they have never met. Twitter style prompts like where you are, what you are doing, and who you are doing it with reveal a lot about behaviours, inner thoughts, even vulnerabilities.

Some upload hundreds of photographs and videos that can be shared publicly with no one comprehending the repercussions for themselves or others involved. A given many teens carry smart phones, interfacing with applications like Facebook is very easy. “Instant” ability to post, click, and upload means trigger happy teens may be revealing way too much. It also means someone who takes footage of you can use it as they see fit without your permission. A single drunken episode or an event showing a teenager in compromising behaviour, freely distributed within a classroom of mobile phones, can drive a teen to despair, and in some extreme cases even to suicide.

There is no room for error in this kind of world where everything is public. Personal space to make our mistakes in private, learn from these trials and errors, and move on is increasingly diminishing. Teens that do not fit the established community can face humiliating consequences and become targets of cyberbullying, financial scams or pranks. Being “unfriended” online can cause feelings of rejection, loneliness, and even depression. When a teen realises the friends they once entrusted with everything meaningful to them have the power to misuse this private information, it may not take long for anxiety behaviours to set in.

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