# Navigating the Algorithmic Labyrinth:

# Unraveling the Impact of Social Media Algorithms on Adolescent Minds

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The persuasive influence of social media has become an undeniable aspect of contemporary life, and its repercussions are increasingly apparent in this current time; we know it hurts the productivity, mental health, etc. of our youth. However, this argumentative research paper will focus on the sense-plan-act algorithmic sequence and how it is used to subconsciously control adolescents. The pages that follow will describe and answer: What is an algorithm? How does it affect youth, why should we care about this issue, and how did we get here? Lastly, future expectations and suggestions. Vast research and multiple studies back up the three main influences that will be addressed: Transgender choices, self-diagnosing, and self-esteem within youth. These topics and the research findings all point to social media being the direct causative factor in these deep societal issues.

*Keywords: Social media algorithms, subconscious control, transgender, self-diagnose, self-esteem*

Every adolescent around you is in an abusive, narcissistic relationship. There is someone purposely preying on their insecurities, vulnerabilities, and malleability. In turn, they are profiting off it and the negative impacts they cause. They get a riveting reward for being addicted to them, regardless of how torn down they make someone. Reading that statement, there might be some confusion, but think about this assertion and then re-read: The stated "someone" in every adolescent relationship is the social media platform they are using.

When society thinks of damaging relationships, the mind always goes to interpersonal ones; however, one of the most damaging is with the device right in our hands. Social media is using destructive, addictive algorithms that are negatively influencing and subconsciously controlling youths' cognition. In turn, this affects their feelings and behaviors about themselves which can impact their lives permanently. These platforms are preying on adolescents' malleable and vulnerable cognitive states and taking advantage of them for their benefit. This problem developed from the evolution of social media apps and the created personal, additive algorithms that increase platform usage. By using a specific algorithmic sequence, the platform targets the user's inner consciousness and deep insecurities. The information presented to the individual creates a cognitive media effect where the exposure influences their mental process or the product of the processes (Potter, 2017). This is demonstrated through girls and boys being influenced that they are transgender and acting on it, adolescents diagnosing themselves with mental disorders and adapting to life accordingly, and the youth population having feeble self-worth impacting their daily lives. These platforms are in the driver's seat of our surrounding adolescents. We need to open our eyes and realize that their algorithms are responsible for these deep issues that run through the youth of society.

As a civilization, we have gotten to this point where social media has created false realities in our adolescents' minds. How did society become entangled in the intricate dance with platforms' disgusting influential programming? You can see it develop through the evolution of social media: Our world started with simple social networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Myspace, and Facebook. These were all in the early 2000s and were created as a space where people could connect professionally or share what was on their minds. This led to the mid and late-2000s social platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. These apps took the same ideas of networking and sharing yourself, but the algorithm and secondary purpose created a different usage for individuals. This bled into an era of social media where the point focus wasn't on networking or just sharing a funny activity your kid did. These six platforms became breeding grounds for usage revolving around status, likes, false information, personalized entertainment, and competition. Algorithms became filled with people sharing and even glorifying mental illnesses, fighting over who's hot and who's not, boasting about their money or fame, and videos so niche it's as if someone was spying on you. It left people to compete and created toxic media usage, but it kept them online: Platforms went from 970 million users in 2010 to 4.48 billion users in 2021 (Dean, 2023). The success came from switching the purpose and algorithm of media apps starting in the mid and late 2000s. Instead of just networking, the content and usage became personal and, in turn, more entertaining. Algorithms fed and reflected on users' information input, interaction, and inner consciousness. Social media usage has increased, companies are counting cash, and now no one can put down their phone. What's a better way to create an addiction than having something feel *crafted just for you?* Standing here today, we have access to multiple platforms that revolve solely around making us the product for money. These addictive algorithms have gotten even *deeper* than not

being able to log off. Individuals are questioning their life stance, purpose, and desires, in turn, affecting their *everyday decisions and views*. We have reverted within social media from having liberating platforms to ones that tear you apart for their benefit.

Adolescents' favorite social media apps use their algorithms as a frictionless way of communicating and influencing them for their greater good. YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc., set up their algorithms through a basic function of delivering relevant content. From the outside, it seems they have the users' best intentions in hand, but adolescents aren't using the app, the app is using them. They are being used for profit through their information and level of engagement, but how is this done? All these mediums use a sense-plan act- algorithm, which "gather[s] data, analyze[s] it, and then carry[s] out the required actions based on the intention of the outcome of data" (Parson, p. 144, 2022). Through this, the algorithm quickly learns how users interact with content and decides what it delivers next based on input gathering. This happens through cross-site tracking and cookies while the user is active. Cookies are small chunks of data that can, "monitor your path, gather information for related ad targeting, and collect personal information" (Parson, p. 281, 2022). When it comes to the algorithmic structure, cookies are key to obtaining the right information when *sensing* the person's vulnerabilities, inner consciousness, and interests. From this data, there is cross-site tracking that can occur within third-party breaches within the browser. This "type of tracking uses your data and creates profiles of your habits" (Parson, p. 282, 2022). The programming that's used for the sense-plan-act approach is the devil in disguise. Your data is constantly being used and profiled so it can spit out relatable content to keep you addicted. Moreover, extended engagement is the main intent these platforms are enforcing. The vast amount of content is neutral at first, however, once the interaction begins, users are delivered content that matches their patterns. Therefore, depending

on what is engaging to the user, the usage could become drastically problematic (Laurel Phillips, 2022). For example, if an adolescent is constantly showing interest (input) in the hashtag "depression" or information relating to body image, the algorithm will gather and analyze this data, and direct them to content that is similar (output). This sense-plan-act sequence repeats itself until the user's feed is filled with material that preys on their deepest insecurities, vulnerabilities, and inner consciousness. The information and content are personal, making the user feel connected and understood, encouraging overuse. Social media platforms

> "Have admitted to being fully aware of the [addictive] effects but put the highest value on keeping people in the system. [This] is easily accomplished by engaging users with inflammatory content keeping them siloed with those who share their views" (Kirkham, p. 9, 2021).

Moreover, if the information and people are relatable it must be reliable, correct? Wrong, and this is the core of the problem within these destructive algorithms. Malleable and vulnerable youth are getting sucked into these media platforms where their algorithm is providing no real educational information. As the behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman (2021) observed, thinking is either fast, based on emotion, or slow, in deliberation (Shirkly, 2021). The relatable content will hit all the right spots emotionally, having the already cognitively malleable adolescent soak up the information like a sponge (without deliberation). Youth will believe "all kinds of things that are not true because somebody relatable said it. They want to value personal experience [over a professional source]" (Quraishi et al. 2023). For instance, if an adolescent starts researching about their sadness or dysphoria with their body, the algorithmic sequence will catch on. It will start to hit an emotionally vulnerable spot and show you information that's related and congenial. The content on their algorithm could range from users talking about their

gender dysphoria to their depressive habits. This media user is not depressed or transgender, but the relatable, personalized algorithm may brainwash them otherwise. This process of reinforcement can occur through repeated exposure to algorithmic content. It adds greater pressure or focus to something that already exists within an individual, making it harder to look at something holistically (Potter, 2017). This addictive, influential algorithm should never trump the validity of an educated professional or a personal, rational belief. However, this occurs when a pliable adolescent is put into the hands of money-thirsty media corporations. They don't care if they bring you down the wrong path; If you feel the app experience is personal and keep using it, their goal is achieved.

The world needs to wake up and see the damaging and addictive scheme social media platforms partake in. This should be an issue that matters to everyone worldwide because somebody you care about is a victim, and it could even be you, and you never even realized it. Social media algorithms are taking advantage of our loved ones' minds, valuing profit over their stability and sanity. If we don't collectively educate ourselves on the impact on developing minds, these algorithms could lead to inexorable damage and technological reliance. Platforms are teaching adolescents what to think and not how to think. In turn, the ideas bleed into their subconscious, influencing their cognition, feelings, and behaviors, leading to negative actions and outcomes. An adolescent doesn't obtain high levels of rationality or reasoning yet. You are easily influenced and can misinterpret or internalize information irrationally compared to a grown adult. The addictive, personalized, relatable algorithms can trigger and take advantage of vulnerability and common cognitive errors within the younger population. A recent CNN interview with a school student, Jerome Yankey, addresses the social media crisis in a spine-chilling way: "I saw myself not putting effort into my own life, rather just trying to live

vicariously through what I'm seeing" (Yurkevich, para.2, 2023). If one adolescent feels this, imagine how many others feel the same: Social media is gripping the throats of youth and taking control of their life. Subconscious influence is when you're making decisions or coming to conclusions without actively being aware or fully thinking about it. The influence can come from internal subconscious beliefs, emotions, memories, or values. When receiving information and engaging with media algorithms, you internalize and process information through your lenses of bias and mental state. The conclusions are based on your vulnerability and malleability, and just like Jerome, your waking life will no longer reflect your consciousness. On top of this, adolescents are using the media at a very fragile and fictile time in their lives. Their brains are not fully developed, leaving them more prone to cognitive errors in thinking and reasoning. From about ages 12-18, "Adolescents are in a phase of identity formation, autonomy development, and self-discovery, seeking validation and understanding" (McVay, para.3, 2023). This developmental stage of life is known as Erik Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion which is crucial in forming a strong sense of self and life direction. This transition from childhood to adolescence is a time when youth might start to feel confused or insecure and wonder where they fit into society. Through social interaction, a conscious sense of self can be developed (Cherry, 2022). The information and social exchanges adolescents experience through social media can heavily impact their internal role and identity. Confirmation bias can be prevalent in a cognitively developing adolescent within this stage. They are young and cognitive errors of thinking are common, but with the algorithm's subconscious influence, harm can occur. A confirmation bias "favors information that confirms your previously existing beliefs. [this can] Impact how we gather information but also influence how we interpret the information" (Cherry, para.1, 2020). Let's imagine an adolescent in this developmental stage: Called Janet. She's

pubescent and confused with her identity, vulnerable, and scrolling on social media for validation of why she feels this way. She ends up having her media feed filled with people to interact with and information relating to her issues. However, her algorithm isn't providing validity within her confusion. The information that was spat out at her is all about gender dysphoria and people being confused with who they are and how they properly fit into society. Notice how it relates, but the main idea isn't there? This girl scrolls and scrolls and begins relating to the *feelings within the information*, not the information itself. This makes her start to wonder if she's transgender because if the content is relatable and personal, it must be correct. The fundamental attribution error within her thinking makes her see a cause-and-effect relationship that is not present. This is where the subconscious influence begins and as time goes on, she starts to look and relate to information that confirms this bias that was created. However, this bias was crafted on false subconsciously influenced beliefs, which makes the way she interprets and internalizes this information not even close to rational. This poor girl is a victim and is being manipulated and pushed to conclusions instead of naturally coming to them herself. The access to this information is changing her cognition, but it can run deeper than that, affecting her feelings and behavior about the issue. This issue can be described as Aaron Beck's (1967) Cognitive Triad. The central tenet of this theory is "that our thinking influences [and alters] our emotional and behavioral experiences and vice versa" (Southam Gerow, 2011). When it comes to this girl's situation or any adolescent in her shoes, a corrupted thought process can be insanely damaging. This can lead to youth making decisions based on false thoughts and beliefs which can negatively impact them permanently.  Our perception of ourselves is heavily based on the information we obtain, experience, and internalize. When adolescents are taking in the content

from algorithms, they are being taken advantage of. Social media platforms don't care about you, they care about your usage and will manipulate you till you're addicted.

Transgender choices and influence are one main issue that stems from social media. When somebody classifies themselves as transgender, those individuals are usually experiencing gender dysphoria to influence their decisions. According to the American Psychiatric Association, gender dysphoria is “discomfort or distress related to an incongruence between an individual's gender identity and gender assigned at birth” (Turban, 2022). The problem occurs when the media plays a role in bringing about that effect and idea. Just like Janet, a young developing adolescent can have nonspecific symptoms and vague feelings. Then they interpret those feelings as gender dysphoria with the information from social media algorithms. From this, they are young, and their vulnerable thought process can influence their feelings and behaviors. In 2019, Lisa Littman, a licensed public health consultant, conducted a related study. The overall purpose was to collect data about parents' experiences and observations about their adolescent child. The 90-question survey was designed for parents who noticed sudden gender dysphoria (Littman, 2019). Littman found distressing results when parents reported their “children exhibited an increase in social media/ internet use before disclosure of a transgender identity” (Littman, para. 3, 2019). Results showed a shocking “63.5% exhibited an increase” (Littman, para.45, 2019). Littman's study shows the severity of this issue and examples of the most valid source: The parents; because out of everyone, who else would know their child the best? Adding onto this, in her survey, 80.9% of the parents reported that their child announced their transgender idea without prior expression of any real gender dysphoria symptoms. And 69.2% noticed their child was using online terminology when ‘coming out’ to them (Littman, 2019). One parent expressed that it didn't sound like their child's voice, and when they looked online,

they found the same nomenclature (Littman, 2019). Adolescents are being sucked into the personalized but false information from these algorithms. The belief runs so deep into their soul because they relate and find it comforting to see their struggles presented. These struggles are being manipulated and related ideas are being spat out to them, but they don't know any better. Algorithms are taking advantage of this and creating serious effects that impact and influence youths' subconscious beliefs, ruining their conscious behaviors. Parents from this study described "The biggest influence was the immersion and excessive use of Tumblr, YouTube, and binge-watching videos… saying 'if you're even questioning [yourself] you are probably transgender'" (Littman, para.1&43, 2019). A separate interview with Helena Kirschner confirms this idea when she tells her story from her autobiography, *By Any Other Name.* Kirschner writes about her experience coming out as non-binary when she was 15. She traces her pursuit of gender transition back to social media and her adolescent obsession with Tumblr blogs (Eckert & McCloskey, 2022). She explains how the time spent on these blogs glorified androgyny and it started to "distort her self-perception, eventually leading her to virtual haunts where her friends blamed her teenage angst on being born in the wrong body" (Eckert & McCloskey, para. 1, 2022). In a developmental and vulnerable time in an adolescent's life, social media is playing too crucial of a role. The algorithmic sequence can put ideas into their head that transitioning is the only solution. However, the emotions they experience are completely normal for a young adult going through bodily and emotional changes.

CBS News reports: "The mental health crisis among American teens deepens [as] they seek out alternative forms of support and information… and diagnose themselves with serious mental health problems" (Quraishi, et al. Corral, 2023). The topic of self-diagnosing through the media is a serious issue, especially with personalized algorithms. Going to the media for mental

health data or advice can make your algorithm turn into an “echo chamber, where the viewer is repeatedly exposed to content related to their perceived mental health concerns” (McVay, para.9, 2023). Media information can worsen the individual's feelings or lead them to internalize an improper label when they are functioning typically. This can happen through false reinforcement and confirmation bias through the representation of vague or false symptoms. The information can be relatable to adolescents; however, the portrayal of mental disorders can look different on everyone or involve indecorous ethics and information. For example, according to The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, “over 52% of TikTok videos about ADHD were deemed misleading” (Quraishi et. al, 2023). This is just one of the many mental disorders portrayed on TikTok: These videos create erroneous credibility and validity for adolescents basing their mental health conclusions on them. Just because someone resonates with certain characteristics being mentioned, this doesn't mean they have the diagnosable criteria. However, with the sense-plan-act structure, an adolescent can start to see more videos on a mental health topic they are researching or interacting with. The content regurgitated can feel very personable, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This can lead the adolescent to think and feel that they are meant to see these videos because ‘they have this disorder’ (Lindsey Phillips, 2022). From this point, youths' behavior is affected through the nocebo effect by “developing certain harmful side effects or symptoms because [one] believes or expects that they occur” (Lindsey Phillips, para. 24, 2022). In correspondence to the cognitive triad, if an adolescent has already falsely convinced themselves they have said disorder, they will start to engage in behaviors that confirm it. The media doesn't address the complexity of mental disorders or issues, and our youth shouldn’t be matching symptoms like an online checklist (Lindsey Phillips, 2022). However, this is our reality due to the algorithms brainwashing vulnerable and malleable adolescents. They start thinking,

feeling, and engaging in destructive ideas and behaviors just because they deem it relatable and personable.

Have you ever thought about how images and information adolescents see on social media affect their self-esteem? It's likely that subconsciously, youth all around the world are comparing themselves to what they see every day. While using these platforms, you are exposed to and inputting a vast amount of information about yourself. If an adolescent has a negative lens of their self or their own life, then their insecurities will be distributed throughout their feed. The sense-plan-act algorithm picks up on the vulnerabilities and distributes the content accordingly. More usage creates more data input, creating a stronger output for the person; this is a reciprocal loop keeping the engagement. For example, if a young girl is concerned about her looks and goes to look up how to improve her body, she opens a whole world for the algorithm to latch onto. She could be exposed to any related content: Dieting solutions, images of ideal bodies, eating disorder solutions, damaging advice from people who relate, etc. Within this, she built up her feed to be personable and empathetic, but it's stabbing directly through her biggest vulnerability. This girl continues to use the app because it's reflecting her inner consciousness; but now she's subconsciously comparing herself to all the information she encounters, making her feel even worse. In a 2023 interview by the Child Mind Institute, two adolescents describe this phenomenon: It's "difficult to resist… social media exposure impacts how [they] view their peers and themselves. It's like you know it isn't making you happy, but you still look" (Jacobson, para. 15, 2023). Platforms have become too personal, and instead of lifting you during usage, you're just torn down. However, they've pinpointed and provided you with the relatable content to make you stay. Adolescents are having their self-esteem drastically affected without having a holistic, conscious understanding of how or why. This influence is exemplified in a 2019 study

by Kathy Tian, Hong Zhu, and Tian Guang. In this study, 150 people were recruited to measure the interaction effects between social media platforms, self-esteem levels, and feelings of self-worth. They predicted that "individuals scoring low in levels of self-esteem will be more susceptible to social comparison" (Tian, et. al, 2019). They started by recording participants' initial levels of esteem before exposure, using the 1965 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Next, different contestants scrolled through different social media sites for 15 minutes (Tian, et. al, 2019). Once members finished, the three authors re-evaluated the self-worth levels with the RSES. This study concluded that "participants exposed to Instagram rate their life satisfaction lower in the post-measure than the pre-measure, and that they also rate their levels of self-esteem lower in the post-measure compared to the pre-measure" (Tian, et. al, 2019). The lower score on worthiness and esteem is attached to the correlation and causation of social media use. This culture of comparison can be extremely damaging to a developing girl or boy. The constant messages being thrown at you can impact your thoughts and feelings about yourself and the situation you're in. Adolescents are left with these subconscious feelings of self-doubt, comparison, and unworthiness. This can quickly lead to an adolescent changing their behaviors based on solutions and ideas they see in their social media feed. The more they see related content, the more confirmation bias and self-fulfilling prophecy take place. They get subconsciously influenced that these ideas are the only way to achieve what they desire because it applies to them and it's all they see. This pattern stemming from social media can lead an adolescent to permanently alter their lifestyle negatively.

On the other hand, some aspects of social media are positively influencing the youth population. In May 2022, the Pew Research Center surveyed over 1,300 teens and their feelings about social media. Within this study, "80% said social media gives them some level of

connection with what's going on in their friend's [and others'] lives" (Holcombe, para.3, 2022). Platforms give the freedom and creativity to make digital replications of your life, creating easy access for everyone to view. In adolescent ages it can feel comforting knowing you can stay up to speed with your friends, quickly communicate, and share updates. Within this access, youth have free range to be part of desired communities that meet their needs and interests no matter how niche. The same Pew Research Center survey concluded that "67% [participants] said that social media reassures them that they have people to support them through tough times" (Holcombe, para.10, 2022). The easy accessibility to personable answers creates a space where you can find people who have similar struggles or feelings. Adding onto this idea, if a teen or tween is struggling, and feels isolated about their mental health they can turn to people in similar situations. In some ways, seeing others share similar or "their same challenges, can destigmatize mental health and help others feel less alone… and raise awareness" (Lindsay Phillips, para.4, 2022). This can be beneficial for grappling adolescents, especially ones who don't have the needed in-person support. Social media can also be a helpful source of information *when paired with* a valid source. For example, if an adolescent is having mental struggles and looks through related posts on social media, this can spark change. A young person can have a lot of questions about why they feel a certain way, and social media can expose them to people relating and giving them possible solutions. With these ideas, they can bring them to an adult or professional and move forward with validity. Kaleen McMickle, a licensed professional counselor finds that "the more insight clients have, the better the outcomes. If they realize [symptoms] on their own, then they come to counseling more prepared to make changes" (Laurel Phillips, para. 34, 2022). Social media can be a great starting point for mental health: Joining communities, obtaining new information, and feeling supported.

I’m 20 years old and have had social media since I was 9. For the past eleven years, I've experienced all the different online effects and eras. I've seen the positives, but they most definitely don't outweigh the negatives. From the moment I first logged on, I became a victim. One insecurity of mine that I held at a young age was worrying about whether I fit in or how I physically looked. I remember growing up with Instagram and it constantly being a competition for who got the most likes or who had the most followers. I remember photoshopping my pictures because I didn't feel I was enough compared to everyone I was seeing online. I fed these insecurities into social media, not only with Instagram, but with Tumblr, YouTube, Snapchat, and eventually TikTok. I was viewing social media through my perceptive lens. This created a false confirmation bias that everyone was better than me because this was my fear. Subconsciously, I accepted and acted on this self-fulfilling prophecy. I felt unattractive and unaccepted compared to everyone I saw in the media, which slowly influenced my thoughts and behaviors. I saw that everyone who was well-liked or had a bunch of followers was thin and looked and dressed a certain way. As I’d scroll through apps, I would look up hashtags such as “how to get skinny fast” or “how to be popular”. The only photos and videos I liked were of weight loss, and my feed was filled with content related. The information being spat back out at me was perfectly targeting a personal spot that kept me engaged, but it constantly hurt. The standard that was flowing through my algorithms was to starve yourself and dress in tune with the trends. That message was blazing hot in my head like fire day after day; I was brainwashed that was the only answer. I believed and accepted the idea that I wasn't enough and that the way to fix it was to look and be like everyone else. That's exactly what I did. I stopped eating, stopped wearing all my favorite clothes, constantly worked out, wore tons of makeup, and eventually even abused drugs. Years later, thankfully, I'm different now, but my mind and body

were permanently damaged and affected by these actions. These actions were directly caused by social media use. Looking back, I never would've developed those thoughts and feelings about myself if I never opened the apps. The level of connection provided by these media apps was negative, and only encouraged and created poor solutions or outcomes. I didn't feel as if I could be creative or expressive because I was too afraid to stand out. I was connected and part of communities, but these were just utter reflections of my current situation. The support I received was only encouraging negative thoughts and behaviors. The output was making my self-esteem worse, but I couldn't stop. The sense-plan-act sequence constantly damaged my mind then life, but those platforms kept benefiting from my usage. I continued to use the algorithm because it was personable, yet it was constantly feeding into my deepest wounds. I became the puppet networks always saw me as. This is only one issue and I'm only one person out of billions that are going unnoticed.

The prospect that lies ahead is that these algorithmic issues are just going to get worse. Unless we admit to ourselves that certain outcomes are not only correlated but caused by social media use, we will never see change. If we keep living in this fantasy that social media is positive for youth, we will keep seeing addictive algorithms take advantage of them. The more success platforms see from using a sense-plan-act sequence, the stronger it's going to get. Adding to that, the popularity of this approach will spread, and "we'll see new sites focusing on [the same approach of] specific needs and interests" (Bajarin, para.7, 2023). It draws people in, makes them stay, and boosts the company, and soon all our websites or platforms will have the same application. Before you know it, our entire world will be puppets, dangling helplessly by the strings of social media. The only way to prevent this is by regulating usage and educating everyone about the consequences. What these algorithms are doing is and has been slipping right

under our noses because we have become ignorant of technological advances and power. The first step to making change is always self-awareness and admitting there's a present problem. We and the older generations are more cognitively developed and responsible. We should be the first to be educated and become aware so we can spread information to the victims. Fully comprehending the extent and power of this abusive, narcissistic control of the media will take us far. However, our youth do not see anything wrong with what's happening to them since it's all a subconscious control and effect. We need to challenge adolescents' thought processes; and if we notice odd, concerning, or random demeanor/ habits we need to make them consciously aware of it. Educate them and create awareness about how those thoughts, feelings, and behaviors could be caused by social media. Obtaining knowledge is only the first step to creating that desire to act, not only from us but from adolescents. Regulating media use shouldn't just be from family to family or from adults, it should be nationwide or globally, from *everyone*; but how do we go about that? The answer is staring at you in the mirror: If you have the power to educate and restrict media use minimally, who says you can't on a wider level? We the people can stop being the product of these platforms through active change. We can protest, speak out to state officials, or bring attention to news channels or journalists. We can work together to diminish the use of social media, increase awareness, protect vulnerability, and decrease the negative impact.

Social media platforms pose themselves as creations that benefit the user, however, the only ones benefiting are them. These platforms are creating digital reflections of the user’s consciousness, making the content niche and relatable, so they stay on the app. The sense-plan-act sequence is used by all the top-rated apps, and they're using it to take control of adolescents. These destructive algorithms are negatively influencing and subconsciously controlling youths'

cognition. In turn, this affects their feelings and behaviors about themselves which can impact their lives permanently. You can see the prevalence within girls and boys being influenced that they are transgender and acting on it; adolescents diagnosing themselves with mental disorders and adapting accordingly, and the youth population having feeble self-worth impacting their daily life. The media plays too big of a direct causative role in bringing about these effects within adolescents. They should have free will to think, act, and feel on their own and not be subliminally and negatively influenced. All this is happening to our youth, and people still see the positives in social media use? The bad outweighs the good with the slow, but long-lasting impact platforms have. Social media is just an actor for the world: Formulating a production, and being one person on stage, and another behind the scenes. They pose themselves as a great source of entertainment and connection, but they leave the stage and take the mask off. The show the world loves is wonderful, but what goes on behind the scenes to make it so loveable? Incorporating subconscious control is the answer. I loved this show once, so much to the point I got sucked into a narcissistic relationship. However, my subconscious was brought conscious, and I saw the problem. The problem wasn't me; it wasn't the people around me, it was the device and apps in my hand. Adolescents are victims, *I was* a victim because *we saw no problem.* If you see no problem with what occurs behind the scenes, maybe you're a victim too.

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