

Olivia Bolton

Tweeting About Mental Health

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Pull Quote: "I used my experience as a young teenager on social media as a way to convert my knowledge into simpler terms."

### **Reflection**

Mental illness is a burden that millions of people have to carry on their shoulders. Depression is an incredibly prevalent mental illness, affecting over 264 million people of all ages ("PSYCH 424 Blog"). Unfortunately, it is uncommon for schools to include mental illness in their curriculum unless one takes a psychology course, so there is much stigma and misinformation surrounding mental illness. Luckily, however, social media is beginning to change this fact by educating others on mental illness and spreading awareness about the warning signs. Personally, growing up with a sister who struggled with severe depression, I understand the immense importance of educating others and spreading awareness about mental illness, specifically depression.

As aforementioned, I have learned much about mental illness through social media. Instagram posts, tweets, Tik Toks, Reddit forums, Tumblr posts, and YouTube videos are all forms of social media that include information about mental illness and warning signs of suicide. My project aimed to mimic these social media posts by discussing the hopelessness theory of depression. I chose to use a series of Twitter posts as my way of educating my audience (young teenagers) since Twitter is a very popular social media platform that has remained consistent throughout my years on social media. This consistency ensures I reach my goal of educating young teenagers because it enables me to reach more teens than if I were to use a different, less

popular platform, and spreading awareness to as many teenagers as possible is my priority.

Overall, in my opinion, social media is more effective at educating young teenagers than classes might be for a number of reasons. Adolescents are on the verge of gaining their independence and are learning how to gain that independence. Sometimes they don't like to be told or taught things from authority figures, and instead like to find things out for themselves. Hearing information from peers and people their own age is a lot more important to them, especially in regards to mental health because they feel safer in hearing this kind of information from people their own age. Adolescents often feel like people their own age are more likely to understand their thoughts and feelings than older people.

As I wrote the tweets for my project, I constantly put myself in the shoes of a young teenager who is scrolling through Instagram or Twitter, as I once was. I learned about the hopelessness theory of depression through a peer-reviewed journal that discussed, in detail, an experiment that took place over several years and the results and implications of the study. The journal was directed towards psychologists and researchers in the field, which contrasts greatly from the audience in my project. Therefore, instead of aiming my writing towards researchers by using formal diction and syntax and quantitative evidence, which is how I learned about the hopelessness theory, I used my experience as a young teenager on social media as a way to convert my knowledge into simpler terms.

I knew that if I used formal diction and syntax, I would not reach my goal of educating teenagers because they would likely scroll past, as I would have at that age. Therefore, I used simple, concise sentences and words throughout my tweets in order to maintain the attention of my audience. For example, in one of my tweets I described a symptom of depression as "They see themselves as the cause of every issue, and so they feel a sense of deep hopelessness and

self-hatred.” As opposed to using the technical terms for hopelessness and self-hatred, I employed simplified terms that young teenagers could understand. To elaborate, in the peer reviewed journal from which I learned about the hopelessness theory, the term used for hopelessness is “the proximal cause of MDD” and the term used for self-hatred is “negative cognitive interpretative framework” (Giollabhui et al.). It is evident that young teenagers would not be able to understand these terms, so it was essential that I simplified them. Furthermore, instead of going in-depth about how depressed people see themselves, I summed up the point in one sentence, thus using concise sentences. Additionally, to hook their attention in the first place, I began with a relatable experience amongst teenagers and connected it to depression, and I made a claim that if they were to continue reading, they would learn why depression happens. This understanding is crucial because understanding why depression happens allows young teenagers to help others or themselves. Additionally, I aimed to maintain attention by using engaging “memes” that made myself seem relatable.

Going back to my experiences as a young teenager, I was more likely to listen to someone slightly older than me, as opposed to someone older who is out of touch with my generation. Therefore, by employing memes and pictures, I made it known that I am close to the adolescent age group and I can be listened to. This was my main purpose in utilizing memes; I wanted to signal to my audience who I am as an author. It is evident that I used my experiences as a young teenager to hook and maintain the reader’s attention throughout my series of tweets, which fulfills my goal of educating the reader about mental illness.

In order to ensure my audience actually remembered the information in my tweets, I concluded the tweets with a statement that connected the information I presented to these young teenager’s lives. The concluding statement I made relayed the fact that the information I

provided more than likely described them, or at least somebody they know. I encouraged them to put themselves in the shoes of somebody experiencing depression (since I thoroughly described what it's like) and to think how their life would be different. This technique urges them to think and feel, and, consequently, take action. I also ended with a statement that encouraged the reader to get help from a therapist or urge somebody they know to get help from a therapist, and I included the National Help Hotline. I know that when I was younger, if people told me the warning signs of mental illness and how to help somebody who is potentially struggling, I would be very keen to help others and be on the lookout for people who fit the signs of depression that I was told about.

Overall, it is evident that I used my personal experience as a young teenager on social media to drive my writing project and get my message across to my audience (young teenagers). Although I learned about the hopelessness theory of depression through a peer-reviewed journal, I employed my knowledge of different rhetorical situations in order to translate content for psychologists and researchers to adolescents. The author of the peer-reviewed journal was writing about the hopelessness theory for a different reason than I am, seeking something else, and presenting the information in a different way. Throughout my project, I looked at ideas from the point of view of a young teenager in order to write in a way that would be interesting to them, and to translate information written for researchers to a simpler context for these teens. By using personal experiences, I was able to help my readers learn, remember, and use the idea of the hopelessness theory of depression. With depression and suicide rates rising amongst teenagers, it is essential for them to understand and be aware of depression and what it does to a person.

Works Cited

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Author Profile: I am a first-year student majoring in Biopsychology, and I have been interested in mental health since I was 12 years old. This writing project gave me the opportunity to educate others in depression in a fun and easy to read format. I hope to be a psychiatrist in my future, so spreading awareness about mental health is something that I am very passionate about.