

## Like, Comment, Follow: The Effects of Meta on Mental Health

Following a report from the Wall Street Journal, increased scrutiny has been placed on social media companies for their role in negatively impacting teenagers' mental health

by ALEA MARKS

When a teenage girl clicks on the Instagram app and the first thing that appears on her feed is an airbrushed and edited photo of a model with her friends, it's easy for her to feel bad about her own life. The toxic effects of social media are not a new discovery. Even officials at the parent company of Instagram, Meta (previously named Facebook), are aware of the negative effects the platform has, yet no progress is being made to improve it, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Facebook changed its corporate name to Meta, which is short for Metaverse, to support the concept of a virtual universe that users can navigate freely, distancing itself from the problematic social media app that is Facebook. According to The Washington Post, the rebranding was made in an effort to distance itself from the recently exposed "Facebook Files" that revealed the lack of efforts the company has taken to combat the concerning statistics about their platform's impact on mental health, as shown from Meta's own research.

In March 2020, researchers commissioned from Instagram found that "32% of teen girls said that when they felt

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bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse." A slide presentation with this information was posted to Meta's internal message board, which was reviewed and published by The Wall Street Journal.

"Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression," another slide read. Junior Natalie Westermann attributes some of her insecurities to Instagram. "It's easy to feel isolated because you see people hanging out with their friends and looking really happy," she said.

For the past three years, Meta has been conducting surveys to better understand how Instagram affects its millions of young users. The Wall Street Journal reviewed numerous surveys with results showing that Instagram is harmful for a majority of its users, specifically teenage girls. Another slide had statistics from teens who reported

suicidal thoughts, and 6% of American users traced their suicidal ideation to Instagram, as reported by The Washington Post.

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**Despite this alarming research, Meta continues to deemphasize the app's negative effects on teens and doesn't publicize the research that exposes these numbers.**

effects on teens and doesn't publicize the research that exposes these numbers. The Wall Street Journal noticed that the company is dependent on its base of users under 22 years old, which comprises more than 40% of the total users.

Compared to other social media platforms, Instagram focuses the most on body and lifestyle and on specific moments of the user's choosing. Westermann chooses to delete and redownload Instagram periodically because she finds herself falling down the rabbit hole of comparison. "Instagram is a highlight reel; it's not representative of people's lives in reality," she said. Not only does Westermann feel the effects of negative social comparison, but she also finds the app to be very distracting and a vehicle for procrastination. In order

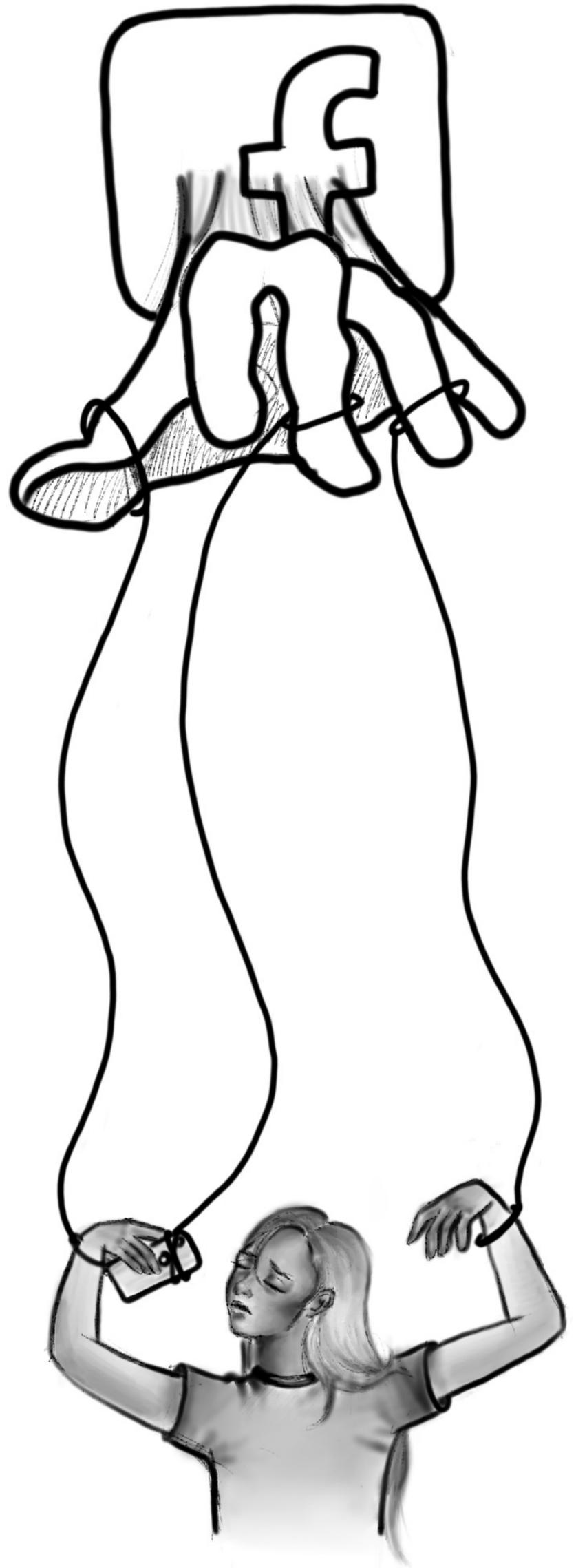
**"I post for myself and turn off my likes [...] people compare their worst selves to other people's highlight reels, but nobody is perfect."**

to combat this, she deletes the app.

An Instagram researcher involved in the "Facebook Files" noted that teenagers don't like that they spend so much time on the app, but they still struggle to turn it off. "They often feel 'addicted' and know that what they're seeing is bad for their mental health but feel unable to stop themselves," the Instagram research manager explained to colleagues, according to the documents.

Sophomore Theo Sanders, who doesn't use Instagram, feels left out and behind on trends because he isn't on the app. "[I miss out on] knowing what's going on in people's lives," Sanders said.

Sophomore Madison Brown mainly uses Instagram to promote her business, a brand focused on upcycling clothes. She is able to combat the negative sides of Instagram by using it as a platform to be creative. "I post for myself and turn off my likes," she said. That way, she is not measuring her worth based on the number of likes, comments or followers she has, which is something she notices her friends doing. Still, she sometimes gets caught up in the comparison. "People compare their worst selves to other people's highlight reels, but nobody is perfect," Brown said.



Since the release of the "Facebook Files" report, it's been revealed that the majority of teenage girls are negatively impacted by Instagram and Facebook. These platforms can even occasionally force teenagers to have heightened anxiety or depression. Staff illustration: Dorinda Xiao

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