Childhood, adolescence and social media: How the 'oversharing' generation worsens stigma and promotes mental illness

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The Problem: Since the uprising of the social media culture our youth is facing more complications around mental health, illness than ever. The problem with stigma around mental health isn't new but now, it's gotten even worse. These young people can now 'create' a digital support system on social media by posting about self harm, abandonment, suicidal thoughts, etc. The very real and present danger we are facing is that while these kids were able to create a false imagine of mutual support that allows them to put their inner feelings out there by still being an anonymous user ("oversharing") makes them not only less likely to share their struggles and insecurities with others ("undersharing"), but it also worsens their existing struggles to a high degree. An example of this would be the countless Instagram accounts by kids age 10 to 25 who post very graphic images of themselves performing self-harm. It all creates a big downwards spiral which is moving faster than ever.

My age allows me to inform about this in a more or less objective matter since I've experienced this time, this new era from my own observations and experiences. I am currently working together with the Austrian department of health and psychological organization funding, with the chief of an Austrian hospital with whom I have developed a concept for a first national, soon international project concerning education, destigmatization, information for mental health/illness for children and adolescents in the educational system, and I also recently met with the technology/engineering firm "RISE", and we talked about developing an algorithm for an artificial intelligence program that forms the base, I like to call it the skeleton for social media and the internet in general and filters out information from servers with which users searched for alarming keywords and makes it able to get them the best help possible eventually.

Biography

My name is Valerie-Claire Überbacher, I'm based in Vienna Austria. The reason I want to speak at your event is probably the exact same one that makes you doubt having me. I want to speak because I'm probably one of the very few young adults who spent over 7 years researching/experiencing mental illness and the social difficulties it brings while always self-reflecting and having an urge to help all those who are still experiencing major inner pain and not knowing what to do, or where to go. My contribution to this event will be the role of reality and experience, in a lot of theory represented. Since I've started an online blog and a social media presence with the purpose of finally being someone to open up and speak about struggles publicly, I've gotten thousands of responses from kids, adolescents form countries all over the world. I've noticed that while I can deliver my honesty, passion, and experience, I need to find people who can contribute technology, scientific experience, rank, age and expertise. This is also why I want to speak at this event. I'm passionate about public speaking if it's about something that I'm devoted to and passionate about. And I have never been more passionate about anything else. It needs to be done.

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