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Social Media: the Loud World of Complete Silence

Social Media has been a major part of my daily routine for over half my life, and it most definitely has its pros and cons. However, the cons are too detrimental, physically and mentally, to ignore or say that social media "isn't that bad." Social media causes people of various demographics to compare themselves to celebrities or influencers, causing self-esteem to plummet. We may think we have the power to ignore social media and love ourselves, but the platform is overwhelmingly competitive, manipulative and deceiving. That is why today I will be diving into exactly how social media inevitably clouds our minds and puts extra burdens on our shoulders, thus we must spread more positivity. Social media is undoubtedly harmful and toxic and alters the way we think and feel.

As for my personal relationship with social media, I can't say I am proud to reveal that I have become a victim of some of the things I am going to be arguing. For that, I am going to treat this essay as a reflection to hold myself more accountable for my social media use; as I urge you to do the same. My phone is the last thing I look at when I go to bed and the first thing I check when I wake up, and my daily average screen time is six hours. Six hours is excessive and there surely are so many more productive things I could be doing with that time, including time to care for my body through exercise or relaxation. The most significant impact that social media has on my generation is the need for society's approval or trying to "prove" to our followers that we are always doing something exciting or hanging out with people.

Likewise, to my personal relationship with social media, two kids in the documentary "Generation Like," stuck out to me for constantly striving to seek approval and attention from society; the girl obsessed with The Hunger Games and the young boy that skateboarded. The way that I just described those two kids would probably anger them because it's too generic. Instead, the girl would rather be known as "Top 60 Hunger Games Biggest Fans" and the boy as, "Baby Scumbag." These young teenagers allowed social media to consume their life and strive to be noticed. For the girl, being a fan on her own isn't enough for her as she states, "It's self-empowering to know that I'm one of the top fans on the website" (Generation Like). This feeling of self and public validation is what the girl from the documentary, myself and most people fall victim to everyday. The amount of approval/attention one receives is also determined by the number of likes you receive. In a study done by the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, the number of likes on the participants' photos were manipulated to determine how their overall mood/self-esteem was. The study concluded that, "A planned contrast confirmed the high likes condition reported higher self-esteem than the combined average and low likes conditions" (Burrow). Not only was there a decreased self-esteem, but a decreased feeling of "purpose in life" resulting from a lack of societal approval. Kids and teenagers already struggle enough to make friends and form healthy relationships with others, so an additional platform that they feel they need to be "good enough" adds unnecessary elements of competition and degrading self-esteem.

Self-esteem and internet use have a strong relationship; as internet use increases, self-esteem decreases. For centuries, society has set the standards for physical attractiveness very high and it only increases. I have grown up constantly seeing images of skinny and flawless women, comparing myself to theirs rather than loving myself for who I am; and I know I'm not

alone in this. Self-comparison has taken on a new level of degrading self-esteem when it comes to social media's "likes." One click of a like button gives another person a feeling of self-worth, affirmation and love that we shouldn't have to rely on social media for. In the grand scheme of things, the internet is a toxic cycle of never having enough attention or self-affirmation. Just when we have reached the most likes ever on one post; we post more just to see if this picture will get more likes than the last. In the article, "The Comfort of a Digital Confidante," the author states, "What we want is to be seen in our entirety, and we are always striving to inch closer to that impossible goal" (Alang 415). Here, the author is trying to convey that there is an endless cycle of seeking more and more attention and how it's never enough. Additionally, the same article that examines the relationship between likes and self-esteem states, "There is emerging empirical evidence to suggest that curating one's Facebook profile can be a source of self-affirmation, and protective against identity threats" (Toma & Hancock). Most of the time, we open our hearts on social media just to find people that relate to us. Although, the best way to do that is face-to-face because that's where the true growth, character development and bonding begins, rather than having that same relation end as soon as we turn off our phone.

There are too many times that I can count where I'm sitting at a restaurant and the family of four at the table next to us is silent because they are buried in their phones. They're contacting people, looking at other's posts – again seeking attention when the best attention that can be received is from your own family. In the article "Can't Quit the Clicks," Dr. Cash has a rehab center to re-establish one's relationship with the internet. This includes an 8-12 week digital detox for an upward payment of $14,000 (Wiskin 418). For anyone that may think that price is unreasonable, it's not, because according to the same article, 80% of users check their phones within fifteen minutes of waking up and the average user checks their phone every six minutes

(Wiskin 417). Therefore, while many of us think it would be easy to abandon our phone for days at a time, it is much harder to do that if your brain is highly dependent on it. Plugging into the digital world can only be done as you unplug from reality, which is another way that the internet is toxic. This dilemma of disconnecting from reality is especially dangerous and highly prevalent in young children, evident by Rayan in the documentary, "Digital Addicts." Rayan screams and badgers his mom for the phone and the second he has it, he runs to the other room only to be silent and lifeless for hours on end; missing out on critical development opportunities at his young age. I've been taught by my parents that it's rude to be on your phone while talking to someone, when someone is talking to you, or while at a restaurant. These tasks seem simple, yet so many people choose to devote their time to a tiny glass screen, than their precious family.

The concern for mental health continues as we dive deep into brain functions and other ways that an excessive amount of the internet has negative impacts. In the documentary, "Digital Addicts," Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, addictologist, and Dr. Gary small, Professor of psychiatry, describe the similarities between social media addiction with drug addiction. Though drug addiction is more detrimental to your body, the symptoms are certainly comparable due to the feeling of withdrawal when you're not on your phone. Both also discuss the relationship between dopamine and phones as they are referred to as a 'dopamine pump' (Kardaras) in which it causes us to adopt key behaviors to our survival and that dopamine feeds the reward system of our brains. This is harmful because the more dependent we are on screens, we experience numerous health results such as shrinkage of our frontal cortex, change in fluid circulation to our brain which restricts circulation and in turn- decreases our reaction time. Hearing all these health effects is enough for me to restrict myself from social media, but I will always eventually turn

back to the toxic habit of overusing my phone. Social media use is all about self-decision and discipline, yet we always choose to greet our online contacts in the morning before our family.

Not only does social media affect us in various negative ways, but it also has to do with our own privacy from others because, “Privacy is no longer a relevant social norm” (Zuckerberg). The classic phrase of, “whatever you put on social media is on there for anyone to see anytime they want,” is completely true. Despite the current features of popular social media app settings such as private stories, my eyes only, friends only… it’s never truly 100% private. Companies take full advantage of this because they receive free statistics. The documentary, “Generation Like” explains how the more interaction you have online creates a demographic profile of yourself which gets added to statistics regarding what you search or view the most. Additionally, the more we try to take precautionary measures and protect our online identity, others assume we’re up to no good and truly sophisticated and determined people would still be able to find out who we are or track us down. In the article, “The Public Square,” the author mentioned while talking to her daughter, “...if she tries to protect her privacy by using browser settings designed to hide her identity, it may well activate greater surveillance of her online behavior” (Turkle 446). Here, we observe the terrible “norm” that society has created that just because a person chooses to conceal their identity and/or location online, “They would think we have something to hide” (Turkle).

Taking a deeper look into the world of social networking service as a means of privacy invasion, studies done by Communication & Society, observed the participant’s personal feelings about social networking services, as well as habits they have adapted through cautionary measures. While some participants were made more aware of privacy issues and consulted the profiles they were unfamiliar with, most fell victim to violating ethics. For example, some of the

people acknowledged having developed practices such as using a webcam to record people without their permission or resorting to apps to track mobile phones via geolocation (Hermida 143). Now lies the risk of yourself developing these tendencies as well as others using these habits on you to invade your own privacy. Further results from this study concluded that, “14.7% of the respondents acknowledged having threatened, at least once, to share someone else’s personal content, while 20.0% claimed that this had happened to them occasionally and 66.6% of the respondents had felt spied on by other users at some time or another (Hermida). A notable factor of variation in these results has to do with gender. While I don’t like to gender “stereotype” the fact that women tend to take more precautionary measures online does not surprise me because women are usually the targets.

While there always are various positives to the online world, there are too many negatives and unsafe measures that completely outweigh the good. Between the need for approval from society, degradation of self-esteem, disconnecting from reality, resulting health issues and invasion of privacy; I can’t help but associate “social media” with being toxic and harmful. A big part of me wishes we were still living in the years where social networking didn’t exist, because then our whole life wouldn’t be consumed with updating our profiles or checking our media statistics. In reality, the things we should be worrying about, like family and our own mental health, gets put on the backburner when we prioritize social media. We have let the toxic world of social media consume us that, “Overtime, living with an electronic shadow begins to feel so natural that it seems to disappear” (Turkle 444).

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