

InSight

Diversity Magazine

Building Empathy in a Digital Age

Bullis School

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Building Empathy in a Digital Age

Letter From the Editors

Technology is a major part of our world and for many teenagers it is also something that we have grown up with. In this issue of *InLight* we want to discuss the impact of social media and screentime, and how technology can build or lessen empathy and connections within our communities. It is important for us to discuss how to build bridges and connect with each other through the common denominator of technology.

This issue highlights students with different opinions about our generation's exposure to technology. It also highlights students who use social media to their benefit and are willing to share their own experiences.

Thank you so much to all of the people who have supported us through the production of this issue of *InLight*. We are grateful to have the opportunity to share these student voices with the rest of the community. To the staff and contributors, thank you for all of your hard work. We would also like to thank Dr. Romeyn for her encouragement, we would not have been able to create this magazine without her.

Please remember that each article is written from the perspective of a single voice and as such does not represent the community as a whole. If you are interested in giving us feedback, feel free to email us. We would love to hear from you! If you would like to be a part of the *InLight* team next year, let us know. Thanks for an excellent year.

Sincerely,
Ava Caceres '19 and Andrea Moore '19



Digital Artwork by:
Raphy Conrad '19

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Using Technology to Continue Dialogue

Sammy Houdaigui '21

Last summer, I participated in the Seeds of Peace camp in Maine. The program brought together Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians, and Americans. We all made meaningful bonds over the course of the camp. After the camp ended, many of us were left wondering how we would stay in touch. We knew that going home likely meant never seeing the new friends that we had made ever again. The physical borders and hostile governments that separated us seemed insurmountable.

In order to maintain relationships we had cultivated over the camp, we spent the last day collecting social media information so that once we returned home, group chats could be made and the dialogue we had during camp could continue. Social media allowed our experience to continue to develop. However, now the dialogues that we had seemed different. Whereas before professional adults acted as facilitators we now were entirely independent. This coupled with the “impersonal” nature of texting changed our group’s dynamics. Arguments that could have been opportunities for meaningful dialogue devolved into all caps clashes that left noticeable animosity. None of us realized this at the time, but a lack of empathy hindered any chance of continuing our camp experience. We were no longer talking empathetically to someone who had lived through three wars but rather to a faceless text.

Out of this frustration, we began to communicate with one another differently. We utilized video services like Skype and FaceTime. Suddenly, we weren't just communicating digitally but rather chatting with a friend. Our dialogue felt meaningful again as video apps allowed us to empathize. Using social media in these specific ways allowed us to continue meaningful dialogue despite our geographic separation.



Photo by: Sunny Hu '20

THE ADDICTIVE NATURE OF TECHNOLOGY

Sydnae Becton '19

The more social media we have, the more we think we're connecting, yet we really are disconnecting from one another. Recently, our generation has become obsessed with social media. As a result, we have lost real communication amongst peers. Our youth's mental health will be negatively impacted and have devastating effects in the future.

Teenagers obsess about getting a certain number of likes on a social media post or having the most followers. I know plenty of people who have deleted a social media post because they did not receive "enough" likes even though their post was terrific. As humans, we constantly compare ourselves to others. For instance, a classmate posts a picture at the same time. You both have the same amount of followers, but as time goes on, you see that she's getting way more likes than you. Is it because she is more popular? Prettier? Cooler? Who knows, but it makes you feel bad about yourself, increases your insecurities and lowers your self-confidence, questioning the belief that you are enough.



If our generation does not feel confident in our abilities and is driven by external approval, we will not create amazing things to transform this world.

Similarly, we lose real communication through social media, downgrading social skills. This generation uses apps to communicate with people by sending "streaks" every day, telling someone that they like them through an Instagram DM or Twitter, or Facebook messaging each other.

As a result they don't know how to talk to one another in real life. I saw this come into full effect over the summer working at lacrosse camp. At lunchtime, I saw how every one of the girls took out their smartphones and did not talk to one another, but stayed on their phones looking at social media. If these 7-to 8-year-olds can't even speak to one another. How will this affect our future?

Finally, addiction to social media negatively affects the identity of teens. Social media is very addictive when we start scrolling through a feed, it is tough to stop. Teens spend up to nine hours a day on social media. These are hours when we could have been reading a book, sleeping, or just focusing on ourselves. We stay on our smartphones, and we receive no reward after using them. It takes discipline to keep social media from stealing our time, and we have to learn to use social media more efficiently.

We can change the effects of social media on our youth by educating them about social media's power by restrictions for adolescents to prevent damage to their mental health and ultimate future. Technology can have powerful effects and we must teach our youth to use social media for good rather than evil.

Artwork By: Alexis Leder '19

Empathy

Calla O'Neil '22

About a month ago, I got the opportunity to play with a group of girls who are a part of the Peace Players program, an international organization that uses the game of basketball to promote conflict resolution and build young leaders. On my Peace Players team, half of the girls are of Arab descent while half are Israelis. They live in Jerusalem and Palestine, which have been the center of violence and conflict for centuries. In this program, girls play together and support each other to bridge the divide.

Since that day at the Peace Players clinic, I have kept in touch with the girls in the program. One girl that I have gotten closer to is Or Mor Yosef. After seeing Or's talent on the court and hearing her story during our group discussion after the clinic, I knew that I wanted to get to know her better. I have realized how much we have in common, even though our experiences in basketball seem so different at first glance. When I knew I wanted to write about the empathy that I have achieved through interacting with the members of Peace Players, I asked Or if she wanted to contribute. She was happy to help, and her words are extremely powerful:

"I started playing basketball nine years ago, and from that moment I couldn't stop. While I played for a professional basketball club, I joined a nonprofit organization called Peace Players. Before Peace Players, I was afraid of Arabs. I had seen them in public places but I had never even talked to them. In the beginning, I joined only for the basketball, but as the time passed we all started to communicate and we became very close friends.

We realized from the beginning that we couldn't play without teamwork and communication. In addition, there was a language barrier, and our only way to communicate with each other was through basketball. I think that sports are an amazing method for conflict resolution because of all of the important values it brings such as teamwork, commitment, respect, and many more. I think that the power of a team can break any barrier, and Peace Players gave me the opportunity to realize that."

Artwork By:
Roya
Ebrahimi-Qajar '21



Across the World

One thing that touched me was when Or described how basketball allowed her to form relationships with girls she would never have been friends with if they didn't play together. While my situation is nowhere near as difficult or intense, the girls on my basketball team are from all different schools and live in all different neighborhoods. It is unlikely that we would have crossed paths if it weren't for basketball. We have differences, but what brought us together is our love for the game, and we have not only become great teammates but also best friends. Or has experienced the same thing with her team. In the Middle East, it is rare for Arabs and Israelis to have any sort of a relationship, so it seems like they have nothing in common. While all of the girls live in different places, speak a different language, and have different values, they are able to come together through the power of basketball.

Or believes that basketball can be a way to resolve conflict and break barriers. A main reason for conflict around the world is people not being able to communicate effectively. When adequate communication is lacking, it is hard to successfully state opinions without others feeling attacked or defensive. This causes arguments between people with different views. Even though the girls who are a part of Peace Players have different views on the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis, they find a way to communicate and work together for a common cause: *winning*. While a language barrier would seem like an impossible hurdle to overcome, the girls on Peace Players don't use it as an excuse.

The takeaway that I gained from Peace Players and my friendship with Or Mor Yosef is that sports can be a powerful agent for change. Basketball is much more than a ball and a net; it is a movement. It can bring people together, build new relationships, break boundaries, and more. The court is the greatest classroom on earth. It teaches people how to successfully interact with others, how to overcome adversity, how to bring people together, and how to be a leader. These skills can't always be taught in school. It is my hope that one day we can get every girl to be able to play on a team so that they can grow to be open-minded and inspired leaders that will tackle the world's biggest challenges.



A Different Relationship

I'm sure the vast majority of the people reading this article either use Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, or even Facebook, all of which I have never used. Considering this, I may not be able to connect as closely or to as many people without these platforms. However, I don't enjoy posting things based around myself as much I like simply contributing to or partaking in the community that is the internet. Here are several reasons as to why *I ignore mainstream social media platforms in favor of the wider Internet.*

I use other platforms, less based around personal communication and more around entertainment. I've watched months worth of YouTube videos and am a proud Imgurian. I'll also delight in Reddit occasionally, though I don't post at all there. These platforms are more based around a sense of community and exist to instill modern creativity through the creation of videos, music, and memes. Unlike more personal posts on other platforms, it isn't really about self and no one necessarily owns anything within these spaces. Content belongs to the community. Thus everyone takes artistic liberties.

My use of the Internet also reflects my personality. I like being a part of a larger community, and I enjoy exploring what other people have to offer.

I see the Internet as an extension of creative arts. It is random and often coupled with mild humor.

The Internet can be a very creative place, one that allows you to do almost whatever you can possibly imagine, and it's one of the only places in the world where you can get honest feedback and opinions. Of course, this isn't always true because anything goes there, but it's worth taking such a risk. Who knows? Maybe you'll discover something you never knew about yourself.

I also choose to avoid social media because I simply don't have enough time to make posts about my day to day life that some people might consider interesting. And with all of my internet browsing, gaming and of course school, unfortunately, I barely have time to write or focus on what I want as my future career.



Artwork by: Christian Hayes '23

With the Internet

Charlie Sims '22

During the summers I attend a summer camp in northern New Hampshire that prohibits use of any technology whatsoever. For some, this would be devastating, we can't keep up with friends as quickly as with social media and instead have to send letters that would take several days or even weeks to reach their destination. But I can do without it all for seven weeks with a short break in the middle. At camp, we have a sense of community that actually is very familiar to the Internet despite being secluded in the mountains. We come from all over the world, but we all also come from a digital age dominated by internet culture. Seven weeks... a lot can happen in that amount of time, but as long as the world doesn't fall into an apocalyptic state while I'm away and I can't know about it, I'll be fine.

I enjoy the company of creative people who share similar interests and have empathy for each other. Through our online culture, we connect with and understand each other in a completely original way, one that the human race has never experienced before. Indirectly, we can learn more about a person than having a simple conversation with them or following their daily lives. The art of creating something that holds a deeper, more subtle personal meaning is different than your average posts that are directly personal. Because of this, we can all relate to each other through memes, videos, stories and so on. The internet is unorganized. It is infinite. It is a complex interconnected system that promotes creativity and empathy for fellow creators no matter who they are.

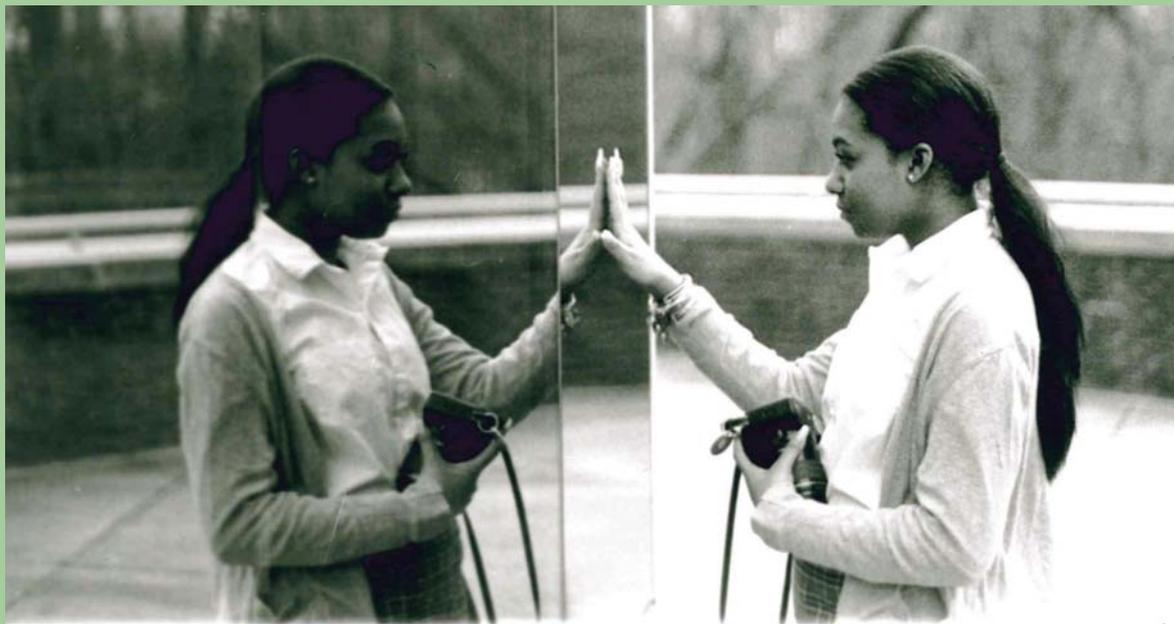
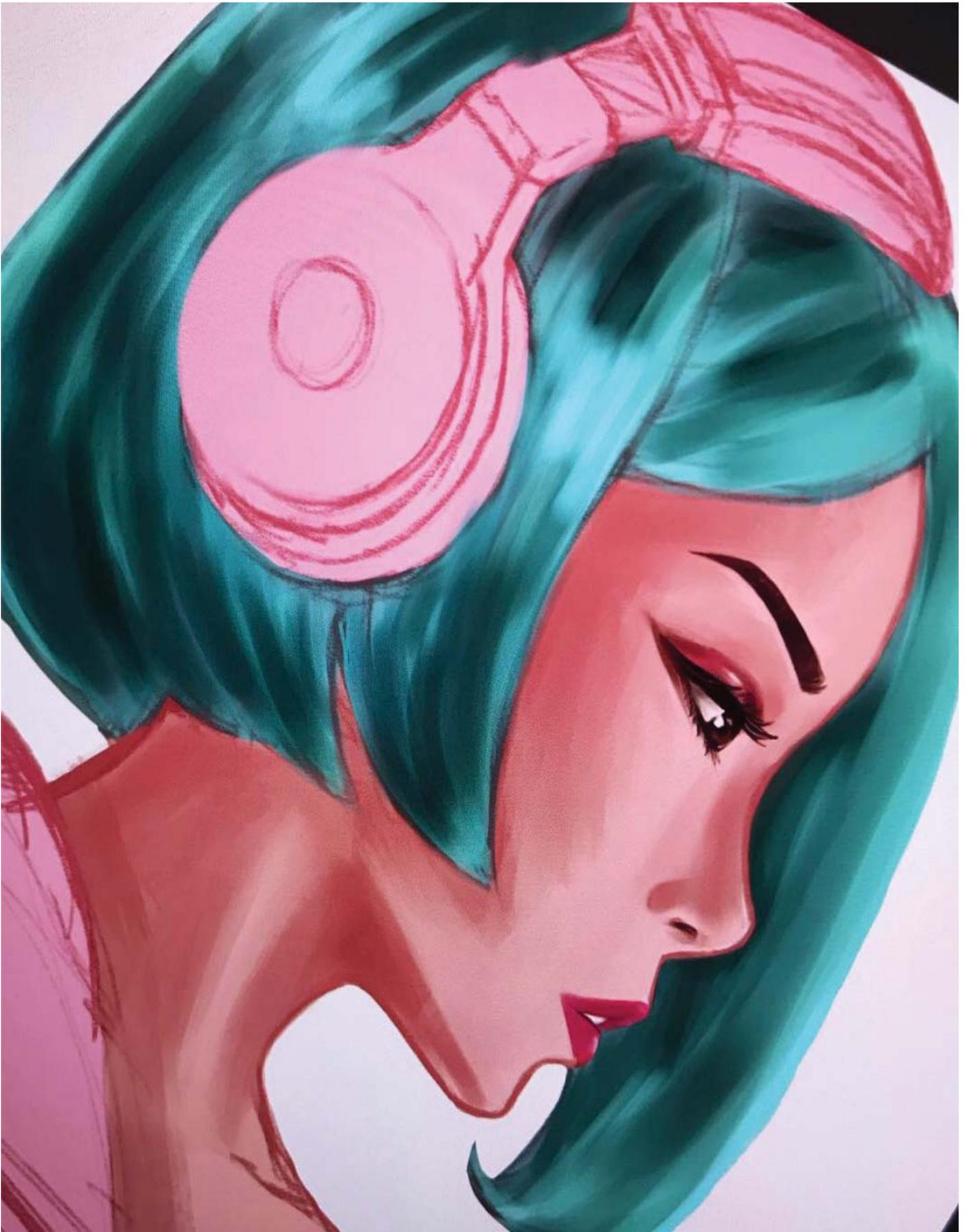
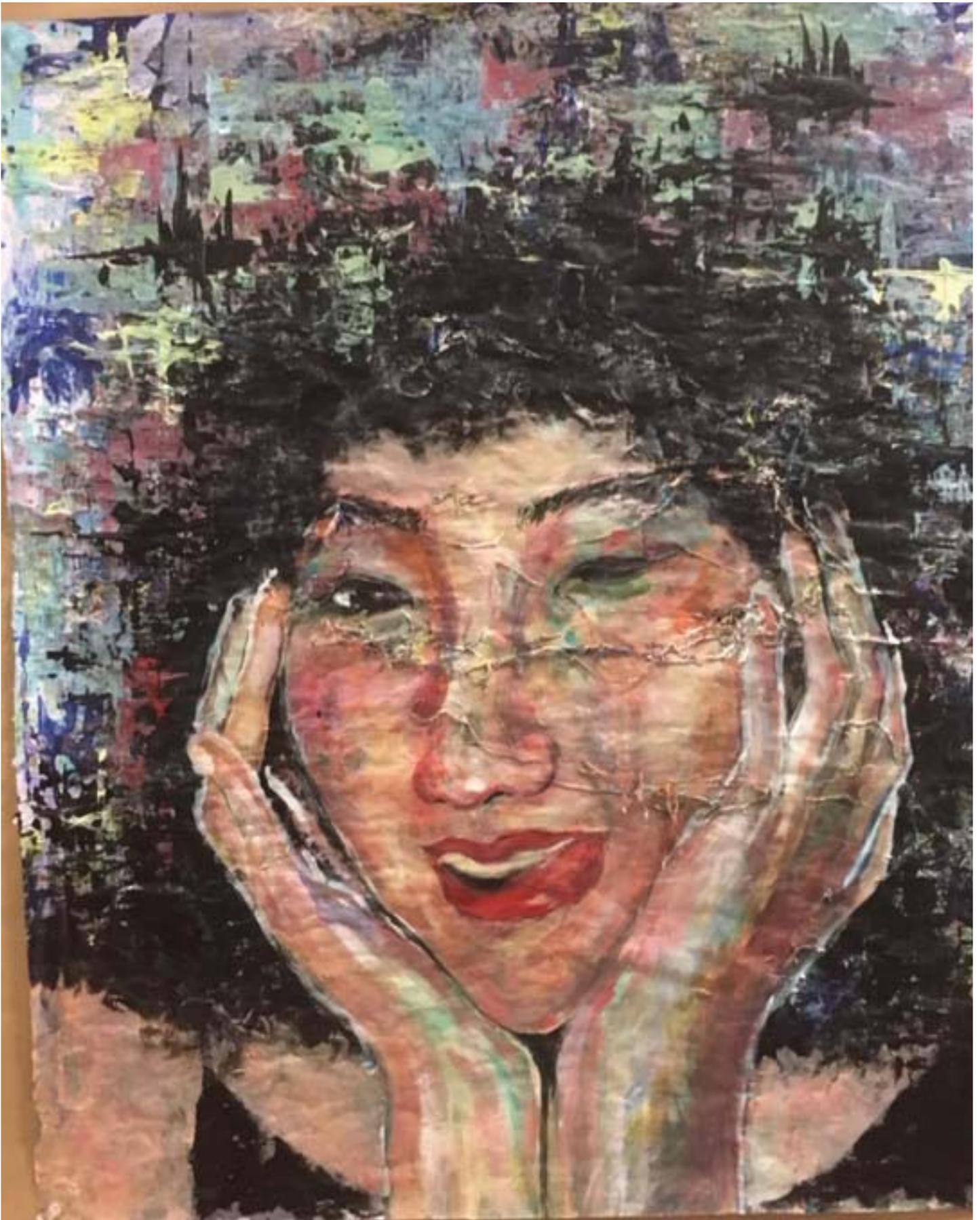


Photo By: Jackson Greeleaf '20



Artwork by: Samantha Jan '19



Artwork by: Sunny Hu '20

Expert Interviews on Social

Emma Bookoff '19

This year, in the Humanities and Global Studies Capstone, I have focused on social media and its mental health effects. This issue piqued my interest because of how relatable the topic is for my generation. Almost every teen uses social media and we all have little to no guidance because it is a *new phenomenon*. I have been trying to solve this problem through extensive research, presentations, and discussion groups. I want students to realize that their social media pages do not represent their self-worth and that posts never go away once they are put on the internet.

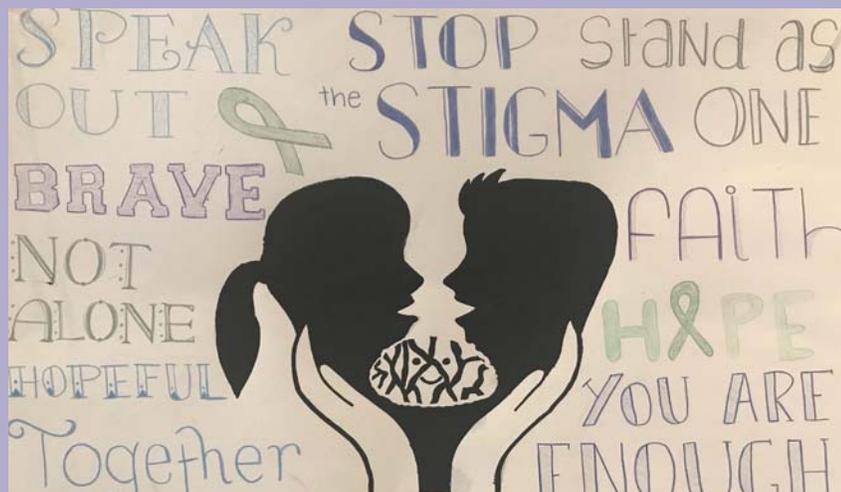
To gain further insight into social media's mental health effects I interviewed two local professionals who work with teens and manage mental health.

Dr. Dana Kornfeld is a local pediatrician who specializes in adolescents and helping them navigate emotional and physical issues and Ms. Joy Cohen is a therapist who works with teens in the area and studies modern-day effects on mental health.

I asked four basic questions on how social media has affected teens in their practices and how to manage the negative effects.

1 I first asked if Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen have seen a rise in the rate of anxiety and depression amongst teens since the advent of social media. Both Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen explained that they have both seen a rise in anxiety in their practices since the advent of social media. They have seen that teens are having self-esteem issues and problems being able to disconnect and find self-worth. Ms. Cohen added that social media is training our brains in a similar way that Pavlov conditioned his dogs. Whenever we get a notification, we have an innate, positive, learned reaction to it.

2 Next, I asked the professionals what, if anything, can parents do to help their children deal with the pressures of social media. The main overarching theme that both Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen discussed was limiting access to social media and screens. Dr. Kornfeld discussed how both teens and PARENTS should put down their phones during bonding times. By putting down the phone, parents and kids can spend quality time together which increases happiness.



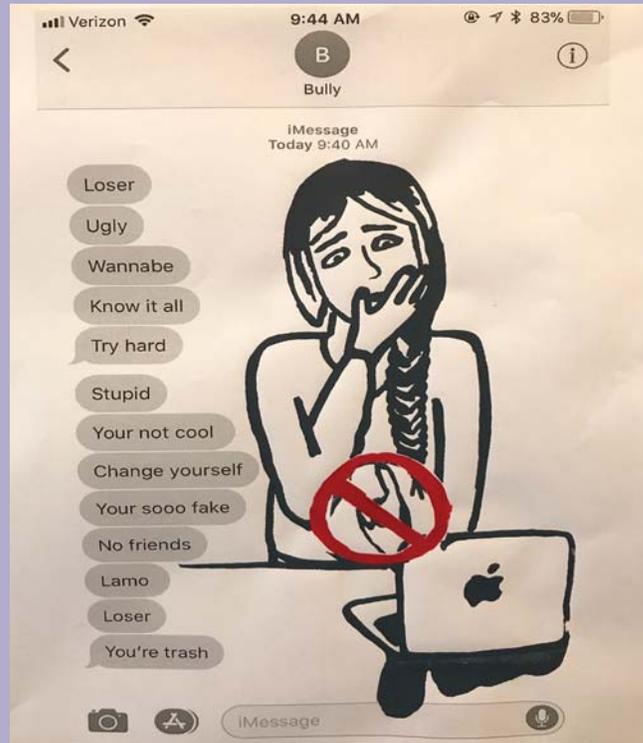
Artwork by: Mira Khera '22

Media and Mental Health

3 I also asked Ms. Cohen how parents can console their children when they are distressed about social media. She said it is very important that teens and their parents have open communication on social media. Without that, kids can further spiral into depression.

4 I asked, what are signs and symptoms that parents and friends should look for to determine if social media is having a negative effect? Both Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen said that parents and friends should watch out for symptoms such as isolation, mood changes, and withdrawal as signs of addiction/negative effects. Dr. Kornfeld said that another sign is that if a teen has stopping participating in hobbies that made them happy and is spending all their time on their phone. Ms. Cohen's red flag of social media addiction is when a teen or adult says that they/their child has spent the whole weekend sitting on their phone.

5 Finally, I asked what can an individual do to practice healthier social media habits. Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen said it is OK to use cellphones, but it is important to put down the phone at appropriate times to create a happier healthier lifestyle. Dr. Kornfeld encourages that "When you are with people, be with those people, shut your phone off." Ms. Cohen said to use social media during times to connect online with friends but put it down any other time.



Artwork By: Sophie Simon '21

Parents also must educate their kids on permanency and self-worth, two major issues surrounding teens on social media today.

Depression and anxiety associated with social media are not just from feelings of FOMO or cyberbullying, they also come from preventing face-to-face connections.

Humans need face-to-face interactions to feel stable and happy, to feel like we belong.

By living through our screens, we are not able to make these vital connections. Another take away was the signs and symptoms of phone addiction. I had never thought about what those were before. After talking to Dr. Kornfeld and Ms. Cohen, I learned that phone addiction symptoms include sitting in isolation, rejecting social plans just to sit on your phone, and being secretive around loved ones and friends. The only way to help ourselves and others lead happier lives is to restrict phone usage, which is hard to do because our whole lives are on our phones. It was proven though that about an hour per day of screen time usage raises self-esteem and happiness.

All in all, from these interviews, I identified unhealthy habits within myself and began to change them. I realized that I have a cell phone addiction that prevents me from being productive, so I have set limits on certain apps on my phone. Once I have met these limits, the app closes out and I am not allowed back into it. It has helped me to reduce procrastination and create better quality work. In addition, this information helped me with my research and experiential component. I knew what to ask and discuss with the students in order to produce a beneficial and worthwhile presentation.



Artwork By: Julia Mendelson '20

Linking Lives

Kayla Mao '22

How do you contact your friends from another school, country, or even continent? The Internet has so many great uses and many resources. However, I believe that one of its greatest uses is to communicate with others you do not see on a regular basis. My best friend lives twenty minutes away from me. With our busy lives, we are not able to meet up every weekend and spend time together. With access to the Internet just at our fingertips, we are able to talk every day and stay friends.

In fourth grade, I left my school and my friends to begin my adventure at Bullis. I was so anxious to move to a brand new school with nobody I knew, but in the first week I was here, I found Bullis to be a very welcoming school and I made friends very quickly. However, I did not forget about my close friends that I left in elementary school. I began to use iMessage and FaceTime more often and more effectively. Every day we would FaceTime throughout our afternoons and play video games together.

Although the creation of social media can be harmful in many ways, it has served me such a great purpose. I've been able to keep in touch with my best friend in a way that has kept us close for six years. Social media is also a way for international people to connect and talk without actually meeting up. Even though I personally prefer meeting up somewhere in person, I don't always have time to. My parents may be out at meetings or they simply do not have the time to drive me somewhere. So, I end up spending an average of 30 minutes to an hour a day talking with my best friend.

When it comes to international relationships, having Instagram, Snapchat, Line, and Discord on my phone have given me the ability to contact my friends in Taiwan. Even though we are in different time zones, I am still able to message my friends at any time I want to, using our social media platforms. Besides my friends, my grandpa also lives in Taiwan. I video chat with him once every month with my mom to keep in touch with him!

I hope that more people take advantage of using social media in this way. Although there are many negative impacts of using social media, there are many ways of using it in a positive way. Keeping in touch with friends, business matters, and family chats across the globe will benefit anyone's life.



Artwork By: Lexi Blank '23

I Hear the Neglecting

Click

I hear America neglecting the fallen soldier and the distorted figure in
need

Everywhere I look

Someone craves help

Simple help

Denied

Scroll

I hear America neglecting the emotional needs of their closest allies

Friendship made to feel included

But included in what?

Real friends denied

By a superficial force

A desire

Neglecting the notion that true friendship comes

Wholeheartedly

No strings attached

Post

Loudest of all I hear neglect from the parents

Stop playing the victim

You poor thing

They mock

Refuge in the Screen

No matter how hard I try

The barrier of neglect becomes thicker and thicker

Each attempt to be seen

Is a failed mission

We burrow deeper into our familiar abyss

Unexposed to the cruelties of an invisible attack

Whispers of America

Sydney Rodman '20

Click

I hear America neglecting who they are meant to be
Neglecting that there is no rule that says
Stay in your comfort box
The box of expectations
The box of expecting others' expectations
The box of guessing who you should be
Trying to please the imaginary society
Concocted in your mind
A self-fulfilling prophecy
That you have no say in
They have control over you
No sense of self
Denied
Scroll
Just neglect the neglect they say
Why should I fight fire with fire?
Why throw ice at an iceberg?
Is there no other way?
How do you fight the silent killer?

*Today, I find that many people of all ages rely on their phones too heavily, compare themselves to others, and lack skills pertaining to face-to-face contact. "I Hear the Neglecting Whispers of America" captures the feeling of loneliness in order to warn about the effects of a world without *empathy in the digital age*.*

~ Sydney Rodman

Post

Please answer

Stop ignoring me

Come back

Don't turn your back on me

How do I get you to just look me in the eye for once?

You, yes you, get your head out of the screen and look up at what you've done

Post the image of your cruelty

An intentional, intimate search

Is that too much to ask?

Nevermind

Forget I said anything

Photo By: Joelle Moore '20

CAPTURING THE POSITIVE DEVELOPING FROM THE NEGATIVE

Ava Caceres '19

To those who know my television watching history, it comes as no surprise that I love the show Doctor Who. Combining the elements of time-and-space travel, lighthearted comedy coupled with dramatic undertones, and a touch of zaniness, the British science fiction program checks off all of my boxes for a show worth a watch. But very few would know that Doctor Who ended up inspiring me to jump out of my comfort zone.

When I was sixteen, I joined a Doctor Who fan page that shared clips from the TV show, fanart, and fanfiction. At the time, I was looking for a place to enjoy memes and find spoilers for the new episodes. For no other show would I even dare look for a spoiler (I mean I could accidentally end up ruining a good plotline for myself!), but for Doctor Who, I was always so curious to find out what the companions would be doing or what time period they were in this time around. What I didn't expect to find were photo editing contests, where members of the community would participate just for fun as a way to be creative and experiment with new mediums. Although I was a writer first and foremost, I was always intrigued by art, and photo editing took less patience for me than painting would.

The first photo I edited, to be honest, was awful. People say "practice makes perfect." They aren't kidding, first attempts can be truly horrendous. I'm not ashamed of it, but let's just say, I hope that oversaturated vignetted photo of Donna Noble doesn't end up resurfacing any time soon. Needless to say, I didn't win any of the competitions with that picture, but I couldn't help but feel a creative bug emerge.

I started creating more photos, taking note of what went wrong with my pictures and what worked with the professional look-alikes that I saw. Sometimes I would collaborate with other participants and our visions would clash, but I would end up seeing from a different point-of-view of how my imagination could end up blossoming. I started experimenting with apps like PicsArt, Polarr, and Photoshop. There came a point where I would hold the contests, since members of the community would tell me that they enjoyed my song lyric inspiration idea and other creative themes.

Although I don't partake in those Doctor Who editing contests anymore, I still find those photo analytical skills coming to use today in my photography and my presentations in school. Without being part of that supportive community, I wouldn't have had the creative passion with viewing and creating digital art that I have today.

Photo Illustration By: Ava Caceres '19

CAPTURING LIFE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Andrea Moore '19

Some adults believe that our generation is entirely consumed by technology. It is quite annoying when parents or older relatives complain about how “you’re always on that phone” or “you stay on that laptop,” even if there is some truth to those statements. But in my opinion, having constant interactions on your phone or device doesn’t always have to be negative.

Don’t get me wrong; sometimes the addiction is real, but devices have created a memory catching generation. I take at least one picture a day, and even though some of them may just be selfies, they are still capturing a moment in my life that I will never have again. As Generation Z as that sounds, taking pictures and sharing on social media are ways of documenting our lives, experiences, and passions. I share experiences like almost touching Beyonce, riding the tallest roller coaster in America, marching for my life, and even the unique opportunity that is Bullis.

We get to exercise our free speech with the world and learn new perspectives, disagreeing with some and completely support others. We get to connect with people and form new friendships by capturing our memories with them through comments images, and group chats.

Through technology students at Bullis have been able to capture beautiful works, evident in this very magazine, put together on digital software within that computer that people say I’m “always on.” There are positive outlets that come with constant technology and access to it.

I know many adolescents who have discovered their passions through having technology, like those who participate in photography.

Social media and seeing the works of others even led me to want to create my own art. It led me to an outlet that I would never have appreciated or discovered if I was not motivated by all of the beautiful things I had already seen without leaving my front door.

So in short, no, it is not ok for us to miss our lives because we are consumed in this age of technology adolescents in this day and age are unique by being able to experience life by capturing and sharing it, and that itself is a beautiful thing.

Photo By Will Everett '19



Artwork By: Demo Bosede '23