

2018 Annual Scholarship Award Essay

What is social media? According to the “internet”, the facilitator of social media, it is the collective online communication channels dedicated to community based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. What does social media mean to us, young and old alike? Social media is an unhealthy habit that children, young adults, and unfortunately adults, can't seem to quit. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube and Twitter, Oh My... social media has consumed all of us and has become a negative influence to our social standards, a place where reality is not really reality, a host for cyberbullying, and a creation that changes how we interact with our fellow humans. How could this drastic shift not cause mental health problems? I believe that social media definitely contributes to the mental health problems that children and young adults suffer from today.

In order to understand the mental health problems in children and young adults, we must understand how much of a grip social media has on them. According to a report by Common Sense Media, children spend an average of **nine** hours a day on social media. This gives a whole new meaning to the phrase “you are who you hang out with”. During these endless hours of time spent on social media, children look at thousands of impressionable posts that influence their view on social standards; ranging from how they should look, to how they should act, to what's the latest trend or “what's cool”, to how to be in a relationship. These posts showcase the impossible, the inappropriate, the outlandish, inevitability causing children to feel negativity when they do not or can not match what they see. In addition, parents, schools, and society as a whole, are unable to keep up with this ever evolving, ever growing event, leaving them unable to combat the negative effects. Consequently, there has been a 56 percent increase in the reports of unhappiness by heavy social media users as reported by the Child Mind Institute, sparking belief that some of the anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation, and even eating disorders in today's youth could be a direct result of social media. I support this opinion because I have witnessed it within my own age group. For example, a friend of mine posted something on her Instagram. She received only a few “likes” and was so affected by the lack of “likes” that she removed the post. How could something so trivial, as the number of people that like a post, compel a person to remove it? Making this person believe that their post was not good enough, even though they originally thought it was?? How many times will my friend remove her posts? How will this continued drive to please affect her self esteem? How long will it take for her mental health to be in jeopardy?

Social media has also become a platform for “One Upping”!. It has become a dangerous stage for society to compete against one another for the most outrageous post, video, or “stunt”. As a matter of fact, there is a teenager in Minnesota that was sent to jail for 180 days for killing her boyfriend during a botched Youtube video taping. They believed a book held in front of his

chest would stop a bullet. It did not; now he is dead and she is in jail. Preposterous posts are seen everyday allowing children to believe that "it's okay" or real when in all actuality it is not. This reality that is on social media is not reality and can create serious flaws in the viewer's perception.

Not only do children have to worry about the impossible social standards on social media but they also must deal with cyberbullying through social media.. Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that is accomplished online, mostly seen through insults or threats on the child's post or page. Cyberbullying has become a major problem with today's children and continues to grow with the increase of social media use. In fact, the Child Mind Institute also states that in the last year, twenty-two percent of females and ten percent of males have had to deal with some form of cyberbullying. It is also a known fact that any form of bullying can cause increased mental health disorders, as well as, creating an increased risk of suicide.

Finally, social media is changing the way we communicate with people leaving children clueless on what normal, healthy, human interaction looks like. According to The Communication Trust, communication is fundamental to children's development; children need to understand and be understood. They continue to say that communication is the foundation of relationships and is essential for learning, play and social interaction. Many studies have shown that poor communication is a risk factor for mental health issues and without intervention will lead to the need of mental health treatment in adulthood. How many times have you seen a group of young adults sitting together but not speaking because they are too busy on their phones? They can assemble in the same space and not say one word to each other. The sad thing is they believe they are "hanging out" with their friends.

With all the negativity social media creates, it is only logical for mental health problems to develop in children and young adults. Although I am a young adult, and enjoy social media as much as the next young person, I fear its effects. Mental illness is increasing by the day and it's time to get to the root of some of the causes; social media being one of them.

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