

Laurel C's Human Rights Speech: Social Media Addiction

Meet Ashley: It is 4:10 and Ashley sits at her desk watching the clock tick. The bell rings. She gets up from her desk and walks outside to her friends who are waiting for her. Together they happily walk home from school. As they reach their street they each go their own ways, agreeing to meet again soon. Ashley approaches her house. She opens her front door and steps inside. Ashley drops her bag and then quickly grabs a snack. Next she heads back outside to meet her friends. Ashley and her friends spend the next hour or two outside riding their bikes, playing at the park and walking around their neighborhood together.

Now meet Scarlett: It is 4:10 and Scarlett sits at her desk watching the clock tick. The bell rings. She gets up from her desk, goes to her locker and immediately checks her phone for messages. She walks outside to her mom who is in the car waiting for her. Together they happily drive home from school. They turn down their street and park in their driveway. Scarlett gets out of the car and walks towards her house. She opens her front door and steps inside. Scarlett drops her bag then quickly grabs a snack. She heads to her room with her phone. Scarlett spends the next hour or two sitting on her bed scrolling through her different social media accounts. As she scrolls through her phone, she is left feeling self-conscious, anxious and isolated from her peers and family.

Notice anything different about Ashley and Scarlett? Obviously Ashley and her friends spent time outside engaging with one another while being physically active. While Scarlett spends her time inside on a device after school. In case you haven't already guessed, Ashley was born in 1976 and Scarlett was born in 2008.

Heschel students and staff, excessive social media use is damaging to teenagers. Teenagers are spending hours using social media daily. This leads to increased rates of depression, anxiety and suicide. Leaked reports from some of the largest social media companies have stated that these platforms are intentionally targeting the teenage audience. This is a human rights violation. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” Social media continuously destroys the future generation of young adults and deserves much more awareness.

There are 7.7 billion people who live on earth. Can you guess how many of which have social media? Worldwide there are 3.8 billion social media users. I know that I as well as many of my friends have Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok so I was not surprised to hear that 90% of teenagers have various social media accounts. Over the past 4 years the amount of time which young adults have been spending on screens has been quickly increasing. In a survey published by Common Sense Media, it was found that since 2019 usage of screens has grown by 17%. On average, daily screen use among children ages 8 to 12 has increased by 45 minutes to approximately five hours and 33 minutes per day. The screen time for teenagers ages 13 to 18 increased by one hour and 17 minutes to approximately eight hours and 39 minutes per day. If you had to guess, what age do you think on average children get a cell phone? I was surprised to learn that by age eleven more than half of kids have a phone as well as social media. Can you believe that every minute 694 thousand TikTok videos are watched and an additional 694 thousand YouTube videos are watched. Many of these videos are

specifically targeted to catch the attention of the teenage audience in order to make them spend even more time using their platforms.

The Talmud makes a point about not wasting others' time. לא יאמר לו בכמה חפץ זה והוא אינו רוצה ליקח" - מסכת בבא מציעא, דף נ"ח, עמוד ב

This quote directly translates to; do not ask someone how much something costs if you do not want to buy it. I interpret this quote to mean that if you have no interest in purchasing something but you inquire as to the price you are wasting the other person's time. Social Media platforms survey children in order to gather data about what they are doing online. They use this data to determine which ads each child will see in order to maximize their engagement and boost their own ad revenues. Social media is doing this to waste our time on their platforms so that they can make more money.

Shockingly more than 200 million people worldwide suffer from addiction to social media. Researchers at Michigan State University explored how much participants were willing to be paid to deactivate their Facebook profiles for up to one year. Experimental auctions revealed that it would cost anywhere from \$1,000 to more than \$2,000 for participants to cancel their Facebook profiles. At the sound of a bing I'm tempted to check my phone, and I'm not the only one. 71% of people check their social media at least once a day and 49% check several times. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, "The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living." I interpret this quote to mean that in order to live a happy and fulfilling life one needs to explore and experience the wonders of our world. Social media addiction leads people to spend hours inside on their phones submerged in the digital worlds of others; because of this they are forgetting to experience the awe and

wonder surrounding them in the real world. As if all the negative attributes of social media I have mentioned are not enough, one of the worst consequences is cyberbullying. 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced abusive behaviors online. This should not be the case. We should not need to worry about being a part of the 40% of youth who have been called offensive names. We should not need to sit frightened at the thought of being one of the 16% of teens who have been the target of a physical threat. We should not need to live in the fear of being a part of the 33% of young adults who have had false rumors spread about them. We should not need to experience the terror of being one of the 7% of youth who have had an explicit image of them shared without their consent. No child should need to dread the thought of being cyber bullied by their peers.

The correlation is clear, the more time young adults spend on social media, the more likely they are to experience mental health issues including anxiety, depression and isolation. Even though many see technology as a means of improving one's ability to communicate with others, the reality is that the more technology people acquire the more it can actually cause them to feel social stress and anxiety. The thought of not being able to check social media causes some to break out into a cold sweat. They also become nervous and anxious and some are not sure how to handle the situation; this is called social media anxiety disorder. People who experience social media anxiety disorder experience severe anxiety after being away from their social media accounts for just a few minutes. Due to the extended periods of time which teens are spending on social media, youth are experiencing mental health issues. No teen should feel depressed because they are on social media. No teen should feel trapped, isolated and

lonely as a result of the comments or number of likes they receive on a post. No teen should consider suicide because of the unrealistic expectations created by the images on social media. Social media should be a platform to share the best that the world has to offer. Not a platform for those spewing negativity from behind their keyboards.

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