Student’s Name

Mrs. Miller

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Technology: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Living in today’s world requires an almost constant connection to the internet. Between getting directions to a meeting, sifting through political tweets, or looking up movie times, the culture of today is dominated by an access to technology. More than 24% of teens say they “cannot live” without their cell phones. If that is taken literally, that puts cell phones on the same basis as oxygen, food, and water, and most teens would agree somewhat with that categorization. Technology has become so pervasive that we hardly notice its presence, until it’s not there when we need it, but the very pervasiveness of technology often blinds people to some of its more adverse effects. Personally choosing to limit your own technology use will lead to a more fulfilling life (Lenhart).

The overuse of technology can lead to a lessened ability to focus. Today’s mode of reading is constantly punctuated by ads, hyperlinks, notifications, and personal messages. It’s almost impossible to read to the end of….really anything. The constant access to information can be a good thing. Almost any question can be answered immediately by google, but we are losing the ability to focus long enough to understand an answer that requires more than a few characters. Experts have noticed a rise in diagnosis of ADHD as the use of technology has risen. In 2010 several studies were conducted in an effort to link technology use with attention problems, and it was found to be a probable factor in every age group studied. Children under age 5 who had 2 hours or more of screen time were 20% more likely to have problems focusing in school than students who had no screen time. Third through fifth graders were studied and found that those who had two or more hours of screen time were 1.6-2.1 times more likely to have focus problems. “Screen media” also associated with focus problems in a sample of 200 college students. The broad range of this study shows that focus problems are prevalent across the ages of those involved in an overuse of media. Often we associate this problem with young children and blame parents for not restricting their media access, but the final number is the most interesting. College students pay thousands of dollars to attend school, and then waste their time in and around class on media that leaves them unable to complete their work. The real problem is in the choices of the adults (Alderman).

Not only is this problem affecting our ability to focus, it’s also affecting our personal relationships. Technology, particularly social media sites like facebook, twitter, and instagram allow us to instantly connect to millions of people. This is an incredibly valuable resource that allows us to stay in touch with friends and family all over the world, but it can also become a limitation on our personal face to face relationships. Although technology can be used to strengthen relationships, a quarter of people in a committed relationship say they have felt their spouse or partner was distracted by their cell phone while with them. That number is actually significantly higher among young adults and teens, at 42%. The higher frequency of contact with and number of “friends” online can make it seem that social media sites are the best place for relationships to take place, but online relationships should never displace the face to face communication and personal touch that are so necessary to life (Duggan).

At the end of the day, technology is not the bad guy. In this world, we cannot fully function without the use of technology. It is an incredibly valuable resource and, with almost 75% of teens having or at least having access to a smartphone, technology is not a tool that can be ignored. But people must remember that they are the master of technology, not the other way around. One quarter of teens, 25% rate the importance of their cell phone next to the importance of air, water, and food: the basic necessities of life. Choosing to use this resource and mastering it by choosing also to limit our use of this resource can and will lead to a more fulfilling lifestyle with a better ability to focus and deeper personal relationships (Lenhart).