

Disconnected from reality

On March 31, rapper Nipsey Hussle was fatally shot outside his store in Los Angeles. For the most part, the response on social media was very sympathetic. However, there were also many posts, tweets, and comments saying “Who cares?” and other ignorant comments about his death.

These kinds of things aren’t uncommon on social media. There are loads of negative posts uploaded constantly.

“I try not to spend a lot of time on social media for that reason,” senior Izzudeen Yahia said. “The constant amount of negativity can affect your mind and attitude.”

As social media is still relatively new, the effects it can have on you have not been deeply investigated by scientists. But, some effects have been identified.

One of these is known as compassion fatigue, coined by journalist Dave Cullen. Compassion fatigue explains the phenomena where people are constantly bombarded with tragic stories and eventually get emotionally worn out. On average, people spend 1.72 hours on social media per day according to the Global Web Index. In that time that we use scrolling through social media, we see status updates and photos that friends post timelines along with tragic stories from across the world. We feel compassion fatigue with wars overseas, tragedies at home, and other awful things that occur in the world around us. We see the same thing over and over, and eventually lose the ability to empathize. While one of the championing effects of social media is that it creates an interconnected world, this also creates a platform for every single tragedy worldwide, which means one sad news event after another is moved by really quickly.

Another limitation of empathy created by social media is confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is when people only

expose themselves to their own thoughts repeated in recursive echo chambers of increasingly radical and exclusionary thought. When this happens, social media users understand and empathize with other users who share the same view as them and demonize and attack them.

Social media also provides people a platform to say things they wouldn't say in real life. It's a lot easier to insult or provoke someone when you aren't talking to them face to face and get to hide behind a screen. This anonymity also leads to a lot of users who go out of their way to "troll" others. Basically, a social media troll is someone who purposely says something controversial in order to get a rise out of other users. These people deliberately try and cause arguments and frustrate others.

"My suggestion to people is to try and take a break from social media. When you spend your entire day on Twitter or Instagram, not only is it a waste of time, but it can affect your personality as well," Yahia said.

Taking a break from social media can be a good idea every once in a while. It can help you stay focused on your own goals in life and can help you reclaim wasted time. It can help prevent negative thoughts from entering and taking over your mind as well.

As a whole, social media does have a lot of positives, but it has its drawbacks as well. Social media is a very good source of entertainment and can create positive relationships across the world, but it's important to be able to distinguish between real life and online life and not get so caught up in the virtual world that you lose your sense of empathy. It's important to remember that behind every social media account there is a person going through the trials and tribulations of life. Respectful and responsible discourse on social media is the first step to overcoming a loss of empathy.

Freedom of speech on social media

One of the biggest appeals of social media for many people is the ability to say whatever you want, whenever you want. However as good as this seems, it can quickly reach an extreme, and companies feel they have a responsibility to regulate it.

One big recent spark was provided by Alex Jones. He is an infamous conspiracy theorist who has long floated patently false claims that child-sex rings run by prominent public figures (like Robert Mueller and Hillary Clinton) are operating right under our noses, and that the Sandy Hook shooting was a hoax staged by gun-control activists. In August of 2018, social media companies decided they had had enough.

YouTube took down Jones' channel, which had 2.4 million subscribers, saying it violated the firm's policy on hate speech, and Apple dropped some of Jones' InfoWars podcasts from its app for the same reason. Facebook removed some of his pages, saying they were "glorifying violence" and using "dehumanizing language to describe people who are transgender, Muslims and immigrants." Twitter eventually suspended Jones and InfoWars as well, for what it called repeated violations of its policy against abusive behavior.

Jones cried censorship. Now, social media companies are caught between a rock and a hard place. They want to create a pleasant environment for users, while also upholding the American value of free speech.

In 1996, in the case *Reno vs ACLU*, a unanimous Supreme Court decision extended the First Amendment to written, visual and

spoken expression posted on the Internet. But this also extends to the limits on free speech as well, which include fighting words and speech advocating illegal activity. Social media companies try their best to regulate this, but the massive amount of users they have to oversee is challenging.

The main problem with this is if there are extreme viewpoints that are not caught by companies. The setup of social media can create an echo chamber and can disillusion those caught in the middle of it because of the algorithms that promote engaging content, in a feedback loop that, link by link, guides new audiences to toxic ideas. Many radicalists who commit serious crimes were later found out to have a presence on social media linking to many hateful and violent ideas.

True freedom of speech is not possible, nor should it be when such radical ideas are spread on social media. Social media companies should try their best to respect freedom of speech whenever possible, while also realizing their responsibility to prevent hateful and violent speech as well.

Your Life on the Line

When senior Andrew Izquierdo wakes up, his iPhone 6S is next to him. It's the first and last thing he sees, spending at least six hours daily on it. He has push notifications for Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter. Like many teens, he has the common habit of always having his smartphone to post about his day publicly.

"I'm independent. I can post what I want, say what I want, when I want like many others," Izquierdo said.

His daily feed consists of casual remarks about people's days.

Sometimes his feed shows profanity, vulgar speech and images. A common trend is for students to rant or expose others either in private stories or accounts.

“I do express my opinion and emotions a lot. However, I limited a bit of what I say because word gets out easily,” Izquierdo said. “People can post whatever because, why not? But one thing that annoys me is when social media becomes a diary for some people. That’s when things get explicit and unnecessary.”

Adolescents can be impulsive when it comes to expressing personal information, and sharing it online can affect their future. Even though posts can be deleted, they may not be gone forever.

Inappropriate messages, posts and texts can still go viral or be saved by users on the other end. Colleges and employers are beginning to take notice of student’s digital footprints.

According to a survey conducted by Kaplan Test Prep, that approximately 25% of admissions officers from various colleges and universities around the country monitor the social media profiles of applicants. Everything from Instagram to Snapchat stories has quickly become a part of the review of applicants.

Just two admission cycles ago, Harvard rescinded admission offers to at least 10 students after discovering obscene memes that were exchanges between the students via a private Facebook group chat. The prospective Class of 2021 students who lost their opportunity to enroll at the prestigious university also exchanged sexually explicit messages that sometimes targeted minority groups as well.

Careless posting can cause for college applications to be revoked, disqualification from jobs and ruined reputations. Even after being accepted, an individual’s digital footprint can still be monitored.

“Stop the nudes, compromising photos, videos of drug use, and drinking because it might be funny now, but in 15 or 20 years when you’re trying to get a serious job, these things can come back,” School Resource Officer Adam Curcio said. “There are some things that don’t need to be documented.”

Smartphone users spend the majority of their time on social media. It offers a digitally interconnected world with access to world news and endless updates. Snapchat is currently one of the most popular applications among teenagers. What makes the app appealing is its unique feature to terminate Snaps once they’ve been opened. Snapchat seemingly allows its users the most privacy by controlling what others can and cannot see.

“Most kids I’ve seen who’ve gotten in trouble for the cases that dealt with [social media], is [the assumption that] just because they sent it on Snapchat or some other platform, it will remain private,” Curcio said. “The reality is that even if it disappears or even if you send it, some of them keep it on their servers and we’ve been able to recover some of these images on Snapchat.”

The 2017 Fairfax County Youth Survey reported that 50.1% of FCPS students reported playing video games, or using a computer (tablets, smartphones etc.) for non-academic purposes for three or more hours on an average school day.

There are different Fairfax County Code Sections that explain certain crimes in detail. Examples of possible social media crimes include sexting, harassment, stalking and sending nudes.

“As far as nude pictures, [it can] always be a serious crime and have the potential to be a serious crime. It’s a felony offense regardless if you send it or if you receive it from someone,” Curcio said. “If your nude is uncovered and you’re a minor, and that it can be determined that it’s you, it’s a

felony.”

Most cases can fall into a misdemeanor but can become a felony depending on various factors of Code Sections, such as being done repeatedly, having malicious intent and having the means to carry it out.

“I’ve seen accounts that post gruesome things throughout my years here like weed, drinking and smoking,” senior Vinh Tran said. “I’m glad I don’t participate in those activities and it made me realize I don’t want to do those things in the future.”

The Youth Survey also recorded students who believe they have the right to say anything online with 7.5% of 12th graders reporting they strongly agree while 32.7% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Adolescents should be conscious of how social media gives a first impression. According to Forbes, more than a third of all employers evaluate social sites as part of their hiring process. Many times, individuals are not hired due to the public information posted on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and any site with one’s name.

“I’ve definitely posted some things that I regret,” junior Hakim Idris said. It’s really awkward when someone brings it up, especially when it’s a long time ago. Even if I forgot it, someone will remember it or have a screenshot of it. Then I immediately delete it afterward.”

Ever since freshman Sophia Marigliano got her iPhone 4S at the end of the seventh grade, she primarily uses it for texts and calls. Marigliano is one of the few teenagers who does not have any social media accounts.

“The reason I don’t have social media is that I’ve never felt a compelling urge to share every little detail of my life with everyone. I have a sense of privacy and I know people spend

hours a day just replying to people on Snapchat or scrolling through Instagram,” Marigliano said. For her, the lack of social media does not impact her social life or disconnect her with others. Marigliano finds more time to manage school with track practice and social life.

“If I don’t have my phone with me, then I don’t have to constantly be looking at posts. I have more time and I can focus more on my schoolwork,” Marigliano said. “It has such little effect on your life. You can text friends and it’s the same effect as Snapchat to communicate the same ideas to them. Just because they are not seeing what they’re seeing at any given moment, doesn’t mean that you can’t communicate or have a good relationship with them.”

Once it’s posted online, it’s public information for anyone to see and evaluate. The network of social media can also be a paradox. Someone can appear to be social with numerous followers, friends or living an ideal life, but this is far from reality. It is possible that the more time spent on social media could lead to an increase in depressive symptoms.

Last month, a study done by EclinicalMedicine evaluated the correlation between social media use and depressive symptoms in 14-year-olds. In comparison to teens who use social media about one to three hours daily, those who spend more than five hours a day had a 50% increase in depressive symptom among girls and 35% among boys.

EclinicalMedicine linked the increase in depressive symptoms with the possibility of social media impacting sleep and low self-esteem. It can also be connected with cyberbullying. In FCPS, 10.7% of 10th graders reported as having been cyberbullied in the past year compared to 9.8% of 12th graders. Both numbers are approximately 4% below the national average.

“Cyberbullying, just like any type of bullying, is serious. If

a student does not feel safe at school in their environment, they are not going to be available for learning,” Social Worker Alissa Green said. “In terms of cyberbullying, make sure an adult knows, a parent. Make sure that you are going and seeking help from a trusted adult, whether that’s a parent, teacher or an administrator.”

Shane Dawson strikes again

Shane Dawson recently released a documentary about popular YouTube star, Jake Paul. Dawson’s intention with this eight-part documentary was to find out if Jake Paul is a sociopath or has sociopathic tendencies like his older brother, Logan Paul. Along the way, Dawson racked up over 141 million views on the series.

There has been a lot of controversy over the videos because many disliked the way Dawson gave Paul a platform and more publicity. Many viewers believe that he’s racist who doesn’t deserve a second chance.

In the first episode, Dawson received a voicemail from Paul who said that the series would be a great idea, but that he didn’t want him to do it if it would hurt his reputation. Dawson said that the only reason why he was doing this series was to find out the truth of why viewers dislike Paul.

“I do not think that it was a good idea for Shane Dawson to make this series,” sophomore Siryet Girma said, “Now a lot of people dislike him for favoring a guy like Jake Paul who has made so many mistakes and never apologized for them.”

In the second episode, Dawson watches some of Paul’s videos and is trying to determine if he’s a sociopath. Dawson even

gets a text message from Logan Paul saying that he's going to be making a reaction video to his series.

Then Dawson asks Logan Paul for an interview, but he rejects kindly and says that people are just quick to diagnose someone and mention that he has sociopathic tendencies.

In the fourth episode, Dawson meets with the former COO of Team 10, Nick Crompton. He explains to Dawson that he liked being on Team 10. Crompton also mentions that he left Team 10 because of the Paul brother's dad. Crompton said that he wanted to tell him what to do and how to handle the company and that Jake was too scared to say anything to him.

In the fifth episode, Dawson goes to the Team 10 household to talk to Paul and live a day in his life. He gets to experience all the crazy things that happen in the Team 10 mansion, and what Paul does when he isn't vlogging.

Paul also tells Dawson that he has taken a break from YouTube because his girlfriend, Erika Costell, has told him to. He also admits that he and Costell's relationship is real and nothing about it is fake.

In the sixth episode, Dawson asks Paul about his former assistant, Megan Zelly and the assault allegations against fellow YouTuber Faze Banks. Paul admits that he should have done a little more investigating to know exactly what happened instead of releasing a video talking about the assault. Paul and Costell both admitted that they know that something happened to Zelly, but don't know what happened and even let Dawson listen to the voicemails that were sent by Zelly to Costell.

Dawson gets an interview with Costell lone and she explains to him that he has been played many times before by his family members and friends, but that he still likes them and forgives them.

In the last episode, Paul revealed that he's asked his dad to move back to Ohio so they could have more of a normal father-son relationship without him being involved in the businesses of Team 10. He explained his side of the Martinez Twins controversy and said that they were lying and exaggerating about some things. Paul also finally talked about the situation with his ex-girlfriend, Alissa Violet, and how much it hurt him, but admitted he was also at fault. Jake mentioned Logan's suicide forest video and the impact it had on him such as, losing brand deals but also that it brought their family closer together.

"I liked this series that Shane Dawson created about Jake Paul because it lets people see how Jake Paul acts when he's not filming," sophomore Kristina Regmi said.

This series has been emotionally exhausting for Dawson who has been criticized for even putting his time in effort into making people realize who the real Jake Paul is.

Is your cellphone unhealthy?

1 Cell Phones can cause cancer

This rumor has been around for ages. Many believe the radiation from cell phones can cause a growth in tumors.

A recent study from the US Department of Health involved exposing rats to cell phones for nine hours a day for two years.

Researches found a strong link between the cell phone radiation and the growth of tumors surrounding nerves in the hearts of males. Those tumors were not found in the female rats.

The researchers made a link to Snapchat addicted humans in

their study. People who are staring at their phone for hours a day using social media may be at risk for certain types of cancer.

Researchers have acknowledged that more studies need to be done before phone users make serious changes. As of now, it is a good idea to limit your phone use.

2 smartphones cause insomnia

Smartphones keep people up late at night for more reasons than just social media. Smart phones emit a blue light that can suppress melatonin, the sleep regulation hormone. This leads to insomnia.

Smartphones are held close to the face, intensifying the absorption of blue light from the phone. This can cause severe insomnia, keeping avid phone users from getting enough sleep.

Keeping smartphones on at night only adds to the problem. Charging your phone in a different room or far away from where you are sleeping will keep way the temptation of picking up your phone constantly. This will help people get more sleep.

Smartphones have the biggest effect on kids. A National Sleep Foundation study found that at least 75% of kids ages six through 17 have at least one electronic device in the bedroom. Pre-teens that keep their electronic devices on all night get about one hour of sleep less a night.

Adolescents cannot tolerate the blue light exposure as well as adults. Their melatonin production is affected much more than adults.

Although many see cellphones as a negative part of the sleep process, some use their phone to help them fall asleep.

"I have insomnia, but I don't think my phone contributes to it. If anything, I will use my phone to watch netflix to help me fall asleep at night," senior Charlotte Getsey said.

Manufacturers are looking into a solution to the blue light problem that affects many peoples sleep at night.

If you have been having trouble sleeping, it may be because of your electronic device. Turn off these devices at night.

3 tiny screens cause vision problems

Reading articles, scrolling through Instagram, reading emails, and texting friends may be the reason that you have been having some vision problems. Those tiny screens have a major effect on your eyes. The combination of the bright light and tiny words can cause blurred vision, headaches, sore eyes, and dry eyes.

Completely stopping the use of your smartphone won't solve the problem. You should take frequent breaks. For every 20 minutes that you are on your phone, look far away for 20 minutes. This will help rest your eyes.

This system will also prevent those headaches that are frequently caused by these tiny electronics.

4 Cellphones can make you sick

You hold your cellphone close to your face, you are constantly touching it with your germy hands, it is bound to catch a few germs.

You use your cell phone everywhere, you set it down on everything, and all these places are sources of bacteria.

A recent study by the Michigan School of Public Health found more than 17,000 bacterial gene copies on the phones of high school students. You are breathing in those bacteria when you are talking on the phone, and you are spreading that bacteria when you touch your face or a door knob or someone else after touching your phone.

That bacteria can attack your immune system and lead to sickness.

Researchers have found several dangerous bacteria on cell phones including streptococcus, MRSA, and E.Coli.

In order to prevent these bacteria from building up on your phone, leave your phone out of the bathroom and be sure to clean it with a microfiber cloth frequently. Don't let your phone be the reason you get sick.

5 Cellphones increase stress

Cellphones project a high frequency with their constant

ringing and buzzing that can have a negative effect on stress levels. The frequent notifications tend to put people on edge. A Swedish study placed a direct link between psychosocial aspects of cell phone use and mental health symptoms in young adults. Excessive cell phone use was found to be the cause of stress, sleep deprivation, and depression in young adults. Cell phones have also been found to negatively affect emotions. Several studies show that when one is talking with a cell phone present, they come off more negative and distant. Be aware of your cell phone. If you are having a conversation, especially an important one, put your phone away and out of sight. Also, if you start feeling distant from people or have an increase in stress, try using your cell phone less.

Beware of fake news

Right after the election, a viral article came out that named Hillary Clinton as leader of a trafficking ring out of a pizzeria shop in Washington D.C., and as a result a [gunman](#), on Dec. 4 came to the shop to root out the supposed “trafficking ring.”

No one was injured, but this is a result of the rapid spread of viral fake news and news sites.

Fake news sites are a new phenomenon that distribute lies to increase web traffic. In using catchy headlines like “Face of Satan Has Arrived in USA” or “Want To Quit Smoking? This Herb Instantly Destroys Your Desire For Nicotine (And How To Grow It),” people are fooled into reading the stories and sharing them.

People are not only increasing the website’s circulation, but misinforming their followers.

Although these websites seem harmless, many of these stories became viral.

Fake news stories about the candidates were at an all time high, which influenced the candidates reputations.

One of the most viral stories during this election was that the Pope [endorsed](#) Donald Trump.

Because of this the Pope called out the media to say that the spreading of these lies is a great "sin."

Another viral story said that Trump won the popular vote by a landslide, when actually he only won the electoral votes.

Tech giants like Facebook and Google are working to reduce these fake news stories and websites as many are blaming them for the rapid spread of these stories.

These sites have even been credited for the result of the 2016 election because many of these fake stories about the candidates went viral.

Because of this, Facebook and Google have decided to [block](#) fake news sites from advertising on their websites and are taking steps to deny revenue to the fraudulent news sites.

However, neither site is prepared to stop the spread of those stories in search engine results.

This does not mean that social media sites are to blame, rather we, as consumers must demand for better content.

Anyone can take measures to reduce the spread of these lies by double checking your sources before sharing these articles.

People are sometimes unaware that they are helping these sites with a simple retweet.

Unplugged: a life away from social media

No Twitter, no Instagram, no Facebook. Many would cringe at the thought of that kind of life. However, this is an actual reality of a few that choose to remain disconnected to most or all forms of social media.

There are still a few that have remained, for the most part, unplugged from technology. Some say being disconnected from modern technology is more beneficial than the easy access information that comes with smart phones.

Many people who aren't in touch with modern technology believe that it benefits them for the better. Sophomore Elliot Alwes is one of the few that can attest to this.

"Not using social media as often makes my life a lot better," Alwes said. "I realized that I have something productive to do every minute of the day and that I should not waste any of my time doing things that don't benefit me at all like looking through social media."

Additionally, the Internet and technology are useful for getting work done because everything is at your fingertips. There are many websites for online tutoring and help with just about anything.

However, the same websites can cause distraction and make a small assignment take over two hours.

This is another raising concern, that technology is a bigger distraction than a helpful tool. This tends to push students to push aside their school work and spend their time on

technology. Procrastination is not the only concern.

Spending hours watching videos on YouTube and scrolling through the news feed on twitter doesn't only make people far less productive, it also raises health issues. Staring at a screen all the time may seem normal these days, but that does not change the health issues that come with it.

Many studies say that eye strain, tension headaches, and dry uncomfortable eyes are some common issues that accompany the use of smartphones for more than one hour every day.

Alwes also finds that people tend to focus less on life experiences, but how to capture that moment through pictures and video.

"People definitely worry about other people's opinion too much," Alwes said, "I want more people to seek to have more physical experiences and do more things they have never done, without documenting every step of the way."

Alwes thinks some of the biggest benefits of being unplugged are living a worry free life, getting more things done, and being a better social communicator outside the screen.

"I mean technology actually helps me stay focused on my work sometimes," He said, "Whenever I listen to classical music, I don't have much to say or do on social media, because no one cares about what I say or do, so I just don't use it."

He also says it has affected his life for the better by helping him realize that there are so many things he could do to improve, so many things to explore, discover, and that he can't fall into the abyss of social media.

Sophomore Lydia Peters find that social media is a distraction. Being social media free allows her to be fully present in each moment and able to interact with others.

Peters also agrees and finds that life has been made much

easier without using her phone.

“[Being away from social media and technology] allows me to interact fully with friends and family,” Peters said. “Instead of being addicted to my phone, I’ve had more time to invest in my studies and other people.”

A lot of teens find that letting go of social media is hard, and especially with technology and media being around teens almost all the time. It can be hard to let go of technology and Alwes shows that it is possible for teens to let go of their devices.

Both have found a way to balance and even depend more on his life outside the screen, rather than focus his entire life on what is going on online, through social media and different mediums of communication.

“I’m definitely closer to my family,” she said, “We end up spending time together rather than apart.”

Facebook is desperate

Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, finally addressed the public’s desire for a dislike button on the well-known social network.

Zuckerberg revealed that a button that would allow users to express another feeling besides like was underway but did not explicitly mention what it would say.

After the announcement, the public went wild and took Zuckerberg’s words out of context and immediately assumed that a dislike button was in the process of being made. They felt his ambiguity gave them a license to draw conclusions. However, don’t seem to be so clear when one examines what

Zuckerburg really said.

He simply mentioned at an event that “liking” something was not always appropriate, especially if someone were to post a sad article or terrible news.

It seems that Facebook’s intention is not to provide users with a long awaited dislike button, but instead, a button to express sympathy.

Manipulating the media was smart on Facebook’s side in the aspect that they gained the attention of users worldwide and received coverage through newspapers and several online articles.

This case of false advertisement is beneficial for Facebook’s side. This news should raise the amount of users on Facebook as people will be eager to see the new “dislike” button and try it for themselves.

With several other social media networks like Twitter and Tumblr rising in popularity, Facebook has to step up their game in order to beat their competition.

They have to stay relevant in the sea of competitors or else their outcome may be nonexistent. Without any new tweaks or updates, users will start to get bored and will desert the site.

Facebook does not want to fall off the grid and the fact that they are willing to beat around the bush about this new button reveals their desperation.

If they don’t keep up to date with the new trends, Facebook will die out and turn into an abandoned site like Myspace or Foursquare.

Facebook also has to compete with app-based social medias such as Snapchat, Instagram and Vine. Especially in light of Snapchat’s new filter update and Instagram’s new picture

sizes, Facebook is in a sense falling behind in addressing the public's wants.

Although Zuckerberg never specifically said there would be a dislike button, the public was able to pick up the news and create a buzz around it.

Despite their desperation to catch up in the market, Facebook is far from obsolete. Its user base is ever growing, and since its inception has slowly evolved from a younger group to an older group. Now the youngest social media users typically opt for applications such as Instagram or Twitter.

The older user base is a more reliable one because they're more likely to use Facebook for a longer period of time. They tend not to jump from app to app like the younger people, who will use whatever is in style.

Survey shows that students depend heavily on technology

In a recent survey conducted by The A-Blast, given to the AHS student body, results were uncovered about the frequency and influence of technology on daily life. From the 300 surveyed, 57 percent of those reported having iPhones, with only 6 percent reporting not having a phone at all. In regards to how frequently students use their gadgets, 25% of those surveyed said that they spent more than seven hours a day on their phone for non-school related purposes. 34 percent admitted to using some of that time during school – reporting that they use their phones more than seven times in a given school day. Students also showed how connected they were through the use of social media with more than 15 percent of those surveyed

had at least one type of social media account: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat included. Nonetheless, 63 percent of students claim that their increased networking and use of technology does not interfere with their learning. However, when asked whether or not their generation could be considered 'dumb' and whether technology creates a better society, the views were split 50-50.

Teens struggle living in a digital age

You are in class, and you notice that you still have an hour left in the period. Ever so slowly your teacher's voice starts to drone on and lose you and you instinctively reach for your phone taking note of the glow that surrounds you as students try to hide their devices stealthily under their desks.

Welcome to generation Y.

We have our phones, computers, social media apps, eReaders, Kindles, iPads, iTouches, and now SMART Boards, Blackboard and online textbooks have been introduced.

Virtually submerged in a digital age, one cannot help but ask, does our use of technology help us or hinder us?

"[We are dumb], because we rely too much on technology," sophomore David Park said. According to Mark Bauerlein in his book *The Dumbest Generation*, because teens do not get a "mental storehouse," a foundation of knowledge is missing. Teens do not have a good understanding of history, literature, politics, economics and culture. Most of the time teens do not have a good background of knowledge and thus have

a harder time understanding how new information learned fits into the context of the world and how it affects them. He explains that teenagers have a hard time putting new information together, like puzzle pieces, as this generation finds themselves having less of the puzzle already completed to fit it into.

“I would say that students nowadays have less background in knowledge, but again the other side of that is they do not have to spend time doing that, because the information is at their fingertips,” Spanish teacher and former AHS student Debbie Estes said. In his Pulitzer Prize nominated and highly acclaimed book, *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr explains that the fast paced information on the Internet and incessant online distractions have shortened attention spans and have made it harder for teens to think deeply.

“Its not that it [technology] makes [teenagers] dumber, I just think they get lazy,” Estes said.

As for the benefits Estes said, “They just have everything at their fingertips... you have access to so much more information...It is so much easier to get different points of view and be able maybe to look at situation from all viewpoints.”

“Teenagers are not very prone to deep thinking as it is... If you know all the information is always available then why bother committing it to memory,” technology specialist Jennifer Cory said, “Comparing students now to students that I grew up with, they would sit through class they might memorize the material to pass the test and then they would forget it. That’s pretty much how it is now. People are going to remember what they are interested in or applies to them and that’s whether or not they have access technology.”

Consequently, many argue that the rise of the digital age has sharpened the minds of students and those growing up in

it.

“I think we are smart, because we have more knowledge on different things and use technology,” sophomore Amanda Adenan.

According to a recent *Washington Post* report, 78% of North Americans have access to the internet today, 30 percent more than the global average.

“The students that I know seem to be often more informed than I am, about current events. They definitely use their smartphones to learn,” Cory said.

But does this constant use still affect our thinking?

“As for not thinking deeply, that is so much of individual thing... I think there are some students who are very deep thinkers and have a much greater knowledge of world events and what’s going on because of the technology that is out there,” Estes said, “[However] I do not think students these days are as strong writers, because I think they rely too heavily on what others have written.”

If you have read this far, congratulations the Internet has made you completely unable to think and concentrate.

Tinder: the newest cyber craze

From Facebook and Twitter to Instagram and Tumblr, teenagers are constantly engulfed in the world of social media. But lately, a new app has caught many students eyes; [Tinder](#).

Tinder is an app very similar to Match.com or E-harmony. The

app shows you profiles of people within a certain mile radius of you, who you could possibly be 'matched with". Each member has their own profile with five photos of them, their age and first name displayed.

To be matched with someone, you and the other person must like each other's profile. Once you are matched, you have the option of messaging that person.

"Tinder is a fun app where people can meet each other and hopefully become good friends," junior Kyle Peich said. "A lot of people use this as a joke to mess around with people but the people that take it serious actually have a good time."

Many people find the anonymousness of Tinder to be very appealing; people are unable to message each other until they mutually like each other's profiles. But others find the premise of meeting people who they don't know on the Internet off-putting.

"I have an account but I feel like it's kind of weird meeting strangers. Plus, people who you're matched with message creepy and inappropriate stuff most of the time," junior Michelle Burnett said.

If used correctly, the app is a great icebreaker and a good way to connect with new people who live in close proximity.

"My friend Austin and I met up with some people that we were matched with in Reston and they were pretty cool to hang out with," Peich said.

Although Tinder can be very fun and appealing, it is very important to be cautious when it comes to meeting up with people who you've met online, you can never be too careful!