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*A Mess of a Mind*

Mixed media

If your mind was created into a room, what would it look like?

What type of room would it be?

Inspired by the hauntings of my middle school halls, my project entails a search to understand the unexplainable adolescent mind, or at least, mine. My final project is a splatter-painted dive bar bathroom that captures one particular location where countless have entered. Inside, with lots of paint, chains, and plastic pills, I portray the inside of an overstimulated adolescent mind as it undergoes new experiences and emotions, shown through the thoughts and work of many visitors, and reveal some of the many potential outside influences that can interfere with the adventures of growing up as a teenager.

In creating my installation, I threw buckets of paint of the colors that currently aligned with my mood as I worked on my piece, attached personal items of hardships and high points, added (FAKE) plastic contraband, drew reminiscent doodles I used to work on while overthinking in class, and invited others to participate in each these processes.

I initially believed I had created this room from a fascination with psychology and excitement to destroy Chris's floor with splatter paint; however, in the end, I realized that it was a way of reconstructing my bland, black-and-white room at home as I covered any past colorless state of mine.

# An Adolescent Experience



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*Writer's Note:* My research aims to understand adolescents' minds better as they encounter new emotions, challenges, and experiences as a result of outside influences. Teenagers experience our realities differently than any other age group, whether it is mental health, social and educational pressures, or struggling relationships.

## **I.**

The hauntings of the middle and high school halls will be forever ingrained in my mind, filled with life-changing events and an adolescent who could not feel enough to experience them. I was always finding trouble, hurting the people I care about the most, and I could not understand the thoughts racing through my head as I faced new damaging situations. Doctor visits became more frequent, my therapist switched every week, and the only peace I could find was in the safety of my room.

After a long period of trial and error in finding medications and diagnoses, I realized that not everything was entirely my fault. Outside influences such as societal standards, social media, and mischievous friendships did not aid in my process of healing and growth and have entirely changed communication culture.

## **II.**

When taking a walk through the adolescent mind, what must be considered is the prevalence of social media and technology embedded in our society. Known to affect human health and wellness, social media raises the question of whether the positive impacts of its use outweigh the adverse effects or whether the negatives outweigh the positives.

As you scroll through your online applications, you are invited to see unrealistic

expectations lacking credible authenticity, leading to a plentitude of problems. According to a registered nutritionist, Pixie G Turner, and research associate Carmen E. Lefevre, the social media application Instagram is significantly linked to increased symptoms of Orthorexia, an unhealthy obsession with eating healthy foods. Within their study, they questioned individuals, "What social media channels do you use?" and "Which of the 19 food types do you include within your diet?" (EWD). Conclusions suggested that higher participation within Instagram resulted in stronger Orthorexic symptoms. Unrealistic photoshopped bodies worshiped within society on social media creates an environment where natural, healthy bodies are looked down upon. As a result, individuals believe they must partake in an unrealistic diet and workout routine that is not sustainable, ultimately leading to eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa, Orthorexia, and Bulimia. Furthermore, with physical health declining, self-image further deprecates, leading to other issues.

Anne M. Morris and Debra K. Katzman, Researchers of Pediatrics and Psychiatry, note that eating disorders among adolescent females have skyrocketed in the past fifty years. Their article states, "A meta-analysis of 25 studies involving female subjects examined the effect of exposure to media images of the slender body ideal. Body image was significantly more negative after viewers had recently seen thin model media images than after viewing images of average-sized models, plus-size models, or inanimate objects. This effect was found to be stronger in women younger than 19 years of age" (Paediatrics & Child Health). There are detrimental effects on mental health and good views of a healthy body image in young women growing up in a flooded mass media environment. Social Media and technology further negatively aid the opportunity to view unrealistic body standards and destructively impact the mind of teenagers.

Social media affects the brain through mental illnesses and cognitive processes such as

acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and senses. As Health Researcher Aviad Hadar points out, the integral behavior of high smartphone use correlates with impulsivity, hyperactivity, inattention, lower accuracy rates in numerical processing, a reduced right prefrontal cortex, and adverse changes within social cognition (PLOS ONE). Consequently, the immediate gratification within a device that releases dopamine within the brain ultimately produces lasting effects and costs on cognitive and neural makeup. The use of social media and technology further allows negative impacts within society by altering the way individuals' brains are made up, also referred to as neuroplasticity. Individuals are found to make riskier decisions, have trouble paying attention, and worsen arithmetical skills, all due to a technology device and its unknown capacity to distress one's brain. According to research by Gary W. Small, a contributor to the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, frequent use of technology tends to interfere with "heightened attention-deficit symptoms, impaired emotional and social intelligence, and impaired brain development" (Small et al.). Although he does explain various apps allow numerous benefits for brain health by activating neural circuitry, there are plentiful amounts of adversities. He explains that with recent studies incorporating ages two through twelve, results showed a correlation between increased screen time and concerns with language development, executive functioning, word recognition, cognitive control, and more. Small also suggests the older adolescents get, the higher their screen time use is. In other words, technology is beginning to be used from a very young age, ultimately negatively impacting many cognitive processes within the developmental ages of children. With young children having the most prone to influence brain plasticity, there can be detrimental effects on development and affect one's ability to reach full potential.

In my initial years of growing up, my relationships struggled, and I have found that social

media also interferes with forming and keeping relationships together. Although social media and technology can bring genuine interactions together, they can also break them apart. As research associate Emily A. Vogel and associate director of research Monica Anderson discuss a Pew Research survey, researchers highlight technology and social media are prone to bring out unrecognizable behavior through jealousy and anger in romantic relationships. Within this survey, "fifty-one percent of partnered adults claimed their partners are distracted by their cell phone when they are trying to have a conversation with them," "forty percent of partnered adults claimed they are bothered by the amount of time their partner uses social media," and "thirty-four percent of partnered adults claimed they have looked through their current partner's cellphone without that person's knowledge" (Pew Research). In other words, technology and social media allow endless opportunities to create fights and a lack of trust. With this opportunity to hide, cheat, and ignore - relationships will deteriorate or cease to exist. Arguments will occur one way or another; however, technology aids in bringing fights to life faster and more frequently. Journalist Abby Moore notes that social media and technology can negatively impact relationships, creating an opportunity for jealousy, narcissism, unrealistic expectations, and more (MindBodyGreen). All of these variables, especially when put together, bring a clear pathway toward the end of a relationship. Social media is prone to create jealousy, leading to relationship issues in that numerous opportunities are designed to stalk your partner's activity and create mistrust. With this, you can view what your partner is viewing, liking, and commenting on, which may lead to fights and possible cheating. Social media is prone to create narcissism, ultimately leading up to relationship issues in that posting builds up ego and is an attempt to feed one's self-esteem. With an excess usage of social media, these traits will build, and a relationship with a narcissist is doomed to end. Social media also tends to create unrealistic expectations because mindless hours of scrolling on an application

allow you to see the perfect lives of couples. When you don't have that, you tend to feel down and as if your relationship is not fit to work out.

The negative consequences on health, cognition, and relationships ultimately outweigh the possible benefits a social media application can support; however, this doesn't mean social media should be taken away completely; it just needs restrictions. Restrictions of age, time, and usage.

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