

a friend in class talking about their own phone use: “No way, I spent 12 hours on TikTok last Sunday?”

## TICKING AWAY

My mood changed pretty quickly, though, after adding up all that time. At this rate, I will spend more than 45 days a year on my device. If I live to be 80 years old, I’ll have spent 8 years, or a tenth of my life, staring at my iPhone. My classmate who spent 12 hours on TikTok? Barring a change in habits, social media will consume 34 years of her life.

Social media giants like Facebook and Google tell us that their platforms make us better connected, but that is no longer the point, if it ever was. It’s true that a Snapchat of my sandwich can traverse the Atlantic Ocean faster than I can take a bite of it, but does that make me and the friend whose phone it lights up any closer? If it does, is it worth the astonishing amount of personal information and control over our lives that we give to gatekeepers like Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg and Google’s Larry Page? When our digital presence bookends our days, we hand over the freedom to write our own stories to vacuous influencers and seedy algorithms, if it’s possible to differentiate between the two.

Resisting social media’s pull is a challenge that will fall into my generation’s lap.

According to the Pew Research Center, 95 percent of teenagers in the United States have access to a smartphone. Of those, 75 percent maintain at least one social media account by the time they are 17. But ubiquitous access has not made my friends and me any happier

“Social media use deepens existing anxieties,” Rebekah Mileo, an English and Psychology teacher at Reno High School explained to me. “It intensifies a fear of missing out, and it creates a sense of ‘this is what other people are doing—my life is not good enough.’ Using social media, you are one layer removed from your experiences.”

Creating a noteworthy online presence—amassing hundreds of likes on our Instagram selfies or thousands of retweets on Twitter—is a generational goal. To us, unlike our parents, interminable connectedness is the norm. More specifically, there is not, nor is there likely to be, a time in my life that is not accessible online. Unnerving, right?

## BRAIN DRAIN

I asked several of my classmates about their phone habits and found that, even though the long-term effects of social media on our brains are not yet known, it certainly isn’t helping teenagers feel level-headed and confident.

“I spend a lot of time scrolling,” said Isaac Sorensen, a senior at Reno High. “I always feel drained and like I wasted my time after going on social media. The way I use my phone definitely has a negative impact on my life.”

It’s difficult to prevent our smartphones and social media from zapping our sanity. But before we can learn to treat our cellphones as tools instead of opiates, we have to make sure we’re all on the same page. There is little authentic discussion of healthy phone habits in school. For most of my friends, as long as their cellphone use isn’t getting in the way of more important things, like grades, everything is fine at home.

For parents and kids alike, though, the line between important and unimportant becomes increasingly difficult to draw when you’re dealing with a phenomena that

“mirrors addiction,” as the University of Nevada, Reno, School of Medicine noted last year.

“There’s a disconnect,” Junior Sophia Nebesky told me. “We’re the first generation to be submerged in social media.

Older generations can’t really relate to it, so they don’t really understand the types of mental health issues that come with it.”

A week ago, I quit social media. The first few days were difficult and full of nervous energy. I checked my phone constantly and had trouble focusing at school, as if the notifications had migrated off my lock-screen and into my head. Today, though, I haven’t checked my phone in five hours.

In fact, I’m not totally sure where it is—and I’m OK with that. □

Oliver Guinan is a junior at Reno High School.

**“If I live to be 80 years old, I’ll have spent 8 years, or a tenth of my life, staring at my iPhone.”**

## FAMILY GUIDE

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