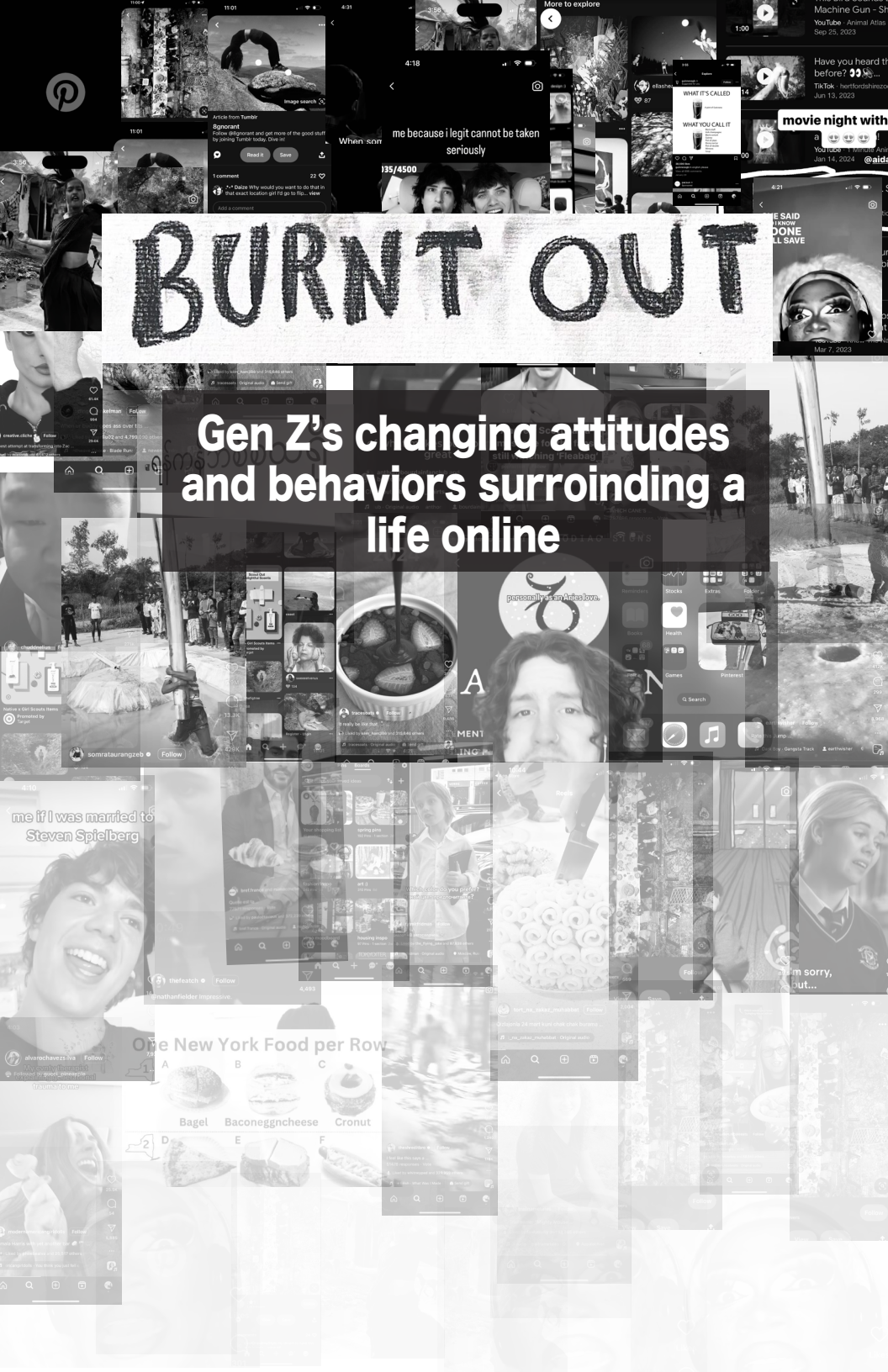




BURNT OUT

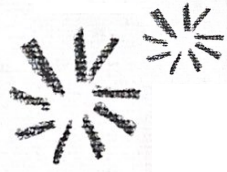
Gen Z's changing attitudes
and behaviors surrounding a
life online

One New York Food per Row





RINGGG

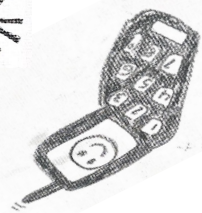
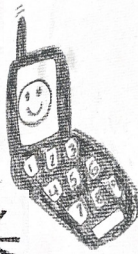


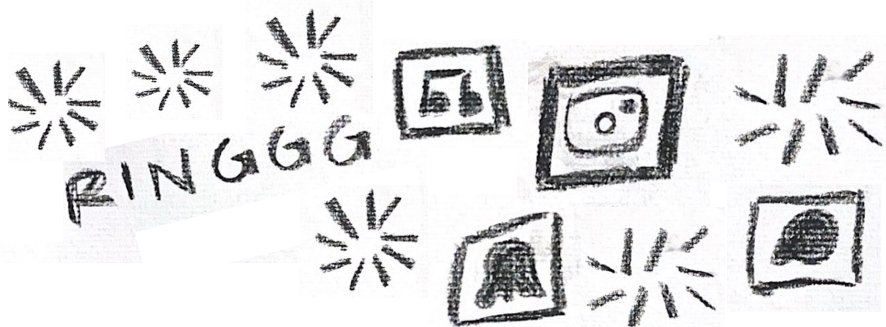
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BZZT



RINGGG





A note from the author,

Partaking in a liberal arts education is supposed to make your brain an interesting place to exist for the rest of your life. Being a part of the Clark Honors College, specifically, is supposed to help students look deeper into the actions they take part in every day. In the CHC, I've taken classes on everything from food origins to black feminist literature. Through them, I've learned more about the systems that I partake in. My time at the CHC has made my brain an active, curious place.

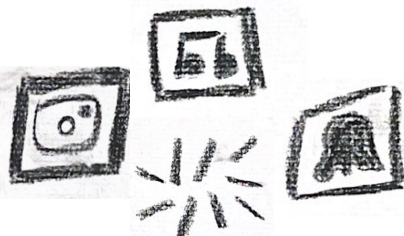
During my thesis, it was my turn to lead a study with these principles. I chose to further examine my generation's ever-changing relationship to social media. Social media is something that shapes my day, something unexplored, and something important to me. Through my research, I've found that my peers share similar sentiments to me when it comes to their screen time. Most of them are burnt out.

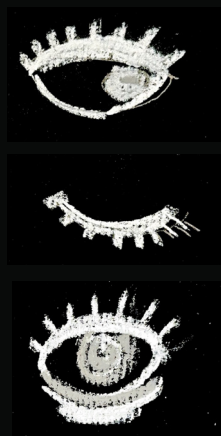
Gathering the interviews for this zine is the first step in a long process of creating change. I noticed a theme of what people are willing to tolerate, both from being on and off social media, and what they gain from their choices. And although I entered my thesis process with a multitude of questions, I left it with two. Why is having conversations about our screen time taboo? And what would we rather be doing than wasting time on our phones?

I hope that this zine will distill current cultural attitudes about social media within my generation. We do not realize how fleeting the cultural moments we partake in are, or pause to realize what makes them unique or special.

Thank you for reading,

Sammy Pierotti





Emeline Tarter

The art of distraction

When asked what her screen time is, Emeline Tarter laughs. “Whatever number you’re thinking, it’s probably more,” she said. She’s not working or in school right now and finds herself spending a lot of her free time surfing the internet.

To gain access to the content that she enjoys online, Tarter tolerates ads and sponsored posts that bother her.

In terms of posting, Tarter hasn’t engaged with social media in over two years. She still likes to connect with people online but wasn’t getting enough engagement with her posts to upload photos. It bothers her that most social media sites are driven by ads, saying that a lot of online presences feel disingenuous because they’re making money off her engagement.

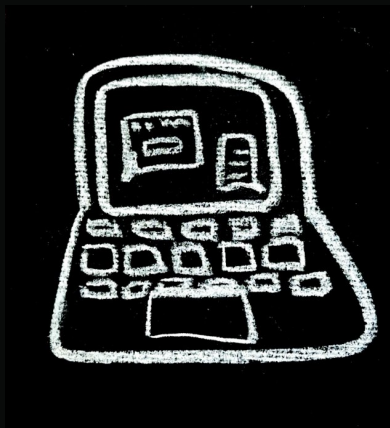
“Everything you see on Instagram and TikTok is advertising. If something makes you mad, it’s because they want you to be mad. Anger

equals engagement,” she said.

Tarter recognizes a toxic pattern of staying on social media for long periods of time, but finds it hard to break the pattern. “Sometimes I’m on my phone and I don’t even want to be on it, but it’s just easier than choosing what to do,” she said. “I don’t like being alone with my thoughts, and so it’s a very easy thing to blot out your thoughts and overstimulate yourself. If I’m bombarding myself with all this information, then I can’t think about anything else.”

“Sometimes I’m on my phone and I don’t even want to be on it...”

She feels guilty about spending time on social media because she knows it’s not good for her mental health. “I know that I’m doing something that isn’t actually going to make me happier. I know that going outside and talking to people makes me happier, but it’s easier to go on social media,” she said. 



Molly Ojeda

Dark side of the web

Molly Ojeda's Pinterest is filled with dark, gothic horror-esque pins. Her latest Dungeons and Dragons character is an elf subrace named Taskhand Nix: Overseer of Arms and Artillery.

Ojeda enjoys using Pinterest and Reddit to help her keep up with her niche D&D interests. "I really love dungeons and dragons," Ojeda said. "If I have a hyperspecific niche question I can look it up and there will usually be a Reddit thread where I'll find what I need."

In order to stay connected to a gaming community online, Ojeda tolerates high screen time and uncomfortable internet interactions. She is on Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, and Pinterest. She communicates with her gaming friends on Discord, though she doesn't count it as a form of social media. "If you meet someone on a game, sometimes it feels too personal to give them your Instagram so it

feels nice to give them your discord because it's a gamer-heavy platform," she said.

Ojeda's screen time averaged eight hours and 26 minutes a day. "I definitely waste time on TikTok and Instagram, but I have ADHD, so it's nice to just be able to let my attention span go," she said. "If I'm not on my phone, I'm probably sleeping or napping."

"If I'm not on my phone, I'm probably sleeping or napping."

A few months ago, Ojeda matched with someone on a dating platform and started talking to him regularly. She was in his discord server, which she explained was an unpleasant place to be. When she moved to cut him off and block him, he put her phone number up on his Instagram bio, allowing random people to text Ojeda.

"He doxxed my phone number," she explained. "We all reported him, but his account is still there. I know how weird they can get in that discord server, so that scares me." □

Maggie Dobson

Zoning out online

Maggie Dobson has a full schedule. “The mindlessness of [social media] can be very attractive, especially as a full-time student who is working and doing grad apps and doing my thesis and managing my social network,” she said. “It’s nice to have something I don’t have to think about.”

Dobson puts up with being at the mercy of the algorithm to have a space to turn off her brain. She uses social media as an escape from daily life, although she recognizes that there are better ways to unwind. If she wasn’t on social media so often, she would do things that she likes more often: making art, reading, journaling, and going outside.

It’s easy for Dobson to become addicted to things. “Addiction runs in my family. It’s easy to get addicted to a lot of things... caffeine, drugs, sex, people, and social media is exactly the same. I know that it’s not good for me, and I can feel it in my body that it’s not good for me, but my brain is not willing to stop,” she said.

Similarly to Tarter and Ojeda, Dobson looks for a community on social media surrounding games and movies that she enjoys. “On Tumblr, they have tags of what’s trending right now, and you can see anything about something that’s trending. But with things like Instagram, especially with reels or TikTok, you’re just taking what you’re given. You’re completely



at the mercy of the algorithm,” she said.

If communication wasn’t such a large part of social media, Dobson doesn’t know if she would be on it. She uses Discord to communicate with her partner because of the adaptable user interface.

“[S]ending each other things was a really important part of feeling connected.”

“With my long-distance partner, in the first few years of our relationship, sending each other things was a really important part of feeling connected. It feels like a love note sometimes,” she said. “The feeling of community, and that you’re involved in something, is also helpful. It’s getting harder and harder to get news and cultural understanding without social media as well.” ■

Nate Rasmussen

Sharing to scrolling

Nate Rasmussen gets home from work around 2:00 p.m. and flops on to his bed. He scrolls on social media to decompress from a long morning of working in customer service at Jimmy John's, a sandwich chain. Suddenly it's 4:00 p.m. and Rasmussen has to decide what he's going to do for the night. The monotony of the day weighs on him, and he rolls over, returning to his phone. It's easier than making a decision.

Rasmussen puts up with the ever-evolving social norms and sometimes disturbing content on social media in order to stay connected with his friends and have an outlet for his feelings. He spends most of his time on Instagram and TikTok for

entertainment and uses Snapchat for communication with his friends.

He has been using social media since he joined Facebook at age seven. Rasmussen used the app to open up to friends in 6th grade, saying "I always felt judged by my parents, so I never shared my troubles with them, but for some reason I wanted to share them on Facebook. That was the time of my life when I most got bullied, so it all ended up on there. It let me get it out, but also maybe I looked for too much validation through interactions on Facebook when I was feeling down."

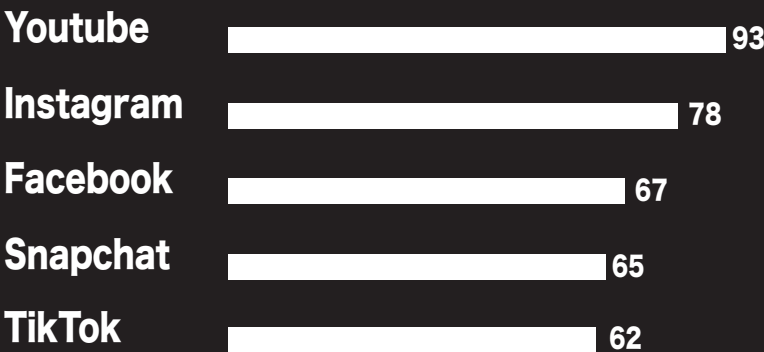
"If there was the safety of knowing I was going to get a bunch of likes and comments, I'd post all the time."

His friends used to leave comments to cheer him up when he shared his struggles and anxieties on social media, but now that he's older, that is no longer the case. Because people are less likely to interact with his content, Rasmussen is less likely to post. "If there was the safety of knowing I was going to get a bunch of likes and comments, I'd post all the time," he said. "I feel like I've always had a sort of relationship where I look for validation through the internet."

In the last few years, Instagram has felt less personal to Rasmussen. "I see people posting and I don't care. I stopped oversharing because nobody cares, and that's fine," he said. ■



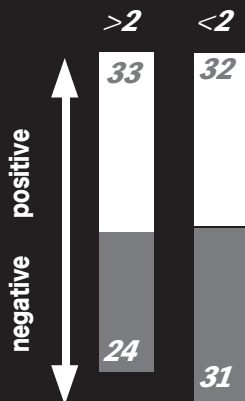
Percent of adults aged 18-29 that say they use ____ in 2023



*Information from “Social Media Fact Sheet” published by PEW Research, updated January 31st 2024

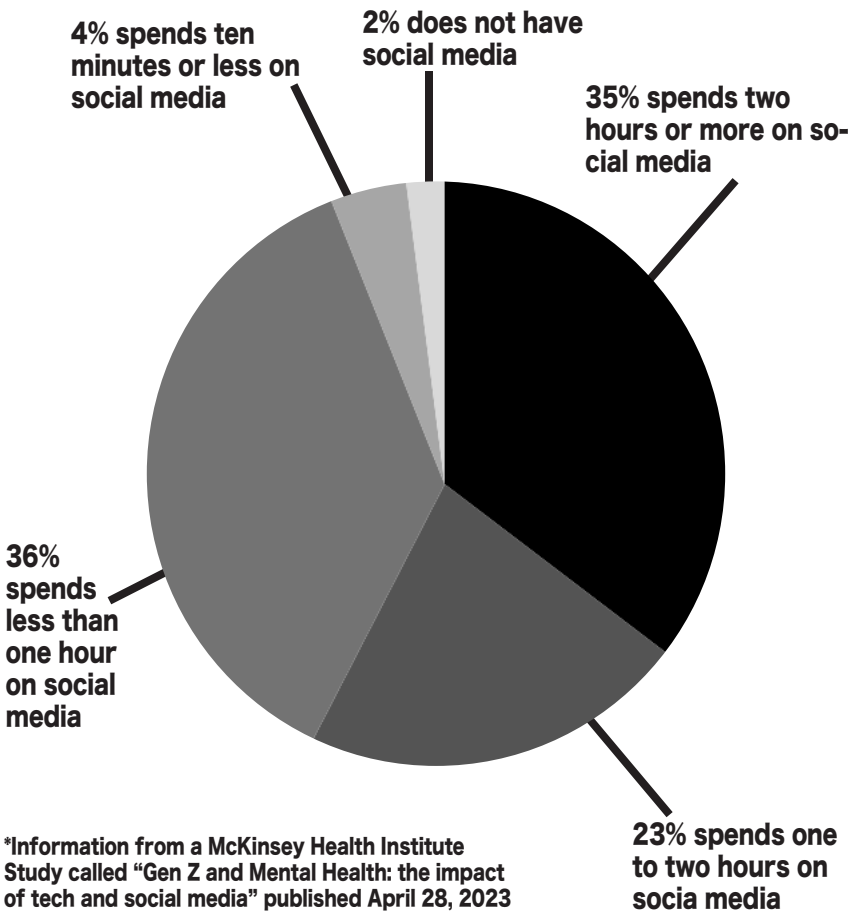
These statistics demonstrate what my interviews have come to show, and provide a counterbalance to the extremely personal weight of this magazine. Like Tartar, Dobson, Rassmasun, Ojeda, and Davis-Powell, many young people find themselves using social media for more than two hours a day. The most popular apps: Insstagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat, are regularly referenced throughout the interviews. “Gen Z and Mental Health: The impact of tech and social media” found that “while social media and tech have a consistent positive impact across all age cohorts, the negative impact increases substantially for younger ages.” This is demonstrated in the interviews as well.

Social media’s effect on mental health by hours spent daily



*Information from a McKinsey Health Institute Study called “Gen Z and Mental Health: the impact of tech and social media” published April 28, 2023

Amount of time adults aged 18-24 spend on social media per day



Ravi Cullop

Stop the scroll cycle

Ravi Cullop is busy. In addition to a full course load and honors classes, he occupies seat 16 on the ASUO senate, representing the schools of art, design, and dance. When asked what he would do if he spent less time on his phone, he sighed. “Probably more of what I already do, which is work,” he said.

Cullop simply doesn’t have time to waste on social media. His screen time averaged five hours and eleven minutes, mostly spent on YouTube, messages, and music. He tolerates gentle jabs and sarcastic remarks from his friends about his low engagement with social media.

Cullop got Instagram in 7th grade, during a period of life where he said he was trying to fit in. “I was trying to make friends so I played football. All my football teammates had Instagram as well, so I got it, and I was like wow this sucks. So at the end of 8th grade, I deleted it,” he said.

Cullop doesn’t feel like he missed out on any part of high school not being on social media. “The people in high school that had Snapchat and TikTok kind of annoyed me, so I didn’t like the app by association. They’re the kind of kids that wouldn’t sit with me at lunch... They would always be on Snapchat in class, and it would be distracting for me when I was trying to focus. The people that were on their phones in high school

were not even taking notes, it was just like bzz bzz bzz for no reason all around me,” he said.

Cullop redownloaded Instagram the summer after his freshman year of college because he realized it would be a good way to keep in touch with friends. He doesn’t get stuck in the same scrolling cycle as other people because when he feels himself getting addicted, he takes a break. “Once I notice myself having stared at my phone enough that my head hurts, I say okay, it’s time to put it down,” Cullop said.

“I don’t know how, but I guess I kind of beat the system.”

Cullop’s secret to breaking the scroll cycle is checking his phone in between classes or while he’s standing up. Then, he won’t get sucked in and end up scrolling for hours. “I don’t know how, but I guess I kind of beat the system,” he said. 



Drew Collins-Burke

Best of both worlds

Drew Collins-Burke uses Instagram on his laptop. He has to go through multiple hurdles to get to his home feed, like opening his laptop, typing in his password, opening his browser, and typing [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com) into his Safari search bar. Although these tasks would take less than a minute to complete, they effectively stop Collins-Burke from endlessly scrolling, something he has struggled with throughout high school and college.

“I think having Instagram on your phone can be really habit-forming and distracting. I think it’s really easy to have that be your default mode, which is pretty much what they want you to do, to open your phone and check it,” he said. “It’s mentally more difficult to use the browser.”

Collins-Burke tolerates a regimented schedule and limited screentime for his social media, 15 minutes every four hours to be exact, in order to reap the social benefits of social media while

keeping it from taking over his life.

With Collins-Burke, social media is a give-and-take relationship. His screentime is always on the lower end, but fluctuates between two and three hours depending on if he’s on an uptick or downtick of usage. He knows it’s time to cut down “[w]hen it starts to affect [his] mood and behavior outside of social media. Especially when it starts making [him] angry.”

“I think having Instagram on your phone can be really habit-forming and distracting.”

“Some of it is that social media is draining, it takes away dopamine, which is a renewable but limited resource,” he said. “When it starts to get to the point where I don’t want to do anything besides social media that’s a sign.”

Collins-Burke has found a healthy balance between doom-scrolling for hours and completely removing himself from social media. “Because I use it in a balanced way now and try to restrict it, I think I honestly get the best and miss out on the worst. There’s nothing right now I miss about it, and I’m glad to use it less and less. I think using it for a little bit of time each day is the best way to go,” he said. 



Maya McLeroy

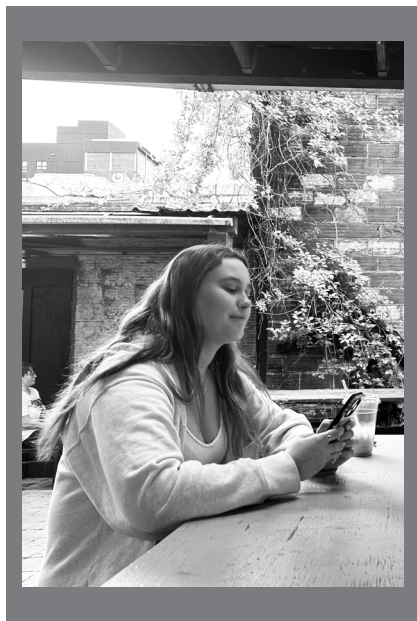
Life through a phone screen

Maya McLeroy was sightseeing at the Museum d'Orsay in Paris with her fellow classmates when something clicked. Everyone was pushing each other, trying to get the best photo of Van Gogh's stars. "Across the room was another painting also by Van Gogh, of a woman, and no one was looking at it. It was a lot of making me think about why we look at the things we look at, and we think they're important. Because people tell us they're important?" she wondered.

The program, "Instagramming in Paris" explored how people interacted with iconic sites in Paris and helped McLeroy see Instagram, and the city, in a different light. "I remember watching people in Cathedrals, and everyone had their phones and were looking at the cathedral

McLeroy tolerates the overwhelming and performative aspects of social media in order to gain access to content that creatively inspires her. She's constantly deleting and reuploading her apps. "I feel like I'm a more enjoyable person to be around [when I'm not on social media] because I'm not constantly in a pit of comparison from it. When I delete, I have more time to create for myself, and do more writing," she said.

She's happy to be online when she's surrounding herself with other creatives. "I'm in the poetry workshops on campus, so my friends and I just



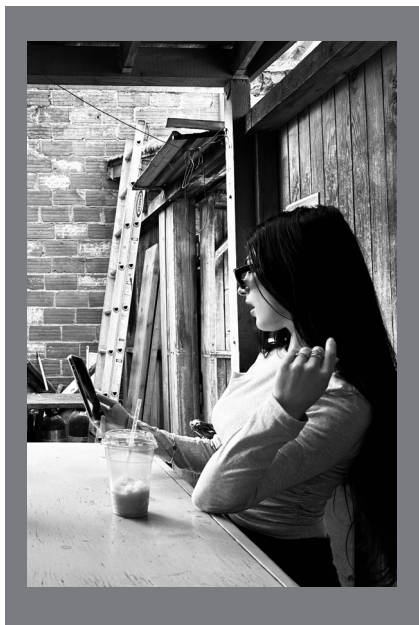
send each other poems, and my whole explore page is just poems. It's a pretty positive environment to exist in online," she said. She wants to work on unfollowing people that she doesn't know so that she stops comparing herself and her life to theirs.

"You're trying to hold your life to the standard of all of these people's best."

"You're exposed to so many different people and different lives [on Instagram]," she said. "But it's weird, because you're exposed to so many people, and you're trying to hold your life to the standard of all of these people's best. There's no winning." ■

Mirandah Davis-Powell

Entertaining the masses



Mirandah Davis-Powell's Instagram is a place of wonder. To an outsider, it looks effortless: pictures of trees, flowers, summer river trips, intimate nights at a friend's house, and delicious-looking meals make up her feed. But to Davis-Powell, it's actually quite a lot of work to upkeep.

Davis-Powell puts up with performativity on Instagram in order to reap its social benefits. Her second Instagram, or finsta, helps her document a more true version of herself.

She's currently trying to figure out the vibe she wants to portray online. "It's kind of outdoorsy, but there's the digital camera photo and a film pic I took. I have music on some of my posts, and I overthink way too much about what song I put on there.

On her second Instagram account or finsta, she has 1/10th of the followers. "I just kind of consider it a second, more personal, private account," she said about her finsta. "I've used my finsta, or second Instagram, for long enough that I can reflect on what was going on during certain periods. It's kind of like a digital diary because I've had it for so long, but it's also a place for me to share things with friends that I'm closer to."

She posts music that she's been listening to, random photos she takes, memes, and the occasional outfit picture. Her finsta has over 1,000 posts, and 100 followers that she considers to be her close friends. "It's a random collection of people, but I feel like if you were going to put me in a room with everyone that follows that account I would feel totally myself," she said.

"[My finsta is] kind of like a digital diary because I've had it for so long."

Davis-Powell doesn't mind the dissonance between her finsta and her Instagram account, or how performative social media is. "I think that we used to be way too deep about it and get all why am I being performative on the internet, but now I'm like whatever, let me put a little show on," she said. ■



Riley Brier Out of the loop

Before Riley Brier deleted his Instagram, it was full of pictures of moss and graffiti, in his words. “But Brier hasn’t been on social media in six years.

“It was unsustainable,” he said about Instagram. “And then by the time it was my sophomore year in high school, I felt like the online world had nothing to do with the real world. And that felt so wrong. I don’t want to be spending all my time in a world that’s no longer applicable or relevant, so I deleted everything.”

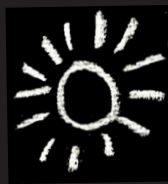
Brier tolerates having limited access to information about friends and music in order to keep off social media. Even though it’s hard for him to partake in the culture of his generation, he prefers not being online to having his attention span drained. He’s glad that he moved into college without social media, but life offline is not without its fallbacks

for Brier. It’s harder for him to get information about local music shows, album announcements, and keep up with new friends because he’s not on Instagram. “It doesn’t necessarily bother me, but events and stuff, and cultural trends, I’m always late on,” he said. “My coworkers will be talking about something and I’ll feel so old ‘cause I haven’t heard about it. I find out about things a little later than I would’ve if I had Instagram.”

“I deleted everything.”

When he’s in a social situation where everyone else is on their phone, Brier will browse through his emails or Spotify to keep busy. Sometimes, he feels like people are offended that he’s not on social media. “It makes people angry because they think I’m judging them. People will say I don’t want to be on TikTok around you because I feel like you’re judging me. Everyone agrees that your phone is bad, but people still use it religiously,” he said. □





Leila Jones Life under a rock

Leila Jones was a nervous middle schooler. She downloaded Instagram with the hopes of fitting in, but when she realized it was causing her stress, she knew she had to delete it. “I stopped using [Instagram] because simply it brought me a lot of anxiety,” she said. “It did not bring me any joy. And my life was fine without it. I realized how much time I was spending scrolling on Instagram not doing anything, and that kind of scared me.”

Jones tolerates being out of the loop on social events and friends, because she thinks the payoff of being off social media is better than the awkwardness of not being informed.

Getting off Instagram also had unexpected side effects. “I stopped comparing myself with others,” Jones said. “I feel like using Instagram in middle school was just too early. You’re going through puberty, your body is changing, and you’re comparing yourself to everyone else’s pictures.”

Jones has been off social media for eight years. She still uses Pinterest

and LinkedIn but is done with Snapchat and Instagram. She has been able to develop new hobbies like baking twice a week, going on long walks, exercising, and going to bed early.

Like Brier, Jones finds it hard to stay in the loop with events and friends “Missing pop culture stuff with memes and quotes, missing events that are happening, and having to ask people what they’re doing instead of just knowing what they’re doing,” she said.

“I stopped comparing myself with others.”

Today, Jones is trying to incorporate boredom back into her life. She fondly remembers being young and dawdling around, starting at rocks. “I don’t have that in my life anymore, and I don’t think that’s a part of most people’s life,” she said. “You can just sit somewhere for an hour and do nothing, literally do nothing.”

She tries to focus on one task, intentionally, daily. “I’m trying to incorporate that back into my life where when I eat lunch after I work out, I just eat lunch,” Jones said. 



Thank you!

To everyone who supported me throughout the process of working on my thesis. To my mom and dad, for listening to me complain about it over the phone. To my roommates, for keeping me sane. To Professor Mark Blaine for keeping me on track. To my interviewees, for letting me pick their brains, and for being open with me. I feel so lucky to be a part of such a supportive network of people.