

Speech Mentor Text

When I was twelve, going on thirteen, I was craving social media—my sister had it, my friends had it, celebrities had it, everyone had it. After weeks of discussing with my mom, I finally got set up on Instagram and would scroll for hours on end. I eventually got sucked into the tidal wave that destroyed my self-image. I became obsessed with getting a "bikini body" for the summer. I dieted for the last month of 2019 and would search up "workouts to burn belly fat." I developed a habit I only recently quit, which was to suck in my stomach at every chance I got. Even when wearing baggy clothes or lounging on the couch, every time I liked a picture where a girl had different features than me, I would make a conscious effort to unnaturally change my body.

Though most of us don't realize it, social media's impact can be seen all around us. Do you ever feel less successful, less beautiful, less productive, less worthy than someone else? The hidden catch of social media is that you might feel like you are relaxing and taking a break from the stresses of work and school, but in reality, the moment you open your phone and prepare to scroll for hours, your confidence is being hurt. The harmful impacts of social media on teenagers can be seen in a 2019 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which explains how suicide rates have risen in girls from 10–14 years of age and speculates that social media use may be one of the leading factors. Everyone here is either of that age or knows somebody in that age group, so it's our responsibility to be aware.

There are ways to monitor your social media use and the effect it can have on you. Next time you are mindlessly scrolling, if you come across a post that initiates comparison, unfollow or tell Instagram that you are not interested in that type of content. Instead of looking at such content, try to find healthier outlets through organizations you can join, communities you can become a part of, and causes you can support. A recent BBC News article explains that curating

your feed can make a huge difference when it comes to how often you are subconsciously degrading yourself because of social media.

If I had the power to make everyone listening leave with one thing in mind, it would be this: put in the effort to recognize how social media might be distorting your self-image. Put in the effort to be honest with yourself if you see that your mental health is being affected, and put in the effort to train yourself to put your phone down when you need to.