

Social media's impact on mental health can't be ignored

Jadyn L, Staff

Murray, NEB- Social media has become a constant presence in the lives of young people. It is the first thing many check in the morning and the last thing they see before falling asleep. While it has undeniably changed communication for the better in some ways, it has also created serious mental health challenges that can no longer be brushed aside. Social media platforms must take more responsibility for the well being of their users, especially in teens and young adults.

There are real positives that come from social media. It offers a sense of community and connection for people who might otherwise feel isolated. It allows users to express themselves creatively, share important experiences, and build networks across distances that would have been unimaginable just a few decades ago. For young people facing mental health struggles, finding others online who share their experiences can provide comfort and even save lives. Social media can be a tool for education, awareness, and encouragement.

However, the negatives are just as powerful as the positives, and often far more dangerous. Studies always link heavy social media use to increased rates of things such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self esteem among teens and young adults. Much of this comes from the constant comparison to carefully handpicked images of other people's lives, leading users to believe they are falling short. Instead of feeling connected, many end up feeling left or insufficient.

I have experienced this effect firsthand. There was a period of time where I found myself constantly scrolling through instagram from late at night into the early morning. At first, it seemed harmless, just a way to catch up with friends and trends. But, over time, it started to feel like everyone else was living a better, more exciting life than I was. Even though I knew those photos were either staged or filtered, or both, it didn't stop the feeling of self doubt. What started as a casual habit slowly chipped away at my confidence, which left me feeling anxious and incomplete after every scroll. It was a clear example of how easily social media can shift from a tool for connection and communication to a source of stress and unhappiness.

Beyond comparison, the addictive nature of social media also damages mental health. Apps are intentionally designed to be as engaging, and as hard to put down, as possible. Infinite scrolling, likes, shares, and notifications create a cycle that rewards staying online for hours. This leads to disrupted sleep, decreased concentrations, and heightened stress. Even worse, there's constant exposure to cyberbullying, hate speeches, and harmful content can cause lasting emotional scars, without the user even realizing it at first.

Social media companies are fully aware of these dangers. Yet, most continue to design their platforms in ways that put profits over people. Their goal is simple: keep users engaged for as long as possible, no matter the cost of mental health. Features meant to protect users, such as time warning or content filters, are usually hidden, optional, or overall ineffective.

There is no longer enough to hope that users will simply "be careful". Real change needs to happen at the platform level. Companies must design algorithms that prioritize well being over engagement. They must provide real tools for users to monitor and manage their time online. Stronger action must be taken to eliminate cyberbullying, hate speech, and other toxic behaviors that are allowed to thrive in comment sections and private messages.

In addition to that, platforms should be required to partner with mental health organizations to offer immediate support to users who are struggling. This could include crisis helplines, mental health check ins, and links to therapy resources built directly into the apps themselves.

Social media isn't going away, and it shouldn't. It has the potential to be a powerful force for good, but if the companies that run these platforms continue to ignore the harm they are causing, the mental health crisis among young people will only get worse.

Protecting users should not be a marketing strategy or an afterthought. It must be a fundamental responsibility. Teens and young adults deserve better than platforms that view their struggles as collateral damage. It's time for social media companies to step up, accept responsibility, and finally put people before profits.

Grading the system

Jadyn L, Staff

Murray, NEB- High school students across the country spend countless hours studying, completing assignments, and preparing for exams, believing their grades reflect intelligence, effort, and academic skill. Yet the current grading system has sparked growing debate over fairness, especially when students in easier classes end up with higher GPAs than peers enrolled in honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or college-level courses. As graduation approaches, many students begin to question whether a number on a report card truly reflects their abilities.

In an interview with a senior from Papillion La Vista High School, the student shared the stress of navigating class choices and GPA calculations. "I took mostly honors and AP classes because I wanted a real challenge and college credit," the student said. "But my friend, who took mostly regular classes or easier electives, ended up ranked higher than me. It feels unfair because I was learning so much more, but it didn't reflect in my rank. Sometimes it even makes me wonder if working harder is worth it."

Parents also notice the imbalance. One mother explained how her daughter struggles to balance AP courses with extracurricular activities and part-time work. "She wants to push herself academically, but she worries about her GPA," the mother said. "It's frustrating to see students who take easier classes finish at the top, even if they aren't as challenged. It sends the message that risk-taking and hard work don't always pay off in numbers."

Research suggests this issue is widespread. A 2021 report from the Brookings Institution found that students in weighted GPA systems often face a difficult choice: pursue challenging classes and risk a lower grade, or take easier courses to boost their class rank and GPA. The study suggests that this system can discourage academic risk-taking, even when advanced courses offer more meaningful learning experiences. Similarly, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) stresses that colleges often consider course rigor more heavily than GPA alone, showing that a high GPA does not always indicate greater intelligence or preparedness.

The consequences of this system extend beyond rankings. Students may feel pressure to choose easier paths to protect their GPA, potentially missing opportunities to develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and resilience. According to a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, students who prioritize rigorous courses over easier options report higher levels of stress and anxiety as they constantly weigh risk against reward in pursuit of class rank.

Despite these challenges, grades still provide valuable feedback on effort and achievement. They can reflect diligence, time management, and mastery of specific skills, even if they do not fully measure intelligence. Critical thinking, creativity, and perseverance, qualities essential to long-term success, are often overlooked in traditional grading systems, meaning students who take advanced coursework may appear disadvantaged compared to peers in less demanding classes.

Ultimately, high school grades and class rank provide only a partial picture of a student's abilities. While numbers can reflect achievement, they cannot capture growth, intellectual curiosity, or the willingness to challenge oneself. For students, parents, and educators, the challenge lies in redefining academic success in a way that rewards learning, not just letter grades, and encourages students to take intellectual risks without fear that hard work will go unrecognized.

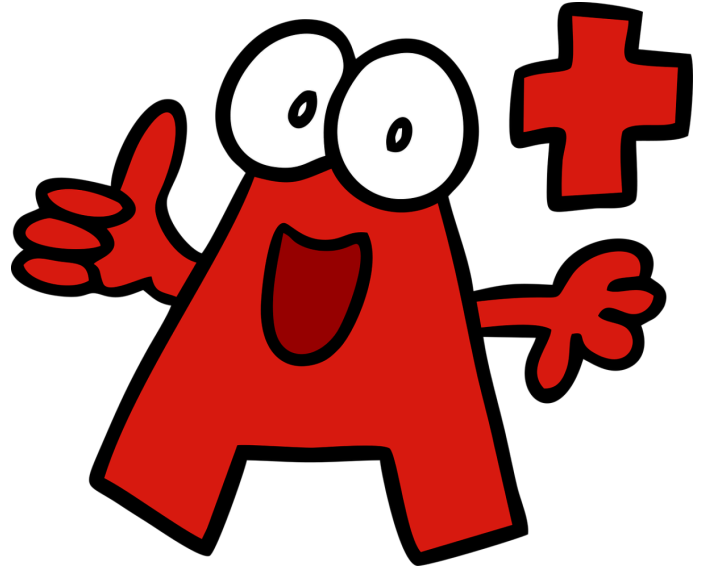


Image by Benjamin Adams from Pixabay

New year, new you... maybe

Jadyn L, Staff

Murray, NEB- Every January 1, gyms, yoga studios, and fitness centers across the country fill to capacity. Treadmills are packed, free weights are claimed, and the juice bars are busier than ever. For a few short weeks, it seems as though everyone is committed to transforming their habits, improving their health, or finally tackling those long postponed goals. By the end of January, however, many of those same gyms are eerily quiet, a familiar reminder that most new years resolutions rarely survive the first month.

This trend is backed by research. A 2022 study from the University of Scranton found that only about 8% of people successfully achieve and stick to their New Year's resolutions. Health, fitness, and weight loss dominate the list of popular goals, yet vague ambitions like "get in shape" or "eat healthier" are difficult to follow through on. Without specific plans and measurable steps, motivation fades quickly, and old habits creep back in.

Behavioral scientists have found that resolutions are more successful when they are specific and achievable. Goals such as exercising three times per week, tracking daily food intake, or saving a set amount of money each month are easier to measure and maintain. Breaking objectives into small, manageable steps can build momentum and reduce the likelihood of burnout, a strategy supported by research from the National Institutes of Health. Habit formation, rather than sky high ideals, is often the key to long term success.

Even for those who abandon their resolutions, attempts are rarely wasted. The University of Scranton study also noted that people who stop short of fully achieving their goals still report some positive changes including increased awareness of personal habits, better time management, or modest improvement in health. Each attempt serves as a step toward self improvement, even if it falls short of perfection.

New Year's resolutions may fail more often than they succeed, but the tradition itself has value. Setting intentions at the start of a new year encourages reflection and self awareness, inspiring people to consider what they want to change in their lives. Rather than judging resolutions by whether they are perfectly maintained, success can be measured by the gradual changes they spark and the new habits they help form.

Ultimately, New Year's resolutions are less about a single moment of transformation and more about cultivating continuous growth. Even if gyms empty by February, the effort made in January can leave lasting effects; and sometimes, that is achievement enough.



Image by Dorthe Wouters from Pixabay