

Scrolling Shackles

“STOP!”

“Please, you can’t delete my _____ account!”— is something an American teenager would say to their parents today. From Snapchat to TikTok to Instagram, as one scrolls through their phone, they often find themselves wandering through a maze, unsure of who to text next about the upcoming pep assembly or who to ask for physics homework answers. They are engrossed in their phone, eyes glued to plexiglass screen protectors, a white rectangle forever present in the reflection of their pupils. Is there any life behind those irises? Or is the only light penetrating those orbs blue? Their fingers drift mindlessly from one brightly colored message or post to the next. They are chained to their phones, an invisible iron link from their wrist to the phone, never more than two feet apart. It’s surprising how many dresses-snack-books-heels-bracelets can fit into the Amazon shopping cart until the link at top of the page breaks. Is it enough for them to break the chain linking them and their phones? Probably not. Social media is a jail, shackling the users with the enticing message: “your following request has been accepted” to forever capture them. The key to the prison gate is thrown away, much like that password for the firewall lost long ago. Social media consumes them, becoming a ringing, dinging, ping, distraction from reality. Many teens suffer from worrying about a missed text, post, or uploaded video. But while they sit and stare, they miss the smile on their cousin at her birthday party, they miss laughing with their friends after a brutal Spanish test, and they miss their teammate scoring the final point in a soccer match.

Reality is tapping on the door, but *can* they answer it?

Oops, never mind, it was just the Amazon delivery.

Ooh, they like the jeans! They just *need* to post them!

The use of social media is obligatory for many. Not for me. I won’t succumb to the pull of the “ping” when an influencer posts a new açai bowl hack on Instagram. I pride myself over the fact that I don’t have any social media. I thank my mom for preserving the small amount of unaltered body image and self esteem I had at the time. No reason to stare at those stick figured models and Kardashians at the time, I was only 13. Still, the obsession of social media around me has only grown, much like the list of followers on every platform.

Yet so has the growth of fear of missing out, anxiety, and depression.

So has the growth of anorexia and bulimia.

So has the growth of suicide.

Are these linked? A link like the chain that holds many so near and dear to their phones? A chain that holds one’s mental health and their phones so that when one gets out of control, ringing and dinging and chiming, then the other can only follow?

Oh how I long to see a b - r - o - k - e - n chain.