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Technology In Our Society

While I could sit here and write about the millions of different ways that technology has poorly affected my mental health, or created platforms where bullying occurs, or the true addiction that it has induced into our world, I come to realize that none of that has personally stopped me from using technology every single day. While I constantly claim to be a victim of social media or say how much easier life would be without its presence, I have begun to open my eyes to the ways in which technology has made the concept of change easier in our lives, and created connection. For instance, during shelter in place in 2020, Cardinal Newman, amongst many other schools, was able to make a steady and quick transition from in person school to online classes. In a situation where we could have potentially lost an entire year of learning, technology allowed for students to continue their education. Students who lacked resources of technology or internet access did lose an entire year of learning, which they can never gain back. This access to technology through zoom didn't stop with a continuation of education. I still recall the modern band concert that happened on zoom during my freshman year. Students at Cardinal Newman were called to join the zoom meeting, connect with other students, and listen to their classmates play music. While we couldn't all be in the same room, we could all still be in the same breakout room!

The greatest thing about the connection brought about by technology that struck me though, was how our society is constantly blaming mental health issues on technology and social

media, when during this time, technology was the only thing connecting and uniting us. Studies have shown that the greatest root of mental illness comes from a lack of connection. In a study done by Stanford Medicine Researchers, “Connectedness and Health: The Science of Social Connection” researcher Emma Seppala reveals that “People low in social connection are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and even suicidal behaviors which tend to further increase their isolation” (Seppala). While I do not deny that technology can promote insecurity and can be harmful, I believe that the connection that has become available through its platforms has outweighed that at a large amount.

Connection continues to show itself through technology in many other forms. In one example, a non profit organization called God Behind Bars, has grown in influence through social media. Platforms like instagram and facebook have provided a space for this organization to collect donations in order to create a fund that allows for pastors and preachers to introduce the gospel to prisoners and baptize people who have been sentenced to life in prison. That chance at connection, and at redemption only becomes possible with the use of technology. Programs and organizations similar to this one flourish because of technology. Amongst a similar topic is go fund me. Go fund me is an online organization that spreads fundraisers across social media specific to the needs of a person with generally an illness. Go fund me has allowed for many lower income families to pay large medical bills, and gives people the opportunity to share their fortune to others who may need it. Technology in a similar way has brought about connections allowing for organ donations.

While all of these examples are on a larger scale of how technology can bring us together, there are also small ways in which technology has had that effect. Anyone of us Oxford scholars are bound for college next year. I believe most of us are relying on technology to reach out to

potential friends or roommates. We are following instagram pages with all of our future classmates posted, or even taking advantage of the ability to take virtual campus tours of each school in order to fully understand what the next couple of years will look like for each of us. Looking forward technology is not only allowing us to make those connections for the near future, but will allow us to maintain the ones of the past. I will be going to a different school than most, if not all of my friends next year, but I can trust that those friendships will last because they're one phone call away, one text away, one "hey here's a photo dump of my life lately" away. And while that does create a culture where we begin to lean and trust technology quite a bit, the connections once again outweigh the concern around that reliance on technology.

With the way that technology makes connections so readily available and accessible for all, I do believe that parents have an obligation to monitor how their children use technology. While I am a proponent for the ways in which technology can, and has brought our world closer, I also am not blind to the effects it has on children. For my CBSL I am working with the Polly Klaas Foundation, where I help teach grade school, and middle school students about how to effectively and safely use social media. The conversations we have teach pre-teens how to responsibly navigate technology ensuring that the connections they make are appropriate. While I would advocate for technology as a whole, I am someone that recognizes that being able to handle technology comes with an overall responsibility that requires a certain level of maturity. Relationships with technology become drastically unique depending upon one's parents involvement or the pre existing knowledge and awareness that one has prior to indulging in technology and social media.

Technology truly has the potential to grow even more in this positive direction. I believe that if our society can better handle the responsibilities of technology, technology will be seen for

its benefits more than its burdens. While as a world, we can blame our problems on technology, and suggest that advancement is the reason that society is struggling so much, I challenge us to progress with the advancements, and make the change in **ourselves** in order to better use the gift of technology.