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Teen Voices: What's on your mind?
By Nelson Chiu

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Media Mind

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Do you watch shows or movies? Have you considered the effects of these movies and shows on your mind? In my opinion, it is not always easy to notice how media can affect our minds and our perception of reality. It is often rare to see these effects until someone we know tells us that we sound like a character from the show we are watching, or point out how we seem to be mimicking that character in the show. In the end, I can see media being so influential that even your outlook on life can be different. My favorite series 'Band of Brothers' makes me feel sad and unhappy over events that happened 60 years before I was even born. I relate to the fictional characters. After watching the series, I decided to appreciate my life a bit more and spend more time with family and friends. The new outlook on life I gained has allowed me to interact with a lot more people, regardless of whether it might feel awkward, rather than stick to the little people I do know.

How do you feel right after watching a movie? Most of the time, movies have happy endings and I feel happy. However with a sad movie, I feel sad. Recently, the feeling of joy I felt immediately after watching The Lego Movie and Frozen quickly went away and I feel normal again by the next day. This is another obvious example of how media can affect our minds, but depending on how you view this, it may be good or bad. The way our mood is affected may eventually wear off, unless the film really sticks to you. On the other hand, constant exposure to the same feelings can lead a person's thoughts to be influenced, regardless of how the person feels toward the media.

By Kelly Zhang

Tell Them Offline

For many of us, Facebook has become a normal part of life. We check Facebook on our computers. We check Facebook on our tablets. We check Facebook on our phones. There are more than 800 million active users on Facebook and nearly half of those users log on to Facebook every day. Like most teens, I have a Facebook account. I don't know about you, but I check Facebook at least three times a day. I use it so much that sometimes I feel like it is taking over my social life. I created my Facebook account in middle school as a way to connect with my elementary school friends who I do not go to school with anymore. Facebook helped me connect with friends and family wherever they were. I kept in touch with my elementary school friends online, but there always seemed to be a wall that disconnected us. As the years go by, less and less conversations were being exchanged between us. The strange thing about Facebook is that it encourages communication, but at the same time it also discourages communication. Studies have shown that teens have become more and more reliant on technology to communicate. When we are using Facebook, it is easier to keep in touch because we feel protected behind the screen. The consequence is that we do not get as emotionally and personally connected to someone as we are when we are communicating in person.

I still use Facebook as a way to keep connected with friends that I do not see often. But having conversations online just does not feel the same as having conversations offline. Using Facebook to communicate is not bad. It is an easy way for us to communicate with friends and family that are not around. However, it is important to remember to keep connected with others in person. Tell them offline what is on your mind.
Using a condom is an effective and inexpensive method to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Some that have unsafe sex often argue that using a condom is boring and unnecessary. They may say things, like: "The latex barrier blocks the connection of the man and woman and results in less pleasure," "Why use a condom when I can always just pull out. Do you not trust me?" or "If using a condom doesn't completely stop the risk of getting STD's or having an unintended pregnancy, why use it at all?"

While condoms are not 100% foolproof in preventing STD’s or pregnancy, they are still very effective. There are cases in which a partner will give in to the unsafe sex in fear of losing their boyfriend or girlfriend. A romantic relationship should be built on trust and open communication. If your partner does not want to use protection, then he or she is not the right one for you.

Condoms are important to use and may protect me from risks to my health. But where can I buy them and how much do they cost? Don’t make the mistake of buying condoms. You can get them at your local clinic or school free of charge. You do not know how to use a condom? You can also get that information at your local clinic and school.

Challenges to follow your dreams may seem impossible to overcome. That is nothing but a false thought. So what should you really do? First, know you are not alone. It took a while for me to realize that I was not the only imperfect player on my soccer team. There were others that felt my pain and most of them were willing to listen and help. There is help out there, such as your family and friends that are by your side and will support you in any way possible. Dreams are not supposed to be given up on, because it is what you love to do.
By Stanley Chan

**Video Games**

Do you enjoy video games? Do you play video games every day? Do you play video games a little bit too much? Video games are a great hobby, but playing them to the point where you find yourself addicted to them is very bad for your social, mental, and emotional health. You should have set times for video games but make sure that video games aren’t your priority.

Kevin Tse, a Teen Health Educator at the Teen Resource Center and also a League of Legends player, explains how video games is a great way to interact with friends during the cold season. Playing co-op, or cooperation, games with friends allows you to still hang out with friends without leaving the house in the cold. This is a great way to still be connected with your friends and also do something that you all love to do. Joe Li, another Teen Health Educator, is all for gaming with your friends and also do something that you all love to do. Joe started to spend less time on gaming. As you grow your priorities change.

Even with all these great things that gaming does to help you, gaming still can take a toll if you game a lot. Joe says that you should have priorities, doing your work first and then gaming, depending on how much time you have. Kevin says the same thing—that you should finish all other more important things first. Video games should not consume your life. You have more important things to care about than your rank on League of Legends or what level you’re up to in Mario. There is school to worry about and your social relationships outside the gaming world. Even though you can talk with people over the mic, you can’t see them face to face. Living in the real world and talking are important skills that can be lost as you game. Yes, you can reduce stress by stepping away from the real world for a moment, but in the end the only actions that really matter are what happens in the physical world. This is also why Joe started to spend less time on gaming. As you grow your priorities change.

I think that gaming is a great hobby and can be enjoyed by everyone no matter the age. However, don’t get lost in it. Don’t spend all your time passing that one rank or level that has taken you forever. Develop priorities and learn how to manage your time.

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**If You Don’t Tell Them Maybe No One Will**

By Jennifer Chiao

When I first entered my not-so-diverse high school, I was bombarded with questions about my ethnicity. “Are you Chinese?,” they would ask. Taking a deep breath I would calmly say, “No, do you know where Vietnam is?” Most of the time I get a blank look which is why I assume that the person asking did not know. Some of my classmates also did not go to a middle school or elementary school with Asian Americans, so I could have been the first Asian they have ever had class with (It’s not that hard to believe). But this lumping of all Asians is not rare and it becomes frustrating when people assume we are all the same. Is it too much to ask that they do not think of Asia as a country but as a continent?

I hated Asian stereotypes my freshman year of high school the most. Everyone just assumed that I was quiet and obedient, because I am Asian. On top of this, let’s not forget the “Asians are smart” stereotype. But as a result, how am I supposed to feel when I stay after school for math tutoring almost every day?

I do not think I will ever forget the time a girl suddenly asked me out of nowhere “Do Chinese people eat dogs?” Well, how would I know? I am not Chinese. Of course instead of being hostile I try to explain that even if it is true, it is only considered “weird” or “disgusting” here in the U.S where they are domesticated and there are different norms. Meanwhile in other countries there are different norms.

Some of my classmates came from disadvantaged middle schools, so I understand that some of their social studies classes were not very extensive. And to be honest, in my middle school, we never even talked about the Vietnam War. It is frustrating because I think to myself, “how do you not know about Vietnam?”. On a lighter note I think, “we live in New York City, with very diverse cuisines, have you never had or heard of Pho?”

I admit sometimes the frustration gets the best of me. One time when someone asked if I was Chinese, I just went along with it and said yes. But I know that it was a mistake, because if the person had never heard of Vietnam, I just lost the chance to educate and inform them about it. Now, it doesn’t bother me so much anymore. It is all about how you choose to respond to it. So if you are ever in that situation, take the chance to educate. If you don’t tell them, maybe no one will.
Senior year feels like a lot of ‘lasts’. Your last football game, your last homecoming, your last musical, your last prom. As the final year in high school winds down—after the nerve-wrecking moments of the college application process—I feel the days fly by quicker and quicker. But, at times, I ask myself a mind-boggling question, how do I survive my final year of high school?

Looking at my time in high school, I have noticed that I have transformed from an eager, yet nervous, freshman who was overwhelmed by social cliques, peer pressure, and academics, to a relaxed senior who can strut through the hallways with confidence. I can pass through class by giving silly high fives and shouting my friends’ names across the school. By now, we know our way around the school—the administrators to avoid, the teachers who we can trust, the quickest way to climb the stairs, and the location of the cleanest bathrooms.

As a senior, I have realized that I am also making more decisions about my future than ever before. As a second term senior, I have learned a few tips to manage senior year. First, create your own definition of success. It is okay to enroll in a class that you are passionate about. It is okay not to follow others who take advanced classes. Do not measure success by the number of points you can collect or the name of the school branded on your diploma, but treat success as what makes you feel happy and satisfied.

Understand that not everything will happen according to plan. You can plan every step in your future, but keep an open mind and look over all of your options. Sometimes, not everything will work out. There will be disappointment, but feeling bitter and regretful is a waste of energy. Watch your favorite show, eat your favorite ice cream (mine is cookies and cream), go to sleep, and believe that possibilities are out for tomorrow. Finally, take a long, deep breath. Try to forget the exams, the interviews, and the projects for a few minutes. Go outside. Make room in your schedule for your friends. Play some video games. Take a nap.

You are in control of your life and you know your limits.

Let me tell you, life gets more exciting at this point. After being admitted to college, and paving through applications for financial aid, the hazy stress certainly clears out. Dressing up for senior spirit days, taking pictures of memories, and, essentially, taking life easily, I can only do so much. Prom is approaching and seniors perform spectacular proposals. Soon, graduation, tears, and firm hugs will follow suit. Would I have enjoyed the most of my senior by then? Will I be able to look at my yearbook in the next couple of years and say that I really had a good time? Only time will tell.
You Are Beautiful

By Emily Lam

Being a teenager is a drag. The pressure to be “good enough” appears in school, friendships, and most clearly—in the media and on the internet. People post ‘selfies’, or photos taken of themselves, which are widely shared or liked. The way this is so publically done triggers us to compare ourselves to our peers. Magazines also show images of elegant stick-thin women and strong, robust men. This is where I believe boys’ drive to build up their bodies and become more defined stems from. These false standards make us worried that others are judging our outer shell.

Personally, I know exactly how teens, whom are struggling with their image, feel. When I was in middle school, I created an account for Tumblr—a social network that revolves around sharing photos and text posts. I spent a lot of my free time on it, blogging my weekends away. Posts started showing up on my feed about thigh gaps and flat stomachs. I quickly became obsessed with trying to conform to society’s standards of being beautiful. I exercised more often than I needed to and ate one meal and one snack a day. My self-esteem dropped more and more each day and I felt small and unimportant.

If I were able to go back to that time, I would tell myself that my actions were not worth the impossible goal I was aiming for. Thinness is not proportional to a person’s level of perfection. It does not equate to beauty. I wish I would have understood this earlier, because I only stopped when I realized how worn out my body was and how many friends I neglected. I stopped menstruating for a few months due to the lack of nutrition my body was getting.

Now I am able to start focusing on better things, like building long-lasting friendships and bringing up my grades. I was able to confide in my friends with my problems and I became more comfortable with being myself.

I felt like a person, and no longer as unimportant as I had previously felt.

What many teenagers need to understand is that perfection is not something you can achieve.

The models encased in a paperback publication are not perfect. Most of the time, they are photo shopped and have to follow strict dietary restrictions. Trying to achieve the body of a model is impossible, because the models in the magazine don’t even look like that. In December of 2013, Ashley Benson saw a poster for “Pretty Little Liars”, a show she stars in. She posted it to Instagram and said “Way too much Photoshop. We all have flaws. No one looks like this. It’s not attractive.” Beyoncé spoke up when she found out that H&M, a clothing store, had edited photos of her body in their ads. She demanded that only the original photos be posted, because she only wanted natural photos. Brad Pitt asked that he not be edited for W Magazine because he wanted a natural look to show his imperfections.

Social media often twists what is “ideal” and makes it seem as if being skinny or robust is the same as being beautiful and perfect. You don’t need to be perfect. Flaws make you who you are.

By Kevin Lin

How is competition related to stress? Competition can motivate a teen to do better, or it just makes them too anxious to do anything. The kind of competition does not matter since a competition will always create some stress. We try to be the best when we compete and we become overwhelmed by competition. We need to think about how competition affects our daily lives and whether it is positive or negative.

Personally, I like a little competition, but there are times when it becomes too much to handle. People always compare and especially since I am a second-generation Chinese immigrant, there is always some sort of competition going on. I remember all those times my mother would remind me about my cousin and his achievements in school. She would bring up his report card when I brought home my report card and compare every aspect of it. I hated how she would always compare me and it made me feel smaller than I actually was. I’m not saying that competition should be completely avoided because it can really help you. I needed to be more competitive than my peers in order to apply for Stuyvesant High School the second time around. I never would have been accepted if I did not constantly compete with others and get better. That kind of competition had a positive effect on my life and really pushed me in a great direction. Competitions should be watched carefully in order to make sure that when we compete with others, we are not just beating ourselves up.

We cannot be consumed by our desire to be great because it will slowly chip away at you. We need to take another look at competition and most importantly, take a good look at ourselves. We need to realize that, as a society, we pressure the youth to be better than others too much. That sort of emphasis crushes the individuality of teens. We can stop this by understanding who we are. Become more self-confident. Build self-esteem. Nurture uniqueness. We need to love ourselves more than we love winning.